
For All The Marbles

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"For All The Marbles"
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For All The Marbles

A novel
by

Jack Riston

Dedication

*To Jan, for her love and patience, and to Traci.
You both believed.*

And to Ricci, for refusing to give up!

**Where your enemy is weak, attack!
Where your enemy is strong, retreat!**

**Sun Tsu
"The Art of War"**

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Chapter 1

Gray Eagle's Story

Wyoming Territory, 1876

The flies were never the problem. One simply got used to them. They were everywhere. But, the stench of death was something that Gray Eagle, a young Oglala Sioux warrior, could never seem to get over. In the early summer afternoon sun of 1876, the stench came quickly. He was only 23 years of age, but Gray Eagle had smelled death often. The end of this battle was no different than the others. Blue-coated soldiers, many of them no older than Gray Eagle, lay in pitiful heaps around the carcasses of their own horses, killed by the soldiers themselves and heaped into makeshift breastworks when the battle began. The bodies of the horses were the last and futile defenses the soldiers had on the nearly featureless prairie hillside. But, in the end, they were to no avail.

Chief Gall, one of the under-chiefs of the Oglala Nation and leader of Gray Eagle's group of Sioux warriors, simply led his braves in a large, dusty circle around the vastly outnumbered white men, firing their rifles and shooting hundreds of arrows at the exposed soldiers, until the Henry Rifles, Springfields, and pistols fell silent one by one. The fight took less than 30 minutes. Two hundred and seventy seven soldiers lay dead. The last one to fall had been the one the Indians called 'Yellow Hair', standing to the last, expending every bullet in his revolver and rifle, finally yielding his life to bullets that pierced his left temple and his chest. Now they were all dead....some flung back over the bellies of their horses, which had already begun to bloat in the summer heat. Some had died while huddled beside their horses, partially hidden by saddles that were used as the last shields against the arrows of a thousand of Gray Eagle's angry brothers. Some of the faces looked as though they were merely asleep, while others were

contorted and frozen in the last seconds of the terror that ended their young lives. They were all dead; bodies mixed with dust, blood, and blocks of prairie sod hastily dug out with knives in a vain attempt by the soldiers to create some sort of protection from the attack. The bodies lay there amid a jumble of arrows, dead horses, silent rifles, and saddles. The shooting had ceased and the only sound one could hear was the buzzing of the ever present flies. The fight that would later be called The Battle of the Little Bighorn was over.

Another group of soldiers had been observed on the far side of the river, riding away from the scene of this particular battle. However, the sounds of fighting would most certainly have been heard throughout the valley and would bring the other soldiers back down the river. Gray Eagle and his companions needed to move quickly. They could not merely win the skirmish and then withdraw. Trophy scalps needed to be taken; scalps that would adorn lances, breastplates, and the teepee lodge poles back in camp; scalps that would attest to everyone that the bearer had displayed great bravery and won a significant battle against a common enemy. Even the youngest of the braves had as many as twenty or thirty scalps. Gray Eagle had none.

As soon as the fighting stopped, the braves dismounted and began the task of scalping the dead soldiers. They worked furiously. Gray Eagle mostly stood transfixed by the carnage. During the actual battle, his reflexes took over, and he fought as fearlessly as any other brave, for he was defending his home and territory. However, once the fighting ceased, he couldn't help but reflect on those who had died. Where one of his brothers had fallen, Gray Eagle knew that mourning would follow in his camp. Another wife and child from within the tribe might now have to be driven away. If she was fortunate, she might be taken as a second or third wife by one of the older, more successful braves. The less fortunate would be driven from camp to fend for themselves and to eventually die alone on the prairie, for there was seldom enough food to feed someone who

could not hunt for themselves, or who was not in the family of someone who hunted for them.

Gray Eagle looked at the faces of the dead soldiers. They seemed less strange in death, certainly less threatening than they had looked in life. They no longer seemed like enemies, and, in a sense, they weren't. Arrows, hatchet wounds, knife cuts, and blood disguised the fact that only minutes before, these corpses had belonged to men who were intent on taking Gray Eagle's life. Yet, Gray Eagle now looked at them merely as other men...whiter, certainly, and clad in strange blue uniforms, but men nonetheless. They were certainly not that different from Gray Eagle. They had arms, legs, a body and head that were in almost all respects identical to his. The only thing that was dramatically different was the firepower they employed...the rifles and small canons, and the apparent intention to use them to annihilate Gray Eagle and his people. There was no doubt that the soldiers had superior force. But, today it had not mattered. Today, Gray Eagle's war party had superior numbers, and the soldiers had paid with their lives. As Gray Eagle looked at the dead faces, he wondered what had gone on in their minds during the last moments of the fighting. Did they have dreams of the future like Gray Eagle did? Were they frightened? When they were faced with death, were they afraid that their dreams and futures were about to be snuffed out? Did they have wives and families in whatever place they had come from? What reasoning made them come from some far away place to take land and life from Gray Eagle's people? What had Gray Eagle or his people done to these men, that they would want to kill him and his entire tribe? For now, these dead bodies were no longer a threat. Yet Gray Eagle sensed that these would not be the last blue coats to come into his land...guns firing, long knives swinging quick and certain death. In his short life, he had already witnessed great changes to the way his people lived, and he heard stories from his elders and from the medicine men of a life before he was born that did not match his current world. Life was not peaceful like the descriptions of earlier times. Buffalo did not roam as plentifully on the plains as the elders said

they once had, or even he had witnessed during his early teen years. His tribe was nomadic, moving around the large swath of land that would one day be known as Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and the Dakotas. He knew it only as Our Land, and knew that his tribe had to be prepared to defend itself for survival. Other tribes also moved about Our Land, seeking out the Bison and the few stands of wild berries, grains, and nut producing trees. Coming into contact with other tribes was just part of the cycle of living. Sometimes these contacts were bloody confrontations. Yet, there were often long stretches of peace.

His world was changing. Gray Eagle had already witnessed cattle-drawn wagons crossing Our Land from afar. They appeared on the horizon from the time of the rising sun and slowly moved to the horizon where the sun went down each evening, occasionally camping for a night, but never more. By the following day, they would be gone, leaving no sign of having passed other than the ruts of their wagon wheels carved into the parched ground. Over the years, however, more wagons had come, sometimes great numbers of them trailed out in long slender threads. It might take days for them to transit from one horizon to another, and there would be frequent campings that might last for a week at a time. It was during these times that Gray Eagle's tribal leaders found enough courage to approach the wagon trains to determine who these strangers were. A small bartering system had developed, since the strangers needed food as much as Gray Eagle's tribe. Over time, the strangers learned to communicate through drawings and sign language that they had a desire for meat; antelope and bison. Some of his fellow braves were quick to cooperate and provided small deer and antelope to the strangers. Exchanges often involved bits of cloth and needles, items that were of great use within Gray Eagle's tribe. Yet, all too often, the exchange was a liquid that, when consumed, took away a man's ability to even stand up.

Gray Eagle, as one of the younger braves, was never allowed to participate in any of these negotiations. He was always well back from any actual encounters with

these strangers, but was close enough to see that the wagons carried more than white men. There were women and small children, too. As strange as these people were, with their white skin and odd clothing, it seemed to Gray Eagle that family relationships not unlike his own might be the way in which these people lived. They were not an enemy....yet. They were just strangers passing through. Gray Eagle would watch with curiosity as small boys and girls from the wagons would run about an encampment, chasing each other with sticks or small pieces of rope, and he compared that with his own camp, where small children ran about with each other.

Over the many months and years of encounters with the white men, things began to change, and not for the better. First, was the sheer numbers of wagons that came. Where one group of wagons might appear each spring, there were now four and five each year. Some of the wagons appeared late in the summer and, because of their slow pace of advancement, were caught in the early plains snowstorms and were forced to camp on the prairie for entire winters. Some of these strangers even broke away from the wagon groups entirely and set up more or less permanent camps, building their homes out of blocks of sod that were dug up from the prairie's surface. With the coming of so many strangers, the demands for the meager supplies of available food were greater. And, when the Indians were unable to supply as much as the strangers wanted, men from the wagons scouted out well beyond the route of the wagon trails, looking on their own for the antelope and Bison that were so important to Gray Eagle's people. Since the white men carried rifles and did not have to hunt with lances or bows and arrows, they were far more successful than the Indians had been. It was not long before the Indians were no longer needed for the food they supplied. The white hunters by themselves gathered all that was needed, and often more than the people on the wagons could consume. Bison were also plentiful, and the white men killed them indiscriminately, taking only the choicest portions of meat, and seldom taking the hides, leaving the remainder of the carcass to rot in the sun. It was not at all uncommon for a small

band of Indians to come across a field of hundreds of Bison skeletons, picked clean by coyotes and buzzards and then bleached white by the sun. What they didn't know, was that the wholesale slaughter of the Bison was a calculated maneuver to starve Gray Eagle's people to death, or to drive them away from the land the white men had decided was theirs. The terrorism of the white settlers was becoming more and more apparent. Mild disagreements were more often turning into skirmishes. The occasional short battles between arrows and bullets were becoming large and lengthy engagements. General and strategic conflicts were turning into all out war.

Some of the Indian tribes saw the coming of the white men as a threat to their very existence and did not hesitate to fight back. Their weapons were no match for the rifles carried by the settlers, but their superior numbers and knowledge of the terrain were the deciding factors. In the summer of 1868, a number of lone wagons, or those traveling in small groups of but three or four were attacked; their occupants overwhelmed and killed; the wagons set ablaze. This was the beginning of the Indian Wars. From that point on, few wagons traveled alone, and most came with extra men who carried additional weapons. As soon as Indians appeared on any horizon, the shooting began and riders came out from the wagon trains to chase away and often kill the curious Indians. For their part, the Indians were growing less tolerant of the white men. Instead of merely passing through this vast territory, the white families were establishing permanent homes, claiming the land as their own. Land where the Bison had roamed in vast, unfettered herds was now divided up and cordoned off with fences. The approach of any Indian was immediately met with gunfire. It was not long before some of these lone settlements were destroyed by bands of Indians, their occupants slaughtered, or taken as slaves.

By the spring of 1871, the Indians anticipated the arrival of the wagons as surely as they anticipated the melting of the winter snows. However, something entirely new had transpired with the wagon crossings of this particular year. Along with the usual numbers of

extra riders who defended the wagons, another group of men, each clad in identical blue uniforms and riding to one side or other of the wagons, accompanied the trains as they slowly rambled across the prairie. These men were far more organized than the ragged band that usually rode with the wagons. They also carried rifles that did not have to be reloaded after each firing, and they were a formidable force against the Indians.

Still, there were the unfortunate or ignorant few settlers who continued to travel across the plains by themselves, in pitifully small groups, or without the extra protection of outriders or soldiers. It was these small groups who were usually the targets of Indians, who were growing angrier and more restive at the arrival of more and more permanent settlers and the decimation of the food supply that was so important to the Indian's very existence.

By the summers of 1873 and 1874, the blue coats no longer traveled along with the wagon trains acting as mere protection for the settlers. They now traveled as solitary groups and actively went in search of Indian encampments. It was apparent to Gray Eagle and to every person in his tribe, that their function had moved beyond protection of the wagon trains and beyond containment of the Indians in ever diminishing sections of the vast open plains. The all too obvious purpose was the annihilation of the Indian way of life and the elimination of the Indians themselves. All of that history had led to this day and to this spot where 277 of the soldiers and many of Gray Eagle's own people lay dead on the prairie landscape. Gray Eagle sensed what no one else did; that unless something changed quickly, he and his people would soon disappear from the face of the land.

With all of that insight and even with the recent violent history of the coming of these settlers and soldiers, Gray Eagle could not help but look at them as men like himself and wonder what had ever happened that one people could hate another so strongly. But for now, they were the enemy...people who tore up the land, who put up fences where none existed before, who chased away the sacred buffalo, and who seemed intent

on killing Gray Eagle and all of his people. As for these blue-coats, they were the guardians of the settlers. As distasteful as the job might be, Gray Eagle knew that it was his obligation to support his tribe, to support his family, and to kill the pony soldiers.

"Just scalp them, Gray Eagle. What are you standing around for? Get busy. There is no time for your day-dreaming. Other soldiers will come as soon as they hear of our great battle." The words came from Chaska, which means eldest son, one of Gray Eagle's best friends, and one of his worthiest competitors. "Sometimes you are like an old woman, Gray Eagle. It is no wonder that you have no war trophies. How will you ever take a wife, if you are unable to prove your bravery? The tribe will see that you are not worthy to gather buffalo dung for the campfires if you don't show that you are a true warrior."

The words stung, but Gray Eagle was unable to stop the thoughts of what was happening to his world. As a younger boy, he had been on many buffalo hunts. There was plenty of food, and very little reason to fear anyone. However, in just a few short years, the buffalo began to disappear and his Sioux tribe seemed to become the hunted. Now, battles like this one happened frequently. Many of his Sioux brothers and sisters had been killed, either by white settlers or by the soldiers. Although this battle had been quick and decisive, Gray Eagle could not help but think that the killing of the one called Yellow Hair would bring a great change in the fortune of his people. Little did he know that the death of George Armstrong Custer would dramatically change the perception of military leaders and the public. After this, the Indian Problem would no longer be looked upon as a minor inconvenience. The Indians themselves would be viewed as a true menace. Elimination would be seen as the only answer. The world that Gray Eagle knew was about to change...forever.

Reluctantly, Gray Eagle went at the work of stripping the dead soldiers naked. Boots, coats and pants were rarely useful within the Indian culture, but all of the braves knew that the Great Spirit would not accept these dead soldiers into the world beyond if they were

stripped of their clothing and their bodies mutilated. Nothing to do with the dead was pleasant, but removing clothing was far less unsettling to Gray Eagle than removing scalps and mutilation.

There were 277 dead bodies and over 2500 fellow Indian warriors, each looking to acquire the trophies of this battle. Fortunately, this was not a job that would take very long. Gray Eagle was removing a tattered coat from the fourth body when he found them. At first he thought it was just a leather bag of rocks and almost threw them away. But, something made him look inside the bag, and he was unprepared for what he found. These were not rocks, or pebbles. As they poured out of the pouch into his hand, he dropped them instantly to the ground, as if they had seared the palm of his hand. Gray Eagle looked at them curiously for a moment and then slowly bent down and picked them up, one by one. They were made of an unfamiliar substance that felt as hard as the stone used in the arrowheads he carried on his back, but they were round like the sun and the moon, although each was slightly different in size from the others. All eight of them were different in color, too. A couple of them were greenish-black, with streaks of red through them. Two more were brown like the prairie dirt with blue flecks in them. One was as yellow as the hair of the soldier-Chief they had just killed, and seemed to shine as brightly as the summer sun. Another was as red as Gray Eagle's own skin. Still another was blue like the summer sky. The last one was a shimmering green, not unlike the greenish-blue of the Little Big Horn river that ran just below where he stood. Gray Eagle was in awe. He had never seen anything like this. The brilliance, color and dazzling beauty of these unknown items must certainly be a sign of their value and good medicine. Surely, these represented a white man totem of some kind. Gray Eagle stood motionless. Although they had not been good medicine for the soldier who had owned them just minutes before, Gray Eagle was mesmerized by the beauty of the items that lay in his hand. He would keep them as his own trophy of this battle.

"Gray Eagle, we're leaving. You have done nothing to help us. You are useless. You are like an untamed colt." Chaska's taunts were tinged with friendly anger and sarcasm, but Gray Eagle felt the twinge of truth. The only saving grace was that he knew Chaska's friendship would overcome any differences. Chaska would not expose him to the tribe.

Gray Eagle quickly and reverently replaced the colorful round stones into the leather bag, and stuffed it behind the beads and feathers of his breastplate. He would examine this white-man-magic later, and attempt to figure out the importance of it. For now, he held the most amazing war trophy he had ever seen, something that surely had power and would be proof of his bravery, more than even fifty scalps. Gray Eagle held some of the first glass marbles ever introduced to the New World, and the first ever seen by an American Indian.

The next few years were not good for the Sioux nation, or any of the tribes living on the plains. Even though it would be said later by his own people that Custer was a poor leader, who committed certain suicide by dividing his regiment into three columns that June morning, public and military opinion had turned against all Indians. They were hunted; starved if they ran; exterminated if they stayed put; shot or hanged if they were captured.

Many of Gray Eagle's friends and fellow tribesmen died from starvation in the winter of 1877-1878. Others simply wore themselves out and died on the forced marches that took place to escape oncoming units of cavalry. Still more died in the many small skirmishes that took place, not only with small army detachments, but also with other marauding bands of Indians that were in even worse and more desperate shape than Gray Eagle's tribe. Frequently, Gray Eagle would open the small pouch of marbles and pour them into his hand, feeling the smoothness of the round surfaces and marveling at the colors they contained. Over the weeks and months he convinced himself that the marbles had somehow kept him safe in a world where their previous owner had come to such a quick and violent end. How

else could one explain his continued existence and good health with such catastrophe happening all around him? Certainly the Great Spirit had wanted him to find these marbles in the first place, and he was just as certain that the Great Spirit was watching over him as Gray Eagle kept the marbles safe.

Many of the Sioux neither ran from the soldiers nor made any attempt to live in peace. Following Crazy Horse, they went on the attack and attempted to overpower and defeat the soldiers. Word traveled slowly among the tribes, but it was soon learned that this had not been a good decision. Crazy Horse was pursued relentlessly, and he was eventually forced to realize that fighting the growing numbers of soldiers and settlers was fruitless. In 1877, Crazy Horse turned himself in to the soldiers at Fort Robinson, in Nebraska. It was here that he died; some said of natural causes; many said at the hands of the soldiers.

In 1878, Gray Eagle was taken prisoner near Brule, between present day Julesburg and North Platte, along with three other young braves. They had not done anything wrong, but to the soldiers, and to whites in general, anything done by any Indian, meant that all Indians were guilty. Gray Eagle was simply swept up in response to some random act of violence some place else on the Great Plains. It didn't matter to the soldiers who they took prisoner, as long as some Indian was made to answer. He was transferred all the way to Fort Leavenworth, and although he was relatively well treated, there was never a trial or any accusation of wrong-doing. Gray Eagle was merely kept in the stockade area for a year, and then allowed to leave unhurt. However, during that year, profound changes came over Gray Eagle. He was quick to notice the nearly inexhaustible parade of soldiers arriving and leaving the Fort. Another very obvious thing was the immense firepower at the hands of the soldiers. Gray Eagle had seen plenty of rifles, but had never witnessed the destructive power of cannons and howitzers. These revelations made a tremendous impression on Gray Eagle. He soon realized that the rise of the white man was not a temporary phenomena. The day of the Indian

domination of the Great Plains was in mortal danger. When Gray Eagle left Fort Leavenworth, he was changed. His conclusion was that some way of accommodation with the whites must be found, and that fighting the incredible power of the pony soldiers was fruitless.

Chief Gall was growing old, and war wounds had taken their toll. He wanted to avoid further bloodshed, and moved his people to the area that would one day form the border between Nebraska South Dakota. This was the Pine Ridge reservation, which had been created in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, but upon which few Indians lived. Although the reservation encompassed nearly two million acres, it was essentially part of the North American desert and could produce little in the way of food. Gray Eagle rejoined the tribe at just about the time they moved to Pine Ridge. They did manage to carve out a pitiful existence, subsisting mostly on insects and small rodents, with only an occasional antelope that could still be found in the low hills of the Dakotas. Even those were disappearing as the white settlers moved into land that was supposed to belong to the Lakotas. It was only the agreements between Chief Gall and the representatives of the soldiers that kept the settlers from taking everything, even the worthless land they were currently forced to occupy as their home. But this was one of the last agreements that Chief Gall was destined to make. His health was failing quickly, and he knew that the end of his life was near. In the winter of 1880 he contracted pneumonia. It was only a matter of time before he would succumb, and it was obvious that it was time to declare a new chief, if Gray Eagle's people were to survive.

Decisions about who would be Chief of Gray Eagle's tribe were never taken lightly. However, the one chosen this time would have more responsibility placed on their shoulders than had any chief in the collective memory of the tribe. This Chief would lead in a time of great turmoil and danger, and there were conflicting views of just what should be done in the face of a continuing encroachment by the white settlers. They came onto the Black Hills

portion of reservation lands to search for gold, and there had been inevitable skirmishes between the Lakota and the settlers. Now, the soldiers had come to protect the settlers, and word had spread among the tribe that even this land would have to be given permanently to the settlers. These were grave times, and the choice of a new Chief would be critical to the survival of the tribe.

Although women were not allowed to enter the sweat lodge to participate in such important discussions, every male past the age of twenty would go into the dark, windowless hogan for days, and would not exit until a decision was made. A single small fire was built in the center of the hogan, and all the men gathered around the fire in a circle. Anyone could speak, although it was custom that the eldest of the braves would speak first. These were not usual times, however, and the more vocal voices were those of the younger warriors, the ones who had most recently and most often faced the guns of the settlers and the white soldiers. Even though the firelight inside the Sioux hogan was low, beads of sweat were clearly visible on the bodies of the braves. However, not all of the sweat was from the heat of the fire. Some of it was from the heat of talk...talk of tribal leadership, certainly, but also talk of battle...talk of death...talk of war.

"Pony soldiers have killed our women and have starved us by killing our buffalo. We must attack!" It was Enapay who spoke. His name meant 'Goes Out Bravely' and his years of experience would normally go unchallenged by anyone. These were not normal times.

"You are wrong, Enapay. We must follow the sun as it goes into the earth. We will find land the white man does not want." Black Crow was younger than Enapay, but he too had been wounded numerous times by the soldier's swords and bullets. He was only a year older than Gray Eagle, but his status as a warrior went without question. With the breaking of the Laramie Treaty of 1868, the U.S. Government was now allowing prospectors to pour into what had been granted to the Sioux as reservation land, the Black Hills area of Dakota Territory. Thousands of lone prospectors began arriving along with other more permanent settlers, all under the

protection of mounted cavalry. With their never-ending supply of Henry repeating rifles, the soldiers held superior force over the Indians. The Sioux were far outmanned. Black Crow was not a coward. He merely sensed the inevitable.

"Black Crow speaks like a frightened woman," Enapay snorted. His anger was obvious, and he continued, spitting out each word in disgust. "The blue coats bring the white settlers. More will come. The yellow metal of our mountains makes them sick with desire. We must not run like cowards. We must strike first and strike to kill."

Chief Gall, though weak and lying on a cot, raised himself in the dim light. "We do not attack. We do not leave. We stay and protect our land."

"I spit on this land. It is worth nothing! There are no berries or nuts and the animals do not come here. You are old and weak," Shouted Enapay. Such confrontation of authority would have normally been met with death, but everyone knew that Chief Gall himself was dying. Even he knew that he was too weak to stick a knife into the throat of such an insolent brave. Even more, he knew that all views must be heard for a leader to emerge, a leader who would save the Sioux from the same fate as the buffalo. Enapay's words were like acid, but he continued. "This is not our homeland. Our land is endless. Before the white man's treaty, the fastest pony could not reach the end of our land during the passing of ten moons. Now, even Ewahee, (Old Woman Who Laughs) can walk our land in less than two suns. This is not our homeland. This is the land the white eyes do not want. It is Wu tun Kita, (reservation). The words were spoken with obvious hatred. "Now, even what they have given, they want to take back, because of the yellow metal. We are Lakota. We will fight."

The arguing went on for hours and extended into days. Small groups of men who had entered the hogan to say what was in their heart now sat back in frustration. Shouts and whoops could be heard from time to time as both points and threats were made...sometimes brother against brother...sometimes father against son...always group against group. The

women would bring food and leave it at the entrance to the hogan, neither wanting nor allowed to be part of the discussion, yet always knowing that the decisions being forged inside would either bring safety or death to themselves and their children.

"We will be Sicunju no more. We are no longer Sioux. We are no longer an assembly of friends," shouted Hakan, a Sioux name that meant 'Firey'. "The white man has given us food to eat and his fire water to drink so that we will give back some of the reservation. What he gives us poisons our tribe and our way of life. It is like the venom of the rattlesnake. I will join Black Crow and lead anyone who follows. We go beyond the great mountains, where the sun goes to sleep."

"Then you will live and die in shame, Hakan! You are a coward and you will be called Lakota no more. I am Enapay, Lakota forever. I will find and kill the white settlers. I will kill the soldiers who protect them. If you leave, then you will not be welcome in our tipis."

Not every brave felt that running away would solve anything, and they too looked at such an action as cowardice. However, many were simply tired of the fighting and wanted no more confrontations with the guns of the coming waves of settlers and soldiers. Mingled among the strong emotions that Enapay and Hakan represented were more moderate voices like that of Mahkah, named for 'Earth'. His feeling was that peace should be made with the soldiers. The yellow metal was of no use to the Lakota, and the Dakota hills were rocky and steep. Food could not be grown on such land. Mahkah felt that the tribe should simply give the land away. Surely, this would be the solution and the path to peace. They would still have the remaining flat prairie land. There were a few Bison herds still to be found, and some small antelope were occasionally trapped. The white men's representatives did bring food supplies from time to time. It was not their existence of the past, but at least they would survive. If they gave the white settlers what they wanted, then surely they would ask for no more. An agreement...a treaty would be made to give up this part of the land, and then no more after that.

"You are worse than a fool," shouted Enapay. "You are named after the strong earth, but you are not being strong now. You show weakness that is shameful. The white man will take the yellow hills. Perhaps you will be safe for a while, but not forever. I have already seen that the white settlers take land that was once open and free for our ponies to ride. They put up fences and then claim that it is theirs. They shoot anyone who comes onto their land. More of them come. They will come and take what you do not give to the soldiers today. You will not be safe."

Hakan could not resist, and he too jumped into the war of words. "No, Mahkah! The land we are left with is already worthless. Will it have any greater value when we give some of it away? It is true that the yellow metal makes the white man crazy, but the hills are the home of the Great Spirits. We cannot defeat the soldiers. That is why I say we must leave. We will go away during the night and leave the white man alone. Change your heart and come with me beyond the far mountains. There is where we will be safe."

There was no consensus among the braves. Many of the men who spoke had unquestioned courage and demonstrated leadership traits. Yet, no one could sway the majority to their point of view in the dimly lit sweat lodge. The volume grew, and angry voices from each part of the hogan filled the room.

The frail voice of Chief Gall begged for unity, but was lost in the shouts and angry exchanges of words among the younger men.

Gray Eagle had heard enough. He had not spoken a single word during the entire sweat lodge ritual. As one of the younger braves, he knew it was not his place to talk first. And, yet by not speaking at all, he was able to hear the views of Enapay, Hakan, Mahkah and others. He was not only able to see the effect their words had on the other tribe members, but he could clearly see that all of the decisions would result in one thing...the destruction of the Lakota and their disappearance forever. Tears rolled down his cheeks and disguised themselves among the beads of sweat. The arguing did not stop as he stood up, moved close to the fire, and sat

down. From the waistband of his loincloth, he took a small pouch and poured the contents on the dirt floor. The eight glass spheres rolled into the dirt, and the angry talking ceased immediately. It was the first time in over a week that the hogan had been without sound. Minutes passed before anyone spoke. When they did, it was in a low whisper.

"What are they," breathed Hakan?

"Fire lives in them," whispered Black Crow.

"They must come from our brother the sun," ventured another voice. "See the light within them?"

"Where do these come from," asked Chief Gall?

"How does Gray Eagle, who has so recently become a man, have such things?"

Enapay was doubtful, and said so with venom.

"This is white-man totem. Gray Eagle brings evil spirits into our hogan."

Gray Eagle did not respond, but sat without speaking, looking not at Enapay, but directly into the fire. Chaska, his friend from childhood, broke the lengthy silence. His voice was one of controlled anger. "Enapay does not remember the battle with their chief Yellow Hair only a few winters past, or he would not say that Gray Eagle would bring dishonor on his people. You do not know of Gray Eagle's bravery. When Yellow Hair and the pony soldiers came, Gray Eagle counted many coup before the fighting began. In battle, he continued to fight with his knife, long after his horse had been killed. Even now, he has the mark of a soldier's long knife on his arm. Gray Eagle worked with me as I took scalps, and he took this pouch from a dead soldier, as a trophy. Gray Eagle is brave, and Enapay will have to fight me if he says otherwise."

Enapay was not deterred by Chaska's defensive monologue and continued his attack, mocking the story of Gray Eagle's supposed bravery. "Many were brave when fighting the soldier they call Custer. Many took scalps. We did not take the white man's totem. Only Gray Eagle took the white magic. Gray Eagle was with the white soldiers for many moons. He has lived with the soldiers. Only Gray Eagle is white in his heart." Enapay made a quick move to grab the marbles, but

Chaska anticipated this and quickly had the point of his own knife gouged just below the left ear of Enapay. Three other braves came to Enapay's defense and stood defiantly behind him. For a moment, it looked as though civil war was about to break out within the confines of the hogan.

Chief Gall had seen enough. "I will allow no fighting," he shouted! "If brother fights against brother, then the Lakota will be no more. We will be forced to leave our sister, the earth, and go to the Great Spirit's home. The white man will destroy us, unless we act as one. The words between us are bad medicine. Who can heal the anger spoken here?"

Silence filled the cramped hogan. After a minute, Gray Eagle stood, looked around the room, turned toward Chief Gall's death cot, and spoke to him. For such a young brave, his voice had the huskiness of someone much older. He looked directly into Chief Gall's eyes and said loudly enough for all to hear, "I will tell the men of Lakota how to survive. The Great Spirit has spoken to me."

Enapay's eyes flashed in anger, sensing that Gray Eagle would be the primary rival for the position that he felt should rightfully be his. Sarcasm laced his voice as he said, "You will tell us that you have the eyes of the Great Spirit in your hands? It is a trick. I have more winters than you, Gray Eagle. These eyes you have stolen from the white pony soldier can be held by any brave and will be just as powerful."

Gray Eagle said nothing in response to the challenge, but slowly bent down and gathered up the marbles. He placed them in Enapay's hand, closing Enapay's fingers over the brightness that shown within them. "You may be right, Enapay. Go out of the hogan, my brother. Go out into the night. If the eyes of fire still burn in your hand, then I will follow you. If not, then return them to me and listen to what I say."

Enapay sneered at the challenge, but the hogan had become silent. Gray Eagle had challenged the strongest and the most senior of the young braves, and all eyes were now on Enapay to see what he would do. Enapay hissed through his teeth and turned to walk out

of the hogan. He would take Gray Eagle's challenge and prove him wrong. A dozen other braves followed Enapay out of the Hogan into the moonless night. When he returned moments later, the look of anger on his face was even greater. He threw the marbles at Gray Eagle's feet, drew his knife and held it less than an inch from Gray Eagle's neck. "It is a trick. The eyes did not glow in my hand. Only Gray Eagle knows the evil magic of the white man. I will not follow the words of Gray Eagle. I will go and fight for the honor of the Lakota. You will die here." Enapay pushed aside the men who surrounded him and stormed out of the hogan.

Gray Eagle retrieved the marbles from the dusty floor of the hogan. Even in the glow of the low fire, they came back to life. The sparkle was enough to blind the braves, and they fell back in awe. Gently, Gray Eagle placed the marbles in the withered old hands of Chief Gall, who spoke slowly to the assembled tribesmen. "I am too old and sick to lead our people any longer. Many changes come. You will be Chief, Gray Eagle. I say this to all Lakota. Gray Eagle has power in his hands. He holds the eyes of the Great Spirit, who has spoken to him. From today, he is chief of Sicunju...Chief of our people."

In the following year, 1887, Gray Eagle participated in the negotiation of the Dawes Treaty, or the Dawes Severalty Act, as it was officially known, which reduced Pine Ridge reservation land to its present area. He agreed to give up that portion of the Black Hills where gold had been discovered. However, in return, the Act also gave portions of unsurveyed land in the Wyoming Territories, which had been formed in 1868, but which was mostly uninhabited, to Indian families and to single or orphaned Indians over the age of 18. In 1895, he traveled to Fort Omaha to sign final peace agreements with General George Crook, the celebrated Indian fighter. About three months after signing the treaty, Gray Eagle took the remnants of his tribe and traveled away from Pine Ridge to a small valley in the northern part of that land the soldiers called Wyoming Territory. It was an area that he knew well from his childhood, and

was less than one hundred miles from where he had participated in the massacre of the one they called Yellow Hair. Gray Eagle's last remaining tribal members applied with to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for an allotment of land under the Dawes Act. They were granted a total of 21 sections, and it was on this small, nearly insignificant piece of the great prairies of North America that Gray Eagle's people lived out the rest of their lives. From a territory that encompassed the great middle heart of America, some two million square miles, Gray Eagle's little band of once proud Oglala Sioux were reduced to living and farming on land that covered no more than fourteen thousand acres. It was a shameful end to a great culture, and it was here that Gray Eagle would die in 1918, nearing the age of 70. He would be buried less than 100 miles from The Little Bighorn, where he had participated in Custer's Last Stand.

When Gray Eagle settled the small portion of land in Wyoming in 1888, he was around 40, and he took a wife at that time. She gave him a son in 1890, whom they named Red Wolf. She also bore him twin daughters in 1893, but as was the custom, their names were never recorded. His tribe was far enough away from the routes of the great migration of white settlers, that they seldom had contact with either settlers or soldiers. The few contacts they did have, however, were always peaceful in his final years. There were still some collective memories of the killings that had taken place on the plains and at Wounded Knee in 1890, when the great Indian Wars finally came to an end. However, a great many of those who had survived those deadly battles were now themselves passed away. The younger tribe members only knew of the massacre as one of the stories repeatedly told by the medicine man and the few remaining older women. Food was not plentiful, and it was barely adequate. Most of the tribes had not yet evolved from hunters to farmers, and the meager results of their farming efforts meant, if not outright starvation, then malnutrition, at least. Disease and death were common.

In 1906, an Indian Affairs agent told Gray Eagle that a school would be built so that the children could

learn to read and write. Gray Eagle was happy with that idea, but unhappy that he would not live to see it. He knew that he must soon go the way of the great buffalo, and that he must leave his son with the ability to be a wise member of the tribe, perhaps even to be chief of Sicunju. Gray Eagle would ride the endless plains no more, and it was not only because he was elderly. It was because the plains as he knew them in his youth no longer existed. Where sod had never been touched by plow, there were now established pioneer encampments, forts, and even small towns. Settlers who had been stopped for decades where the great forests ended, now had the technology to farm and live on the grassy plains. Where herds of buffalo had once flowed like angry brown oceans, and where a young brave could ride his pony for days on end, there were now ribbons of barbed wire separating one settler from another. And, where Gray Eagle and his people had once roamed for years without ever encountering a white man, there were now great lengths of wagon trains bringing yet more of the people who would eventually engulf the land and its original inhabitants.

Red Wolf, was just 14 when Gray Eagle took him on a hunting trip into the high forested plateaus of eastern Wyoming. While they were camped deep in the forest, Gray Eagle gave Red Wolf the pouch of marbles that he always carried with him. As he poured the eight marbles into the waiting hands of his son, he told him the story of how they came to be in his possession and how he had depended on them for courage when the tribe came so close to destruction. He told Red Wolf about what he perceived in the marbles; how they inspired and protected him; how they were seen as a source of power by the other tribal members, and how Red Wolf should keep and protect them. The boy listened to the story without speaking a word.

Gray Eagle spoke at length. He didn't leave out any details of his youth, the great battles, the killing and dying, the anger and anguish that his tribe had suffered over the years. Once he was finished, Red Wolf sat silently in the light of the fire for minutes before he spoke. At first, he could not even look at his father, but

when he did make eye contact, he found the strength to ask questions that young men seldom asked of their elders. "Why do you give me these, Father? You have told me stories of endless lands that once were ours, of buffalo that could not be counted even over many days; of freedom under the skies; of our lands that could not be traveled in even three moons. All of it is gone. We have lost everything that you said we once had. The old tribe members speak of things that no longer exist. They speak of days of peace and days when we hunted the Antelope. But now, the Antelope and the Buffalo are gone. And, now we are the hunted. The marbles have not made us a great people. We are not free. There is nothing left. How would I be chief of something that is no more? There is no power in the marbles. They are useless. They are a white man's evil totem, and they have brought us nothing but sickness and death."

Gray Eagle looked carefully and for a very long time at the face of the boy and thought of conversations in a sweat lodge across so many earlier years. He spoke slowly to his son, for these were important observations by one so young. "If you believe the marbles have power, then you are right. If you believe that they are the white man's evilness, then you are right. If you believe that something is, then it is. And the same is true if you believe that something is not true. It is how you see it with your eyes, Red Wolf. But it is more important how you see with the eye of your spirit, the spirit that cannot see the deer and the trees, this fire, and that moon above us, as you and I do."

Red Wolf was not convinced and pressed in a way that reminded Gray Eagle of Enapay, the firey brave who had challenged Gray Eagle in the sweat lodge. Red Wolf had doubts, but he was strong. Gray Eagle knew that Red Wolf would lead one day.

"Father, some say that you should have never smoked the peace pipe with the white man. Some say that you were not like the mountain lion or the wolf. They lie in the rocks or the grasses and attack. They do not run away. Some say you are more like the rabbit. It is fast, but it uses its speed to escape, and does not fight."

"So, Red Wolf thinks I should have continued to be in battles, to attack, to fight to the death. Would Gray Eagle have been a great warrior? Would Gray Eagle have been killed in battle? Our people would remember me as a great chief then. Is that what Red Wolf thinks? Or, maybe the white man would have put me in a prison like Red Cloud. And, there I would have still gone to the great spirit. How would any of these things have made life better for you, my son?"

"Father, you don't understand. If you had defeated the soldiers, then we would still have all of our land, our horses, our Buffalo. We would not live on this poor ground that gives us no food and which we can walk across in only four suns. We would still have the life you talk about."

"Red Wolf, if you are chosen to be a chief someday, then you must decide when it is time to die or when it is time to live to fight on another battle ground. A chief must look at his people and see how they can adapt and change in the face of a stronger force, even if it appears to be evil. A Chief may have to ask his people to fight..and to die. Even the lowest brave must be ready to decide whether it is greater to take life or to give life. I chose to give life to my people, and to give life to you. It is true that I could have joined Sitting Bull and fought until death. It is then also true then, that you would not be alive. And, your questions and wisdom tell me that I have always made the right decision. It is true, my son, that our lands may have been taken from us. The mighty buffalo herds are no more. Our ability to cross open plains may have come to an end. But during all of our battles, only our lives have been taken, never our freedom. These marbles saved my life and the lives of many of our people, so that I could give life to you and so that they could give life to their children. You have life so that you can continue to give this precious gift to your children. As for freedom, we will always have that. Freedom is something that you are, not what you have, and it is something that can never be taken from you. Freedom can only be surrendered. We have little today, but that does not mean that you will have little tomorrow. I have seen the white settlers who arrive with

nothing. They build a home to live in. They plant crops. After many moons, they have more than what they started with. We must learn from them if we are to survive. You must watch and learn from them, but, you must not give up yourself. You must remain free inside. That cannot be taken from you. You cannot be a prisoner unless you agree to be. So, take the marbles as a reminder and a memory of what I and your people have been through. Take them and be a wise chief, if you are chosen. And, even if you are not Chief of our people, be a leader to your own son, and tell my story to him, and to the son of your son, and to all of our people. And, with the many experiences of your own life, make the story yours to tell many times over until the day you go to the home of the Great Spirit."

The words did have impact on Red Wolf, and he accepted the small bag and its sacred contents from Gray Eagle. In the years that followed, long after Gray Eagle was dead, he told the story of his father and the marbles to his oldest son, Lone Hawk. Along with the story of the marbles, he also told of his eventual belief in the power they held. When Red Wolf died in 1964, Lone Hawk had long since told the story of Gray Eagle to his own daughter, who in turn, presented the marbles and their history to her own first-born son, the great-great-grandson of Gray Eagle, James Lincoln Night-Wolf Anderson. Like his mother, grand-father, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather before him, Jim Anderson received the marbles at a very young age. But, unlike them, he did not encounter challenges to his beliefs while in his youth. He had no idea that his test of faith would come when he was much older.

Chapter 2 The Arrival

**Near Wilmington, North Carolina
May 2nd , Present Day**

The Panamanian-flagged freighter rounded the Lighthouse at the tip of Oak Island just after 6:00PM, and slowly threaded its way into the channel between Cape Fear on the right, and old Fort Caswell on the left. Southport was just ahead, off the port bow, and the Captain ordered a course into the deepest part of the channel, keeping the Bald Head Islands well to his starboard side. Within three hours, the ship would be docked at the foot of Mears Street in Wilmington, directly across the channel from the battleship USS North Carolina, and arrival activity was already evident among the Ligano's crew.

There was little time for the crew to do any gawking over the ship's railing. They would be docking soon, and there was a lot of work to be done in order to quickly and efficiently offload cargo. Besides, the passage up the Cape Fear River was similar to the entrance of countless small port cities. There was little to see, and to the crew, what they did see on each side of the wide river channel looked like a thousand other small towns they had visited over the years. They worked away in the early May sunshine, unaware and uncaring about the rich history surrounding this part of America. Wilmington had started in the 1700s as an important outlet to the Atlantic and other world cities. But, between its sleepy beginnings in 1739 and re-beginnings in 1900, it had ceased being a major shipping link with the rest of the world. It became just another little dingy, backwater seaport with a name that quickly brought to mind pictures of brackish water, mosquitoes, malaria, and criminals. Wilmington had not always been its name, either. In fact, the town went through many names before the name Wilmington was chosen in honor of Spencer Compton, Earl of Wilmington, an Englishman and patron of Gabriel Johnston, North Carolina's governor at the time. First known as New Liverpool,

then New Town, and then Newton, Wilmington was finally the name that stuck until the present day.

Wilmington had actually played an important part in US history, and was the scene of one of the first successful armed resistance movements against the British imposition of the Stamp Act. It was here, in 1765, that the local stamp collector, Lord Bute, was forced to resign when 500, or so residents gathered at the waterfront to burn him in effigy. Lord Bute, quickly sensing the wisdom of a sea voyage, was London bound within a week, never to be seen again in the Americas. It was also from Wilmington, in 1781, that Lord Cornwallis left on his fateful march to Yorktown, Virginia where he surrendered to George Washington. However, after its short-lived glory in the Revolutionary War, Wilmington devolved into nothing more than a best-to-be-avoided backwater town. Since it was nearly 30 miles from the open Atlantic, navigation up the Cape Fear River had always been a serious impediment to modernization anyway. The Civil War, the rise and fall of the cotton trade, horrible and regrettable racial incidents, the emergence of the tobacco trade in the Piedmont Region, and the Great Depression all conspired to leave the city a shabby reminder of its pre-Revolutionary War self. The 1940s finally brought a resurgence of ship building because of World War Two and brought Wilmington back to the brink of being a world class port. Modern dredging techniques allowed for widening and deepening the Cape Fear River enough to accommodate deep water ships. As busy as it became however, Wilmington was never to be as important as Savannah, or Charleston, making it ideal for a lesser known shipping carriers and smaller freighters like the Ligano. Wilmington had one other advantage for the Ligano's cargo: trucks could have immediate access to Interstate-40, allowing speedy delivery of shipments to inventory-hungry stores and manufacturers throughout the mid-Atlantic states.

Foreign flagged vessels were no stranger to Wilmington, and the Ligano's manifest, cleared through the East Coast Port Authority thirty-six hours earlier, indicated that auto parts, batteries, asphalt roofing

materials, soy bean oil, textiles, Honduran Mahogany, and a large shipment of Taiwanese-made wind chimes made up the bulk of the cargo on board. Within forty-eight hours of arrival, most of the items on board would be on the shelves of one of the ubiquitous K-Mart, Wal-Mart, Home Depot, or Target stores that dotted the North Carolina landscape, or gobbled up into one of the many small manufacturing plants that made up the state's economy. This was certainly a cheaper shipping decision than having the cargo come through a more distant port like Miami, or Delaware, and the state's merchants were thankful for Wilmington, no matter its history or size.

The *Ligano*, was late of Jakarta, Taipei, Managua, and Panama, and passed all of the latest Homeland Security profiles. Although Jakarta was on the list of suspected terrorist havens, there had been at least three non-suspect port calls since leaving Jakarta. The arrival of the *Ligano* caused no alarm in the small US Custom's offices in Wilmington. It docked just past 10:00 PM.

In the mid 1900s, even a rather small freighter the size of the *Ligano* sailing into the intermediate sized port of Wilmington might have been cause for a great deal of local curiosity. But, today, such arrivals were commonplace. Furthermore, Memorial Day was close at hand, and many residents had already left town for Carolina and Myrtle beaches to the south, Nags Head or one of the many shore towns surrounding Pamlico Sound to the north, or inland to the relative coolness of the heights of Raleigh-Durham or Winston-Salem. Even the Port of Wilmington Customs Office was already on its pre-holiday shift. Only three inspectors were available to take care of all ships currently in port. The *Ligano* would arrive without fan-fare and would be hustled quickly to and away from the wharf loading area. That suited the Captain just fine.

There was room for only seventeen, pre-loaded shipping containers on board. After docking, each one was carefully craned down from the deck of the ship to the dock. Inspectors quickly examined container seals and bills of lading against the manifest and directed crane operators to proceed with the loading of containers

onto waiting trucks. American businesses and their 'just-in-time' inventory procedures demanded quick clearance of the precious cargo. That had truly been one of the quandaries faced by The Department of Homeland Security after 9/11. How would Customs inspect every one of the millions of shipping containers arriving at US ports each year, without completely shutting down the US economy?

The compromise reached was pre-clearing of manifests based on the ports of call for ships arriving in the US, along with the actual inspection of as little as two percent of the containers. The Captain and his employers knew all of this information and counted on the ravenous nature of American consumers to help them in their mission. In only six hours, the Ligano had disgorged its entire cargo, was refueled, and was ready for departure. The Captain wasted no time in directing the release of all mooring lines. With the help of a harbor tug, the Ligano slipped out into the main channel and headed south down the Cape Fear River, back to the anonymity of the Atlantic Ocean. As she again cleared the Oak Island Lighthouse two hours later, some crew members lowered themselves over the sides of the rusty bow on what appeared to be window washer's platforms. Within twenty minutes they had completely covered the two-foot high white letters making up the name Ligano with fresh black paint. Before the ship was out of sight of land, the Ligano had become the Mitsu Maru.

"Honduran Mahogany, huh?" The wharf area gate guard eyeballed the green shipping container on the trailer of the truck as it hissed to a stop in front of him. He noted the eight foot high, white, stenciled CSCO letters on the side of the container and compared the serial number to the one provided by Customs just an hour before. "Guess I'd like to have a load of that for my home workshop," he chuckled. "Where ya'll headed?"

The wiry little driver flashed a mouthful of white teeth at the guard and used his best English to respond. "Winston-Salem and Asheville," he said. His accent made it sound more like Winstune-Saleem and Hatchville, but

the guard got the idea. The driver had a fifteen hour trip ahead of him, first up the I-40 to Winston-Salem, and then on to the western end of the state, where the talented Asheville furniture makers would turn the \$10,000 declared value of this Mahogany load into \$2,000,000 worth of custom furniture.

The guard touched the bill of his cap shook his head. "Got some bad news for you, Pardnuh. The RADSCAN is down. Can't let your load out of the yard until mid-day tomorrow." RADSCAN was short for radiation scanner. This was the final line of defense that Homeland Security had installed as part of the post 9/11 compromise security bill of 2002. The principal was the same as that employed at most modern department stores in the US once shoplifters discovered that they could easily keep their EBAY accounts full of for sale merchandise by simply stealing it right from under the eyes of merchants like K-Mart, Wal-Mart, and Target. It was an interesting little game until the scanners at the exit doors of most stores brought the procedure to a virtual standstill. Ships would offload trillions of dollars worth of goods at American ports, from where it would travel to store shelves. Shoplifters would steal about twenty percent of the merchandise right off the shelves and undercut the merchants by selling brand new products on EBAY, UBid, and other surviving dot-com websites. The stores would simply write off the losses, raise prices for everyone, and order more goods to be shipped from overseas where labor was cheap and life even cheaper.

After 9/11, Homeland Security needed something that would at least give the impression that our ports were secure. The transfer of so many jobs to overseas markets where labor costs were a tenth of the US labor costs meant that all of those manufactured items came back to the US in shipping containers. Millions of those containers flowed into the US each year, and a hand inspection of each one meant that the US economy would sink to its knees. To circumvent a melt down in the economy, Homeland Security depended on its triumvirate shipping procedure. First, containers were filled and sealed in the country of origin, inspected by the

shipping country port authority representative, and a contents manifest was digitally transmitted to the destination US port authority no later than 72 hours before the container was to be offloaded here. Second, a record of all port visits was kept for each ship prior to its arrival in an American port. In its infinite wisdom, Homeland Security felt that a ship visiting ports of countries where there were no known terrorist groups operating would indicate a certain level of safety, not only of the ship itself, but its precious cargoes of shipping containers containing billions of dollars worth of goods for American stores. If any port visit was made to a suspect country prior to entering US waters, the ship was flagged for more meticulous inspections of crew, ship, and containers. Since time is money in the shipping and the retail businesses, flagging a ship for comprehensive inspection might mean that days would be added to the ship's turn-around time. And, it also meant that ravenous US consumers would find store shelves empty when they ventured out to find their latest electronic gadget. Retailers would have none of it, and Homeland Security was extremely sensitive to the needs of the US economy.

For the third and crowning line of defense at US ports, technology was rushed into service in the form of radiation counters, actually called Advanced Spectroscopic Portal Radiation monitors, or ASP for short. When a shipping container was loaded onto the trailer of a delivery truck, the driver would then maneuver the entire truck through the up-stretched arms of the ASP. The counters were designed to probe deep within the contents of the container without ever having to break the seal. Essentially, it worked like a giant Geiger counter, looking for unusually high radiation counts that might indicate either a nuclear device on board or fissionable material that could be used to construct a bomb. Even lead shielding around a bomb wouldn't provide enough protection from the electronic eyes of the RAD counter. It was highly sensitive. So much so, that to shield a bomb from the device would require enough lead that its container would weigh more than the truck, trailer and shipping container combined.

Homeland Security felt very confident about the ASPs, and the truth was that they were a very efficient and accurate answer to the task of inspecting forty or fifty million containers each year. The weakness in the system was the sensitivity of the machines themselves. There were countless 'false positives' that then required manual inspection of the containers, delaying shipments. They broke down often. And, when they were out of commission, the giant economic conveyor belt of consumer goods that stretched from Beijing to Main Street USA came to a certain and expensive halt.

"But, tomorrow too late. I must get wood to 'Hatchville' tomorrow." The driver flashed his most game, toothy smile and spoke in a gentle, almost pleading voice.

"No deal, Buddy! You know the rules: No RAD, No Roll." The guard was smiling, friendly, and the driver knew that getting out of the yard depended on him remaining that way. He leaned back in the cab of the truck and sighed deeply, as if signaling defeat to the rules of the system.

"Ahhhh, yes, it ees dee rules, my friend. I understand. I only hope my youngest daughter will understand that I will miss her trip to Washington for the fireworks next weekend. Look at this sweet face"! The driver held out his wallet, flipping it open to expose the picture of a young girl, about six years of age. "You have such a daughter?" he asked of the guard.

"Boys! Got three of 'em.....'bout her age, I suspect. A set of twins who are seven years old, and a boy nine. Kids! Something else, huh?"

The guard flashed a knowing wink, and the driver decided that he must make one final attempt to gain the help of the guard and get his rig out of the yard and onto the highway. "I have a boy! Let me show you his picture. His name is Benjamin."

The guard's eyes widened when the driver flipped over the picture holder with the little girl's face. Six one hundred dollar bills were on the other side of the wallet fold, each with the face of Benjamin Franklin staring back at the guard. Even in the washed out light of the yard

vapor lamps, the guard could see that they were brand new.

The driver looked into the face of the guard for a long moment before he whispered in a low, calm, friendly voice. "You can have one for each boy, and some for yourself and your wife. Your boys can have many fireworks next weekend." The driver waited...smiling.

The guard reached out, took the bills and put them in his shirt pocket, while his eyes darted back and forth across the yard area. "Yeah, well, ya'll get on out of here now, ya hear me? And, let's be driving real careful like up to...'Hatchville', OK?"

The driver ignored the mocking way the guard mispronounced and emphasized Ashville. However, in this case, the sound of "Hatchville" coincided with the grinding clank of the lock on the ten-foot high security fence gate. It was opening, and there was nothing left to do but smile at the guard and drive away into the night.

The driver gunned the semi out of the loading yard and up Mears street to Second Street where he turned left. From there, it was only nine blocks north to State Highway 17, and less than five miles east to the 132, which eventually turned into I-40, finally getting him northwest bound for Winston-Salem. Mapquest was a miracle, thought the driver. With only a few clicks of a mouse, he had been able to find complete directions from Wilmington to his destination. His printed maps were on the seat beside him.

Four hours and two Big Macs later, the driver pulled off at the Hannah's Creek rest stop for a restroom break and a chance to stretch his legs. It was only two more miles to the I-40/I-95 interchange, and another 40 miles or so to Raleigh. A few minutes later, as he climbed back into the cab of his truck, he took his all-important manifest paperwork from the clipboard on the seat beside him. In careful, deliberate moves, he tore the paperwork into thin strips and stuffed the strips in with the wrapper and remains of the Big Mac on the floorboard of the cab. He then wadded the sandwich bag up into something no larger than a baseball, leaned out of the truck window, and carefully tossed it into a green

waste bin provided by the North Carolina Department of Highways. There was no sense being stopped for littering, he thought to himself.

The truck motor roared to life, and the driver pulled out of the rest stop onto I-40. Just two miles further along, he approached the I-95 interchange. This was one of the main arteries of the eastern seaboard, running north and south from the tip of Florida to Trenton, New Jersey. To his left lay Fayetteville, Savannah and eventually Miami. To his right was Richmond, Virginia and Washington. The driver stayed in the slow lane as he approached the I-95 transition road. At the same time, he pulled manifest forms from his coat pocket that were nearly identical to the ones he had destroyed just a few minutes earlier. In fact, there were identical, with the exception of one thing: the destination! Instead of Ashville, the forms now read, "Akmel Import/Export, Washington, DC." As he reached the transition lanes, the driver left the I-40 to Winston-Salem and took the transition road to the right...to I-95 North...to Washington.

Washington, DC
Early morning, May 3rd

It was located between 24th and 25th streets on L Street NW in Washington. According to its filed business papers, Akmel Import/Export specialized in hand-carved wooden artifacts for distribution nationwide. The location afforded good access to the Ronald Reagan National Airport across the Potomac River to the south. It also provided close proximity to the I-55, the Beltway, and points further west. By using the inner and outer loops of the Beltway, a business person could access almost any part of the greater Washington metropolitan area within an hour. There was one other great benefit of Akmel's newest business location: It was less than ten blocks west of the White House and the US Capital building.

The green CSCO shipping container hardly looked out of place, as the driver slowly negotiated the streets of Washington. Many companies had headquarters or

major office locations in the nation's capitol. Moving vans and delivery trucks of all sizes were a common sight. With pork barrels of money to be spent, new government buildings were always under construction, requiring the appearance of trucks of all sizes and shapes at all hours of the day and night. George Washington University Hospital was only about three blocks from Akmel's US Headquarters, and was constantly in a state of refurbishment and remodeling. Contractors stored their tools in similar shipping containers, and had dozens of them scattered throughout the parking lots of the hospital grounds. Whoever had planned this mission had done well, the driver thought. No one would give his rig a second look.

When he arrived at "Akmel", the driver thought how non-descript these "World Headquarters" looked. The small, three story building was essentially a cube, made of a grayish sandstone, with darkly tinted windows on two of the three levels. There were no identifying marks or words on the sides of the structure, other than the address. The driver gunned the heavy truck and trailer through the driveway entrance on the west side of the building, into the parking lot beyond. Although it was only a little after three in the afternoon, there were no cars anywhere in the parking area. Behind the offices was a separate building made of similar materials. The only differences were that it had no windows at all and had only a single roll-up garage door that was fifteen feet wide and equally tall, obviously meant for deliveries by larger trucks. After using a standard garage door opener to activate the entry door, the driver carefully backed his truck through the building doorway and turned off the motor. Before exiting the cab, he turned the garage door opener over in his hands. On the other side he found a standard calculator face, and he punched in a series of numbers listed on one of the sheets of paper in his manifest documents. A small set of lights began to blink on the dash panel of the truck, indicating that his number sequence that he had entered was the correct one. What he didn't see was that an identical set of lights began to blink within the dark confines of the container itself. The driver stepped down from the cab

and walked out of the building, using one of his keys to activate a lock just outside the building entrance. The warehouse door slid to a closed position. From there, he walked back out to L Street NW and began looking for a bus stop. He had done exactly as instructed and had no idea what the next group of men would be doing with the truck, nor did he care. What he knew was that all of his actions were done to the glory of Allah's name. What he didn't know was that in just a matter of days the history of Washington, DC would embark on an entirely new chapter.

Chapter 3

The Coming Storm

Washington, DC The Following Monday

May weather in Washington was not always as cool as this. But, it was unpredictable. At this time of year, the remains of huge thunderstorms, fresh from rumbling across the Great Plains and the Ohio Valley, would frequently plow into Washington with a vengeance and what appeared to be little spent energy. Washington was just at that geographic point where, in the springtime, tremendous masses of newly warmed, humid air from the south began to push into the last remains of colder Canadian air. Not only was this the stuff of awesome lightning storms, but it also meant that one Spring day could be influenced by a sweater-cool winter chill, only to be followed 24 hours later by a near summer day when lovers strolled near the reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial and young men over on the Ellipse tossed Frisbees to dogs that defied both gravity and physics to catch them. But, perhaps the weather was a natural metaphor for politics, where one never quite knew what to expect even from one day to the next. In fact the local joke about Washington politics was a take-off on the joke about weather in most local communities: 'If you don't like it, just wait five minutes. It will change.'

This was a particularly cool day though, and Jim Anderson sat alone in the Washington Grill. He wasn't sure whether the overnight change in the weather was indicative of Democrats or Republicans currently holding sway in the halls of Congress. And it didn't matter a lot to him. There was a whole business made up of pundits who made daily book on everything from the color tie the president wore at his infrequent press conferences, to which particular Senator was chosen to respond to the president's weekly radio message. Jim had long before learned to tune out all of the "noise" of Washington in

particular and politics in general. Although he and his wife, Liz, had only been in Washington for the last 10 years, local politics back in his home state of Nebraska had made him a very quick study. He had been in DC only a few weeks when it became quite evident that national politics was a similar game to local politics, just played with a larger number of decimal points. Of course, there was the added fact that state governors had never had the power to send young men into war. But, take away that power and the president seemed little more than mayor of a large city. Oh sure, the various political groups were more contentious than most towns; and, some Representatives and Senators actually thought that the national destiny rested on their shoulders. However, one just couldn't take their pomposity seriously and maintain one's sanity in Washington. That didn't mean that insults could be leveled at their daily antics in front of the cameras and microphones or that one could dismiss the theatrics they displayed on the floors of the Senate and House. Far from it. The care and feeding of the American government demanded that ordinary citizens continue to feel each and every day that two things were always happening: First, that someone was in charge. Second, that their personal interests were being taken into consideration in all political matters. If those two things were not broadly felt across the face of America, then trouble certainly was brewing for one party, and sometimes for both. And, of course, all DC politicians were adept at keeping the cauldron of public opinion at a slow simmer most of the time. A party that was out of power had an apparatus that circulated daily talking points to their members designed to "worry" the public that there was no one in charge and that their interests were not being taken seriously. The party in power had a similar organization and main themes that were designed to convince the public that all situations were under control and that the political folks in Washington were doing nothing without first taking the pulse of the heartland and main street, always doing what was best for the American public, American business, and the American way of life. These were the 'spin' organizations

that each party maintained, and some of the best and brightest - and many times the sleaziest - young attorneys, business graduates, pollsters, economists, media mavens, and general political wannabes inhabited (many said 'infested') the hierarchy of these 'spinner' groups. The result was two titanic forces and a few splinter political groups that acted on each other to keep the great ship of state upright and moving, if somewhat fitfully, ahead. In fact, Jim had often thought of that very metaphor when thinking of the US government...that it was like one of those America's Cup sailing sloops, with one party, the one in power, forming the sail...filled with gusts of wind, leaning hard to one side or the other, and pulling the vessel forward. The other party, the one out of power, forming the hidden but all important keel of the ship, acting with even greater force but in exactly the opposite direction to keep the ship from simply tumbling over and capsizing in the ocean swells. Both were critical, and although they acted against each other, the ship could not operate without both. The billowing sails were beautiful and awesome to behold. But, the keel? It was mostly unseen. And, it certainly wasn't a lovely sight when exposed, often stained with green seaweed and occasionally boasting an array of ugly attached barnacles. However, without the unlovely keel, a ship would founder and sink.

Jim also knew that the image of a smoothly functioning government was important on the world stage. From its very beginning, America had fearsome and formidable enemies, and it had always been critical that a strong and stable face be presented to the world of powerful countries that threatened to crush the upstart colonies. The great ironic twist was that the enemies of America's youth were counted among its most trusted allies today. America's independence had been born out of a bloody conflict with the British. But France, and to a lesser degree, Spain, were in that picture also, frequently changing alliances to suit the needs and aims of the countries in question. Prior to the Revolutionary War, when France owned present-day Canada, they had conspired with many from the Mohawk Nations to wrestle control of the Ohio Valley and other areas beyond the

Appalachians. Meanwhile, Spain picked at the southern borders of the thirteen original colonies and controlled what would one day be Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. When asked, most people thought of Spain's control on the North American continent as being confined to the southeast and southwest states. Few people remembered from their early US history lessons that Spain controlled the vast central portion of the North American continent between 1762 and 1800, extending as far north as present day Michigan and as far west as Idaho. As late as 1775, just one year before the little group of thirteen colonies would declare independence from Britain, the Spanish Crown sent Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra north along the Pacific Coast of North America, in an attempt to find the fabled Northwest Passage and to exclude Russia and Britain from a Pacific foothold on the North American continent. Their obvious aim was to secure for Spain, everything west of the original thirteen colonies, all the way to the Pacific. One of the famous bays in northern California still bears Captain Bodega y Quadra's name - Bodega Bay, north of San Francisco.

Jim was at the Washington Grill to meet his son, Todd Anderson. And, as the minutes ticked by, he couldn't help but think about one of his favorite topics - American History. DC was full of that history, of course. Reminders were everywhere. History seemed to permeate the air itself. One merely had to breathe, and history flowed into the lungs. He could breathe history deeply every day, and his thoughts continued about the founding of the country: At the end of the Revolutionary War, America found itself poor and adrift among a sea of threats by what were certainly the world superpowers of that day. After our declaration of independence in 1776, we fought the British for eight horrific years. And, even though that war ended in 1784, resulting in the actual independence of America, we would fight the British again, just 28 years later, in The War of 1812. The French and Spanish game of playing both sides of the equation meant that they were our 'friends' at one moment and potential adversaries in the next. But there was no love lost among the three countries. In 1800,

through the efforts of Napoleon Bonaparte, Spain ceded all of its North American holdings to France. Then, in 1803, a mere sixteen years after the Constitution was signed, Thomas Jefferson had the wisdom to authorize the Louisiana Purchase. America was gaining in size and strength.

The initial fragility of the nascent country was the genesis of both a tragic and a strategic framework for our beginning as a country and as the country exists today. The 'tragic' part of that near still-born birth of America was its decision on the question of slavery. Most, if not all of the Founders realized the inherent evil of slavery. Yet, all of them were keenly aware that forcing the question at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 would likely result in the split of the original colonies into two separate countries. America would not start even as 13 states, but more likely as two countries of six or seven states each, both of which would most likely have perished when faced with the perils of forming a new nation. So, by agreement, the question was taken completely off the table for the first 25 years of America's existence. There was little doubt that this 'seed' of denial grew into the full harvest of civil war in 1861 and the continuing issue of racism in America into the 21st century. However, few recognized that without this initial denial, there was a strong possibility and probability that America would have simply died in its early years as an interesting but short-lived experiment. In short, had the founders not turned a blind eye to slavery, doubtless caving in to the special interests of the southern colonies, then America would never have come into being, certainly not the America that we know today. It was true that some of that unfortunate history had finally been put to rest with the election of Barack Obama back in 2008, but everyone knew that it might take another 250 years to disappear completely.

Since the events of 9/11, Jim had often thought of the second aspect of America's founding that was really a two-parter...one that affected his ancestors personally. The first half of that aspect was America's early struggles to establish itself as a world power. The second was the concept of Manifest Destiny.

As a member of the current administration, Jim often heard disparaging comments about America's position as the sole superpower on the world stage. Whether that was born of some belief that power had been misused over the centuries, or just some jealousy or anger that America had power at all was never made clear. In truth, it was probably some of both. Jim only knew that America was born out of bloody conflict, just as nearly all nations have been formed, and from the beginning there was a determination that infant America would succeed. It was John Adams who, even with an almost empty treasury, determined that with French, British, and Spanish warships and privateers crisscrossing the Atlantic and Caribbean in search of land and treasure, America would have a navy, or it would easily perish. One might accurately say that America's arms race began in 1797, and that with only brief periods of isolationism, had never stopped.

The other aspect on which Jim reflected was Manifest Destiny. This was the one that had affected his own ancestors, and upon which countless hours of discussion had been spent with his son, Todd. With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, America essentially quadrupled in size with the stroke of a pen. Jefferson was the one who clearly had the vision of an America that stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific. There was only one little problem with that vision: Jim's ancestors lived right in the cross hairs of Jefferson's America. Libraries across the country were filled with books about the rightness or wrongness of Manifest Destiny and its ultimate effect on the Native Americans. Jim often wondered whether the history of the "Indian Problem" had resulted in his very existence today. Since he was half Sioux Indian and half Caucasian, his existence was obviously the result of America's expansion westward. But, would he still have existed in some alternate country made up of American Indians if European settlers, moving west of the Appalachians in the early 1800s had simply said, "Oh, this land belongs to someone else. Let us go back to our original colonies. In fact, let us return to England and leave this land to its inhabitants, for they were here before us." It was a great philosophical

question, but it was similar to debating the number of angels that might fit onto the head of a pin. For, as Jim knew, a different decision by Adams, or Jefferson, or Custer, or that poor potato farmer from Pennsylvania, his paternal great grandfather, who decided to move west in 1870, might just have easily meant that he wouldn't exist at all.

Perhaps it was the pragmatism of his own Sioux heritage or having grown up in the more practical world of farming and ranching in Nebraska. Either way, it simply was! History was history. And, although the Sioux side of his nature might express anger and outrage at the injustices done to his ancestors, the Caucasian side sensed that nothing around him would exist today, had the early Americans, realizing that they were encroaching on inhabited lands, turned around and gone home. It was the old question of whether 'good' could eventually come out of a birth that was inherently bad, and which treated the inhabitants of the new land in an evil and inhumane way. The same question existed in his mind about the slavery question. There was no doubt that slavery was wrong, but there was also no doubt that it had existed in reality. What if the thirteen colonies had split into two groups over the slavery question at the Constitutional Conventions of 1787? Would the northern states have evolved into something akin to the America of today while the southern states continued to enslave an entire race to this very day? Would there even be an America today? Would all of the thirteen colonies instead have succumbed to the larger, more dangerous world that existed at the time? Would Washington, DC exist? Would he be sitting here in the Washington Grill waiting for his son? Would he be Secretary of Agriculture of the mightiest country on the face of the planet?

It was a common statement in Washington that 'all politics are local'. But, Jim thought that the phrase should also be expanded to include a statement that 'all politics are current', too. Many pundits and politically motivated and agenda-driven speakers were fond of denigrating the founders for their unwillingness to face difficult questions over 200 years earlier; for sweeping issues under the rug, so to speak, until they came back

to haunt the country in gut-wrenching events like the civil war. However, Jim saw the same irresponsibility in Congress in the present day. Abortion, Social Security, gay rights, illegal immigration, border security! These were just a few of the issues that had become so politically charged that a firm position on either side of the topic could mean certain political suicide at the voting booths for a politician who made anything other than a wishy-washy statement of belief and philosophy. Taking a publicly firm position either way was almost always fatal. Would Americans 200 years in the future look back at these times and say the same things about our current politicians as pundits were so fond of saying about our fledgling political process 230 years earlier? Would it be said that current politicians were simply afraid to make the tough calls, setting the country up for even more violent confrontations in the future? Jim thought for a second, and then muttered to himself, "Yes, that's exactly what they will say." Then he added, "And rightly so." And there was the continual audacity of Senators and Congressmen to give themselves a "free pass" for past decisions by boldly stating that if they had known at that particular point in time what they knew today, they never would have cast a particular vote. It was a statement of spinelessness in Jim's mind. There was no way to know "then" what one had only recently learned. Yet, no politician seemed willing to state that they had made an earlier decision based on the best available information at the time. They only wanted to escape the responsibility of stating that they had made, but only with 20/20 hindsight, a wrong decision. Jim often thought that it amounted to something akin to a doctor's Hippocratic oath, "First, do no harm." Only, in the case of politicians, it was more like a hypocritic oath - "First, admit no wrong."

"More water, Sir?" The waiter's voice brought him back to reality.

Jim indicated to the waiter that his glass should be refilled and then continued to reflect on his own history and heritage. Where was all of this historical thinking coming from? It was the commencement address at the

University of Nebraska. That was it. During the previous Fall, he had been approached to speak at May graduation ceremonies. And, now the time was here. The presentation to him had been simple. He was an alumnus. He had played half-back and occasional quarterback under Coach Bob Devaney, perhaps the nearest god-like figure ever to hail from the UNL campus, until Coach Tom Osborne came out of Hastings, Nebraska to take over as head coach of "Big Red." And, he was Secretary of Agriculture. In a state where beef, wheat, corn, and soybeans might form the top industries, but where Husker football was without equal as a topic of conversation, what could be more appropriate than to have the current Secretary of Agriculture speak 'pearls of wisdom' to the newest crop of graduates? He had instantly agreed to the request.

Even though the events of September 11th, 2001 had begun to fade from immediate memory, everyone, especially those in government service, remained a little jumpy. He flinched when his cell phone started ringing. This was not an emergency. The caller ID identified the caller as his son, Todd, and Jim flipped the phone open. "Hey, Todd, stuck in traffic again?"

"You know it, Dad. I'm caught in construction near the circle. I'm running late. Can you wait for me?"

"Sure, not a problem." He chuckled into the mouthpiece. "You know us high and mighty politicians. Nothing but time on our hands. Why don't you use the time productively and think of some topics I can use for my commencement address."

"Commencement? Dad, you finally got your Bachelor's?"

"Funny, Kid!" Todd had inherited his dad's sarcastic wit, and he couldn't help poking fun at his dad's attainment of a mere Master's degree, when Todd held a Ph.D. in Electronic Engineering.

"No, Doctor Anderson!" Jim parried his son's remark with a little humor of his own in return. Todd was the only child of James and Elizabeth Anderson and was married to Adina, herself a Doctor..."a real one", he would often say to Todd. Adina was just about to complete her residency at Silver Springs Memorial

Hospital. "I'm headed out to Lincoln to give a commencement address, and I have really procrastinated on pulling my thoughts together. The president keeps me pretty busy. You remember the president, don't you? Our Boss? President Merkelson?"

Todd couldn't help but laugh. "Oh, yeah, that guy! Well, it's because of him that I'm running late. Looks like I'm headed to Russia for a few days. I'll tell you all about it when I see you, but I'll be thinking about beef, corn, and Husker football, so that you have some timely material for the grads to eat up when you're in Lincoln. Mom going with you?"

"No, she's got her own national conference to attend. It's the US Child Advancement Symposium coming up, and she's the national chairwoman this year. Can't miss that, you know. She's presenting the national award at the White House next week. I'll be doing this one alone, but I've got to go on to Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana afterwards, anyway. So it worked out just fine. I'll miss her on this trip, though. I Always do. She'd love to be there, I know. We've got too many shared memories in Nebraska and the Lincoln campus in particular. You know...once college sweethearts, always college sweethearts."

"OK, Dad. I'll be there as quick as I can. Maybe I can teach you some of the current hip phrases, so that you don't get any "groaners" during your speech." Todd disconnected and Jim folded his cell phone and placed it back in his coat pocket. As he put the phone away, his hand touched the small leather bag of marbles that he always carried. He took them out and placed them on the table in front of him. Then it came to him. A speech about ancestral history really might make a good topic for the address in Lincoln. After all, these grads were just like the grads at every other college this May. They were the latest in the long line...the line that stretched from then to now...the line that might have started with a weaver, a baker, a candlestick maker, or yes, even an Indian Chief. In America, it didn't matter. For some, there might be a leg up because of family history or wealth. But, even those people came from....somewhere...something...that perhaps had not

always been wealthy or maybe even respectable. In America, anyone and any group could succeed. However, America's promise was equal opportunity, not equal success. The opportunity was there. It had been won for all at a great cost by many. But, "success" would not be given without effort. One merely had to strive, to do one's best, to get educated, and to move forward. If the great-great-grandson of a Sioux Indian Chief could reach this point in life, then anyone could do it. Yes, maybe that would be his message to the grads...that you aren't guaranteed to get ahead because of your family or group, and you aren't guaranteed to experience success because of social achievements of your race, color, ethnicity, or creed. But, you are also not going to be refused success because of your skin color....not any longer...not in America, certainly not since the presidency of Barack Obama. Success is the result of taking the education and skills developed to this point and applying them to the future. The door to success and opportunity had been opened through the countless efforts, and often the ultimate sacrifice of men and women throughout America's history. However, to step through that door required individual effort. The opportunities were endless. The playing field was now almost always level and fair due to the laws of the land, largely the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Success depended on the individual from this point on. And, this was the beginning...the commencement. Yes, those sounded like grand messages for the graduates, but also a bit too serious. Todd was right; he needed some levity, too. It was the 21st century, after all, not 1776. The waiter poured more water and hovered expectantly as Jim toyed with the bag of marbles and thought about Nebraska and his own life since his graduation in 1963, the life he had created with Liz.

Todd arrived in just a few minutes. "Sorry I'm late, Dad. You know DC traffic better than anyone." Jim had been lost in thought and hadn't even seen Todd approaching. He slipped the pouch of marbles back into his coat pocket as his son took a seat at the table, placed a napkin into his lap, and opened the Grill's ample menu to the luncheon specials.

"Not a problem," Jim said. "I was just imagining the final applause and standing ovation of those eager-faced graduates at UNL."

"A legend in your own mind, huh?" Todd laughed as he poked a bit of fun at his father and sipped at a freshly poured Pellegrino. "Those kids don't know what's in store for them. Maybe I should phone ahead and warn the University Chancellor of just what they are in for. After all, I've had plenty of experience with you. I can tell them the parts they should pay attention to and what they can safely ignore."

Jim ignored the sarcasm. He pointed out the seared Cod filet special to the waiter and continued. "Russia, huh? Off to see our Russkie buddies? So, what's cooking with the Russian Navy Brass? Hunt for Red October, or, some such thing? Or, can you tell me?"

Todd ordered a Cajun Chicken Salad and continued as he handed his menu to the waiter. "Well, I'll need to see your security clearance, Mister, and even then I might have to kill you after I tell you." As an undergraduate, Todd had developed a taste for engineering. His Master's was taken from Cal Tech, and his Ph.D. in electronic engineering was earned at MIT, where he specialized and did original research in underwater acoustic signatures, specifically studying the effects that saline and temperature layers had on underwater communication. Immediately after earning his Doctorate, he started work for the Naval Research Lab in Washington, and had been there ever since. Jim's own history in the Navy, with two tours aboard submarines, made the subject the one area where he and Todd seemed to have the most commonality. They could talk endlessly about thermal barriers, underwater inversion layers, and salinity walls. The conversations bored Liz to distraction, but she was always pleased to see 'her two men', as she called them, so deeply engrossed in a subject that interested them both. As lunches arrived, Todd was deep into his favorite subject. "Well, it's Callisto, Dad. We've still been unable to get consistent CSD and continually have to fall back on VLF first as a signal for the sub target to come to at least 50

meters before we can get dependable communication. Our best penetration is 80 meters at the most."

Todd spoke in jargon that almost no one but another researcher, or an old submariner like his father would understand. From the introduction of the very first submarines, the trade-off between stealth and invisibility. The need for communication had been the realm of experts such as Todd. The question was how to communicate effectively, with complex messaging, to submerged ships. The problem had been large enough already during World War II, but those vessels were battery powered. Contrary to popular TV shows and movies of the period, those ships almost always traveled on the surface and were submerged only for short periods of time on batteries that quickly exhausted themselves and filled the submarines with choking gasses. The vessels very frequently surfaced to recharge their batteries, and there was always time for passing of communications from fleet to ship and back again. With the advent of the nuclear fleet, however, submarines were submerged for longer and longer periods of time until present day, when the Ohio Class Ballistic Missile subs, commonly known as the Trident submarines, went out to sea for 70 days at a time and frequently stayed submerged for the entire voyage. Added to the length of time under water was the depth these subs traveled. While the published operational depth of the Ohio Class, or "Boomers" as the crews call them, was 800 feet, secret Navy documents indicated a much deeper operational capability, and stories of dives to the 1500 and 1800 foot range circulated as common scuttlebutt among the enlisted men. How much of this was truth and how much was one-upmanship bravado could never be determined. However, it never hurt to have your enemy believing that you could dive deeper, stay submerged longer, hit harder, and escape faster than they could. In truth, the Navy let stories like this circulate on purpose and without comment for the very reason that they kept enemy forces...and nosey friendly ones...off guard as to just what fleet capabilities actually were.

But, deep diving or not, communication was always the problem with submarines, and CSD or Communication at Speed and Depth was the holy grail of Navy technologists the world over. Any time a submarine had to come to or near the surface, it exposed itself to danger. The ability to communicate with submarines while they were fully underway at operational depth was the goal of every naval power in the world. While movies popularized the myth that communication between submarines and fleet command took place at all times, nothing could be further from the truth. In peacetime, submarines, even the most modern Trident-carrying nuclear subs, left port with a preplanned set of instructions for the Commander. Unless there was some other form of communication to the ship while underway, it would proceed on a particular cruise mission profile, coming close to the surface, or actually surfacing at predetermined times and locations to send and receive communications to and from fleet command. Messages at this point might change the mission, or the sub would simply re-submerge and continue silently on its way.

So, just what was the problem with underwater communication? Any school child knew that sound carried for great distances underwater, and that was certainly true. Silence underwater was critical to success and to survival. Vast sums had been poured into propeller and power plant silencing of submarines over the years. A submarine was essentially a steel tube filled with valves that had to be opened and closed, tubes that fed water and steam to people and machines that controlled and powered the ship, a propeller that had to turn constantly to move the ship forward, and various mechanical devices that had to be employed to make life livable below the surface for 70+ days at a time. Meals had to be cooked, garbage had to be discharged, bolts had to be turned, toilets had to be flushed, movies were played. Any one of these things might make a sound that an enemy sonar could hear, giving away the position of the sub. Taken together, all of these small sources of sound could make a submarine into the equivalent of an empty aluminum can with a couple of metal ball bearings in it. The enemy could hear it coming from a hundred

miles away. So, endless changes were implemented to make submarines quieter, from unusual and precision ground propeller blades to the simpler changes like mounting equipment on rubber bushings and coiled spring feet to reduce conductive noise.

Conductivity of sound underwater was not the problem with communication. The problem was that electromagnetic waves - radio waves - do not penetrate water very well, and they penetrate salt water even less so. The problem with communication with a submarine while it is at constant speed and depth (CSD), is that salinity and differing temperature layers play complete havoc with the radio waves. At best, most systems could penetrate to a maximum depth of about 150 feet. When one considers that an Ohio Class sub's fully submerged dimension from the bottom of its keel to the top of its periscope is approximately 75 feet, it's easy to see that this did not offer much submerged depth protection for the submarine when it pulled close to the surface to send and receive messages.

The early solution to this radio wave problem was VLF, or Very Low Frequency communication. While the short, high frequency waves of normal communication cannot penetrate deeply into a body of water, VLF waves can penetrate to unknown depths, possibly to the very bottom of the deepest part of the ocean. However, VLF waves cannot carry communication signals as we know them. The frequency is so low and so slow that even the communication of a single sentence of information might take hours. Instead, the Navy learned to use VLF as a way to simply signal a deeply submerged vessel to either come to the surface or within a certain range of the surface to receive new communications. In peacetime this worked in an acceptable manner, but it was like slapping the water to get the attention of the submarine below. There was no message sent. It was just a signal, perhaps a three-character identifier, for the sub to surface and receive a message. Planners recognized that in a wartime situation, a submarine and the mission were put in jeopardy when the submarine exposed its position by coming near the surface. Furthermore, the submarine had to suspend its underwater maneuvers while it

surfaced. If it was tracking an enemy ship, or worse, being tracked by one, surfacing could be a fatal mistake. Thus, CSD was the ultimate goal of Todd's section of the Naval Research Lab, and Todd was recognized as one of the most knowledgeable experts in this area of underwater communication.

Jim ate the last bite of his Cod while Todd finished telling his dad about the trip to Russia. "We're stymied, Dad. So far, I can get excellent CSD at 150 feet, and spotty results at 250 feet. We just can't get the algorithms right to penetrate deeper unless we've got uniform temperature all the way down. Of course, we can never count on that."

"What's your target?"

"Ultimately, we hope to be able to hit 900 feet. That gets us nearly to the max operational depth of the Tridents, and it's deeper than the Los Angeles Class or the Virginia Class can operate. Even at that depth, the Boomers would still have over 800 feet of ocean above them. That's plenty. They are well hidden at that depth."

"So, what's in Russia?" Jim asked.

"You're not going to believe this, but we think that they've penetrated 500 feet with their system, which is similar to our own Callisto system. I'm on my way to see what they have. You might remember Ivor Dobrin'yev. He's my opposite number in Murmansk. He was here three years ago at the War College symposium. Do you recall?"

"Yes, I think I do. Ivor had dinner with the four of us, didn't he?"

"That's right. He's the Russian's Project Chairman, they call him, for undersea acoustical research. Under START-II, some of these breakthroughs have to be shared, and since we have similar systems, we're going to get to take a look at what they have. They may be jerking our chains here, but I don't think Ivor would do that. He and I have stayed in contact all these years. He's pretty straight with me. We can't pass up an opportunity to see what they've developed. I'm hoping that this will give us what we need to get Callisto up and running the way it's supposed to.

"So, you get a nice little vacation to Russkie-Land, huh? This is what?...your second trip over?"

"Third, actually, Dad. Besides, Ivor has promised to have some of their finest Vodka and some real caviar for me to try while I'm there. Not that Black Sea stuff that they sell to the tourists, either. He gets the real McCoy."

"Caspian Sea, right?"

"Even better than that, Dad. The Caspian is over-fished, not to mention polluted. The Sturgeon are small, weak, poor producers. With the bust-up of the old USSR, there's been a rush for US dollars, and when our economy soared in the 90s, well, caviar was flowing like water, so to speak. The quality plummeted, but what do Americans know? The stuff sold like gold nuggets and was on every corporate dining table on Wall Street. No, this is the really good stuff, caviar that comes from the Volga and the Ural rivers before they even get to the Caspian. That area is actually what we call Kazakhstan today...fiercely tribal, and for the tribes, caviar is a cash crop that they protect like Fort Knox used to protect our gold supply. But, the Russians know that this is the best caviar on the planet. So, they sell us the junk and make sure that their shelves are stocked with this. Only the political elite can get their hands on it. I guess that gives you some idea how well connected Ivor is."

"Maybe someone is funneling it to him in order to pump you for information on Calisto. Maybe they want to know just how much you know before they tell you what they know? Maybe?"

"So you're suggesting that they've created an electronic version of a Potemkin Village with their system?"

"It wouldn't be the first time. Sure saves a lot of money and time if you can get the other guy's system, or even parts of it, and hoard your R&D rubles for some other project."

"Anything's possible, Dad!"

"Well, I know you're careful, Todd. It's top secret stuff. The guys who can communicate with their subs at constant speed and depth have a leg up on everyone else."

"I never put all of my cards on the table. What I do know is that Ivor's one heck of a good host, and a darned good scientist."

"You bureaucrats!! Travel...fat-cat expense accounts! You're spending so much time in Russia, that if you and Adina ever decide to give Liz and me a grandchild, we'll have to get Ivor to be the Godfather."

"Now, don't even go there, Pop. You know that Adina finishes residency next year. She is on track to be an attending physician in Silver Springs. I think she would eventually like to teach, though. I'm not sure a kid is in the plan."

"Yeah, but she's 33 now. The clock is ticking."

"Well, I think that's your clock...and mom's clock that you hear ticking. I know you have this thing about grandchildren, and a grandson in particular, but we've been down this road before. I might be the last of old Gray Eagle's line, Dad. Will that bother you?"

Jim paused for a moment before answering, and looked beyond Todd to the ancient Sand Hills of Nebraska. "Yes, I suppose it would, Todd, but you have to live your life the way you see it. We've always taught you that."

Todd looked down and toyed with the last few remains of his salad, and then he changed this well-discussed and difficult subject to something that he thought might be lighter. "So, what's your speech about?"

"Oh, my commencement address. Well, it's about ten percent done. That's what it's about. And, that ten percent is still in my head, not on paper. I'm thinking about something that would deal with ancestry and how even a relative from 200 or 300 years ago played an important part in setting the stage for how these grads will live out the next 70 or 80 years of their lives. What do you think?"

"It's the old, 'you can be anything you want speech', isn't it? Just in a new form, huh?"

"Well, yes, I guess so."

"Dad, that's not a new speech. I've heard it at least a thousand times."

"Well, it will be new to some of them, and besides, it's timeless. And, furthermore, it's true. Look at me! Even more so, look at you! You're the great-great-great-grandson of an American Indian Chief, and just look at you: Ph.D. in electronic engineering...head of some spooky-communication department at the Naval Research Lab. You make about two gazillion dollars per year. You drive a what?...a \$100,000 BMW? You're married to a fine physician. You're the son of an extremely handsome and successful farm boy-turned football player-turned Navy Commander-turned politician and his glamorous wife, I might add. And, you're only 38 years old. Who knows what you will have accomplished by the time you reach my age?"

"Dad, you know good and well that my success is largely because I've always been able to check that little block that says "Native American" on admission forms and job applications. If it weren't for that, instead of driving a BMW-750, I'd probably be behind the wheel of an old Allis Chalmers, harvesting sugar beets in Elkhorn, Nebraska."

"Well, if it was in Elkhorn, it would probably be soybeans, not sugarbeets. But, just what the heck is wrong with driving an Allis Chalmers in Nebraska? It's very honorable work, and someone out there considers that "successful" in their world. The point is that anyone can aspire to that, or anything else. Yes, there is a very small 'something' to do with group, or race. I'll grant you a little bit of that. After all, where would blacks be without the likes of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Act? But, King doesn't make blacks successful. The Civil Rights Act is not what makes blacks successful. It's always up to the individual. The individual African-American decides to make something of his or her life and works toward becoming successful. All we have to do is look at the path Barack Obama took. He set his sights on a goal and achieved it, and changed the lives of Blacks in America forever. The same is true for you. The fact that you are where you are today, is because you decided to be, not because you are 75% Sioux Indian and certainly not because you checked some ethnic box on a form. I'll guarantee you that your job as

a department head with Naval Research is not because you have Gray Eagle's blood in your veins. It's because you have smarts in your head and determination in your soul."

Jim knew he was sounding a bit preachy and just like a father. It was a discussion that he and Todd had debated many times before. It had always proven impossible to convince Todd that his Indian heritage really was not either a positive or a negative in his success. The reason behind Todd's success was simply Todd's intelligence and boundless energy. Todd's militancy was difficult to understand. Jim had frequently scanned the history of his own household and could find no obvious time when either he or Liz had spoken of their combined Sioux heritage other than in a simple, matter-of-fact manner. It was benign. It was neither good nor bad. It simply was. It was history. The treatment of Indians had most certainly been shameful, a horrible blight on American history, certainly in a league with the enslavement of Blacks throughout the south. Different? Yes! In the early US history, whites enslaved the Blacks and tried to convince everyone that the justification was because Blacks were intellectually inferior. But, they murdered the Indians and tried to convince everyone that the justification was because Indians were naturally dirty, thieving, and hostile. As far as his being an Indian, Jim had decided many years earlier that it was simply biology and had decided to move past it.

When Todd was of college age, he rebelled against attending UNL, the alma mater of both both Jim and Liz. Instead, he attended Chadron State, in the northwest corner of Nebraska. Chadron State is a fine school, but it's also very close to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. As Todd's college career advanced, it was obvious that he was discovering his Sioux roots. There was even a short period of time during his Junior year when he began wearing native American outfits. Jim and Liz considered that Todd was simply discovering...experimenting...testing, and held their tongues until the phase seemed to pass. Todd graduated

with a BS in Earth Sciences with a minor in American Indian Studies.

Jim and Liz had, without any particular forethought, always sought to teach Todd the basic beliefs in honesty, integrity, and hard work without any coloring that might have been added by their ethnicity. As Todd was growing up, the only point of their native American history that was shared with Todd on any continuing basis was the story of old Gray Eagle, the history of the small pouch of marbles that Jim carried in his pocket at all times, and the connection they provided to the determination that Gray Eagle demonstrated in his life. This self-belief and self-determination was at the core of Jim's beliefs. He shared that belief system with Liz, and they had imparted that same message to Todd. Yes, Jim was proud to be half Sioux...far more proud than the other fifty percent, which Jim's father had labeled, Heinz-57. Liz was a full blooded Sioux. However proud they were of that heritage, neither of them had ever been inclined to go live on the reservation or to be held back by any of these ancestral elements. Jim simply "was", and his mother and father before him had instilled the strong belief that his success would be an individual matter...his own individual effort...not because of any group. His parents recognized the need to participate in the society that faced them, to recognize the wrongs that had been committed against the Indian nations, but not to wallow in the self-pity and anger that infested the reservations. At the same time, his mother, also a full-blooded Sioux, passed along the grounding of his Indian heritage, so that it would not be forgotten. When he was just twelve years old, she told him the story of Gray Eagle and placed a small leather pouch in his hand. Jim had never forgotten the story of how Gray Eagle led his people from certain extinction on the Nebraska plains to a little valley of northeastern Wyoming, near the site of present day Sheridan. It was there that they managed to survive, and it was there that Gray Eagle was buried, less than one hundred miles from the Little Bighorn river in Montana, where he had participated in Custer's Last Stand. It was a heritage that Jim never forgot, but it only formed the foundation of the life he continued to

live for himself. Jim had also grown up fully aware of the possible discriminations that still existed against Indians. There was no denying that racism still existed in America. Jim remained aware of it and kept his antenna sensitivity turned on for its ugly possibility. And, he had learned early to speak up for himself when it appeared. However, it didn't cripple his life, and he didn't want it to ever cripple the lives of his children while they grew up. Todd was their only child, and while he had never been crippled by these beliefs, Jim had frequently sensed that since college days, Todd harbored a certain degree of anger at America's history in dealing with the Native-Americans. It was time to change the subject. "How's Adina?"

Todd's eyes rolled in mock amusement as he spoke. "Adina? Oh yeah! I remember her. I married her, didn't I? Doctor, or something, isn't she?"

"Yes, a real Doctor, though." Jim couldn't help but chuckle as he needled his son. "Professorship, huh? Residency's almost done? When will she interview?"

"In August, I believe. She's been sick, though. Probably a spring cold, or she's picked up a flu-bug of some kind. When you do internal medicine you come in contact with everything. Plus, she's working nearly 80 hours per week. She'll kick it. She knows a pretty good Doc, I hear. She sends her love, by the way."

"Will you guys be around for Memorial Day? I'll be away, but Liz still makes a mean hamburger. And, I know she'd love to see you both."

"No. Neither one of us will be there. I'm dropping Adina in Seattle to see her folks when I leave for Murmansk. I'll be gone for a few weeks, and she wanted a break, anyway. When I get back, we'll take a little time to do some hiking up Rainier before coming back to this madhouse."

"Well, I know that Liz will miss you guys. But, I won't be there either. After I do my speech thing in Lincoln, I'm headed to Dallas, Oklahoma City, and Denver for a series of meetings, and then on to Billings, Montana...Hardin, actually."

"How many is this now? A hundred years since Custer's Last Stand?"

"Todd, history was never your strong suit, was it? 1886 was the year. So, it's nearly 130 years. I'm one of the last direct descendants, except for you, of course. So, they want me to appear and make a brief statement. Maybe at a future one, you and Adina could come. And, it would be nice, of course, if there was a new little "Anderson" to bring along then. Let's see, what would your son be? I'm great-great grandson, so he would be great-great-great-great grandson of Gray Eagle. Has a nice ring to it, don't you think?"

Todd just smiled broadly at his dad, and said, "Pop! You just don't quit, do you?"

After paying the lunch bill, they walked out to the front of the Grill and waited for the valet to bring both cars around. They shook hands and hugged. Love was sent along to both wives and they parted company, one to visit an alma mater and then an ancestral touch stone; the other to visit the land of a former enemy. Neither of them were aware that the next time they met, it would be under vastly different circumstances where they would have to face America's newest enemy together.

Kenner, Louisiana Earlier that same day

Wariq Hassan Al Gherrin knew nothing about pirogues, or their history. All he knew after living for eight years in the swampy areas between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, was that a pirogue was the best, and in many cases the only way, to get from one point to another. After Katrina hit the area in the summer of 2005, the scope of destruction was such that many were reduced to using small boats to get around. Wariq blended right in with thousands of others who had lost automobiles and homes and had no transportation other than the lowly pirogues.

Wariq made his home in a small, floating houseboat, anchored in one of the many channels connecting soggy patches of swampland near Garyville, Louisiana, west of the Crescent City. How often he thought of the nickname of that town and his own

Islamic religious symbol. The Crescent City. Allah had surely placed him in the right location, at the right moment in his life.

For the eight long years of his assignment in Louisiana, Wariq used a pirogue, with its shallow draft and flat bottom to explore the swamps and channels between smaller Lake Maurepas, and its larger sister lake, Pontchartrain, just to the east. This was an area rich in wildlife, and Wariq made the best of his natural hunting instinct. In addition to the ducks that seemed to constantly inhabit the Louisiana flyway, he trapped thousands of alligators, snakes, and Nutria, which was essentially a large, hairy rat, valued for its fur. It was his thriving little fur trade that brought Wariq to Kenner, Louisiana, about 30 miles further east and just a few miles west of the New Orleans city limits, where he disposed of the Nutria skins into the local market of hat and clothing makers. The skin crafters would take the Nutria skins and fashion "authentic-must-have-Cajun-attire" that would eventually make its way from the tourist traps of New Orleans to the upper closet shelves of tourist homes in places as far away as China. Wariq must have felt that Providence had smiled upon him once again by placing the terminus of his fur trade in Kenner. It's here that New Orleans built its international airport, an area that in its 1945 dedication was 25 miles outside of New Orleans and right in the middle of the great Louisiana swamp. This was a decision that long ago proved prescient. All of that available space meant that runways could be expanded and added at will. When more runway space was needed, it wasn't necessary to negotiate with homeowner associations or angry citizen groups. Draining the swamp was either ignored completely or looked on as a community service. The only evictions required, were countless mosquitoes, a few Egrets, Herons, ducks, water moccasins, and the occasional alligator hunter. None of them voted, and in the old-boy political atmosphere of south Louisiana, this was just "gumbo on the rice."

Airline Highway ran like a rifle shot from Louis Armstrong field, designated as MSY on aeronautical charts, to New Orleans. So, no matter how big the

airport grew, it could easily disgorge its daily passenger load of conventioners and revelers into the heart of New Orleans. The 'Big Easy' was the destination place to enjoy a chicory-flavored latte and a bignet at Café Du Monde, learn the fine art of making a roux in one of the many shops surrounding Jackson Square and the St Louis Cathedral, see an occasional bare breast in the heart of the French Quarter, and just generally witness the happy parting of otherwise intelligent tourists from their dollars.

The airport was perfectly situated for the economy of New Orleans and for Wariq. More than once, he had taken his faithful pirogue, trailered it to Kenner, where he put it into one of the many swampy channels, and paddled it around the western edges of the airport property. Even in a post-9/11 world, few ever expected any problems from the swamp-side of the airport so there were only a few low fences to keep out the 4-legged intruders who might inadvertently wander onto the runways. Wariq was able to get within a few hundred feet of the ends of either runways without any difficulty. He had never been challenged, not even after 9/11. Even if he had been stopped, he always had the perfect cover - a couple of dead ducks, a Nutria trap, and the ever-present cane fishing pole. It didn't matter, however. Even if there had been security fences or guards, Wariq knew that he only had to be within a mile or so of the airport to complete his mission. He never intended to set foot on airport property.

Yes, New Orleans had created a fine airport, one that served the city well. In the near future, Wariq would help them learn that they had created something else -- a way for him to show his other hunting specialty - - terror.

Chapter 4 The Attack

Los Angeles, California
May 12th

The old box truck had seen far better days. Los Angeles traffic is brutal on the strongest of vehicles, and the strength of this one had disappeared decades earlier. The tractor was a white 1953 diesel with just a little over 300,000 miles showing on the odometer. However, the odds were that during the 50 intervening years of road use, those numbers had been rolled back more than once. Whatever writing had been on the door had faded from view many years earlier, and now appeared as only a faint discoloration on the driver's side. A filthy old army blanket served as a seat cover and barely succeeded at doing that. The majority of truck drivers seem to be smokers, and it was obvious from the burn holes in the blanket that many careless ones had driven this truck previously. Springs showed through the ancient kapok covering, and it was only a matter of time before the beaten bench seat would simply collapse onto the floorboard, probably crashing through the nearly transparent metal onto the roadway below. The speedometer worked, but never went past 35 miles per hour, no matter how fast the truck was going. A hole was evident where the glove compartment had once been, and the operator license holder was shoved onto the tip of a nail that had been soldered onto the dashboard above the opening. The dash panel bore witness to 50 years of regulations and company policies that had come and gone. Holes were all that remained where manifold pressure monitors, motor governor monitors, emission detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, driver cameras, time clocks, and maybe even an amphetamine dispenser had been mounted at one time or another. Splashes of garish paint attested to the different company ownership over the years, with no evidence of any attempts to make the driver's "front office" comfortable in any way. Ominously, two closely spaced bullet holes showed in the upper right hand

corner of the windshield, with one matching hole in the back panel of the tractor cab, at just about the point where the driver's head would normally be. It was not worth asking what had stopped the other bullet.

Outside, the tractor showed even worse wear. If there was a place that was the original color, or the original shape of the metal, then it was not evident. At some point in time, the tractor had run into a loading dock, or a load had been swung against the cab. The right quarter panel was distorted like the crook of an elbow, and the passenger door would only open about 15 inches, allowing only the skinniest passenger to enter from that side. There would be no passengers on this trip, so it mattered little.

The trailer was newer than the cab, but had certainly carried loads far beyond its design limits in its twenty or thirty years of use. The swayback effect of the bed transferred itself to the roof of the trailer, and the whole effect was one of tiredness. A uniform layer of dust and freeway soot said the entire assemblage had been on the lot for months, perhaps years.

"How much?"

"Twenty-Two Thousand dollars," the salesman said in his thick, foreign accent, "...and worth every penny."

"It is perfect," said Hakim Fazel. "I will take it, if I can drive it away today, and if we can do the paperwork sometime next week."

The salesman flashed a knowing smile and said, "With your cash, the keys will be in the cab."

Hakim loved doing business in America. It was so easy: A little money...drive away...no paperwork...no questions asked. He wouldn't have to worry about the condition of the truck. It only had to travel approximately 50 miles more. And, he didn't have to worry about next week's paperwork, either. Sometime in the next few days, Hakim would show all Americans the power of his faith.

After driving away from the sad little Southgate truck sales yard, the first stop for Hakim was just next door in the city of Bell, one of the many scattered satellite cities surrounding the core of Los Angeles. Here, on the

border of cities with such inviting names as Commerce and Cudahy, are thousands of nameless, one-story, tilt-up industrial park buildings, all adding to the huge glut of rentable space in and around Los Angeles. Landlords and leasing agents, all too eager to rent the empty space, will quickly rent to almost anyone who can pass a cursory credit check, and more importantly, who can pay. In areas such as Bell, there were few questions about the nature of one's business operation. Cash talked! The other BS walked! All one had to do was provide some easily obtainable business formation records, including an income statement, which could even be pro-forma, pay a first/last rent payment, and take over the keys. Although most of the business owners in this area were hard working and honest, the lax procedures meant that even disreputable businesses could exist side-by-side with those that were far more honest. Hiding in plain sight was easy in Los Angeles.

It was in this area that one of Hakim's many contacts ran a truck painting service. Within three hours of purchasing the truck, it was transformed into an old, but serviceable looking delivery vehicle for "Glory Wholesale Farms." After over 50 years of hauling scrap, tires, furniture, freight, books, and who knew what else, it turned out that the old truck had one more life left in her: She was going to be a nursery truck. With her new-found life, there was one more stop to make before calling it a day. Hakim drove the truck away from Bell, to the nearby city of Pico Rivera, to the very newest Leo's Wholesale Nursery Supplies. He backed the old truck up to the loading dock of Leo's, and presented cash and a purchase order for one thing: two tons of ammonium nitrate. From there, Hakim took his truck and its precious cargo to the City of Commerce, to a recently rented warehouse building on Sheila Street, just south of East Washington Blvd.

Los Angeles

The following morning

The next morning, Hakim and his helpers were up early. There was a lot of work ahead of them and not a moment to waste. The first task was to heat nearly 300 pounds of wax to its melting point. Then, came the task of mixing the wax with the ammonium nitrate until it was just slightly moist and moldable into brick-like shapes of about 100 pounds each. As the blocks were formed, they were carefully stacked in the trailer until it was full from top to bottom and side to side. When the entire load of ammonium nitrate had finally been processed into bricks, Hakim sent all of his workers home for the day and sat on the warehouse floor just looking at the truck. He was proud of his work to this point and knew that Allah would also be proud of him. He would surely have an esteemed place in paradise. There was just one more thing to do before Hakim could sleep for the night and it involved a simple twist of wires and connection to a dash-board switch that had been installed earlier in the day, and the insertion of a single stick of dynamite strategically among the grayish bricks of ammonium nitrate. Hakim was now ready to show the infidels the power of his faith. He knelt down on the bare concrete floor, faced east and prayed. Then he slept his last night of sleep.

Kenner, Louisiana

Late evening; May 13th

It was evening and time for another of Wariq's frequent trips to Kenner. For many months, during all seasons, during all kinds of weather, and at various hours, Wariq had taken his pirogue and trailered it to one of the many canals that criss-crossed the swamps west of Kenner. Sometimes he would park his truck along the very wide expanses bordering the I-10 and simply launch his pirogue into the old pipeline canal, or the Walker Canal. On a few occasions, he launched a few miles earlier at Bayou La Branch or the Cross Bayou Canal, slowly paddling the distance to the very edge of St.

Charles Parish, bordering Kenner. He had even exited at the Loyola or Williams offramps within the Kenner City Limits, and backtracked west along old Veterans Memorial Highway to the point where it came to a dead end at the edge of the swamp that completely surrounded the Interstate 10/310 interchange. From there it would take him less than an hour to position himself below the approach/takeoff end of runway 10/28, that formed the east/west leg of the two main runways at MSY. It was easy paddling, gliding almost silently below the canopy and among the tens of millions of 'knees' of the millions of Cypress trees that filled the swamp. All the routes led him to the same place near the runway. The airport property was only four feet above sea level. So, the transition from swamp to airport grounds, apron, and runway was barely discernible.

Wariq wasn't really concerned about finding a position in the swamp that would give him a clear view of departing aircraft. He continued to make these trips into the swamp for two simple reasons: If he was being watched, then his constant appearances in the swamp, with equipment that clearly made him appear to be just another Cajun fisherman, would reduce or eliminate any suspicions about him. Secondly, Wariq wanted to know if any security patrols were working in the swamp area. If they were, he wanted to know where and at what times. Thus far, he had never seen another living soul in the swamps.

Tonight's trip was special, however. He would be staying out all night, and into the morning hours. He would need some extra food and liquids, so he took the time to pack energy bars, dates, fresh humus, and water. In May, the Louisiana spring rains can be frequent and unpredictable, so Wariq made it a point to include a Goretex pancho. Since he would be in the swamps over night, he decided to include a 12-volt DC battery and light. It would probably not be needed, since Wariq was so experienced in these swamps, but he decided not to take any chances. He would be in the boat during morning prayers, so he rolled up a small rug and carefully placed it inside the cab of his truck. Inside

the prayer rug, Wariq was careful to include a set of bone-white prayer beads. Because he had an interest in which aircraft would be arriving and departing from the airport, Wariq was careful to pack both his UHF radio and extra batteries. He double-checked the radio presets for the New Orleans airport tower, 119.5 and 254.3 megahertz, ground control at 121.9 megahertz, and westbound departure control at 125.5, although Wariq also knew that he wouldn't need to use that bit of information. When all the presets were checked, Wariq installed six fresh batteries, and stored twelve more in his backpack. He took three medium-sized catfish, placing them carefully in a small blue and white ice chest. His trusty Nutria trap and fishing pole were set out for the trip, and he also included an old metal fish stringer and twenty-five feet of one-half inch rope. Then, because the next morning was supposed to be a working morning, Wariq set out one more tool to take with him: an FIM-92A Stinger, ground-to-air missile weapon system. As soon as he had the Stinger carefully wrapped inside five layers of 32-gallon plastic trash bags and sealed with gray duct tape, Wariq placed all of his items in his truck, started the engine, pulled out onto the local highway, and headed for I-10. Wariq Hassan Al-Gherrin was ready to go to work.

Miami, Florida
WNB Bank Tower
Evening of May 13th

"Yo man, the west side of the 23rd floor is still showing leaks. Dude says he has to work all night." Julio Chavez's stocky, six-foot frame just about filled the security booth on the first floor of the Washington National Bank Building at 1416 NW 3rd Ave, on the eastern edge of Miami. Roberto Castillo, his sole shift partner, paid him no attention as he appeared in the lobby and walked toward the guard booth. Roberto, about 28, was a two-year security veteran, and seemed destined to retire as nothing more than a security officer.

He seldom communicated with Julio, grunted most of his comments in mono-syllabic sounds, and grabbed the sports section of the early edition Herald as he headed for the crapper.....again.

"Yo, Aaron, man!" Roberto threw the remark over his shoulder as he walked away.

Roberto was obviously making reference to tropical storm Aaron, the unusually early cat-4 storm that had roared through Miami just weeks earlier. The dismissive tone of his voice as he buried his face in the 8th page sports stats was typical. Julio was used to it, and he reminded himself again to just avoid trying to make any sort of conversation in the future.

It was no secret. Modern, all-glass buildings like the WNB tower leaked like sieves, anyway. When a storm like Aaron arrived in town, these buildings suffered the most. Cleanup seemed to take forever, and the glaziers never seemed to get replacement windows tight on the first try. Return visits were not uncommon, although it seemed unusual for a glass company to work overtime. The need was pretty obvious though, and the work order had checked out, so Julio had personally cleared the sole repairman to the 23rd floor suite of offices overlooking the freeway interchange below. The offices had recently been leased to one of the many import/export firms operating in Miami, and the leasing agent for the bank would be furious if the offices were not ready for occupancy on the first day of June. It was no wonder that overtime was authorized.

WNB had owned this 32 story building since 1985, and it was a landmark of sorts, standing apart from the garish hotel and resort monoliths closer to the water, and nearly straddling the I-95/836 interchange. Julio had only joined Atchkinson's Security Service a month earlier, but had already picked up the poorly kept inside joke that when you worked for Atchkinson's, you didn't have to put you're 'A.S.S.' on the line. It was a good job, one that a 21 year old Cuban immigrant like Julio could use as a springboard to something far better, like a chance to eventually land one of the coveted slots with Miami PD. The money was pretty good, but Julio had something more important than money at the

moment....time. Time to study and time to think about his young wife and newborn son. This particular job also afforded him the opportunity to do something most people never had the chance to do, and that was to explore the WNB building from top to bottom. He even had roof access. In the early morning hours, around 2:00 AM, just about 'lunchtime' in his shift, he would often take his carefully packed 'brown bag' and make his way to the rooftop. From here, he would walk around the perimeter of the helipad taking a look at Miami, a city that seemed never to sleep. The view from the top of the tower was breathtaking, and Julio felt certain he would never tire of looking at it. Off to the east, he could easily see the Macarthur Causeway snaking its way past Bicentennial Park, across Watson Island, to the former alligator swamp land that now made up some of the most expensive real estate in the western hemisphere - - Miami Beach. Beyond that was just the blackness of the Atlantic. In the right moonlight, he could even make out the lighted bell tower of Cor Jesu Chapel, near the entrance of Barry University, where he was enrolled as a first semester Sophomore, studying police science. Julio's plan was that with a degree in police science and a few years of experience as a security officer, he would greatly increase his chances of entering the Miami-Dade police academy.

Working swings and graves, Julio had very little contact with the public, and he liked it that way. But tonight was unusually quiet, and probably reflected the beginning of the summer heat in Miami. Memorial Day was only a couple of weeks away and many of the building's employees and tenants had already planned vacations for the maximum days off. No one seemed to be around, except for Julio, Roberto the 'Crapper Guard', and the repairman on the 23rd floor.

It was nearing 3:00 a.m., and Julio had not been hungry enough to eat his lunch. With Roberto's continued disappearances, no one had done the 2:30 AM building security check, either. There would hell to pay for that, but Julio was not about to falsify the figures like Roberto often did. Roberto had a two-way and was obviously nearby. Julio grabbed his lunch, his own two-

way unit, and stepped out of the guard booth. He checked the security of the front door again, and headed for the elevator bank.

"Yo, Roberto. Security check, Man!"

"Ugh," came the reply, followed by some static and something unintelligible. Julio ignored it, and continued across the lobby to the elevators. He would eat his lunch first and start his check from his favorite building location....the rooftop.

What a night! Some warm southeasterly breezes flowed over Miami, and the moon was about three-quarters full, just beginning to set in the west. From the rooftop, Julio could clearly make out the runway lights of Miami International Airport off to the west. Even at this hour, jets were lined up like a string of pearls out over the Atlantic, moving in five-mile gaps toward touchdown. As the planes reached final approach and descended to about building level, just to the north of Julio's position, he tried to make out the airline name on the vertical stabilizers, lit up like Christmas trees by onboard lighting. Julio's parents had brought him to Miami only four years earlier, when he was just 17. After such a short time in Los Estados Unidos, Julio felt like he was on top of the world.

As part of his security check, Julio always scanned down the four sides of the tower, just to make sure some prankster wasn't trying to climb the building. All sides checked out clear, with most of the offices and windows dark, not ready to take back their workers for days. Even the west side of the building checked out OK, and Julio could see the lights on the 23rd floor, where the window repairman was supposedly hard at work. He could see no movement from his vantage point nine stories further up, and there was one other thing that Julio could not see. He couldn't see that rather than applying caulking to the seals of the windows, the 'repairman' had completely removed one of the tinted glass panels, offering him a clear view of the I-95/836 interchange directly below the building

It was nearly 4:00 a.m. when Julio completed his security check, and he headed back to the guard booth.

Maybe the toilets had ceased working, because Roberto's rotund body filled up the guard booth, instead of the john. Julio decided to play Roberto's non-communication game, and to take advantage of the fact that Roberto was more or less 'on duty' for a change. Julio's shift ended at 7:00 a.m. and he'd been on duty since 9:00 p.m. the previous evening, without a break. The hours were getting to him, and he had a class at 10:00 a.m. at BU. "Rest break, Man," he grunted at Roberto. "I'm going to catch some sleep. Wake me in 30 minutes."

Roberto ignored him, which was just as well. Any sort of discussion would probably have ended with Roberto trying to pull some seniority crap. Julio didn't even look at him, and headed toward the cot in the break room.

Light was showing under the door when Julio woke up. He looked at his watch only to discover that it was after 5:30 AM. Had Roberto forgotten him? Julio would be fired if they found out that he had slept for nearly two hours on the clock. Maybe that's what Roberto wanted. Julio slapped the sleep from his eyes and headed for the lobby. As he approached the guard station, he challenged Roberto. "Hey, what you doing, Man? You let me sleep too long! You want to get my butt fired?"

"Chill. It's OK." Roberto had the Herald spread out in front of him, and it was obvious that he had forgotten, or simply didn't care that Julio slept over the allowed limit. However, Roberto wasn't going to miss the opportunity to flex his supposed superiority either. He turned toward Julio, lowered his voice an octave, and tried to imitate his best "Law & Order" command voice. "Just do the last security check, and then you're out of here, Dude."

Although he still felt some anger at Roberto, Julio was happy for the extra sleep, and grabbed his two-way as he headed for the elevators. Maybe this would turn out all right, anyway. He loved to watch the Miami sunrise....never tired of it, in fact. As a boy, growing up in Baracoa, on the eastern tip of Cuba, he had spent many mornings watching the sun rise up out of the Atlantic. Since coming to America, he looked upon each

new day as a gift from God, and never grew tired of watching the day's new present being opened. Julio took a few moments to scan the entire horizon, and then started his check. The helipad was secure, and the first three sides of the building checked out secure, also. As he peered down the western side of the building, however, he was surprised to see that lights were still on at the 23rd level. Maybe glass work took longer than he thought, but it seemed like the repairman should already be gone. There was something just a bit odd about the situation, and Julio decided to check it out. He grabbed his two-way. "Hey, Roberto. Did the dude on 23 check out?"

The reply came back in a few seconds. "No, Man. He's probably asleep."

Julio took one more look over the side and made a mental note to stop at 23 and see how the repair job was going. He was just putting the radio back in its leather holster when he saw it. Julio drew a deep breath, and his eyes nearly fell out of his head. There was no mistaking it. Julio had seen pictures of these in his text books, and had seen plenty of them on CNN's news coverage of the middle eastern conflicts. Someone on the 23rd floor was slowly waving a Rocket Propelled Grenade back and forth, aiming at traffic that was passing on the freeway below. He didn't know what was happening. Maybe it was some kind of a prank, but Julio was taking no chances. His pulse raced, and he could feel himself hyperventilating, but his actions were flawless. He grabbed his radio and communicated with Roberto first. "Yo, Roberto! We got a situation, Man! The dude on 23 has a weapon, aiming it at I-95. Call 911, Man, right away!" Julio didn't even wait for a reply. Instantly, he switched to the emergency channel on his radio, and started to broadcast, but he didn't know what to say. All he could think of was, "Yo, Man."

The radio's speaker jumped to life. "Miami emergency. What is your situation?"

Julio almost dropped the radio. It was one of those moments when you expect an answer, but don't know quite how to respond when it comes. "He's got a weapon, Man."

"Who has a weapon?"

"The dude on the 23rd floor?"

"Stay calm, OK? You're in a building. Where are you?"

Julio slowly began to collect his wits. "WNB tower...1416 northwest 3rd Avenue. You gotta come, now!" Although he was still on the verge of panic, Julio struggled to remain calm. His mouth was dry, and the words seemed to come out with the consistency of cold polenta. His pulse rate pushed past 100, and the dispatcher could hear the heavy breathing that told him the voice on the other end of the radio belonged to someone who was witnessing a terrifying event. The dispatcher slowed down his words.

"OK, you're doing really well, my friend. Now, just take a deep breath and tell me what kind of weapon you saw."

"I think the Dude's got an RPG!"

Even the police dispatcher began to breathe a little faster as he said, "OK, now, how can you be sure it's an RPG?"

Julio's pulse dropped a notch. He was being taken seriously. "I'm a student at BU. I've seen these in my Jane's Weapon's book. He's just waving it out the window on the west side of the building, aiming it at the traffic on I-95."

The dispatcher was detecting authenticity in Julio's voice. "What's your name, and where are you exactly?"

"Julio Chavez is my name. I'm a security guard for Atchkinson's, service badge 04697A. You can check it out! I'm on the roof of WNB. I seen this dude on the 23rd floor, west side. He's got an RPG!"

"Hold on one!" The radio went silent.

Julio wasn't aware that the dispatcher was talking to Miami SWAT and began to panic further. "Where are you? You gotta send someone!"

The dispatcher's voice came back. "I said hold on one!" More silence. When he came back on the radio he said, "OK, we have another 911 call from that same location...Roberto somebody. Who is that person?"

"He's the other guard. He's on the 1st floor. I'm on the roof doing regular security patrol."

"That building have a helipad?"

"Yeah, I'm right beside it. Yes!!" Julio almost screamed his response.

"You have a key to the roof access?"

"I got keys to everything, man!"

"Can you get us into the office where the shooter is?"

"I got a master that fits every lock in the building!"

Julio's pulse was still at a fever pitch, but he was beginning to calm down. The dispatcher was saying exactly what he wanted to hear.

"OK, we've got ground units coming from the east side of the building....no sirens. A chopper is already airborne and will also come in from the east side. You stay to the side of the helipad and keep your hands where the pilot can see them, OK? My guys can put a bullet through the middle of a quarter at 400 yards and give you ten cents change. No use getting yourself killed on this fine morning, my friend. OK? When my guys get there, you let them have the keys to 23, and then you stay the hell out of their way, OK? Do you copy me?"

All Julio could say was, "Yes, Sir!"

He felt better when the dispatcher said, "Julio, you done good, Dude! You stay put and be safe."

The HH-60G Pave Hawk was visible on the clear horizon well before Julio could hear it. He watched it as it approached from the east, directly out of the rising sun. The helicopter was a modified version of the famous Black Hawk and had a barn-door sized opening on the right side. The pilot turned the craft sideways and let the chopper slip in toward the building in a way that allowed the SWAT members to have a full view of the target. This profile, in turn, offered the largest target to anyone in the building who might be planning to shoot at the chopper, but without the rockets and machine guns of the military version, the Pave Hawk pilot wanted as much firepower forward as possible. Even from a distance, Julio could see men crouched in the doorway, each with a high powered rifle trained on the building, the helipad, and frighteningly enough, directly at him. He knew without a doubt that if he made even the

slightest wrong move, he would be a dead man. Julio held his arms out to his side, palms forward. When the helicopter was within a 100 yards of the helipad, Julio slowly turned in a complete 360 degree circle, never lowering his hands. He wanted to show that he was completely unarmed. The copter reached the rooftop and hovered about two feet above the helipad as seven men poured out onto the deck. The copter immediately departed and began to turn in slow circles about 2 blocks to the east. Four of the men set up a kneeling perimeter facing the four compass quadrants. Two of them pointed their weapons directly at the roof access door. The last one ran toward Julio.

"Are you Julio?"

Julio felt very cold. "Yeah!"

"Where did you see the shooter?"

"On the west side, 23rd floor. He's a window repairman. I let him in last night."

"Is he alone?"

"No one else in or out. We check everybody. He's alone for sure."

"What suite number?"

Julio thought for a moment, remembering his trek to the 23rd floor on the night before. "Number 2360....Akmel Import/Export, or something like that, four offices, nice view of the freeway."

The man from the helicopter was dressed in full military style battle dress, and Julio couldn't decide if he was a policeman or a soldier, but his voice was comforting, matter of fact, and direct. He gave his directions without emotion. "OK, Julio. Give me the keys to that suite of offices, and then I want you to move to the east side of the building and stay there. Do not move from there! Do you understand me?"

Julio said that he understood and handed over the building master key. "This is a master key. It will get you into any room, even the ladies' john." There was no visual or audible signal that Julio detected, but as soon as he dropped the keys in the leader's hand the six other men immediately started to move toward the access door. The last thing the soldier/cop did before disappearing through the access door was to silently

point first to Julio, and then to the east side of the building. Julio moved as directed.

There were no sounds as the seven soldiers began to move down the nine flights of stairs to the 23rd floor. They moved as a unit, guarding both forward and flank positions. As far as they knew, there was only one shooter, but chances were never taken. Besides, if he really had an RPG, it could take out all seven of them at once. The leader's earphone radio came to life. "SWAT one, we're in the building...first floor...clear. Where are you?"

The leader whispered into the microphone molded into his helmet. "We're in the stairwell...26th floor. He's on 23. Stay with me. We'll be there in one."

At the 23rd level, the SWAT members started their move out into the corridor in a standard pattern. The first man cleared the hallway right. A 'thumbs up' indicated all clear. The second man stepped slightly to his right in the doorway and cleared the hallway to the left. The crossfire this formed would limit their exposure. Nothing! The first two men went through the door and set up a left/right perimeter. The other five men moved through the door into the hallway. Carpeting muffled any sound. It was approaching 7:00 a.m. The building was empty, with the possible exception of the SWAT members and a guy with a rocket propelled grenade.

Suite 2360: One of the men withdrew a slender, flexible metal rod from his backpack and extended it to its full 30 inch length. It looked vaguely similar to the flexible gooseneck water pipes that are under most household sinks. He took off his helmet and lay stomach-down on the floor. After threading the pipe beneath the door to the offices, the cop peered into one end of the pipe, slowly moving it back and forth to the left and right. After a moment, the pipe was silently withdrawn from under the door, and the man got back to his knees. The other men looked closely at him as he used hand signals to tell them what he had seen with the fiber optic tool. He formed a 'V' with two fingers of his right hand and pointed to his eyes. Then he held up his index finger by itself. He then pointed to his compass

and indicated the west quadrant. For the last movement, he used both hands as if holding a rifle, and swung slowly to left and right. Everyone understood immediately. "I saw only one man, facing west, holding a weapon and swinging it back and forth." It was exactly as Julio had described.

The leader silently placed the master key in the lock mechanism. As he did, the other six men got into position. Two lay prone on the floor, one on either side of the door. Two were in a kneeling position, crouched over their comrades and also on either side of the door. The two remaining men guarded the hallway in both directions, as well as the ceiling.

The moment of truth had arrived. The latch on the door released, and the door began to swing open slightly. Now, the leader stood up and using the flat of the bottom of his boot, kicked the door just hard enough to swing it open, without the risk that it would hit the inside wall and swing back. "Police!" he yelled. "Drop your weapon!"

The next few seconds moved with glacial speed. The body of the man in the office jerked in recognition of the command. It was obvious now, that the he held an M72-LAW, Light Anti-Tank Weapon, commonly called an RPG. These were used with great affect against US forces in Somalia and Iraq, fired a high-explosive warhead that could disable a tank, and had an effective range of approximately 200 yards. These were nasty customers. The man was standing at the very edge of the room, looking out through an open widow. The glass had been removed, and he was slowly moving the RPG left and right while sighting through the rear pop-up sight. He was aiming down toward the busy I-95/836 interchange below, and appeared to be casually searching for a target on the freeway. As the SWAT voices pierced his reverie, he began to wheel around to his left, bringing the business-end of the RPG with him. It only took a moment for him to turn 180 degrees to face the new intruders, and the barrel of the RPG came to bear on the SWAT members at the door. His eyes grew large, and the slight smile on his face changed to a snarl. He closed one eye and sighted through the peep

sight of the launcher. With a fierce voice, he yelled, "Allah is....." but he was unable to complete his sentence.

The first bullet struck the man directly below the sternum, entering his heart and killing him instantly. The other two bullets were for effect to the head, with one entering the right side of his neck, severing the carotid artery. The third entered directly below the left eye, blowing out the entire back half of his head. Although he was dead, his automatic reflexes were still active. As the force of the bullets carried his body backward toward the open window, his index finger began to close on the trigger of the launch tube. Fortunately, his upper body was arched backward, completely out of the window when the RPG fuse ignited and launched upward. The shell entered the 25th floor of the tower and blew out a gaping 40 foot hole, taking out portions of the 25th, through 27th floors. As the body of the man and the building debris began to tumble toward the parking lot below, a huge fireball was fully visible from both the I-95 and the eastbound traffic of the 836. Within seconds all traffic on the freeways below had stopped. Drivers got out of their cars and gaped at the plume of smoke still rising from the WNB tower. At least all of these people would get safely to their destinations this morning. Whoever this shooter was, he was killed on the job. For the Miami SWAT team, and soon the FBI, the rest of today's mission would be to find out just what his job was all about. Little did they know that they would find out too late.

**Kenner, Louisiana
Morning of May 14th**

Wariq had quietly launched his pirogue into the Louisiana swamps around 3:00 a.m. and took a great deal of time and care moving his little boat into the ideal position, about one mile west of runway 28. In order to throw off any suspicion, he had stopped at many familiar spots along the way and dangled the line of his trusty cane pole into the fetid waters of the swamp. He had

even managed to catch a couple more small catfish and one medium sized small-mouthed Bass. He added these to the old metal fish stringer and continued to work his way south and west into a position that would put him directly below any departing airliners. Just in case he was stopped, there was one more thing that was dangling below the brackish waters...tied to the fish stringer in such a way that he could easily cut it loose with a knife. The Stinger missile and launch tube dragged along in the wake of Wariq's pirogue, just about one foot below the surface. They would stay there until he was in position and certain that he was alone.

He had been in position for nearly an hour and had taken a moment to say his morning prayers. It was easy to tell which direction was east, as the late spring sun had already risen from the direction of the airport. The time was closely approaching when Wariq was supposed to complete his mission, and he had his UHF scanner in front of him on the other seat of the pirogue. So far, the winds were out of the northeast, and the departing aircraft were using runway 10, taking off to the north, well away from Wariq's location. However, winds were beginning to shift, and were now coming from the northwest. With only a little more shift, the tower would begin assigning takeoffs to runway 28. Wariq sensed that this morning's mission would be successful, and slowly pulled the stinger missile from its temporary watery home.

"Ground, Delta three-six-four-seven-Tango, heavy, at Bravo-Eight, ready for taxi, please, with Kilo." Wariq's Bearcat scanner came to life on the Ground Control frequency with a word that was seared into his mind: "heavy." The Delta Airlines jet was a jumbo, probably a Boeing 767, which would mean as many as 250 to 350 passengers and crew, plus a full load of fuel. He listened carefully for the ground control response.

"Roger, Delta four-seven-Tango, New Orleans ground. Did you contact clearance?"

"Ground, four-seven-Tango. Clearance is Whisky-November-eight-five-one. We're squawking seven-one-two-two and ready for pushback."

"Four-seven-Tango, roger. You're cleared for pushback and taxi on four-echo, cross foxtrot, hold short of the runway. Current active is one-zero, but expect two-eight. I'll have to hold you for about three minutes. Inbound traffic is an Airbus 300 on extended final. Expect release at fifty-nine."

The other phrase that Wariq was waiting for didn't change his pulse beat at all. He was trained for this job, and when the tower indicated that takeoffs might be changing to runway 28, or 280 degrees, Wariq merely smiled....and waited. Allah was looking with graciousness on him, since his orders were to do his work as closely to 9:00 AM as possible, and the change in Allah's blessed winds would soon take departures west, instead of north. The plane now had an anticipated takeoff time of 8:59. He waited some more while the big plane lumbered down the taxi ramp toward the eastern edge of the airport, toward its takeoff point at the far end of runway 28. Here, runways 10 and 28 crossed each other and stretched their arms out like some giant, backward "L" shape. Planes could be quickly shifted to either runway, taking off either in a northerly direction on 10 or a westerly direction on 28. It all depended on the ever-changing and erratic winds along the Louisiana coast. If assigned to runway 28, it would take off directly over Wariq's swampy location. The Bearcat squawked again. "Four-seven-Tango, altimeter two-niner-point-niner-four, runway two-eight, taxi into position and hold." There would be a moment more of delay, possibly as the arriving airbus cleared the runway.

The plane's Captain or First Officer responded in the usual pilot shorthand. "four-seven-Tango for two-eight, position and hold."

And, then, less than a minute later, the tower directed. "Four-seven-Tango, cleared for takeoff."

"Roger. Four-seven-Tango's rolling on two-eight." From his position nearly a mile west of the end of the runway, Wariq was almost three miles from the position of the jet when the takeoff roll began at the eastern end of the ten thousand foot long stretch of concrete. He was unable to hear the growing scream of the engines as the pilot pushed the controls forward. The two, powerful

General Electric turbofan jet engines spooled up to full power, and the airliner began what appeared to be a normal takeoff run into a cloudless but hazy south Louisiana morning sky.

Wariq felt blessed by Allah when he heard the tower say, "Four-seven-Tango, you are cleared direct Los Angeles. Climb and maintain one-five-thousand. Contact Departure Control one-two-five-point-five. G'day!"

"Roger one-five-thousand. Departure on one-two-five-point-five. Four-seven-Tango. G'day, Sir."

Less than 60 seconds later, at 9:01 AM, the big jet passed over the swampy expanse at the end of the runway. Even if they had known to look for Wariq, it was doubtful that he could have been spotted. The jet was already climbing through two thousand feet, and the pilots were preoccupied with contacting Departure Control for handoff to Houston Center, the enroute controllers who would handle the progress of flight into Los Angeles. They wouldn't have seen Wariq simply because of the clothing that he wore to blend in with his surroundings. And, even if they could have spotted him, they would have never been able to make out the army green coloration of the stinger missile that Wariq now had hoisted over his right shoulder. The jet passed over and beyond Wariq, which was exactly as he wanted. He waited until the infrared eye of the missile began to "see" the exhaust of the two jet engines. That part was easy. The engines were under full power, lifting over 400,000 pounds of metal, fuel, and humans into the sky. As soon as the missile had a solid acquisition on the engines, Wariq pressed the trigger on the launch tube. The roar of the missile was nearly lost in the thundering echo of the passing jet.

A white contrail of exhaust gases reached out like a finger from Wariq's hands to the right engine of the jet. The plane was now about a mile west of Wariq's position, still climbing, as the 'finger' reached the wing. He could just see a muffled puff of black smoke as the missile flew into the white hot exhaust of the engine, disintegrating the internal combustion chamber and both the aft and forward compressor blades. For a instant, Wariq thought that the missile had malfunctioned, as the jet continued

on without any sign of trouble. And then it happened. As the disintegrating metal fragments of the compressor blades flew at nearly supersonic speed through the engine wall, into the thin aluminum of the wing, and sliced into the fuel bladders built into the wing assembly, the right engine and wing area exploded in an enormous ball of flame that was larger than the plane itself. A second later, the rest of the plane seemed to also disintegrate in a burst of flame that was the color of the sun. The left wing, and whatever was left of the fuselage and tail began a slow, climbing turn to the right, before arching into a dive toward Lake Ponchartrain. The remnants of the plane and people began to rain down on the southwest shore of the Lake. Wariq knew that traffic along west I-10 would be snarled as he made his way back home. He knew this, but he didn't care. Allah would be preparing his reward in paradise, and Wariq basked in his success.

Los Angeles
Morning of May 14th

In May, the morning light comes early in Las Angeles, but Hakim didn't mind. He had to be awake early in order to be on the freeway with ample time to spare. His destination was the four-level, named for that impossible tangle of freeways that cross over, around, and through each other near downtown Los Angeles. Here, the Pasadena Freeway empties every type of vehicle, from lowly Hyundais to Bentleys into the downtown business sector. And, in doing so, it travels over the connector lanes that transition traffic onto the northbound Hollywood. It also runs under the Golden State where it merges into the northbound Hollywood Freeway. While the 4-level is not the busiest freeway interchange in the world, there are close to 750,000 automobile transitions through this freeway arterial choke point every day. Hakim knew that at any moment during the rush hour of a business day, close to 1000 cars and trucks were in the immediate vicinity of the 4-level. He knew one other thing: The 4-level could be

easily seen from many of the office buildings in the heart of downtown Los Angeles.

Yes, it was true that Los Angeles had made great strides to get people out of their cars and into mass transit during the previous 15 years. Blue, gold, red and green lines snaked into the city from outlying areas as far away as Pasadena and San Dimas. The Metrolink stretched out even further and brought commuters in from Santa Clarita and Simi Valley to the north and west, a distance of some 50 to 60 miles. From the east, trains came from San Bernardino, a 90 mile run. Amtrak brought passengers up from San Diego, a trip of well over 100 miles. Underground subways were the latest addition to the Los Angeles mass transit solutions, but a combination of hills, ancient landslides, methane pockets, and an indescribable web of previously undiscovered faults were destined to make a truly functional and useful subway system the stuff of political campaign speeches rather than reality. The result was that the dribs and drabs of mass transit, while taking thousands of cars and commuters off the freeways each day, were simply no match for the influx of new residents moving into metropolitan Los Angeles each year. These people needed to commute to jobs, and for every person who left their car for the less stressful mass-transit ride into the city, it seemed that three or four new commuters took their place on the road. The freeways were more jammed currently than they were in 1990. For Hakim, it was a blessing.

The old International truck coughed and wheezed as it lumbered north along the Golden State portion of the I-5, heading in the general direction of downtown Los Angeles. Hakim carefully navigated toward the point where the Golden State and the 101 part ways and slid his truck left to merge with traffic headed toward downtown on the 101. This route would take him past the new Catholic Cathedral, aiming him right for the "downtown slot", as the locals called it, and directly to the four level freeway exchange.

The engine was running as perfectly as a 300,000-plus mile engine could run, but Hakim was just approaching the four level, carefully sticking to the right-

hand lanes, as slow vehicles were supposed to do. Just as he approached the four-level, he merged right onto the connector lane that would have normally transitioned him either north toward Pasadena, or south toward Long Beach. He chose the Long Beach transition, which put his truck at the second lowest point on the four-level....just above the Pasadena Freeway, and just below the Hollywood.

It was here that he needed an 'emergency breakdown'. So, Hakim did the totally expected: he turned off the engine, and the big truck rolled to a halt. He pulled the truck as far to the right as possible, but with the rear of the vehicle still sticking slightly into traffic. And, as the truck slid to a halt, the drivers also did the totally expected: they honked, yelled at him, and made obscene gestures, as they tried desperately to negotiate their way around the truck. This only made Hakim smile more broadly as he slid down from the cab of the truck and made his way to the engine compartment. He undid the brackets holding the engine hood and raised it to expose the ancient Cummings diesel. As he did so, he splashed about two quarts of mixed motor oil and water onto the hot engine. This immediately sent up a plume of white steam and blackish, oily smoke, snarling traffic even further. Since his truck was partially visible to traffic below and above him, those sections of roadway also became affected and began to slow. The result was certainly not an uncommon sight on Los Angeles Freeways: One broken down vehicle began to choke up an entire freeway, as if the automobile drivers in all their years of driving experience had simply never seen a truck with its hood open. As the four-level slowed to a molasses-like crawl, the stage was set. But Hakim still needed two more players in his morning mission and they were quickly approaching from behind: a motorcycle policeman and a freeway service patrol truck.

In another effort to ease traffic congestion on the freeways, Los Angeles County had taken a portion of the state gasoline tax to establish a fleet of service patrol trucks on the county freeway system. These trucks had one mission: get stalled cars out of lanes and off the

freeway or onto the nearest shoulder of the roadway as quickly as possible. Almost before Hakim's truck had rolled to a complete stop, a CHP motorcycle patrolman and the familiar service patrol truck were dispatched to clear the latest of this morning's countless obstacles. But, until Hakim's truck was removed, the motorcycle and the extra tow truck only added to the confusion, and traffic slowed even further. Hakim left the hood of the truck in a raised position, made his way back to the cab, climbed inside and made a valiant showing of an attempt to restart the ancient vehicle's engine.

Before the CHP Officer dismounted his motorcycle, he made the routine dispatcher call, giving a description of Hakim's truck along with the license number. He didn't wait for a response, but would not have had to. The truck had no 'wants' or 'warrants' and only showed a recent Dealer registration to Balzakian's Truck Sales in the city of Southgate. There was nothing suspicious about this vehicle. It was simply old, and as the Officer reached the cab, he treated the scene as a routine breakdown.

"Any luck getting it started?"

Hakim just shook his head and continued grinding away with the old truck's diesel starter button.

"We'll get the tow in here right away, but I'll need to see your registration and operator's license."

There was still no response from Hakim, and he kept his eyes lowered, looking at the steering wheel of the truck, but focused on the dashboard at his knees. The Officer noticed the sweat pouring from Kakim's face but didn't think it was really that odd in the early morning warmth. What he did think was odd was the way Hakim ignored him. It also made him a bit irritable, as almost all levels of traffic were now being affected by this one truck. A traffic helicopter hummed overhead, probably broadcasting the scene into a few million Los Angeles homes. It was the CHP Officer's responsibility to get this truck out of traffic as soon as possible, and his patience was wearing thin. With one hand, he grabbed the door handle of the truck while placing his other hand on the lower part of the truck window frame. He would

get this driver out of the cab, get the truck started, and get traffic rolling again.

Hakim anticipated the Officer's move and placed his own hand on top of the hand of the young patrolman. As Hakim's eyes locked with those of the young cop, he smiled and uttered words that only he and the Officer could hear: "Allahu akbar." At the same time, Hakim flipped a switch on the dashboard of the truck.

They would later determine that the blast of the truck and its ammonium nitrate contents had registered on the seismographs at Cal Tech, some 30 miles to the north of downtown Los Angeles, with the same force as that of a 4.3 earthquake. But the immediate impact was to the four-level itself along with the cars and the hundreds of passengers within them. The force of the blast caused the connector on which Hakim's truck sat to collapse and fall onto the southbound lanes of the Pasadena freeway below. Huge chunks of concrete crushed any cars immediately below the connector overpass. The enormous blast of flame incinerated anyone caught in the area below Hakim's truck. The fireball extended outward and upward to engulf the entire four-level area and could be seen by air traffic controllers at Los Angeles International airport, some fifteen miles to the west. And, while the structure and overhead lanes of the Hollywood Freeway withstood the blast shockwave, they offered scant protection from the heat and flames of the blast itself. Bits of metal, glass, concrete, and roadside debris were transformed into lethal projectiles that completely shredded cars within a 500 foot radius, killing occupants and penetrating gas tanks, which added more fuel to the intense flames of the initial blast. Most of the windows in the immediate downtown area of Los Angeles were blown out, and many office workers were cut by flying glass. The pictures of the blast seared themselves onto the screens of TVs throughout Los Angeles. In the space of only few seconds, 2,861 people lay dead or dying. Hakim was one of them, but his feelings in the afterlife were probably no different from the feelings he had only one second before he flipped the switch on the dashboard of the old truck: He simply didn't care.

Chapter 5 Change of Lives

**Office of Dr. Steven Yalters
Lincoln, Nebraska
May 14th, 2007
9:08 AM**

"It looks like a bone spur and perhaps some weakness in that ligament to me, Jim. Your football romps in college are coming back to haunt you." Dr. Steve Yalters chuckled as he continued. "Didn't someone tell you back then that football would just mess up your bones sooner or later? If I'd have been your Doctor in college, I would have told you that playing football is just living on borrowed time."

"Yeah, well, if you would have been my Doctor back then, you would have been 18, two years behind me, a Freshman, and I would have had to use you as a tackle dummy for making a smart-assed remark to an upper classman. And, I'm not sure that I shouldn't consider doing that even now. What's this going to do to me?"

"Well, you're certainly not going to do any down-and-out patterns or wind sprints, either. Oops, bad play on words, huh? You politicians sort of specialize in wind, don't you?"

"Very funny, Bones." You know, as Secretary of Agriculture, it may be within my power to have your Veterinarian's license revoked. I know from the way you poked me, that you're not used to treating patients that can talk back to you."

"OK, it's a draw!" Dr. Yalters laughed and closed James Lincoln Night-Wolf Anderson's file, leaning back in his chair. "Jim, it's just age catching up with us all. You're 64, for crying out loud. And, I know that your grandfather...."

"Great...Great...Grandfather," the Secretary said, correcting him. "I'm fourth generation, Sioux, remember?"

"You just like it when I write the word 'great' in your medical file, don't you?" Steve Yalters could not

hide the smile that a bit of friendly insult generated; something that had made them the best of friends since their first meeting in the dorm room at Abel/Sandoz Hall, just north of downtown Lincoln on 17th Street, on the University of Nebraska campus. They first met in 1963, and even in those days Jim Anderson was considered small for a football player at just a shade under six feet and 190 pounds. From the very beginning, Steve kidded Jim about being the "team mascot", not a real football player. Maybe it was an early bedside manner, but Steve had a way of making an insult sound like an invitation out for a beer with the guys. Perhaps for Jim, it was his natural Sioux stoicism. He never took offense at Steve's ribbing, and they became best friends through college and right up to the present day. As Secretary of Agriculture, Jim had a full-time, personal physician assigned to him at Walter Reed Army Hospital. However, he had always trusted Steve, and saw him for the ancient ankle injury whenever his travels brought him near Lincoln.

What Jim lacked in size, he made up for in toughness. On more than one occasion, Steve, who had been a pre-med student in 1963, used Jim for his own form of exam review. And, on most of those occasions, on a Sunday, after a particularly bruising Saturday "Go-Big-Red", "Bust-'Em-In-The-Teeth" Big-8 Conference game, Jim was ready for any kind of medical help that young Steve could hand out. It was the perfect Trifecta for Jim: Bob Zenner would describe a spectacular play for the Nebraska Football Network, aired over KLIN Radio; Jim would bust through a bunch of defensive players for another six or seven tough Husker-yards; and Steve would study for a Monday quiz on Sunday afternoon by rubbing some awful mixture on Jim's tortured calf muscles and Achilles tendons, while drawing full color pictures of exactly how the ligament and tendons had probably torn loose from the fibula and possibly separated the fibula from the talus. There was no doubt about it! Steve Yalters was a fun guy as a Freshman all right, and he apparently hadn't lost his "sense of humor" over the years. Jim found it difficult to believe that Steve had ever managed to catch someone

as beautiful as Linda, his wife of nearly 40 years. It had to be the money. It certainly couldn't be his stunning dinner conversation. Jim remembered the last time he and Steve had been up to Omaha for a steak dinner. After Steve spent an hour discussing how the beef sinew connected with the cartilage and the bone to allow the movement of the steer leg, Jim decided that any kind of post-college relationship that did not involve food would probably be best. There had even been moments of reflection on the benefits of becoming a vegetarian.

"Well, as I was saying, Jim, I know that your great...great...Grandfather used to run for miles across the plains. Maybe the very ones we see outside this office window. But, I'll bet even he wasn't doing it at your age. I'd recommend that you just use one of the over-the-counter pain relievers for now, maybe wear a pressure bandage if you're flying, and you might want to consider a cane if you're standing for hours. With a little luck, your ankle will last long enough for you to be in politics another 100 years, or until term limits catch up with you...whichever comes first."

For a moment, the word "Quack" entered Jim's brain, but exited just as quickly as he caught a glimpse of the Nebraska plains from the office window. They seemed to stretch westward for an unlimited distance. Lincoln is the last major city before Denver, and at the very southwest edge of the point where the last ice age glaciers stopped their southward migration. The ancient moraine hills add relief and beauty to the land between Lincoln and Omaha. But from Lincoln on west, the tallest thing one sees are telephone poles. At the western edge of town, houses give way to flat farmland, with an unbroken horizon. When visitors approached Lincoln from the west, it was said that if they looked carefully, they could see the 400 foot tall capitol dome from as far as 50 miles away. Jim would have loved Lincoln even if he hadn't gone to school at the University. There was something particularly wholesome and honest about the town, and the whole state for that matter. Perhaps it was symbolized by the capitol building itself. Built in 1922 at a cost then of \$10 million, it was a tall, slender tower affixed to a flat base in the form of a Greek cross,

within the perimeter of a square, 437 feet on each side. The large base was said to represent the flat plains of Nebraska while the tower was supposed to symbolize the dreams and aspirations of the pioneers who traveled across and settled this area. And, sitting atop the tower dome was the Sower, which was supposed to serve as a reminder to Nebraskans that their unusual unicameral state government was always dedicated to sowing the seeds of fortune for a good life. That was the Chamber of Commerce story. The more irreverent students back in his college days had referred to it as the "Penis of the Prairie" and the story of The Sower had probably been used by more than one young college horndog to convince some reluctant coed of the historical significance of sowing wild oats. From the capitol tower observation deck, one could see both the immense history and the equally immense good fortune that had been spread across Nebraska. Maybe it was all true, just like the story his own mother had told him about Gray Eagle's small pouch of marbles. Believe....and see it happen.

Many small and picturesque towns like Cozad, Grand Island, Karney, North Platte, and Oglalla dot the cottonwood-flanked banks of the North and South Platte Rivers as they wind their way back toward the Colorado and Wyoming borders. However, except for those signs of civilization, the land had changed very little since Jim's ancestors had roamed freely from the Black Hills of South Dakota to just about the northern border of present day Oklahoma. It was very easy to imagine his great, great...grandfather, Gray Eagle, riding off in the distance. Nebraska had been good for his family, and Jim was looking forward to retiring here for good.

"OK, and you might want to take two hearing aids, and call me in the morning! Hello....did I lose you, Jim? Should I go ahead and reserve that room at the home for you?" Dr. Yalter's voice brought Jim back from a moment of reverie. "Reliving that famous 1964 off-tackle touchdown again?"

"Oh, the Kansas game where you volunteered to give CPR lessons to the cheerleaders from either side after we beat the Jayhawks? That game?"

Yalters didn't miss a beat. "Yes, the Kansas game: The one where you managed to step in a gopher hole and rip these bones apart in the first place. If they had given the ball to Mathers, instead of you, maybe you wouldn't be in my office this morning."

Lee Mathers! Jim hadn't thought of him in months. For some improbable reason, everyone called Lee "Skeeter", as in 'mosquito', but at 6'4" and around 285 pounds, he was anything but a mosquito and towered over Jim. They were the most unlikely pair of backs the game of football had ever seen. Lee was from Phoenix, but could have passed for one of the corn-fed kids who filled out the Black-Shirt roster on the Husker team. He lived to play football, and apparently lived to heckle Jim, who at 5' 10" and 200 pounds was barely bigger than the team's water boy. But, Jim was good enough at the game to make the stand-in QB position, and occasionally ran a little interference for Lee as one of the other I-Backs. Then there was Hank Boevka, the "Ramblin Checz from Beatrice." The three of them had been good, although competitive friends at UNL, graduated together, and joined the Navy on the same day. Only Lee and Hank had decided to make careers of it, however, both finding a home in the submarine fleet. Lee retired as Commander and also went into politics, gaining one of the Senate seats from his home state of Arizona. He was currently the ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee - still with a reputation as a "junk yard dog" for the conservative side of the aisle, always on television with some biting remark about this or that issue, and truly a force to be reckoned with on Capitol Hill. Hank Boevka, who was good-naturedly called "Bev" by his friends, was the real success story. It was now Admiral Boevka! For a kid who had grown up in the farmlands south of Lincoln, "Bev" had a sheer knack for naval operations, a head for the administrative tasks that Navy life offers, and a gift for negotiating the political minefields so prevalent in the life of a higher ranking Navy Officer. He had been a rising star from the beginning and had achieved Flag rank early. "Admiral" Boevka was currently CNO - Chief of Naval Operations in Washington. While Jim was well aware of the success of

his two former teammates, he had not spoken to Lee directly in a few years. The friendship they had in college had always been slightly on the strained, more competitive side. Lee was also a bit the loner and rebelled at some of the teamwork required on a well functioning football team. It was when Jim had stepped in as QB that the rebellion had become most evident. Perhaps it was the issue of taking directions from someone that Lee considered an equal, or more possibly, less than an equal. Jim never really knew, and they had never discussed it. They managed a decent relationship over the four years of college, but had never been in contact during Lee's Navy years. After Lee was elected Senator, the only contact he and Jim had was when some official Washington function had brought them into the same room. And, even though they were in the same political party, the relationship had not been terribly close. It had been an entirely different relationship with "Bev" however. Even though Jim had separated from the Navy after a single hitch, he kept close contact with Hank - well, perhaps as close contact as one can maintain with someone who is prowling deep below the surface of the ocean for months at a time. Before the days of the internet, communication was strictly by letter. And, during the cold war years of the 70s and 80s, communications had been infrequent. It was not uncommon for Jim and Hank to exchange contact only once a year. Still, he had managed to arrange for Hank to be present at the christening of Jim's only child, Todd. Hank was Todd's godfather, and to this very day, Todd called the Admiral, "Uncle Hank."

Steve jolted Jim back to reality. "Still listening to the crowd cheering after one of your snappy pass plays, huh?"

The 40-year-old camaraderie was showing through again. "No, Steve, I was just thinking about good friends, good years, and retirement. Liz and I have had just about as much of the beltway politics as we can stand. I'll turn 65 in the not too distant future, and we're coming back to Nebraska, perhaps back to Elkhorn, to the family farm....but maybe here to Lincoln. There are some awfully good memories in this town, and I

might even find time to introduce you to some of those big-city doctors from Walter Reed. You know...real doctors!"

Dr. Steve Yalters was just about to respond when they both heard a piercing scream from the waiting room. The receptionist burst into the room in total panic. Tears were pouring down her face. "It's gone! Washington is gone!"

Dr. Yalters held her by the shoulders and tried to calm her. "Sara, what do you mean, 'It's gone'?"

Sara gasped for breath and huge sobs broke up her words. "A truck blew up in Los Angeles and killed hundreds of people. They think a plane was shot down in New Orleans. Some guy blew himself up in Miami. And now Washington is gone." She started to sob violently again, the words coming in gulping spasms. "It's...gone....they.....they.....blew it up!. Look!" Sara pointed to the reception room TV hanging on the far wall, where a distinct mushroom cloud appeared on the screen.

Jim and Steve watched the TV screen in horror as the office billing clerk clicked from channel to channel. The picture was the same on every station, indicating either a pool reporter or fixed camera location was being fed to all of the networks. This picture, however, was obviously coming from an aircraft, and the CNN banner below the picture identified it as coming from an NOAA Grumman Gulfstream jet, some 40 miles west of Washington. The mushroom cloud seemed to fill the entire picture, however. The plane must have been on a weather observation trip when the bomb went off, and the narrator was breathlessly trying to fill the viewers in on what was happening:

"...and early estimates are that the bomb might have been two or three megatons. There has been no contact with The White House, and it is unknown whether the President was in the residence or not. No one at this point is..."

"Oh my God! Dr. Yalters turned to his friend of nearly 40 years. "Jim, what's happening? Is it 9/11 all over again?"

Jim was stunned. He stared at the TV and managed to utter the one and only word that filtered through the shock of what he was seeing on the screen: "Liz!" The TV voice continued.

"... that the US Capitol has been completely destroyed. Estimates are quickly coming in that as many as one million people may be dead in the initial blast. We're going to switch now to..."

Jim Anderson grabbed his phone reflexively and hit the speed dial number for his Annandale home in the suburbs of Washington.. It took only a couple of seconds until the four tones alerted him to the professional, but recorded, female voice he was just about to hear. "We're sorry, but due to call volume all circuits are busy. Please hang up and try your call at a later time." His sudden guess was that all circuits weren't busy. They were vaporized, and he didn't want to think about Liz. She wouldn't have been at home in any case. She was scheduled to be at the service group luncheon at the White House. The Interior Secretary was giving a speech and Liz's group was scheduled to present that annual award for....for...for what, damn it! Why couldn't he remember, and why did she have to be there anyway? Why the hell couldn't she have made this trip with him? Jim refused to think about the inevitable.

Cabinet positions had not always warranted travel with Secret Service Agents. But, since 9/11 it was standard procedure to have one or two of them around at all times. Two agents had met Jim when he arrived at the airport and had been with him for every moment of his time in Lincoln. Under the circumstances, it wasn't a surprise to see them burst through the front door of Dr. Yalter's medical suite. What was a surprise was the sight of the Para Micro Uzi machine pistols that each of them held at waist level. While one of the men stood at the front door of the suite, the other moved directly in front

of Jim. His face was stone white, and his eyes didn't blink as he spoke quietly but forcefully. "You have to come with us now, Sir. There's been an incident."

Jim was in shock and looked at the agent with a blank stare. Finally he mumbled, "What are you hearing about Washington?"

The Secret Service Agent motioned toward the reception area and in a low voice said, "Not here, Sir. We are to move you to Offutt immediately. You will be briefed as soon as we arrive." The Agent did not wait for either an objection or another question. "Now, sir! We must move now!"

Jim turned to Dr. Yalters and reached blankly for his hand. "Steve, I...I...don't know what to tell you." He searched for words, but only shook his head in confusion and disbelief. "Give my love to Linda. They want me to go with them now."

Steve's mouth gaped open, and he stuttered out the words. "Liz? James! Liz? Is she...all right? What's...going on? What's happening? How...bad is it?" Before James could attempt an answer, the Secret Service Agent said seven words that told them both that it was far worse than they imagined. He said the words that momentarily cut through the fog of terror that filled Jim's mind and struck an even greater fear into his heart. The Agent said, "Please come with us now, Mr. President."

"This couldn't be real! What he had just seen on TV must have been his imagination or one of those documentary films that tried their best to show what would happen in a real attack. What else could explain the kaleidoscope of cruel, sick images that he had just seen? This was a test of some kind, done to see how quickly and in what ways the nation's security forces would respond. It had to be that. There was no way that this could be real, and nothing about this that he liked, especially if it involved Liz. He was in a total daze. Nausea overwhelmed him, and he doubled over in the back seat of the SUV.

"Roger that! We have the package; Our 20 is 13th and N. ETA in fifteen." The crisp voice of Agent Browning, penetrated Jim's foggy sense of the moment. It was the same agent who almost bodily carried him from Dr. Steve Yalter's 4th floor office to the waiting black Suburban on the street below. The specter of three men, two with drawn weapons, running from the entrance of one of Lincoln's tallest commercial buildings to a waiting vehicle must have shocked those people on the street just moments earlier. The agent had pushed Jim into the back seat of the big Chevy and had barely made it to the front passenger seat before the vehicle screeched away from the curb. He hung up the phone and grabbed the SUVs overhead support strap as the other agent took one more corner on what surely must have been only two wheels. Although the on-board siren wailed and emergency lights flashed, they were alone. There was no police escort as the big vehicle accelerated past 60, right in the heart of downtown Lincoln, weaving from side to side to avoid other cars and pedestrians alike. Yes, it was a test! That was it! Whatever he had seen on TV had certainly happened more than twenty minutes earlier. Why were people still on the streets? There were people everywhere, and no one seemed to be in any panic. Wouldn't everyone have been evacuated by now if the nation was under attack? And yet there was the Cornhusker Hotel looking completely normal from the outside, with people entering and leaving, oblivious to any major event...only pausing in their routines to see this big, black, tinted-window, Chevy Suburban wail past them, headed north on 13th street. Then he realized how ridiculous that thought must have been. How many hours and days did it take to communicate with residents when Hurricane Katrina struck, and still many of them didn't leave. How long had it taken to evacuate New Orleans, or Houston when Rita struck a few weeks after that? It took hours....days, literally. There was nothing but bumper-to-bumper traffic...stagnant rivers of tail lights trying to pour out of the city, but more like the ooze of trails of molasses. If what he saw happening in Washington was real, then the average citizen would probably not even know yet. And,

when they did, the same trickling rivers of humanity would turn into floods of panicked drivers who would clog every highway trying to get to where? Some place safe? And, just where would that be? The only reason his agents knew what the city of Lincoln mostly didn't, was that they were in constant contact with their own security headquarters, which obviously had to be some place other than Washington. They took one more corner with tires screaming in protest and headed west on "O" street. The driver pushed the SUV past 100, blowing through stoplights as they sped out of town.

"Where are we headed," Jim asked.

Agent Browning didn't even look around as he said a single word, "Offutt."

All Jim could think of to say was, "Offutt. But, I don't have a base pass."

Agent Browning turned in his seat and looked directly at Jim, realizing now that the man was in shock. He spoke slowly and distinctly and in as calm a voice as he could muster. "Sir, it's OK. You won't need a base pass today. An Air Force chopper will meet us at Lincoln Municipal and take you to Offutt. From there...." He didn't finish the sentence as he obviously responded to some sort of message he was receiving thorough the ever present ear piece that both agent's wore. He responded through the wrist microphone that was also part of an agent's daily wardrobe. "Negative. We'll come into the west side of the field from NW 48th. Have the bird meet us at Taylor Aviation, where Air Park Road empties out onto the apron. Our transponder is on, and we are squawking two-four-niner-zero. We're lit up like Christmas. He won't have any trouble finding us. Patching GPS now. ETA in ten." He turned back to Jim. "I'm sorry, Sir, but my orders are to get you to Offutt the fastest way possible. They'll chopper you in. We're meeting military assets on the west side of the Lincoln airport. They'll take it from there."

Jim looked at the agent and nodded, but Agent Browning could see that Jim was only marginally comprehending. Nothing seemed real and Jim's head spun with thoughts. "But, what about DC? What did we just see on ..."

He was unable to finish the sentence before the agent cut him off. "Sir, I'm sorry. I don't have any details. My job is to get you to Offutt. We'll be at the airport in five minutes."

The SUV raced west on "O" street at 110 miles per hour, leaving Jim to try and sort out the insanity of the moment, along with the fear and sudden possible loss of Liz. Why hadn't he tried to call her this morning? Why hadn't they spoken longer the evening before? Why did the conversation consist mostly of small talk about the gardener and that damned settlement crack in the front walk? Why hadn't he remembered to tell her that he loved her? Why didn't they talk about the first day they met, or something else of equal importance? Would he ever have a conversation with her again in this lifetime? No, she just couldn't be gone! How would his world continue?

When the driver turned north onto NW 48th, Jim could already see the helicopter on the horizon. Actually, it was helicopters...plural...six choppers in all...and jet fighters...plenty of them. There was no movement of aircraft on the commercial side, but two fully armed F-15s screamed past them, no more than 500 feet above the ground, paralleling the main runway. He could see a flight of four more fighters approaching from the northeast and two more just over his shoulder to the south. But, he couldn't see the two Apache gunships that were just forming position on him some 200 feet above and 100 yards behind the Suburban. The driver wrestled the vehicle through a right-hand turn onto Air Park Road, throwing a rooster-tail of gravel and dust in his wake, and raced the last few hundred yards to Taylor Aviation, one of the Fixed Base Operators on the west side of the field. There was no one in sight as the vehicle screeched to a halt well out on the apron, almost to the grassy area that separated the aircraft parking section from taxiways and the active runway. They were some 500 yards beyond the operations building of Taylor's FBO, totally out in the open. Agent Browning turned to Jim and said tersely, "Sir, stay in the vehicle until I tell you otherwise." He and the other agent exited the

Suburban, drawing their Uzi machine pistols as they did, and took up positions ahead of and behind the vehicle.

Four of the approaching Blackhawks peeled off from their formation of six and began to circle for landing. Jim watched as they maneuvered to the four compass quadrants, settling down to the north, east, south and west of his position in a hurricane of dust and debris. Jim knew from his casual aviation knowledge that the Blackhawk carried a crew of two and perhaps ten or eleven troops. But he was still surprised when a total of forty or more men in full combat dress poured from the helicopters and formed a perimeter around the Suburban. They were not close enough for him to make out details, but he could tell that they each carried automatic rifles. He watched as they took up positions facing away from his location. The remaining two Blackhawks settled to the pavement approximately 100 feet away, but did not spool down their engines. The rotor blades continued to turn at full power, obviously ready for an immediate departure. Jim watched as three men exited the first craft and ran toward him. One appeared unarmed. The other two carried M-16s. All three were in full combat gear.

Agent Browning came from his location at the front of the vehicle and opened the rear passenger door, motioning to Jim that it was OK to exit the car. As the three soldiers walked up, Jim was able to see that the unarmed man was a two-star General, who rendered a crisp salute to Jim. "Sir, I'm General Carter. My other bird is designated Air Force One and will take you to Offutt. I'll be riding shotgun in bird two. We'll have you on the ground in less than thirty minutes. You'll see an envelope of F-15s with us as we bug out. We've got boys from the 8th Air Combat flying high cover and we also have two angels with us." He motioned over Jim's shoulder, and only then did Jim become aware of the Apache gunships hovering to his west, just above the hangers on the edge of the field. The General continued, "Sir, if you'll follow me, we need to leave now!"

Jim, the General, and the two armed airmen walked toward the second helicopter, leaving the two Secret Service agents behind. As they walked up to the ship,

General Carter strained his voice to be heard above the wail of the Blackhawks. "Sir, I apologize for the accommodations, but this is all that was on the ready line. No one prepares for anything like this. Captains Schmidt and Lewis are your pilots. They will take you directly to Offutt. We'll be right behind you, but there are no communication devices on the chopper. If you need anything, please notify the pilot. Would you please board the chopper, Sir." It wasn't a question. It was a command.

Jim stepped aboard the craft and one of General Carter's airmen helped him secure his flight harness. When Jim was safely strapped in, the airman climbed down and took a position beside General Carter about 25 feet to the side of the helicopter. All three men stood stiffly as the Blackhawk spooled up to full power. One of the pilots turned from the cockpit area and gave Jim a 'thumbs up' and 'OK', but Jim raised his hand to the pilot and signaled for a momentary delay. He then motioned for General Carter and indicated that he had a question. The General sprinted the few yards to the Blackhawk's open doorway and leaned halfway in to more easily hear the question. "How long before they are able to get me back home to Washington, General?"

General Carter's eyes widened and he looked into Jim's face, realizing that the full impact of the morning's events had not yet hit this man, but not realizing the force with which his words were about to hit Jim. He said the only thing he knew to say. "Sir, there is no Washington to go home to."

Jim slumped back in his seat in stunned silence. He looked into General Carter's face, trying to understand the words he had just heard. The General stepped away from the chopper and signaled to the pilots that they should depart. With a powerful whine, the helicopter struggled into the heat and humidity of a late May Nebraska morning. As the craft left the ground, General Carter and his airmen came to full attention and saluted the departure. The chopper leaned forward to build up speed and banked sharply, heading northeast toward Omaha. In the cargo bay of the Blackhawk, Jim was alone, confused, and very scared.

The noise of the helicopter engine and the wind from the open door assaulted Jim's ears and face, but he heard and felt none of it. 'There is no Washington to go home to'. The General's last words tumbled through Jim's mind like rocks in a washing machine. He wanted to rewind the morning and go back to the beginning, back to when things were normal; back to when it was just another morning in America; back to when he had a wife. This couldn't be happening. There was no way that this could be anything but a bad dream, one that had suddenly been transformed into an even worse nightmare. Liz! Not Liz! No, she couldn't be dead. This had to be a mistake. The whump-whump-whump of the helicopter blades whipped wind and dust into Jim's eyes as he took one last look across the Nebraska plains to the northwest. Reflexively, he reached into his jacket pocket and retrieved a small leather pouch that had been given to him by his mother over forty years earlier. He could feel the roundness of the marbles through the leather and could feel them slide and move smoothly past each other. As he shut his eyes to escape the wind blast, he could see Liz's face again, but it wasn't the gracefully aged face of the present. It was the face he fallen in love with in 1965. The tears came freely, and he buried his face in his arms.

Liz would have loved to be on this trip, and have a chance to see the campus again, but scheduling conflicts had nixed that chance from the time he received the request late in the previous year to be the commencement speaker for this year's graduating class. He had been looking forward to getting out of Washington for a few days and getting back to the wide open spaces of Nebraska. He'd have a chance to see some old friends, like Steve and Linda Yalters, and maybe even have a chance to do a little touring of the old campus, just to see how many changes had taken place since his last visit. It would have been great to bring Liz along. No....she couldn't be gone.

He still counted Liz as his best friend, and, he was proud to say, as his only lover, even after all these years. It was easy to remember the first day they met, just in front of Hardin Hall on the East campus, at 33rd and Holdredge. It was love at first sight. Like him, she lived on the City Campus, but took many classes on the Agriculture, or East Campus. Chalk it up to room assignments in a pre-computerized age, perhaps. Or, maybe Cupid was in charge. Liz was just over five feet tall, with long brown hair and brown eyes and weighed 105 pounds when they first met each other. The day they met, she was dressed in that typical college coed style: pullover sweater, skirt, and penny loafers. Today it was called the 'preppie look', and was the "in" campus style for women in the mid 60's, well before blue jeans, sweatshirts, tennis shoes, and backpacks took over. He knew instantly that she had at least some Indian heritage. She was beautiful. She was alone. She was lost.

"I'm looking for the Animal Research Lab," she said. "Can you help me?"

Jim was a Sophomore and already knew his way around campus. The Research Lab was not on his way, but he jumped at the opportunity to be her tour guide. "Sure, I know exactly where the lab is. It's right on my way...real close by. I'll walk you there." Hardin Center was in the southwest corner of the grounds. The Animal Research Lab was as far to the northeast corner as one could go without leaving campus. Jim knew that if he walked slowly he could spend most of the next hour walking this beautiful girl to the lab, and he took the opportunity to point out every building and every interesting historical fact that he had learned in his first year on campus. By the time they arrived at the lab, Liz knew James was different, in a very good sort of way. To this day, they laughed about his rambling monologue about UNL, the Ag campus, the old and new buildings, and all the other little factoids he had memorized about the University and Lincoln in general. She had often said that this must have been what prepared him for a life in politics, as he never seemed at a loss for words. It had become such a running joke between them over the

years that she often called him "Prof" when she wanted to let him know that he had been 'busted', or when she felt he got a little too wordy or pompous in front of her or friends. She kept him honest with himself...just one of the many things he loved about her.

Later that first afternoon, they took the Holdredge Flyer back to the City Campus and had a late lunch at the Student Union. Afterwards, they walked to Love Library, on the pretext of studying. However, they spent the next three hours talking about everything...anything, and never opened a book. By the time they said goodnight at the Tri-Delta front door at 16th and R Streets, they both knew they were at the beginning of a very long relationship.

Jim had learned a lot about her family history while sitting in the library that evening. Liz was full-blooded Sioux, and her ancestors had originally lived on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation; first in Edgemont, South Dakota, eventually moving to Chadron, Nebraska, where her grandfather was one of the last real Indian-cowboys, riding herd on the famous, old Sidwell-Whistler Ranch during the 20s. He had frozen to death in the winter of '26, leaving her grandmother to care for six young children. The following spring, her grandmother moved to Ainsworth, and the family had made it their home ever since. Her dad, the oldest, never completed high school, but somehow managed to eke out a living in Nebraska's Sand Hill Country as a guide to the many hunters who came to add one of the famous Sand Hill Cranes to their trophy cases. This was well before they were declared an endangered species, and the money allowed Liz and her two brothers to reach adulthood in relative comfort. She was the baby of the family, and if she completed her degree, she would be the first to graduate from college.

They dated all through college. After Jim graduated, he took a few grad courses while Liz finished her senior year. The day after her graduation, they were married in the campus chapel.

Two weeks after they married, Jim left for Navy OCS in Pensacola, leaving Liz with friends in Lincoln. His 13 weeks of Officer Candidate School left little time for phone communication, but they poured out their hearts

to each other in frequent letters. Jim was surprised as anyone when he was assigned to submarine duty. Not only was he a large man, but he'd never had any intention or desire to be on a ship that sank on purpose time after time. Were those guys trying to tempt fate, or something? It was strictly administration duty, and probably the Navy's sense of humor, but he would spend the next 18 months stationed in Bremerton, the Navy's gateway to the Pacific fleet. But, he would spend at least six months at sea, and the prospect of being separated from Liz for even more months did not sit well with him. After graduating from OCS, Jim took a bus from Pensacola to Lincoln, bought a car, picked up Liz and their meager household belongings, and headed across country to Bremerton. Their life together was just beginning.

The hand on his shoulder brought Jim to startling consciousness. It was the co-pilot. He held up both hands with all 10 fingers extended, closed and then extended them a second time, and then pointed to his watch. Jim understood. They would be landing at Offutt in twenty minutes. He nodded acknowledgment as the co-pilot headed back to the cockpit.

As the craft banked a bit more to the east, Jim looked down on I-80, snaking its way among the moraine hills. What was happening to this beautiful land? What did all of this mean? Who had done this? Nebraska always seemed as far away from Washington as one could get. He could come here and go pheasant or dove hunting and forget all of the nonsense of the beltway. Or, he could get on a horse and ride for a day without seeing anyone or any thing other than a few tumbleweeds and a few scrubby old trees. In an instant, Nebraska and every other square foot of America was bound up in what had happened this morning. The very fabric of the nation was being threatened. Jim suddenly felt the impact of Todd's words. Is this what it felt like to Gray Eagle? When the settlers and the army arrived, did old Gray Eagle have some immediate sense of the threat? Was there ever a thought that equated settlers and soldiers with terrorists? Is this what drove Red

Cloud, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Cochise and all the others to fight? Maybe Todd was right. Crazy Horse wasn't "crazy" at all. He was trying to defend his land and his family with all the might that he had. The sad fact was just that the soldier's numbers and power was greater. The soldiers had far superior weapons and greater military discipline. It might not have been right, but it was inevitable that the white man would prevail. In those days, there was no thought of assimilation. The Indians would simply be pushed out of their homeland. And, if they resisted, they would be exterminated. It was a history of which America was not proud. But it was a history that was nearly 200 years old. Certainly, we were more civilized today! And, yet the events of the morning told Jim that civilization was not as advanced as he thought. The civilization that he had known was suddenly under extreme, perhaps fatal attack.

After 9/11, there had been a great deal of talk about what drove the terrorists to fly airplanes full of innocent civilians into buildings filled with even more. The arguments always seemed to come from the extremes and left little room for any sort of civil discourse. The very far right shouted for the middle east to be turned into a nuclear parking lot. The fringe left said that America was to blame for everything. Few seemed to inhabit the middle ground. But, to America's credit there was no wholesale roundup of people who looked to be of mid-eastern ancestry. Even the invasion of Iraq was done with a minimal footprint, utilizing perhaps 150,000 troops at most, where 300,000 troops might have assured quick victory. America had tried to protect itself against a mostly unseen enemy. Was this the payback? Had the same terrorists who inflicted 9/11 on us done this as well? Or, was some other world power taking advantage of the situation to bring America down?

Jim squinted against the wind to catch another glimpse of the land below. Except for the farms and a few ribbons of highway, not much had changed about Nebraska since Gray Eagle's people traveled these hills. Even his grandfather, Lone Hawk, could relate stories about Nebraska before much of the land had been

developed, and he always had time to tell Jim about the history of Gray Eagle, buffalo hunts, war parties, sweat lodges, fierce winter storms, forced marches....life both before and after the white man came.

The helicopter lost just a little bit of power, nosed down somewhat, and banked some more to the east. General Carter's twin Blackhawk kept identical pace with Jim's chopper and executed its turn in sequence. The F-15s turned in unison, struggling to fly slow enough to keep from overshooting the Blackhawks. They were beginning their decent into Offutt. Jim gripped the bag of marbles even more tightly, and tried not to think about Liz. There would be time for his own grief at a later time. Right now the country just might have to depend on him. How much control and command damage had been done? Was the president or vice president alive? How about the cabinet? And, how many members of Congress had survived?

Jim closed his eyes once more to protect himself from the windblast coming through the open door of the Blackhawk. The loneliness was almost overwhelming. The fear was not less than that, and his thoughts suddenly turned to what many thought of as a simpler time.

Seattle! Except for his time in Pensacola, Jim had never been out of Nebraska, unless one counted occasional trips to Council Bluffs as a boy as being "world traveled." For Liz, Lincoln was just about as exotic as it got. As they drove into Seattle and caught glimpses of Puget Sound stretching off into the distance, both of them were dumbstruck at the mixture of green and blue that surrounded them. Nebraska seemed a distant memory, and they quickly embraced their adopted home.

In Bremerton, Jim and Liz found half of a duplex for rent in the hills just north of the shipyard. It was a single bedroom, single bath apartment, with only the tiniest of kitchens. However, since it was clinging to the side of the hill near the corner of Ridgeview and 30th, they had an unobstructed view of the southern part of Bainbridge Island to the east. At night, they could see

the distant lights of Seattle twinkling to the east as the sun went down behind them to the west. Their apartment also allowed a clear view of ships as they steamed to and from the Puget Sound shipyard. It was in the Naval shipyard that Jim worked by day. And in this modest apartment so very far from their roots in Nebraska, Jim and Liz made gentle love to the sound of foghorns and ship's bells at night.

They both knew that Jim's Bremerton assignment would include sea duty. However, neither of them were prepared for how soon the day would arrive when he would leave the house one morning and not arrive home that evening. It wasn't the year delay that they both had expected. It was less than two months before Jim received orders to ship out on the USN Swordfish, a World War Two class diesel submarine. He would be at sea for six months, but their joint sense was that it would feel like a lifetime.

Liz wasn't the only one crying on the pier that morning as lines were cast off and the Swordfish slipped her mooring and moved out into the middle of the channel, but she was the one who was crying the longest. There would be no letters delivered during this time, yet hundreds of letters would be written during the next 180 days. As she stood on the pier, waving, until the ship was long out of sight, Liz knew that she would have to write every day...write to this man that she loved so much...write about some of the simplest housekeeping items...write about a broken faucet...write about potlucks with other lonely, but temporary Navy "widows"...write about storms of such a magnitude that they put anything on the Nebraska plains to shame...write about her love for him and her worry for his safety. She would write about it all. And, then one day, she would cry never-ending tears as she wrote about a child that would not be sharing their lives.

Chapter 6 Facing The Enemy

Offutt, AFB Bellevue, Nebraska

The wheels of the helicopter bumped slightly against the grassy area of the field as the second chopper settled in beside them, some thirty or forty yards distant. General Carter appeared in the doorway of the second bird, jumped to the ground before the engines even began to spool down, and sprinted the short distance between his helicopter and the one in which Jim was riding. In seconds he was in the doorway of Jim's helicopter, pulling harness straps and helping Jim to the ground.

Jim wasn't exactly certain what to expect when they arrived at Offutt, but this seemed hardly to be an airbase. In fact, there was no "base" visible at all, unless one counted the ribbon of concrete that stretched off into the distance perhaps five hundred yards from where he stood. A camouflaged B-52 lumbered into the morning air and Jim could see his escort group of F-15s lining up on a downwind leg for landing at still another unseen strip of runway.

From where Jim stood, there was nothing visible except fields of freshly mown wild grasses, the small section of runway that he could see, and a small ten-by-ten concrete block building about twenty yards from their aircraft. Anyone who would have been inclined to even look at the non-descript building would have guessed that it served merely as storage for a sprawling Air Force Base. It wasn't big enough to store anything of significant value, and the only thing that gave it away as anything more than an outbuilding in which field mice and gopher snakes might find shelter were the two Marine guards who stood on either side of the door to the building's interior. Each of them was in full battle dress, carried the latest M-4 automatic rifle, and had a .45 strapped to his waist. Despite its unpretentious appearance, something important was inside this building.