

Cold Camp

by TimJ

PDF Version 1 – May 21, 2006

Chapter 1

He broke camp at sunset, packing his gear into his Kelty pack, everything going back where it had come from. He was comfortable with the routine of the act; it gave him a feeling that some things were consistent, and hope that some things would remain so.

After packing, he pulled the camouflage cover over the pack, securing it at the top and bottom so that an errant tree branch wouldn't pull it off at the wrong time. Shrugging on his Blackhawk chest pouch he picked up the pack by the sides and lifting it over his head, settling it onto his shoulders. He jumped up and down to get the pack just so, and buckled the waist belt, pulling it just a little tighter. He wondered to himself how much more weight he was going to lose. Not that it was a bad thing. His trek so far was burning the soft life off of him 1 pound at a time, and every day he felt both younger and much, much older.

He picked up his rifle, and draped the sling over his shoulder and neck. He set out cautiously, stopping every few minutes to listen to the sounds of the forest. So far so good. Just birds saying good night to the sun, and the last few crickets of the season looking for love in the twilight. As the fading light turned the world from Technicolor to gray and black, he paused for moment to look up at the darkening sky. The stars were much brighter now that there were virtually no electric lights to blind suburban man to the wonders of the universe.

Well, he thought, we really were a short footstep from the dark ages. Continuing on, he consulted his USGI tritium compass every so often, and adjusted his course as he needed to. After moving a click and a half, he again stopped, and removed his canteen from his hip belt. He took a long pull of the tepid water, and swallowed. He stowed the canteen and moved forward, even more slowly than before, using every bit of his somewhat rusty skills to make as little noise as possible.

After two hours and then some he saw a break in the trees, marked only by a band of twinkling stars through the leaves. He stopped and took a knee, loosening his right pack strap and unbuckling the waist belt of his pack. Rolling his shoulder, he shifted the weight of the pack to his left, and slid it to the ground at his left heel. He then dropped to the prone position, pointing his rifle at the road that lay 20 meters to his front.

Shivering slightly as the chill of the night crept up on him, he listened for activity on the roadway. The sound of a motor, a cough, muffled voices, a radio breaking squelch, the distinctive whir of the thermal sight of a TOW launcher mounted on a Humvee. After a half hour of hearing what he wanted-nothing- he again rose to one knee and adjusted his left shoulder strap, then replaced the pack on his back. The cold sweat on his t-shirt made him colder still as the pack resettled on his spine. Pulling the straps tight he left the waist strap unbuckled in case he needed to dump the pack in a hurry. He slowly made his way to the edge of the brush that lined the two lane state highway in front of him, and promptly walked into a rusty wire fence. "Damnation" he hissed. The rusty fence was put there by the state to keep random and easily deterred trespassers from despoiling the

wood surrounding the reservoir where he had refilled his canteens and spent the day. He felt the wire with his bare left hand, and determined that it was thin enough. Reaching into the left accessory pocket of his chest rig he pulled out his trusty Leatherman Tool and unfolded it. Cutting carefully, with his attention still focused mainly on listening for the sounds of approaching danger, he clipped the wire in two areas, about 30 inches apart, and down four layers of wire. Re-stowing his Leatherman he pulled the wire towards him, and folded the cut area down. He quickly crossed the fence, and turning, pulled the wire back into place, as best he could by touch. He turned to the road and took a knee, looking both left and right for signs of approaching vehicles, or something or someone waiting quietly on the shoulder. Seeing and hearing nothing but normal night sounds, he quickly rose and darted across the road, his pack thumping against his back with every step, his rifle held at high port in both hands. Reaching the far side of the road, he crashed through the first row of pucker brush that is so common on roadsides, and stopped. He flopped to the prone, and peered over his rifle at his back trail. After several minutes of listening to his heart return to a normal rhythm, he stood and buckled his belt, turned on one heel, and moved slowly and deliberately through the woods, keeping the highway, as best he could, 200 meters to his left.

He again made camp in a wood. It wouldn't be dawn for a few more hours, but according to his map this was the last significant patch of undeveloped land on his route for about 10 miles. And between that patch of land and this was the Turnpike, eight lanes of potential danger. He had several miles of semi rural land to cross, and at least two of suburban tract houses to pass safely through. He ate a cold MRE beef stew, and dug a small cathole to take care of other matters. He buried both his waste and MRE packet in the same hole. He had stopped outside of a dense stand of Oak trees growing from a wild pile of bracken and vines. He risked a brief red filtered search with his LED flashlight, and found what he was looking for in a few moments. On hands and knees he followed the small game trail into the thicket, wriggling on his belly when his pack hung up on the dense vegetation. Reaching the clear spot at the base of the three oaks, he listened tensely for a few minutes. He then took off pack and removed the cover. Rolling out his ensolite ground pad, he unrolled his sleeping bag and laid his poncho over it. Fishing around in the outside pocket of his pack he removed a small bundle of green bungee cords and quickly assembled a low poncho hooch over his bed. He removed a pair of socks from the pocket and threw them onto his sleeping bag. He then sprinkled dried leaves over the top of the poncho, and quickly crawled back down the game trail. He then covered the trail as best he could in the dark in an effort to disguise his path. Reaching his hooch, he again covered his pack with the cover. After listening to the sounds of the night and detecting no apparent threat, he removed his chest pouch and laid it next to the sleeping bag, and placed his rifle on top of that. He removed his boots and socks, and put the socks in the bag. Dusting his feet with foot powder, he pulled on a pair of dirty but dry socks, crawled into his bag, and drifted off to a fitful sleep.

Chapter 2 – Preparation

He woke with a start and it took a moment for him to remember where he was. He then tensed. What was it that had woken him? He reached out from the bag slowly and felt his rifle next to him. Feeling slightly less tense he listened for a moment. Suddenly a Blue Jay called from above him, its raucous cry startling him. He laughed at himself. Just a bird, he thought. He looked around. It was a bright, mid-October day, Indian summer they called it, when the cold air and wind of fall was replaced with one final sign of the summer that had passed, and a reminder that the cold time was just around the corner. Releasing his L1A1, he unzipped his fart sack and stretched. He really was too old for this stuff, he thought. He smiled to himself. He sounded just like his old platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Chadwick. Hell, he was now older than old SFC Chadwick had been when he was platoon daddy for a bunch of miscreant recon soldiers back in the day. Getting out of the bag, he sat on the edge of his sleeping pad, which he still called a puss pad, often to his wife's dismay. He did have a way of letting things slip, which could be awkward when you were a middle management type for a stuffy brokerage firm. Pulling his pack towards him, he removed the cover and fished around inside, removing a pair of dry polypropylene socks as well as a pair of GI wool socks. Removing the socks he had slept in, a thick pair of wool hunting socks, he dusted each foot with foot powder before putting on the sock liner and GI sock. He then pulled on his hiking boots, and laced them up. Stowing his sleeping bag in its compression bag, he placed that inside of a waterproof bag, and returned it to the bottom compartment of his pack. He then took down his poncho hooch, and returned its various components to their place in his outside pocket.

Time for food his rumbling stomach told him. He laid the pack down and unzipped the front compartment, taking inventory of his food supply. Five Mountain House dehydrated meals. Seven MRE's, still in their heavy plastic bags. 12 stripped down MRE's, all but the essentials removed to make them lighter and more compact. A large Nalgene bottle stuffed full of instant white rice, and a smaller one full of instant oatmeal. Six Ramen noodles packets, looking slightly worse for the wear in their heavy-duty freezer bag. A small container of sugar, one of salt, and one of mixed spices. Sighing at his unappetizing breakfast fixings, he dug a small hole at his feet. Pulling on esbit stove from the GI buttpack clipped to the top of the pack, he removed one heat tab, broke it in half, and returned one part to the stove, which he then replaced in the buttpack. Placing the tab at the bottom of the hole, he removed the canteen and canteen cup from the waist belt, and filled the cup halfway with the remaining water. He then fished a disposable lighter from his pocket, and lighting the heat tab, placed the cup of water over it to boil. While the water heated he took care of his morning toilet, and took a moment to wash himself with a small facecloth he kept in his personal hygiene kit. He then dropped a Ramen into the water, opened a stripped MRE, and removed a green foil packet of beef stew, which he opened and spooned into the canteen cup also.

While waiting for the Ramen stew to cook he refilled his canteen from the water bladder in his pack, noting that he needed to find potable water before the next day started. After eating, he consulted his map. Fortunately a company had long been offering atlas' that contained fairly large scale topo maps of different regions of the country. He had

purchased on for his state, Connecticut, which also covered diminutive Rhode Island, one for Massachusetts, where he was now, and one for New Hampshire, where he was headed. He had treated each map with water sealer, and kept them in a conveniently sized pocket on the front flap of the pack. With an alcohol pen he marked his present position, as close as he could determine. The next danger area for him was the Mass Turnpike. He could cross at a less populous area, but that would take an additional three or four days of walking. He had long ago determined that this route was safe enough to risk crossing the highway at this point. Studying the map, he committed to memory the terrain ahead, noting the main roads, train tracks, and streams he would need to cross. A cemetery would provide a good spot to move through and not be seen, but most of the area ahead was suburbs. He would have to wait till dark and try to traverse 2 miles of backyards, sidewalks, and streets before reaching the largest danger area he would face on his trip. Restowing the maps, he dug around in the pack and removed two rectangular items. One was a small, self powered AM/FM/Short-wave receiver. Although it didn't have the SW frequency range he would have liked, its ability to produce power via a built in dynamo was deemed a valid compromise. Winding the machine up, he plugged in a headset, and plugged one earpiece into his left ear. Scanning the channels, he found the airwaves nearly dead. The only stations he could find were coming in so faintly and with so much static he could gain nothing from them, so he needed to pull out some help. Again opening the buttpack, he removed the small wire bundle that was his field antennae. Made from brown wire, it was a copy of the "Jungle 292" improvised antennae used by the US Army to improve transmission and reception of their often weakly powered FM radios. Tying the wire to a carabiner unclipped from his pack, he threw the 'biner over a convenient tree limb, and wrapped the wire around the small handle of the radio. As the AM antenna was mounted internally, this was as close as he could get the wire. It was crude, but scanning the AM band again, his reception was much better.

"...hsssss.....and today the European Union announced another 15,000 men for the International Security Forces providing security for the American people in light of the recent crisis. President Susan Billary welcomed the announcement, saying it was one more step to restoring order in America. The President also announced that in light of the large, now defaulted debt owed to many of the governments in Europe and Asia, payment would be made in mineral and oil rights to many millions of until now protected areas, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, areas of Utah and New Mexico, the Gulf of Mexico, and forests in New England, the Pacific Northwest, and Michigan. The President had this to say..."My fellow Americans, today I take a great step forward in reducing the amount of debt faced by the American people. By letting our debtors utilize some of our untapped resources they have agreed to forgive or debt on our defaulted Treasury Notes and Bills, in which they had invested considerable amounts of their nation's assets. I want to remind the American people that the foreign troops you may see are merely ambassadors of their respective governments, here to protect their interests until we are able to restore order...."

The announcer continued "While many members of the cabinet stood behind the Presidents announcement, Attorney General Bloss was to resign today, proclaiming that the turning over of sovereign American soil to foreign governments was tantamount to treason. However, he apparently decided that the pressure was too much for him, and

Washington, D.C. police told us today that he died last night by his own hand, with a single gunshot wound to the back of the head....We will now be signing off, and will return to the air, as we always do, every two hours on the even hour. This is SDFR radio, signing off.”

The radio went silent. Scanning the bands, both AM and FM, produced nothing. Sighing, he shut off the radio, and removed the wire from the antenna. He then took out his Yaesu handheld short-wave transceiver, and connected the wire to its antenna. Plugging in the earpiece, he tuned it on and started scanning the 2, 4, 6, and 10-meter bands. What he heard was nothing new or unexpected. Electricity was still out to all but government facilities and hospitals. The government had passed a decree against the possession of any rifle or pistol above .22 rimfire, and any shotgun that held over four rounds in its magazine. Gasoline was being rationed, and people were being encouraged to move to secure facilities-school gyms, churches, National Guard armories, where they could receive food and shelter. One operator even stated that his neighborhood, near an oil depot, was being forcibly moved the next day. He didn't feel he had any alternative but to comply. Food was being rationed, and new ID cards would be needed before months end for anyone seeking government assistance. One Ham even broadcast that his neighbors house had been raided by foreign troops and local police, the occupants being taken away in a big tank “You know, with eight wheels and a cannon on top”. He stopped broadcasting abruptly, as if someone had pulled the plug on his radio. Other reports had it that people who were more then 20 miles from their address of record, either that on their drivers license or new Gov.org ID were being detained unless they were able to show that they were staying with a local family. Well, Dave thought, since they prevented people from traveling last week no doubt they are rounding up a lot of folks. The whole reason he was trekking to New Hampshire from his home in Northeast Connecticut was because a government edict preventing people from traveling on the interstate and local roads except for local trips. Police and National Guard checkpoints, as well as nosey sheeple looking for the reward of \$10,000.00 were actually successful at shutting down almost all non-approved traffic in a matter of two days. After listening to the chatter and learning little more than what he expected, he took down and put away the antenna. Finding a sunny patch on the floor of the small clearing, he took the batteries from the Yaesu and put them in the small solar charger, and put the charger in the sun. He then replaced the Yaesus batteries with a charged set, and put the radio away.

Next, he turned his attention to his rifle. It was a home built L1A1 kit on an Imbel receiver. Dave had originally built it for himself, but had sold it to a friend when President Billary had finally passed her “turn them all in” law. As it was a duplicate of a rifle he already owned, he flet te sale was appropriate. His friend had immediately cached it, along with the chest pouch, 12 magazines, and two .50 caliber ammo cans full of 7.62 ammo. Since Dave had actually sighted the rifle in, and his friend had never shot it, he was confident that it was still dead on for his use. He unloaded the rifle and using an StG 58 cleaning kit wiped down the bore with a patch held in the pull through thong. He wiped down the bolt and carrier with an oily rag, and made sure the gas piston was moving freely. He then reassembled the rifle, as always taking care not to make any unnecessary noise. While reinserting the bolt, he dropped a round into the chamber and

closed the bolt on it slowly, pressing it into battery with thumb pressure, thus avoiding the distinctive metallic 'clack' of the bolt slamming home on a fresh round. Inserting the magazine, he touched the safety with his thumb, ensuring it was on.

Again reaching for the pack, he pulled the waist belt to him, and removed an East German Makarov pistol from its nylon holster. He unloaded and checked the bore, wiped it with the oily rag, reloaded it, and replaced it on his belt. Ironic, he thought, I have two somewhat customized .45's in my stash, and here I am with a borrowed pocket pistol.

Rolling up the pad, he attached it to the pack. Before securing the pack, he removed the Yaesu and earpiece. He then leaned against a tree, and pulled the camouflaged pack in front of him. He had a schedule. He also had to wait for sunset, and wanted to wait for full dark before moving the highway. Hurrying was dangerous, and Dave had plans for the rest of his life. Those plans did not include Federal Detention.

Chapter 3

Resting against the pack, Dave looked at his watch, and set the alarm. He then drifted into a light sleep. Waking to the beeping of the watch a little more than an hour later, Dave again connected the little Yaesu to the improvised antenna, and pushed the third of his preset frequency buttons. Today was a Thursday, and an odd numbered day of the week, and he checked the frequency in his head, ensuring he was on the right push. As Noon approached, he again put in the earpiece, and turned up the volume. Just as his watch turned to 12 o'clock exactly, he heard squelch break on the frequency. Marveling at the technology that could produce a watch that kept synchronized time so well, he listened to the music playing in his ear. The gentle tune of Greensleeves broke through, a version played by a folk group using words from the mid 1880's. The female singers soft voice called to him, "Away, away, come away with me, where the grass grows wild, and trees grow free. Away, away, come away with me, and I'll build you a home in the meadow...". Dave sniffed. It was a beautiful rendition in ordinary times, and given his situation, very poignant. A voice came on the air. "Sua Sponte." The transmission ended. Dave leaned back as if a heavy burden had been suddenly lifted. Sua Sponte, the motto of the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment, was one of the prearranged code words that indicated that all was well back at the ranch. He knew his wife and sons were safe, and so were his friends. Sua Sponte, "of their own accord". The rangers other motto was leave no man behind. If he was in serious trouble, sick, injured, on the run, he could answer with codes of his own, indicating approximately where he was, and what was wrong. They would monitor the frequency for a half hour after playing the message, and the alert frequency was part of the retreats preset scanning. Hearing this his friends, some of them, anyway, leaving behind enough staff to ensure the security of their families, would come for him. Mutual aid was one of the things they had agreed upon long ago. Can't pay rent this month? We'll help. Sick and can't shovel your walk? We'll be there. It all worked out and in this case Dave's investment was paying off.

Dave settled back, the camouflage painted rifle sitting across his lap. Looking at the rifle he smiled to himself. What would old Sgt Chadwick say about this, he wondered, drifting back to sleep.

"McGrath" the voice ordered.

"Yes Sergeant" answered Dave, his eyes on the ACU clad NCO at the front of the room. "Since we are covering the basics, kindly explain camouflage, cover, and concealment to the platoon"

"Yes Sergeant," answered Dave, "Camouflage disguises something, to make it look not at all like what it is. Concealment is something that hides you from observation, and cover does the same and provides protection against small arms fire."

"That's right, college boy" said the Sergeant, "You win a cookie. Breaking up the form of you or your equipment is camouflage. Take your rifle," he held up his M-4 carbine, "It's just straight lines and all black. Pretty good color, but it still is a large black straight line when all is said and done. What we're going to do today is to rectify some of the problems this presents to us in a tactical environment. Pratt" the Sgt pointed at a red

headed soldier in the front, “that box on the corner of your table, pass out the contents, one color per two men.”

Pratt lifted the box and began passing out small spray paint cans to the assembled men. “This is called “Bowflage”, and it’s a removable paint sold to hunters. We’ll be using this today on our carbines. Hunters might need this to sneak up on Bambi, but your game is harder-Bambi doesn’t use mechanical ambushes and RPG’s on Joe Sixpack. Later we’ll be constructed camouflage for your rucks and your sorry asses. I don’t care much for pretty equipment. When you put your ruck down in the field I want you to run a 70% chance of losing it in the bush.” The platoon chuckled. Sgt Chadwick was a hard core trooper. Having served most of his career in Special Forces, he was doing a three year stint in a line unit to perfect his troop leading skills. The platoon was, for the most part, glad to have such a colorful and knowledgeable NCO leading them. At the very least he kept them interested-he came up with so many wild schemes the platoon would have stuck around just to see what he came up with next. “I can’t train and lead a guerilla battalion without having time training and leading troops” he had explained when he reported to Lt Moore the previous spring. Lt Moore agreed, and was happy to have him. An ROTC graduate, Lt Moore was also unique in that had served for four years a Marine Infantryman before college. Also, he was smart enough to know his own limitations, and had hence learned quite a bit more about leadership and command than any other Lt in the Brigade.

After painting their weapons and receiving Sgt Chadwick’s approval (several men had to redo their weapons to Chadwick’s standards), he had Pratt start passing out woodland pattern ruck covers and four foot square sections of camouflage net. Using black electrical ties and para cord, they attached the netting to their pack covers. They then cut the net to size, and using strips of burlap from rolls (“I have the NSN for everything” Sgt Chadwick had answered deadpan when Lt Moore asked him where it had come from), they added detail to their new covers. This cover is what Dave had on his pack now, although with slight modification.

“These covers have been treated by the esteemed Mrs. Chadwick,” said the Sgt. She was always “The Esteemed Mrs. Chadwick”. Never a name, “with a water repellent, as has the burlap. You nasty smokers had better not set the burlap on fire, boys, or I will make you regret it” His malevolent smile reinforced his word. “We’ll be doing a smaller cover for your boonie hats, too, so leave some burlap, Williams”. Looking at Williams, Dave could see that he had a cover that looked not so much like a camo’ed pack cover as a lump of burlap the size of a hay bale. Williams smiled apologetically and started removing material. “That’s better,” said Chadwick, tying more burlap to his own pack cover.

Their first field problem after the camo session proved the worth of the camouflage. They were crossing an open area when they heard helicopters. “Down” yelled Chadwick. The men dropped beneath their covered rucks and peered up at the Blackhawks coming in from their left front. Flaring, the birds touched down and quickly disgorged their cargo of heavily laden infantrymen. “Psst” hissed Chadwick, “we’re recon. No one fires unless fired upon, pass it on.” Under the roar of the idling UH-60’s the men passed the word. Suddenly the engine noise changed, and the four ‘Hawks applied power and lifted off in a cloud of dust, leaves, and grass. The LZ soon filled with the sound of an infantry platoon moving, the jingle of rucksacks being put on, the sounds of squad leaders issuing

commands for movement. Heading out through the tall grass, the squads formed into wedges and moved out, right through the recon platoon. Even though he knew it was only training, Dave felt tension as soldiers bearing heavy weapons and packs walked through his platoon. After the platoon entered the woodline, Dave let out a sigh of relief. The camo had worked. Over 40 men had just walked over and around 18 men lying in the grass, and not one had been spotted. After calling in a report of the size and direction of the just landed platoon, the recon troops split into their three teams and one command group, and continued their mission. Camouflage, concealment, and staying still had just made a great impression on Specialist David McGrath. It would one day save his life.

Dave woke from the cold. The sun had set and he could see stars shining brightly above him in the clear Fall air. He drank some water, and nibbled a Maple nut cake from an MRE. Finishing, he took the cover off of his pack and reversed it. He had, some time ago, had his wife, Sandy, sew green cotton onto the inside of the pack. He could then reverse the cover and it would appear to be a commercial pack cover and not present an alarming appearance to the gentler citizens of the hiking world. Dave felt that he would create less of a scene if he were noticed walking through suburbia than if he had a large, burlap covered tick on his back. He removed a cotton flannel shirt from his pack, and put it on over his chest pouch to hide it from casual observation. His rifle would present more of an issue. Taking his pack he left the little hiding spot and crawled out of the thicket. Taking his bearings, he consulted his compass and set out. Before long he came to the first of many houses. They were all dark, some with a little light showing through curtains, but it was apparent that this was a no power zone. He made his way through backyards, carrying his rifle on his left side, up close to the side of the pack. Eventually he came to the cemetery he had noted earlier. Staying near the wooded edge of the property, he paralleled a small stream and left the security of it only when he came to a school. He paused on the embankment, and conducted what he had once called a security halt. Listening for anything unusual, he only heard gunshots once, three of them, from a very long ways off. What did give him cause for concern was the car that turned into the parking lot of the school near the gym. When the door opened he saw it was a police cruiser. The two officers in the car went to the door of the gym and knocked. Light flowed forth as the door was opened, and the Officers entered the gym. Darkness returned as the door shut, the sound of the metal fire door hitting the jam echoing across the ball field like a bass drum. Dave was up and moving before the echo was gone from his ears. He wanted to move now, while the cops were inside. He made his way along the edge of the field, and then ran across the street and into a backyard. Taking cover behind a shed, he rested for a moment to catch his breath. He then rose and continued through a seemingly endless maze of backyards. Several blocks away he almost died of fright as a shed door opened in his face. Stopping and backpedaling, he backed around the corner of the building as a man holding toilet paper in his hand walked across the backyard and entered the house. Dave slunk around to the back of the shed and was suddenly assaulted by the ripe odor of human waste. "Outhouse" he thought to himself. Had things really gotten that bad so soon? Well, he reasoned, if the water treatment plants were without generators, water would be rationed. Only those with artesian water would have enough.

He skirted several houses that had dogs in the yards, and had to change his course several times to avoid large stockade fences. He finally sought cover behind a house that was somewhat secluded from its neighbors by trees, apparently being built near the center of a large double lot. In fact, the house was large enough and old enough to have been here before the area was developed into a tract of soul-less, cookie cutter colonials. Taking shelter behind a garden shed, Dave dropped his ruck and drank the last of his water. This was going to be a problem. If the water was being rationed, how could he fill up? The sound of a door slamming sent his adrenal gland into overdrive. Grabbing the FAL, he rolled over into the prone and aimed at the house. The door opened and slammed again. The wind, he thought. He looked at the house. Several windows were open, with curtains blowing gently out of them. The door itself, wait, the screen door was askew on its one remaining hinge. Abandoned? Dave watched for a half hour, and then quickly opened his pack to get the water bladder. Unclipping his buttpack, he slung it over his shoulder on a length of para cord and headed for the house.

Pausing at the back stoop, he examined the door more closely. It definitely had been broken in. Whoever did it may be inside, thought Dave, sleeping something off. Well, no guts no glory he said to himself, and quietly climbed the concrete steps. He entered the kitchen to find it untouched, except for wood splinters on the floor from where the jamb had given way. The living room and bedroom were trashed however. In what was apparently the master bedroom one section of wall had been exposed, plasterboard all over the place, trampled by a number of feet. What the H??? thought Dave. The dressers were open and the contents were scattered all over the room. Dave looked around. The wall in the hall was covered with family pictures. A young man in a sailor's uniform, the same sailor in uniform with a young girl in her wedding gown, both smiling. Children turning to adults, must be grandchildren, too. Returning to the kitchen, Dave noticed a yellow paper attached to the table with a thumbtack. Using his red filtered light, and lying on the floor to avoid exposing the light, he read the notice, all information on the preprinted form. Dave saw that the details were filled in with the same block printed handwriting, and the date was yesterdays:

Official Notice Department of Homeland Security
FEMA REGION 1, NEW ENGLAND

NOTICE OF SIEZURE

The property located at 13 Maple Terrace is hereby under seizure by the Department of Homeland Security for the crime of (filled in) willful possession of unregistered assault weapons.

List of items seized:

M1 Carbine, SN 1503117

Japanese rifle, S/N 456329

.45 pistol, US Property marked, S/N 67644 (stolen Gov't property)

Ammunition, three cans

Unintended Consequences, seditious material

Patriots, Surviving the Coming Collapse, seditious material

Boston's Gun Bible, seditious material

Various sedition material found on hard drive of iMac computer S/N AG 456E3410

All items seized as evidence.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH FEDERAL LAW SECTION 15, PARA 55, THE PREMISES, MATERIALS, AND PERSONS RESIDING AT THIS RESIDENCE ARE REMANDED TO THE CUSTODY OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FORCES, UNITED STATES REGION, FOR TRIAL.

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FEMA REPRESENTATIVE OR ISAF HEADQUARTERS FOR THE RETURN OF ANY PROPERTY THAT IS NOT LEGALLY HELD BY THE OWNER, RESIDENTS, OR REPRESENTATIVES OF SAID PREMISES.

Dave crumpled up the form and dropped it to the floor. Well, they went and did it all right. Rounding up old people for a few war trophies. Unbelievable. Dave sat for a minute. Get some stuff and get out said the little voice in his brain. Dave got to his feet and turned. He opened the fridge and looked inside. His eyes were drawn to a bottle of soda and a 2 1/2 gallon jug of spring water-almost full. He removed the jug and the soda, and put them near the door. Finding nothing else of use in the fridge, he went through the cupboards, finding some cans of tuna, beef stew, canned meat, and various veggies. Justifying his actions by the fact that the Gov.org now owned the contents of the house, he stuffed as much as he could into the buttpack, grabbed a few apples and bananas from a basket on the counter, and knelt by the door. He heard crickets in the backyard, and determined that it was safe. Leaving the shelter of the house behind, he quickly retrieved his pack, donned it, and continued through more backyards.

Chapter 4 – Beginnings

Dave approached the highway cautiously. He went through the parking area for a school bus contractor, the silent yellow buses magnifying the sound of his steps on the gravel. He had wanted to go around, but the way was blocked by a fence and a steep gully. He approached the rear fence, and dropped his pack. Taking a moment to look around and listen, he once again unsheathed his Leatherman and undid the soft aluminum ties that bound the fence to the bottom crossbar. Propping the fence open with his pack, he wriggled under the fence, then held the fence open and pulled his pack towards him. Gently replacing the fence, he returned the ties to their spots and resealed the fence. He took a moment to reverse his pack cover and donned an olive green BDU top. Rebackling his chest rig, he once again shouldered his pack and entered the woodland. About 75 yards into the woodland, he saw an open area to his front. Dropping his pack, he placed it near the base of a large pine tree.

Pulling on a pair of aviator gloves, he removed a pair of small binoculars from the ammunition pouch on the right side of his pack's hip-belt and put them in his left cargo pocket. Moving with as much silence as he could, he slowly approached the cut. As he got closer, he dropped and crawled the last ten yards, winding up under a mountain laurel bush. Below him the empty interstate stretched like a black snake in the setting moon's light. He was right where he wanted to be, about 75 feet above the road on a cutout, an almost sheer granite face to his front. On the other side of the highway he saw a similar face. To his left the ground gently sloped away, and he could just see where the highway crossed the low area, resting on a built up berm that rose about 15 feet above the surrounding terrain. He took the time to study the ground opposite him, straining for any sign of an OP. Scanning the roadway, he saw no vehicles on the shoulders, and no sign or sound of anyone. Remaining where he was for an hour, the only traffic was three Humvees led by a State Police car heading East, from his left to right. The Humvees towed covered trailers, and were running without light discipline. That meant, said Dave to himself, that they do not expect ambushes or hostile acts, which meant that they would not be as observant as they would if they were fighting a guerilla war.

Moving away from the road, he checked his watch. Dawn was fast approaching. He moved back and eventually found his pack (good camo, Sgt Chadwick, he thought as he finally found it). The sliver of moon had set, and the light of the stars lit his way. He moved to his right and dropped his pack again. Walking and kneeling frequently, he finally found a likely spot. A large pine tree with broad sweeping branches close to the ground, very near the edge of the cut, with a large fallen pine right in front of it. Retrieving his pack he returned to the pine and crawled under the lowest branch. Using a bit of para cord and some stout dead sticks he quickly set up his space blanket over him, shiny side down. In doing so he hoped to avoid observation from any aircraft or road bound vehicles equipped with thermal vision. Laying out his sleeping bag, he unstrapped the waist belt of his rig, and pulled the magazines forward, allowing him to lie on his stomach comfortably. As he settled in for a long wait the first rays of dawn streaked the sky. He watched the road, and his thoughts drifted to the circumstances that had brought him here.

David McGrath was a typical American kind of guy. Two kids, a wife, a mortgage. He lived in a modest home in semi rural Connecticut, and attended church weekly. He had grown up in a home broken by divorce, but had a good relationship with his father and mother, who had not let the divorce destroy their relationship with their children. Dave had a fairly typical childhood for his area. Growing up he lived in a more rural area of the state, in a house surrounded by farmland. He spent much of his free time as a youth roaming the neighboring woods, graduating from a bb gun to a pellet gun then, on his 16th birthday, a .22 rifle, the same one his grandfather and father had used. He learned to camp through his father and the Cub and Boy Scouts, and developed a life long love affair with wild places.

Starting summer during his 14th year he worked for Mr. Houston, the old timer who owned and farmed the land surrounding Dave's house. Mr. Houston was a good man, a Swamp Yankee, as they were known locally. He had only left his farm for any appreciable time once, when he spent three years in the Pacific babying the piston engines of Marine Corsair fighters. Like many of his generation he had come home from the war and married his childhood sweetheart. As far as Dave knew there had been no children, no heir to pass on the trade of farming. Mr. Houston never spoke of it, and it just wasn't something you asked someone about unless they volunteered it. Mrs. Houston was a little bird of a thing, always baking pies and cookies, and Dave and his sister had been welcome guests in her kitchen since they were in diapers. She canned the vegetables grown in her modest kitchen garden, and they raised both a pig and a calf every year for meat. They were the closest thing Dave had to grandparents, as both sets of his had died before he was born. When Dave turned 8 Mr. Houston was complaining about the squirrels and crows destroying his garden. Dave suggested shooting them with the BB gun Mr. Houston kept behind the kitchen door. Mr. Houston put him off, saying he had too much work to do on the farm to play with rodents. Dave suggested he find someone to do it. After considering and discarding several names, Dave finally suggested that he be allowed to do the job. Mr. Houston agreed with a twinkle in his eye, and it wasn't until years later Dave realized that he was the man Mr. Houston had been looking for the whole time. From that day forward, Dave was never outside without the BB gun. That Christmas he received one of his own from Mr. and Mrs. Houston, and the next summer he started getting rewarded for his efforts-three ears of corn per squirrel, and two for each crow.

When he started working for Mr. Houston around the farm, Dave learned much about life. The birth of dairy cows, how to tell if an udder was infected, and mechanics by working on the battered Ford pickup that was the farms workhorse, and the several old tractors Mr. Houston around the place.

During the school year he rose early and helped with the morning milking, and grew to love the early morning smells and sounds. Every summer he did take a break, though. His uncle Tom was a history teacher at a local Community College, and house sat for one of his friends for 6 weeks every summer, when his old roommate took his summer trip to Europe. Dave would go for one to three weeks to stay with his family, spending his days

at the loaner beach house swimming in the Atlantic and boating in Long Island sound. Dave's uncle was a major military history enthusiast, and collected many historical firearms and replicas. He would take Dave to his cabin in New Hampshire once or twice a year, and they would spend the weekend shooting them. Cap and Ball revolvers, flintlock and percussion muskets and rifles, lever action Winchesters, and his uncles' trapdoor Springfield. Dave's favorite was the M-1 Carbine an old man had given his uncle. Despite his uncle's best efforts, Dave developed a taste for more modern, magazine fed arms. Eventually his uncle gave him the carbine, saying it was about 50 years ahead of his interests anyway.

Eventually his uncle took a position with a large college in New Hampshire, and Dave visited him as often as he could until his untimely passing due to the affects of Agent Orange exposure. Dave graduated from high school at 18, and while not a stellar student was able to get into the state university that was about 50 miles from his home. He attended school for two years, and studied History and Finance, and joined ROTC. During his summer camp for ROTC Dave received a taste of military life. All of the adult males of his family had served in the military in one capacity or another, except for Uncle Rich. Dave suspected his Uncles lisp and feminine ways were more than an act put on for the draft board. In fact, Dave could trace military service from members of his family going back the Mexican War, and he had relatives on both sides of the Civil War. For all of his effort, Dave didn't really enjoy college. He dated a couple of girls, but found the majority to be shallow and vain, interested more in parties and social circles than anything of substance. Dave started to think of dating them as "defiling infidels", and started to reexamine his own life. This decision led him to enlist in the Army in the spring of his sophomore year. He told his mother that weekend when he went home, much to her surprise. She was counting on Dave going to school and becoming successful.

Mr. Houston was happier with his choice. "Glad to see you doing something useful", he said in his gruff way. Dave could tell he was bursting with pride, "sitting around all day listening to panty waisted professors yakking about things they have no real experience with is a good way to get a pedigree, but no way to learn about life. You keep your mouth shut and do what they tell you and you'll do fine. And drop Mrs. Houston a note from time to time, she'll be worried sick about you." Dave smiled. That was the most affection Mr. Houston had ever overtly displayed to him.

His semester ended but Dave's thoughts were on the summer. He had two weeks from his last final exam until he reported the MEPS station for his processing. He spent most of that time working around the farm. Mr. Houston was getting long in the tooth, and Dave had a lot to do around the farm before he left for Fort Benning and Infantry School.

Dave eventually graduated from Infantry School and went directly to Airborne School across post. Jumping out of planes was as exciting and as awesome as he had hoped. He got his orders in his first week of jump school-Korea! He was both intrigued and apprehensive. He spent the next two weeks trying to find out what Korea was like, but the rumors that floated among the initial entry soldiers contained more false information than a Clinton press release. Service in Korea turned out to be better then he expected. Here

was real soldiering. As part of an Air Assault Battalion, Dave spent much of his time humping a large rucksack up and down the numerous “yammass”, or hills, in the Land of the Morning Calm. Dave eventually wound up as a machine-gunner, by his own insistence. He loved firing the big 23-pound M-60, and being an important part in his platoons organic firepower. Also, being able to hump the “Pig” while heavily burdened and in a country with little flat ground gave one a little more bragging rights than the ordinary guy had.

Two months before his tour ended he got new orders-Fort Bragg. “All right”, said Dave to his roommate, “82nd Airborne, here I come.” Dave was excited about the prospect of joining “America’s Honor Guard”. They had a reputation as a fierce fighting unit, and certainly he stood a better chance of seeing some interesting deployments.

When Dave arrived at Fort Bragg and checked in at the reception station, he talked to a Sergeant who was waiting, like Dave, for orders to a unit within the division. “It’s like this” the Sgt. began, “when you get to your battalion you’ll be assigned to a company. The day you get your orders, take a walk to the battalion area and talk to the guys, find out which company has the best reputation, then talk to the first shirt or the CO, and let them know you’re being assigned to the battalion and due to the company’s reputation you want to go to them. When you get to battalion HQ the next day, they will usually send a runner up to grab you from the staff poguees, and you’ll get the assignment you want.”

Dave took the advice heart, and when he got orders for the 1/504th Infantry he did just that. Putting on his best BDU’s and his newly issued Maroon beret; he walked over to the Battalion headquarters, and asked the CQ where he could find the Scout Platoon. The CQ took Dave to the door and pointed out Recons area to him. Dave thanked him and smiled. Looked like where he wanted to be. Above the door was a large, hand painted sign, a black field with a gleaming white skull grinning down at him. The sign boldly proclaimed “Where Mortal Man Fear Tread, Recon Leads the Way!” He knocked on the door and a smiling black face soon opened it. “Watcha want, troop?” asked the soldier, a Specialist by his collar insignia. “I’d like to speak to the Platoon Leader or Platoon Sergeant”, said Dave. The soldier grinned “Looking for a job?” Dave nodded. “Well, this is the place. Lt. Moore and Sgt. Chadwick are really cleaning house. If you aren’t squared away and STRAC as Audey Murphy you won’t stand a chance. You just in from Benning?” Dave shook his head, “Alpha, 1/503rd, Second ID.” The smile grew broader “First Rock! I was in Charlie Company in ’92. I’m Williams, c’mon, the Platoon Sergeant will want a guy used to humping the ROK.”

Dave was promptly introduced to Sergeant First Class Wesley Chadwick. Dave was slightly intimidated by the Sergeant. He had more patches on his uniform than Dave had ever seen. Drill Sergeant, Pathfinder, Jump Wings with a star, indicating a combat jump, CIB, Special Forces combat patch on his right shoulder, Ranger and Special Forces tab. “Pfc. McGrath requests permission to speak to the Platoon Sergeant”, said Dave from his best parade rest. “Speak”, rumbled Sgt. Chadwick. “Sergeant, I report to battalion tomorrow, and I would like to be assigned to the Scout Platoon.”

Chadwick looked at him. Jump wings. Reasonably fit. Didn't sound like an idiot. "You a college boy?" asked Chadwick. "No Sergeant, I'm a soldier", replied Dave. "But I did attend college before I wizened up." Chadwick considered him again. "Troop, that makes you a college boy. Can you type?"

"No sergeant, no more than hunt and peck."

"That's the right answer. Where you coming from? Benning?"

"No Sergeant, Alpha 1/503rd, Second ID, Korea."

"What'd you do there?"

"Walked point in the Z, then humped a '60."

"Why'd they let a cherry walk point?"

"I grew up hunting and am good in the woods."

"Country boy?"

"As much as a Yankee can be."

"You use a radio?"

"Yes, Sergeant, I was an RTO for a short time, but I really wanted the '60, so my Platoon Leader squared me away."

"What's your GT score?"

"125"

"Last PT score?"

"322"

"Can you swim?"

"Yes Sergeant"

"How well?"

"I spent a few weeks every summer at the beach, so well enough."

"Like jumping?"

"Well, Sergeant, the first five were pretty cool."

Williams laughed "Cherry", he said, a derisive term for new jumpers.

"That's enough, Williams," said Chadwick, "you were a cherry not to long ago yourself."

Williams looked away, embarrassed to be chastised by his well respected Sergeant.

"Come by before you report to battalion tomorrow. I'll ask Lt. Moore to go up and grab you before the staff wienies make you a commo section chief. We'll look at your file and make sure we want you, but based on what I've heard we'll try you out. If you can't hang, or you're an idiot, or if the platoon doesn't like you, you're gone to a line company. got it?"

"Loud and clear, Sergeant", answered Dave. His face glowed. Recon! Better not screw up, boyo, he thought.

"Get out of here", said the sergeant.

Williams walked him to the door. "See you tomorrow. You're going to love it here, this platoon is kick ass. It's a lot like the Rock-we train hard, but they give us less B.S. and more high-speed training. The platoon is going to rough terrain jump school in six weeks, you'll get a couple more jumps before you go. In four months JOTC in Panama, and we'll be in the field pretty much the whole time until then, except for RTJ School."

Dave thanked him, and headed back to the reception barracks. One more day to kill before the fun started.

The next morning was spent out-processing the reception company, and he reported to

Battalion HQ with seven other men at about 11:30 A.M. He managed to get over to Recon by saying he need to hit the latrine, and he told Williams he was going to battalion HQ. As he stood in line, a short 1st Lt. Came out of a door to their right.

“O.K., O.K., I’m Lieutenant Castner, and I’ll be assigning each of you men to the unit. Any NCO’s?”

One man, an E-6, raised his hand. Lt. Castner pointed, “Go on in, Sergeant, and Specialist Gomes will take care of you.”

The Sgt. nodded and picking up his small backpack left the group. Lt. Castner called the remaining junior enlisted men to attention.

“You men are about to join the 82nd Airborne Division, the most powerful force projection organization in the United States Army. Before I hand out your assignments, is anyone here not 11 Bravo?” (11B is the MOS for Infantryman-Willard)

No hands went up.

“OK, anyone here type?” Again, no hands. “Anybody have college?” No hands.

The Lt. Looked at the man next to Dave. “What’s your GT score?” he demanded. (GT score is like a military IQ test-Willard)

The man swallowed, his Adam’s Apple bobbing like a dangled orange, “109.”

“109 what?” asked Castner.

“109 SIR!” barked the soldier.

“And yours,” he said, turning to Dave.

“86, sir,” lied Dave. He didn’t want to type for anyone.

Castner went down the line, asking every man the same questions. He then had the men turn in their records, which they were carrying from their last post. He handed them to a clerk behind a desk as Sergeant Chadwick walked in. “Can I help you, Sergeant?” asked Castner in a condescending tone.

“I’m all set, L.T.” he said, pronouncing each letter of the abbreviation separately. “Just picking up my new man. McGrath, grab your sh*t and come with me.”

“Wait a second, Sergeant,” ordered Castner, “I’m not through with that man.”

“You’ve got his folder, you’ve tried to steal him for your office staff, you’re done” said Chadwick, “we’ve got to get him settled, the platoon is jumping the day after tomorrow.”

“Why was I not informed of this jump?” asked Castner. He tried to get on as many lifts as he could, and was not beyond screwing up a training mission just so he could get in one jump.

“It’s a training jump for the platoon, sir, and you are not in the platoon.” Answered Chadwick honestly, “and you are not in my chain of command, so I have no reason to inform you, sir. Let’s go, McGrath.”

“You stay right there, specialist,” ordered Castner. Dave stopped. “This man goes where I say he goes, and when. Sergeant, step into my office.”

The lieutenant turned on his heel and walked away. Chadwick turned to Dave and said, “Grab your stuff and go to the platoon CP. I’ll get this straightened out.” And he followed the young Lt. Through the door.

Dave heard the shouting start as he left the HQ building. He collected his bags and went down to the CP, where he introduced himself to Lt. Moore. He told Lt. Moore what was happening, and Lt. Moore hustled over to battalion to see what he could do.

Dave wound up spending 5 years at Fort Bragg, all of it in the Scout Platoon. He left as a Sergeant E-5, and would have had Staff Sergeant had he re-enlisted. He had decided the Army wasn't for him after deploying to a peacekeeping mission in a squalid third world African nation. As had played out so often in the past, order was restored soon after the arrival of American troops. But as the Democratic administration in Washington vacillated on its policies, the rebels grew bolder, stealing food convoys and murdering civilians with almost free will. As the situation deteriorated, the Americans were finally pulled out-having been prevented from accomplishing anything of substance by an administration fearful of any risk to American lives or European sensibilities. Dave and the platoon discussed the operation at length during the months following their stand down, and all of them agreed that they would have risked their lives to fight for the poor, starving wretches they had seen on the roads and in the refuge camps. A person would have to have lost all his sense of humanity not to be touched by the misery and suffering they had born witness to and they all felt let down that they were not encouraged to unleash their anger on the savages responsible for it. They were ashamed, too, that their government would build up the hopes of so many innocent people, and then abandon them to almost certain death.

Dave returned home and got a small apartment, and started attending college at night. He worked full time in a hardware store, and visited his Mother and the Houston's nearly every weekend. He eventually returned to a normal school schedule, and finished his degree. He started working for a large insurance company, training new employees. He liked the work, it was a little like dealing with new soldiers, and he had a lot of freedom in his job. He eventually was promoted to a management position, and it was interesting enough that he didn't feel boredom creep up on him very often. It was through this job that he met his wife, Sandy, a computer programmer at his firm. They dated for a few months and kind of drifted apart, and drifted back together nearly a year later. They married when they were both 33 years old. She was the child of a lawyer father and homemaker mother, and had three brothers and two sisters. She was a little more liberal a woman than Dave had ever envisioned marrying, but other than politics they enjoyed many of the same activities and were very compatible, and very much in love.

Dave's activities that sometimes caused strife in his home were his habit of keeping quite a bit of canned food on hand. He eventually put together a mountain of dehydrated food, enough to feed 6 people for up to a year, by his calculations. His wife didn't understand his preoccupation with storing ammunition, clothes, and medical supplies, either. Dave finally told her all of the gory details of what he had seen in Africa, and she lightened up on him, although she still bore reluctance to the idea that she was living above a supply dump. Her mind would not allow her to believe that there was any real chance of famine and social breakdown happening in her America.

Dave still shot as often as he could. It was at his local range he bumped into a man of about his own age shooting a .45 into a bank of three targets. He drew from the holster, fired six shots, reloaded, and fired six more. Dave recognized the el presidente drill, and when the shooter turned around he was wearing a ball cap with the words Ranger across

the front.

“Hiya, ranger” said Dave by way of greeting, “nice speed on the el presidente.”

“Thanks” said the stranger, “you military?”

“I was in the 82nd for a few years. How about you?”

“I left the 82nd and went to Second Battalion, then to Fifth Group. Got out a few years ago. What battalion you with?”

“Recon, 1/504th”

“Really? I was Recon, 2/505th.”

They fell into a discussion about when they had served and where they had deployed, and it turns out they had been briefly introduced at Rough Terrain Jump School, when Daves Platoon had arrived and the strangers platoon was leaving.

“Jim Bowen” said the stranger, extending his hand.

“Dave McGrath”, said Dave.

They talked for while, and found that they had run across many of the same people while in service. Jim’s memory of names and places impressed Dave. Dave’s knowledge of firearms impressed Jim. That afternoon they became fast friends.

Jim and Dave started their own social group. One of Dave’s friends from high school and college, Scott, moved back to town after living and working abroad for several years. He too was an avid shooter and a survivalist. Jim’s brother Rob often joined them, and there were several other local shooters who joined them for shooting, cookouts, and weekend camping trips. When Jim moved to New Hampshire to escape Connecticut’s ever expanding socialist government, he urged Dave to move there, too. But Sandy was adamant about staying in Connecticut, where her parents lived. Eventually most of Daves circle made the move north, too. While Dave’s uncle had passed away while Dave was in the Army, he had left Dave his small cabin where they had gone shooting so long ago, along with all of his firearms. Dave wound up selling most of the guns to provide a nice annuity which he presented to his widowed aunt. Dave kept the house as a vacation retreat, and as he and Sandy had children they built on small additions. They put on space for a larger bedroom and expanded the living room, as well as adding a one car garage with a play room for the kids over it. Dave had his friend Steve assist with most of the work. Steve was a local man who fit in nicely with the Connecticut crew that had moved north. With his help, Dave dug the basements and poured foundations for the additions. Also with Steves aid he completely enclosed the basement of the garage in concrete, reinforcing the ceiling, putting in extra drainage, and actually drilling a well in the far corner. There was a reinforced doorway going up to the garage, which was hidden in the back of a small broom closet upstairs, and via a larger steel door in the basement. Dave, over the next several years, moved most of his storage food up there, and kept a number of guns, ammo, and medical supplies there. He bought as many off the paper guns as he could afford, and put them up. He became a licensed HAM radio operator, and through HAM flea markets picked up a good base station and several portable models. He attended an EMT course at the local community college to improve his medical skills. He had taken the Combat Lifesaver course at Bragg twice, but felt that the EMT course would serve him for civil emergencies.

Daves sons, Thomas and Patrick, were born three years apart. They were typical boys,

and Dave and Sandy were kept very busy with them. They took frequent camping trips, and canoed, biked, and hiked locally. The boys also played Little League and soccer, neither of which Dave really knew much about. Dave and Sandy were both active as Cub Scout leaders, and the children attended the school run by their local parish. Dave and Sandy both agreed that public education was not acceptable in their area.

Dave watched the slow decline of Pax Americana for years. The steady slide of America into socialism was unmistakable. Every year more money flowed out of the public coffers and into the pockets of the lazy welfare recipients, who merely had to vote for the same candidates to keep the payments coming. The virtual elimination of the southern border with Mexico created a situation where millions of illegals entered the country and funneled billions back to Mexico without paying taxes. The Southwest became flooded with Spanish speaking persons who insisted that the American Southwest was theirs. No politician with the courage to speak the truth was quickly branded a racist, insensitive moron by the fifth column national press. The few true Constitutionals in the House and Senate were too few to stem the building tide of oppression that socialism inevitably brings, but they battled boldly on, for as long as they could. As the US Government funded its ever increasing programs-President Billary had finally nationalized health care-it increased its reliance on foreign money. Foreign governments invested heavily in US Government debt obligations, backed by "the full faith and credit of the United States government". This meant, of course, that it had the power to tax people dry to pay the foreign governments back. He took comfort in the fact that he and his family could hole up in their cabin and be warm, dry, and safe.

Dave and his friends had as many theories about what was happening than there were stars in the heavens. Steve maintained it was an Illuminati conspiracy. Other plots involved the Masons, the former Soviet Union, or punishment from God. Dave figured it was laziness and a bad educational system. They all agreed upon one thing, that there was something rotten in Denmark, and they weren't going to abandon the constitutional republic without a fight. They made group buys of stores, as well as individual buys. They cached supplies all over their area, made plans for security, comms, and medicine. They frequently trained as a military unit, and used local IDPA, three gun, and practical rifle matches as a ground to test their performance.

After a terrorist attack left Dave without power for a week, he convinced his wife just how tenuous Americas hold civility was. The next time a power station was destroyed by fire-it was held to be eco-terrorists; Dave was out of power for two weeks. Dave was then able to convince his wife they needed to invest in a small generator that they could also take north with them to power the cabin, as winter storms were known to leave their mountain home without power, too. Dave managed to help his friends purchase a 300 gallon gasoline tank, which they all filled. The gas was rotated annually, and was also treated for long term storage.

Chapter 5 – The Crisis

When it began it was like an avalanche. A snowball here, another there, until it cascaded into an inevitable slide into chaos. America had never been able to eradicate the terrorist threat begun by the attack on New York City. After the Democrats took the White House and Congress in 2008, the war on terror lost its momentum. Iraq was turned over to the UN, who gradually forced the United States out of the country. Iraq took two years to slide back into a dictatorship, with one of Saddam Hussein's chief deputies as the new dictator. With a weak kneed coward at the helm of the US ship of state, Afghanistan was eventually abandoned again, and became a bastion of Islamic militancy. Terrorist attacks against US nationals abroad became common, and there were three or four major attacks in the US every year, everything from random home invasion that ended always in the homes being burned to the ground with the terrorists inside, to attacks against power lines, school buses, and shopping centers.

The U.S. government actually stopped far more attacks than occurred, but the public outcry for more and better security was quickly answered by politicians. The Department of Homeland Security was expanded, and all local police agencies were eventually consolidated into state police forces. Eventually the plan was to go national with the police, but that would take a few more years of public outcry for safety.

When suicide attacks destroyed the liquid natural gas port at Boston, and an oil refinery complex in Louisiana, the price of gas went up dramatically. Additional attacks on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and on the Alaskan pipeline created further supply trouble. As a result, the price of food, which was moved mostly by truck, went up. In response to public outrage over this, the government instituted tight price controls over food and other consumer goods. Many farmers were foreclosed on, their already thin margins reduced to nothing by the heavy hand of Congress and the President. The President proposed an initiative to nationalize food production, which was quickly passed by a Congress that was bipartisan in name only. Many farmers took this badly, and there were a very few well publicized armed standoffs, and as Dave knew through the resources on the Internet, many more that were virtually unheard of outside of their locales.

Many other farms were taken over by government appointees, and as in the Soviet example these farms were far less productive than private farms of the same size. Like many other people, Dave and Sandy began a garden of their own, and raised quite a bit of their vegetables that way. They canned much of it for the long New England winter, and donated what they could to their church's food kitchen.

Constant pressure on the Americas power system was compounded by the fact that local zoning and the effects that environmental extremists lobbying elected "representatives" had all but eliminated the construction of any new electrical power plants in the last 20 years. Many of the coal and oil powered plants were running on outdated equipment, and due to the mass migration of manufacturing to other countries replacement parts were only available from overseas sources. Due to the devaluation of the dollar overseas, this made fixing worn or non-functional equipment very expensive. Nuclear power, of course,

which would have alleviated much of the dependence on foreign sources for power, was all but a lost cause. Despite the excellent safety record of Western Nuclear plants, the Three Mile Island incident and Chernobyl had given the anti-nuclear power crowd enough material to ensure that the United States was at the mercy of semi-hostile second world fiefdoms. Dave had long ago discovered that the development of affordable, efficient solar power technology was controlled by the large oil and power companies, usually through subsidiary companies. Any new advances in solar power quickly had their patents bought out for large sums of money, and the technology was kept from the public eye. Technology that would have allowed every house in America to be roofed in photovoltaic shingles for little more than twice the cost of conventional asphalt shingle, efficient batteries, and practical electric cars, all locked in the vaults of the some of the largest corporations in the world.

Most of the country was subjected to rolling blackouts, and food was sometimes rationed-unheard of in the land of plenty since World War II ended. Dave took comfort in the fact that he had stored food that he could depend on if things got worse.

The straw that broke the camels back in Dave's mind was the fact that the government instituted national travel and power restrictions. You got a card with a number of points on it, which indicated how far from work you lived and the fuel economy of your vehicle. You were basically allowed to buy enough gas to go to work and back with little left over for travel and running about town. If you went over your "allowance", or "resource allocation", in Newspeak, you would have your next months allocation reduced proportionally. The same went for electricity and home heating oil. Fortunately Dave heated with wood for most of the year, so he was able to trade some of his heating oil allotment for gasoline with his neighbors. The government also acted to prevent farmers from producing "gasohol", an alcohol based fuel made from corn. Regulating its manufacture through the auspices of liquor control, the government both prevented farmers from making a living and achieving any kind of energy independence. When the government mandated that everyone needed to register at their local post office, Dave began making preparations to bug out.

The next week the government declared that due to the numerous attacks by terrorists that all previously legal center fire semiautomatic rifles were banned completely, and that people had 30 days to turn them in for a tax credit, the amount of which would be determined at a later time. Any persons in possession of same after the cutoff date would be charged under the Patriot Act 3. No jury, no habeas corpus, no speedy trial. Dave and Sandy gave their notice, and his family left.

They sold their home for far less than market value, took their equity and converted it into silver coins, and moved to their cabin. Dave went to work for his friend Steve, running a backhoe and driving a dump truck for his excavation business. Sandy stayed home with the children, and volunteered at their school during the week.

New Hampshire was an ideal choice for his relocation as the conservative "Live Free or Die" state took its motto to heart. When the government passed its last anti firearms

legislation, the state general assembly voted with a 90% majority to invalidate the law within its borders. They reasoned that the Federal Government had no power to pass or enforce laws contrary to the Constitution of either the United States or the individual states. A number of states followed suit, including Maine, Vermont, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, and Utah.

While the states and federal governments battled in the court rooms, Federal Agents were escorted to the borders by State Police and National Guardsman. Attempts by the Federals to activate, and hence federalize the national guard units was met with an unexpected response-the state governments disbanded the guard units and reformed them as "State Guard" units, not subject to federal authority. In "passive" states, like Connecticut, people were treated like a resource for the government to use at its pleasure. People who were suspected of not turning in their guns were arrested, held, released, and arrested again in a well orchestrated plan to place as much pressure as possible on them.

Sandy and Dave were able to keep in touch with their family through the spotty telephone system. They were shocked to learn that Sandy's father, who had spent the majority of his career researching land titles as a lawyer, had been physically assaulted by federal troops in a courtroom in Hartford. Always a devout liberal, Sandy's father had been a member and supporter of the ACLU. When the son of an acquaintance was held without charge or contact with the outside world, his working class parents begged him to take the case. Although it wasn't the law he was used to practicing, he was a crusader at heart and attempted to file for the release of the young man on the grounds that he was being held in violation of his civil rights.

"You honor, this man is not a foreign terrorist, he is not an illegal alien, and he has committed no crime that we are aware of. As such, he should be remanded to my custody," said Ted, Sandy's father.

"These are not ordinary times, Mr. Peterson," said the judge, nodding to the three Homeland Security Enforcement troops in his courtroom. They began to move towards the bespeceled lawyer, "further, you overestimate the leniency of this court in cases of sedition that border upon open revolt to the rule of law." The judge's voice rose, "You need to realize that the special situation we are now in..."

Ted Peterson, Esquire, shook his finger at the judge, "This 'special situation' is all of your own creation...the courts and the President do not have the authority to ignore the Constitution this much," he held up two fingers about an inch apart, "therefore you cannot hold a person incommunicado for any period, nor can you hold him and deny him counsel, as you have done, or not inform him of what he is charged with!" he ended by thumping his hand on the table, making the opened law books spread across its surface jump.

The judge sat, red faced. "How dare you address this court in that manner! How would you like a contempt charge, Mr. Peterson?"

"AT LEAST I WOULD KNOW WHY I WAS IN JAIL!" Shouted Peterson, his voice trembling with rage, "unlike some people here, Anson."

"You will address me as 'Your Honor' in my court room, Peterson," snapped the judge.

“There isn’t enough honor in this courtroom to fill a mouse’s thimble, Anson” stated Ted, his voice firm, his jaw jutting out defiantly.

“It’s only through the graces of our long association that I don’t have you thrown in jail, Ted,” said the judge. He nodded again the security troops, “Gentlemen, please remove this man from my courtroom. If he attempts to set foot in here again for any reason...that’s any at all, Ted, arrest him and lock him up. This matter is settled.”

The guards grabbed the unsuspecting lawyer by the arms and dragged him, despite his wild struggling, to the door. Once out in the hallway, the lead thug leaned over said, “Old man, we can do this the easy way or the hard. Your choice” Ted struggled even harder against the arms dragging him down the hall.

“OK, your choice,” and without further provocation, punched Ted directly on the nose. Ted felt bone break and blood flow as he continued to fight. The man struck Ted again and again, in the stomach, solar plexus, and face. When they finally got the now limp man outside, all three of them took turns kicking and punching the man for a few more minutes.

Ted lay on the sidewalk for almost three hours before an ambulance arrived for him. He vaguely remembered Samaritans being driven away from him by a Homeland Security troop who stood near him the whole time. His wife came to pick him up from the emergency room, and took him home. She tried to talk to him, but he would only grunt and mumble in reply. She cleaned him up and put him in bed, and went to call Sandy. It took her almost four hours to get through to New Hampshire.

When Sandy hung up the phone, she was crying. She was still sitting at the kitchen table crying when Dave got home from work.

“What’s the matter, Hon?” he asked, as he took off his mud spattered boots just inside the door.

“My Dad was assaulted and beaten half to death this morning,” she cried. “He was in court trying to get them to release old Mr. Donnelly’s kid, and the judge had him thrown out. The Homeland Security goons almost killed him.”

Dave frowned. “Where is he now?”

“He’s at home, Mom picked him up and took him home. He’s not talking much, Mom thinks he’s depressed and angry. She’s worried he might do something rash.”

Dave sighed. His father in law, while always treating Dave well, was a dyed in the wool liberal. He was happy as a clam when Billary became President, and laughed at Daves “kooky theory” that the President was murdered to facilitate Billarys rise to power. He was now, sadly, a victim of the big government he supported.

“My Mom wants me to come down and stay with them until he gets better,” Sandy said, looking up at him. She knew how he would feel about THAT idea.

“No F’ing way are you going down there, Sandy. It’s way too dangerous. I’m on their list for a dozen guns I never turned in, and I sent their last demand letter back to them in a box of dog sh*t. They will pick you up in a heartbeat as an accessory.”

Sandy looked mournful “But they’re my parents! You’d go if it were your Mother or Father!”

“But they are both safe at my sisters in Paulden and my cousins in Laramie. Your folks

should come up here. We can clean up the kid's room over the garage for them. We have plenty of food, and lawyers can still practice up here."

"I tried to talk her into that, but she wants to stay in her home."

"Call her and talk to her, then let me talk to her, she usually listens to me on any question not relating to politics." Sandy smiled. Dave and his Mother got along well, and she thought that other than Dave's "Neanderthal" politics, he had a good head on his shoulders. After all, he married Sandy and stayed in the area, while all of her other children had scattered to the four winds, and she only heard from them when they needed money or at Christmas time.

It was almost 11 p.m. by the time they got through to Sandy's Mother.

"Your dad is talking dear, but he's ranting about revenge. He says the judge will pay for stealing the country, and that he must be a Republican at heart.....oh, I don't think we could make the drive, I mean your Father, and you know how I hate to drive. Why don't you come and get us, dear? I'll feel much safer, and you can help me with your father.....no, no, I don't listen to the news much, dear.....OK, let me talk to Dave."

Dave took the phone, "Hi Mom, how's Ted?....well, have Doctor Ianotti come out and look at him tomorrow, he might have a concussion.....yes, I know...no, I won't say I told you so, especially to him....no we don't mind you coming at all, we'd love to have you.....yes, bring the cats and dogs, the more the merrier," and we can always eat them if it gets bad, he thought, "I am completely against any of us coming for you. You can make the drive, we can meet in Jaffrey, it's only 80 miles or so from your house to the border. You need to do it before they shut down travel...yes, I believe they will.....well, I was right about....OK, OK, but you see my point....well, talk to Sandy....love you to, Mom"

Dave handed Sandy the phone, "You need to convince her to leave right now and drive up here with your Dad. I can meet them in Jaffrey. It will take them two hours."

Sandy took the phone and argued with her Mother for 45 minutes. Carol was adamant that Dave or Sandy come get her, just as Sandy was insistent that her Mother drive herself up. They were still at an impasse when the phone clicked dead. Sandy tried repeatedly to get through to her Mother, but the poor quality of the phone service prevented them from completing the call.

Chapter 6 – Where Mortal Men Fear Tread

Sandy spent the next day at home trying to reach her Mother with no success. She finally resorted to calling the old woman that lived across the street from her parents, Mrs. Robidas. Although cordial with her, she was known as the neighborhood busybody. At least she would be able to let Sandy know if her folks were home. It only took Sandy half an hour to get through to Mrs. Robidas, who was happy to tell Sandy everything she knew.

Mrs. Robidas launched a one sided conversation as soon as she knew it was Sandy. “You know dear, they came at about 4 A.M. and took your Father and Mother in a van. I don’t know what they must have been up to; did your Father own guns? They must have been looking for guns or drugs. Anyway, the police took them away. They broke the door down dear, the house is wide open. Oh, they’ll use all of their oil if the heats on. Do you want me to go turn it off? I really shouldn’t be seen over there if they are terrorists, dear, but I’ll do it this once. But when will they be home? Do you know? Oh this is awful. What could your father have done? Maybe I shouldn’t talk to you, I bet they’re listening. Sandy, you need to get your parents a good lawyer. Why did you move away, your mother misses you so. Well dear I’m going to go, I don’t want to miss Days of our Lives” and with that she hung up. Sandy hung up, having not been allowed one word during Mrs. Robidas’ rave.

Sandy called Dave on the 2-meter radio and let him know what had happened to her parents. Dave told Steve, and they both drove to Daves house.

“We’ve got to get my parents out of jail,” said Sandy, her eyes red with tears.

“We don’t even know when they are going to be released, or even with what they are being charged with,” reasoned Dave. He had a feeling he was going to lose this one, no matter how much sense he made.

“I don’t care. Those are my parents, and this is still America”

“Well,” said Steve, “This is still America, but down there it isn’t, Sandy. Things have changed.”

“I. Do. Not. Care,” stated Sandy deliberately, “Dave, you and the guys do all that commando training out at Steve’s place, can’t you rescue them?”

“Sandy, a raid into a place like that with no support? We’d all die. You know I’d do it if I thought we had even a slim chance of pulling it off. We’ll come up with something, I promise you. Steve, I want to meet with the group up at Jim’s place, can you help me round them up?”

“Sure, we’ll stay on 2 meters and I’ll see what I can do.”

They met in Jim’s barn. Jim didn’t use it for anything other then storage, so he and the others had fixed up a large corner of it as a meeting room. They often met there for classroom training or just to hang out and BS. The wives of the men called it the clubhouse.

The discussion about what Dave should do was animated and lively. Some suggested he write off his in laws, others suggested raiding the prison, and one even half jokingly

suggested that Dave head out alone to find them, stay at his place for a day or two, and then tell Sandy he couldn't find them. Dave finally decided he would go down there, before Sandy took off herself. They discussed how he could do it. He still had his license plates from Connecticut, and he had not removed his state inspection sticker. He decided to put those plates on his car. Jim's brother Gene made him a very close copy of a real registration certificate. He would hide his New Hampshire plates and registration behind a body panel, and replace them in his in laws garage, then use that on the way home. He decided not to carry any firearms. This was a soft recon, and if he was stopped an M-4gery and 15 30 round mags would take a lot of explaining. After some discussion, he adopted the suggestion that he dress as he had been hiking. That would allow him to explain his BOB. If questioned he could say he had been hiking the White Mountains. It was an iffy excuse, especially given the gas restrictions, but there was still limited tourism, mostly by people who had the means to purchase black market gasoline. It was the best he could come up with. They arranged daily radio contact, and pre arranged signals to let him know if the situation in New Hampshire had changed. They also vowed, over Dave's protestations, to come get him if he was hurt, surrounded, or in other danger. As the meeting broke up, Bill, who lived 20 miles north of Dave in Connecticut, handed him a note as he shook his hand. Dave read it later. All that was printed on it was "under my grill". Dave destroyed the note after reading it.

After filling his wife's car with gas, Dave went home and began packing his backpack. He wanted enough gear to bug out, but did not want to draw attention to himself. The pack itself was a forest green Kelty internal frame. It was expedition size, around 6500 cubic inches. Dave tried not to overload it, but liked the flexibility the larger pack gave him. The pack itself had integral side pockets. Into the left Dave put a lightweight, camouflaged, USGI poncho and 6 green bungee cords. Also in the pocket was a roll of 550 cord, GI duct tape wrapped around a Calyume stick, and a heavy green Space blanket. In the other pocket he put a black knit watch cap, a pair of GI leather gloves with wool liners, a pair of green aviator flight gloves, his expedient antenna, spare AA batteries, his folded up GI "boonie" hat with it's camo cover, two locking carabiners, and a small bottle of water purification tablets.

The main compartment was accessible by a zippered flap, and this flap itself was a flat pocket. Dave kept his waterproofed maps in here, along with a spare compass and an alcohol pen set and a small New Testament. In the main body of the pouch he put food, his water bladder, a pair of OD jungle fatigues, 4 pair of GI wool socks, four pair of polypro sock liners, foot powder, a Katydin water filter, an extra rubberized poncho, German surplus, more 550 cord, his two meter handheld, his wind up radio, a small solar battery charger, two t-shirts, a flannel shirt, and a small personal hygiene kit with toothpaste, toothbrush, medicine, Band-Aids and gauze, sewing kit, nail clippers, soap and a facecloth, and a small packet of baby wipes.

In the top pocket he kept a small LED flashlight, toilet paper, and an OD green handkerchief.

He attached a GI buttpack to the outside compression strap of the pack. In that he a

carried a space blanket, a change of socks, one MRE, and an esbit stove full of fuel along with a disposable lighter. Attached to the backpack was a length of 550 cord so he could detach it and use it as a shoulder bag. Under the backpack in a bag made for a MOPP suit he carried a lightweight Gore-Tex rain suit in black.

On the waist belt he carried a GI canteen and cover set with a metal canteen cup. On his left hip was a black accessory pouch from a commercial gear maker that carried a small mirror, a Leatherman Tool, a lighter, bug repellent, a metal spoon, a sharpening steel, his old GI tritium compass, two heat tabs, a film container of cotton balls soaked in petroleum jelly, a survival space blanket, a red lenses LED flashlight, a condom (for water), and even more 550 cord. Next to that on the belt was his knife, a Cold Steel ODA.

His 20-degree Wiggy's sleeping bag went into its compartment in the bottom of the pack, and he strapped his dark grey ensolite pad to the outside. Everything in the main pack was housed in heavy-duty waterproof bags.

In his pockets he carried a Swiss Army knife, his keys with a small LED light attached, and his wallet stripped of all unnecessary material. He also had a Spyderco knife clipped on his right front pocket.

He put his custom pack cover in the top pocket of the pack, and looked at his load. Well, for all the military stuff he used he may as well carry an ALICE pack. But this pack was so much more comfortable. Oh well, gotta try, he thought to himself.

While Dave was busy making preparations, Sandy made phone calls to the police stations closest to her parent's home. They would release no information to her, not even confirm that her parents were being held. She started calling local emergency rooms and found that her father had been checked and released just a short time before. Sandy immediately called home, and the poor phone service caused her a 20 minute delay. The 20 minutes seemed a lifetime to Sandy.

"Mom, are you okay, it's me, Sandy," Sandy blurted when her Mother answered.
"I'm OK dear. They arrested your father last night, and took me in as a 'material witness'. I refused to say anything dear, not even yes or no. They questioned your father the whole time, and told him he could be picked again, at any time. He's upstairs taking a bath."
"Mom, pack your stuff and come up here."
"Dear, your father wants to fight this in the courts."
"Mother, the courts are a lost cause. Can't you see? How much pressure can dad take? How much can you take? The next time they might not let you go so soon. You could be held for weeks."
"Sandy, I know it seems bad. But we'll be OK."
They spoke for a few more minutes, and the call was disconnected. Dave told His wife
"I'll leave right now. I will basically kidnap them if I have to, but I should be back tomorrow after noon if all goes well."
"What if it doesn't?" asked Sandy, now looking like she regretted Dave's leaving.
"I can walk home if I have to. And we'll be in touch, I have my radio."

After tearful good-byes with Sandy and the kids, Dave headed his wives Subaru south. Dave felt like he did before a parachute jump-excited, apprehensive, and he would never admit to himself, a little bit afraid.

Chapter 7 – Checkpoint Charlie

Dave crossed the border on a small back road that saw little traffic. He planned to take back roads all the way, feeling that the road less traveled would be safer for him. He did get pulled over in a small picturesque Massachusetts town, by a local cop who didn't look too happy in his newly issued black BDU Homeland Security uniform.

“What's the problem, Officer?” asked Dave, his hands on the steering wheel.

“We're just checking all out of state plates and cars coming from up north”, replied the man, who looked to be about two years past retirement age. Dave nodded. ‘Up North’ meant New Hampshire, a whole 20 miles or so away.

“Well, sir, I'm just coming back from a hike in the White Mountains. Here, let me get my license and registration...” Dave leaned over towards the glove box.

“Don't bother son, you seem harmless enough. Watch your speed and go home and stay there. It's going to storm soon.”

“Thank you officer.” Dave rolled up his window and drove off. Seeing as the sky was clear, Dave assumed the officer meant the storm brewing was political, not atmospheric. Perhaps he'd be heading “up north” soon himself.

As Dave crossed into Connecticut he was forced to turn onto a main road by a “detour” sign. As he turned onto the road, he hit his brakes. The traffic in front of him was backed up with no indication as to why. As traffic moved forward, he saw police lights. It looked like a checkpoint. Damn! He was trapped. If he tried to make a break across the shoulder he'd be spotted. He couldn't turn, as there were Jersey barriers dividing the lanes. Depending on how difficult it was he'd try to bluff his way through.

As Dave approached the head of the line, he saw a number of cars pulled off to the left, with security troops going through them. Some people were in handcuffs on the side of the road, watched by sub-machinegun wielding thugs.

Dave was waved up by a black uniformed troop wearing a reflective vest. Dave rolled down his window. “What's up, officer?”

“License, registration, proof of insurance,” said the man for the umpteenth thousand time that day.

“Sure, here you go...” Dave handed the man his papers.

“Where are you coming from,” demanded the Security Troop.

“I was hiking up north. I'm going home.”

“If you were up north you must have friends up there, huh?” asked the guard, suddenly very friendly.

“No,” answered Dave, “just a solo hike.”

“Pull over to the left, please,” said the officer. It was an order, not a question.

He handed Dave his papers and waved the next car forward, looking for a way out.

Armed police were everywhere. He felt trapped. He was trapped.

He pulled up to a signaling troop.

“Turn off the car and leave the keys in. Please step out.”

Dave did so. He looked at the troop, “Kenny?” he asked. Kenny was Sandy's cousin, who

they only saw on the Fourth of July, when Sandy's family threw a big party. The cop looked up and looked at him hard. "Oh, Dave, how are you?" He quickly looked down at the documents in his hand. "This looks all in order. Where are you going?"

"Home" said Dave.

"Where ya been?" Officer Ken asked.

"Took a few days to hike up north," he answered.

"Oh, we're supposed to search anyone who's not between their work and home.

Waddaya got in back?" he asked, reaching into Dave's car and pulling out the keys.

"Just my backpack," answered Dave. Just then two more troopers came over.

"Anything, Ken?" asked one.

"Nope, nothing here."

"You check the gas yet?"

"No, I'll check it in a minute."

The other troop opened Dave's door and released the gas cap cover. "I'll get it."

"It's all right, I can get it."

"Trying to steal all the collars yourself, huh?" laughed the other troop, "Allow me," he said to Dave. He took a long plastic tube and snaked it into the gas tank, pulling out some gasoline. He let the gas out into a clear glass quart container. Taking a bottle from a pouch on his belt, he used the dropper to squeeze a few drops of fluid into the gas. The drops hit the gas and immediately swirled blue and purple. "Uh-oh, we've got bootleg gas, here, Ken" said the other man. Looking at Dave he said, "Where did you get this? Are you hoarding? Huh?" he got close to Dave, "You a bootlegger? We got a cell for you."

"No," said Dave, "I bought in Nashua at a gas station."

"Well let's see a receipt."

Dave managed to find the home made receipt on the passenger side floor of the car after a brief search.

"Well," said the troop, "it's still obviously bootleg, probably from Canada. You can go, but we're confiscating your car."

"You're what?" asked Dave, incredulously.

"You heard me. Talk back again I'll lock you up for interfering with a peace officer in the line of duty."

Kenny butted in, "That's enough, Tony. He's mine, I'll handle the paperwork."

"Okay," said Tony, giving Dave a hard look, "but don't take any sh*t off of nature boy there. And call me if he gives you any lip." Leering at Dave the thug turned and strutted off.

"Look, Dave, I'm sorry. If I had found it I would've let you go. Heck, I have bootleg gas I my car right now. But with big nose Tony I'm gonna have to write this up."

"Can I take my pack?" asked Dave.

"Sure. Look, let me write this up and I'll give you a ride. I actually got off duty about a half-hour ago. I can drop you, well, where do you live, anyway." He looked at the license.

"How about I drop you near your in laws, can they get you home?"

"Sure, that'd be great," said Dave, "and thanks for the help."

"Oh I'm glad to help Dave. This war is tough on all of us. I wish people would just cooperate, things would be so much better."

Dave waited while Ken finished the paperwork. He gave Dave a receipt for the car that indicated the driver was free to go. He told Dave to take his pack and start walking, he'd

pick him up about a half mile down the road-“Don’t want to try to explain giving you a ride” he said.

As they rode in silence, Dave in the back, Ken drove, listening to his police radio through his earpiece. “Hope you don’t mind Dave, but I’ve got to keep up with current events.” He said, laughing. A few minutes later Ken answered a call. “This is Romeo 4-5” he said. Dave saw him turn and look at Dave. “OK, sure....no, I understand....I will, I’ll be there in 20, captain.”

Ken turned to look at Dave. “I don’t know what you are up to, Dave, but your in laws are in huge trouble and I’ve got to go in to the station and give a detailed report on what I know. I’m going to drop you off here,” as he pulled up to the curb, “and you go home and stay there. We may wish to speak to you.”

Dave thanked him for the ride, but had barely started to speak when Ken disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Dave was still ten or eleven miles from his in laws. He set out on foot, his pack a familiar weight. As he walked along the road an old pickup pulled up. An old man wearing coveralls and a feed store cap rolled down his window. “Where you headed, fella?” he asked.

“Merrow,” answered Dave, naming the town next to his in laws.

“I’m going right by there. Hop in back and I’ll give you a life.”

“Thanks, that’d be great,” said Dave, dropping his pack over the bed and climbing in over the tailgate.

Dave had the man drop him off near the town forest. He took the path through the forest, and came out three miles for his in laws. As he headed across side streets and the odd unbuilt lot, he heard the sound of sirens in the distance. As he got closer, he realized that it was coming from quite close to his in laws house. When he got to their street, he saw it was their house. It had burned down to the foundation. Police and fire units where up and down the street, the firefighters still pumping water over the smoldering embers and beams. Dave quickly walked into on open garage, and dropped his pack. He then walked up to the crowd that had gathered behind the yellow police tape.

“What happened,” he asked a man standing open mouthed.

“Police raid this morning. Man inside shot two cops, then barricaded the house. Shot at the cops all morning, then set the house on fire, and killed himself and the two people inside.”

Dave looked at the man. “Who killed them?”

The man looked at Dave and shook his head. “Well, they found the bodies of the old couple, but they think the guy who did it escaped.”

Dave repeated himself, “Who was that?”

“They say it was their son in law.”

Chapter 8 – Escape And Evasion

Dave was stunned. “His who?”

“His son-in-law. Big gun nut, according to the news. They’re still looking in the rubble for the remains.”

“Thanks,” said Dave, blood pounding in his ears. He turned and walked away, trying to look non-chalant. He stepped in to pick up his backpack and heard a voice “SHOO!!! Get out of here, you hobo!” Dave turned to see a large woman wielding a straw broom. “You heard me, shoo! We don’t want hoboes around here.”

“I’m not a hobo, Ma’am,” said Dave, “I’m just passing through.”

“You just keep...don’t I know you? You’re Sandy’s husband aren’t you? Why are you hoboing? Lose your job?”

“No Ma’am, I just came down to get my in laws.”

“I knew that wasn’t you when I heard it. You’re a nice boy, always shoveling my walks when it snows, not like my lazy good for nothing son. Doesn’t even call me when it snows.”

“Yes Ma’am, that was me,” said Dave.

“You look hungry, you hungry?”

“Not really Ma’am. I need to get going.”

“Where is your car? Where are you going?”

“The police took my car,” Dave told her, “I’m walking to New Hampshire.”

“That’s ridiculous young man. Take my car. You can bring it back when this is all over.”

“I can’t do that,” said a surprised Dave, “I might never get it back to you.”

“I don’t care; I can’t drive since they took my license away. It’s got gas in it. You never let me pay you for all those times you plowed me out, take the car as payment.”

Dave didn’t know what to say. He offered her money, but she declined. “I’ve got enough of that, young man. I get plenty of food, too, I tell them my Harold is still alive but bedridden, they give me double rations,” she ended with a cackle. She certainly looked like she got double rations, “So here, let me get the keys,” and she turned and went into the house.

Dave drove straight to Bills house. Billy had a house in an older neighborhood, with large backyards and old, tall hedges. He pulled the Dodge Dart into the backyard and parked near the barbecue pit. He looked all over it for a hidden compartment or some clue as to what to do next. After searching for ten minutes, he paused to look the fireplace over. Constructed of bricks covered in granite paving stones, it was really an outdoor fireplace. Chimney, grill, stone blocks for a base...the base! Dave went to the front of the grill and dug around the large flat stone that the fire burned on. He dug with his hands for a minute, then went to the shed and after a brief search found a length of iron water pipe and an old shovel. Clearing away the wood ash and cinders from the large paving stones, he dug up the front of one, exposing the lip. He pried that up, and then the others, finding sand beneath. He struck the sand with the shovel, but it only went in a few inches before striking something hard. Clearing the sand away, he found another layer of 1 inch thick pavers. He dug those up and exposed what looked like a cesspool cover. Preparing to gag, Dave pried up the cement cover and found a plastic sealed opening. Cutting away the

plastic, he smelled nothing like what he expected. He went to the car and retrieved his LED flashlight from the pack. Returning to the opening, he removed the red lens and turned on the light. He saw rebar steps leading down to a small chamber filled with plastic wrapped packages. Slowly climbing down the steps he shined the light around. "Pheeeeweeee..." he whistled. Cases of MRE's, boxes of ammunition, long trunks he assumed contained rifles were visible under the plastic wrapping.

He approached the closest pile, what looked like two steamer trunks, elevated from the cement floor by two pallets. He saw a plastic freezer bag taped to the top. Opening it, he saw it was a list of the boxes contents. He went down the list. Civilian clothes, first aid items, shoes. Moving around the cellar, he read more. Feminine hygiene items, rice, a bicycle (!), and finally, one that said "FAL rifle and equipment". Dave whipped out his Spyderco and cut open the heavy plastic sheeting. Underneath was a black plastic locking case and two long plastic food containers duct taped to it. Under that were two .50 caliber sized ammo cans, and one .30 caliber sized one. He cut off the duct tape and lay the long case on top of the steamer trunks.

Undoing the latches, he opened the case to reveal a camouflage painted L1A1 rifle. He recognized it, having built it in his own shed. Bill had fallen in love with it, so Dave sold it to him for the cost of his parts, immediately building another just like it. Dave had hoped it was this rifle when he saw the tag. It was built on an Imbel receiver with an Inch parts kit. In deference to Dave's preference, it had a metric magazine release and took Metric magazines. Dave had built it in accordance with the law of the day, with US made fire control parts, gas piston, hand guards, pistol grip, and butt stock. Looked like Bill had been busy though. The muzzle brake had been replaced with a Vortex flashhider. The sling he had put on it was rolled up in the corner of the case, and the rifle was coated in grease. He closed the case and placed it near the ladder. He opened the first plastic container. In it was a Makarov, four magazines, a box of hollow point ammo, one of ball, a leather holster, a nylon holster, two USGI ammunition pouches, and a small pair of binoculars.

The second container contained an StG-58 cleaning kit, a stripper clip guide for FAL mags, a GI ammo pouch with two empty FAL mags in it, and a Woodland camouflaged nylon chest pouch with room for eight magazines, as well as two smaller ones for pistol mags or similar sized objects. Dave set these items aside, too. Opening the ammo cans he found them full of 7.62 ammo on stripper clips, the .30 caliber can contained ten 20 round FAL magazines. Dave was elated.

He moved the boxes one at a time out of the dim hole and put them in Bills shed. There he opened up a can of white gas and cleaned the rifle of its protective layer. He cleaned each magazine and loaded them from the stripper clips. As he opened the second can, he found that, under the bandoleered ammo were three boxes of soft point .308 and a handful of loose rounds with black tips. Dave dutifully unloaded five mags and loaded two with 20 rounds each of soft points and the 38 rounds of Armor Piercing he had. Dave placed the two mags of AP in the right most pouch on the chest rig, and two mags of soft points in an ammo pouch, which he would later attach to the left side of his waist belt. He

cleaned up the Makarov and loaded it up, and put it aside to later attach to his waist belt on the right. He put three 50 round bandoleers in his pack.

Dave then returned all of the extra equipment, boxes, and ammo cans to the subterranean cache. He looked around once more, to see what else he might need. Not seeing an ultralight or a Star Trek transporter he could think of nothing else. He did find a tube of silicon sealant, and used that and some of the plastic from the rifle case to reseal the opening. He'd have to talk to Bill, that guy was serious about his caching. Dave had seen everything Bill had brought up when he bugged out, and decided he must have inherited money somewhere to buy all that he did! He then rebuilt the fireplace, and did his very best to return it to its previous condition. He even scooped up some old doggie droppings from around the yard and threw them on top to make looking there more unpalatable for the fedgoons. Dave's work had carried him well past sunset. He loaded the car, adjusted the chest rig, and put the Makarov under his thigh on the seat. The L1A1 was placed next to him, covered with his flannel shirt. He wasn't going to jail. War had been declared, as far as he was concerned.

Dave took back roads as far as the Massachusetts border. He then abandoned the car at a public transportation "park and ride" bus area that was basically deserted. He left the doors unlocked and the keys in it, wishing luck to whoever used it next. Tightening up his pack straps, he settled the comforting weight of the FAL over his shoulders on its assault sling and headed down the embankment and into the woods.

Dave had long planned several bug out routes from his home. He had routes for cars, bikes, and a partial escape route down a river and into neighboring Rhode Island, where he had a few friends who would help him. He had three routes for walking north. The one he chose took him East of Worcester, Massachusetts, West around the I-495 corridor, and up through the countryside to New Hampshire. The largest danger area was the Mass Pike, Interstate 90, which ran due West from Boston to Albany, New York. He had driven and walked much of the route, trying to determine where good places to travel were, and noting new housing developments as they sprouted up, which was often. He identified three areas where he thought he could cross the highway without detection, and was heading to the most likely one. He only had to reach the New Hampshire border.

Once in NH there were several maintained hiking trails that plugged straight into the northern part of the country. He crossed the border in a rainstorm, choosing to move in the dark and in bad weather, as he would stand less of a risk of being spotted. Two more nights of uneventful travel brought him to the base of a large pine tree overlooking the Turnpike.

Chapter 9 – Refugees

As Dave watched the road, traffic started to pass by him, almost all of it from the East, moving away from the population center of Boston and its surrounding suburbs. He took time to drink water and scarf down a can of beef stew. He took the binos and wrapped them in his sniper's face veil, a camouflaged net that would hide his lenses but not obscure his vision appreciably. Under his little hooch he changed out of his green Dockers and into his OG jungle pants. Like his shirt it was sprayed in light stripes with black spray paint. He tied them off at his ankles, and made sure his hiking boots were tied with the laces tucked away. Rooting around in one of the ammo pouches on his belt, he removed an old section of Humvee mirror he had carried in the service. It had been cut down and backed with green duct tape, "hundred mile an hour tape" in Army parlance. Using tubes of green and brown camo crème he painted his face and neck, using the lighter green on the dark areas of his face, and the dark brown on the high points. Making sure he covered his ears well, he tried to slip into his "tactical" mindset. This was the most dangerous area he had to cross, and he was sure that after this he would be home free.

Taking his wind up radio from his pack, he again scanned the AM bands. What he heard only intensified his tactical animal.

".....message repeats. Forces from the International Security Assistance Forces, ISAF," the announcer droned, pronouncing ISAF "issaf", "are here to protect their individual nations interests in the United States. They are also volunteering to assist the Department of Homeland Security in protecting the American people from terrorists, both foreign and domestic. Do not interfere with them as they go about their duties. Their presence here is in compliance with United Nations Declaration 6664, and covered under the International Agreement on Infrastructure Protection. President Billary has opened Americas doors to our friends from Europe, who have stated that they wish to repay America for all that America has done for the world. Compliance with the ISAF forces is mandated by special legislation passed last night in an emergency joint session of Congress, and further backed by a U.N. resolution passed this morning in New York City.

These cities in our broadcast area are currently under curfew-Boston and surrounding suburbs, Providence and Rhode Island, Hartford and east, and the New York City metropolitan area, to include western Connecticut. Anyone attempting to defect to areas that are refusing to comply with the legal government of the United States are subject to arrest and detainment. Any residents of the following states and areas who are now in the safe areas-Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and northern New York state, and any other state not mentioned, are to report to the closest US Post Office facility to register with the department of Homeland Security. As you know by now, President Billary has declared specific areas to be in open violation of many of the security measures passed in light of the terrorism committed against the American people in the last two years. ISAF troops will be moving into these areas to protect the assets committed to their respective governments under the Debt Consolidation and Repatriation Act of this year. Persons are directed by Executive Order 5712 to stay in their homes or places of work, unless transiting from one to the other. Anyone on the road in violation of this order will be subject to detainment for an unspecified length of time. Anyone found to be in possession

of prohibited items, including firearms, narcotics, food for more than a two day period, gasoline over 15 gallons, any gasoline in separate container, and two way radios capable of broadcasting on frequencies above 23 centimeters, will be subject to forfeiture of property used to facilitate said crimes, and civil and criminal penalties not to exceed \$1 million in fines and/or 25 years in federal detention.”

“We repeat-if you are traveling, return to your homes. If you are in possession of prohibited items, turn them in to your local Homeland Security forces. If you have knowledge of persons violating these terms, please contact your local Homeland Defense forces. Rewards of up to \$500 are now being offered for successful reports of antisocial hoarding and activity.”

“In local news, a Moosup couple is dead after their son in law, currently wanted on charges of antisocial behavior through non compliance with the Terrorist Control Act, engaged police in a three hour standoff this week. Police have identified David McGrath, 43, of Lower Quinonapaug, as the shooter. The standoff ended with the house of Mr. and Mrs. Ted Peterson being burned to the ground after the couple were killed execution style by McGrath. Police reports indicate that McGrath, a decorated Army veteran and known anti-government activist, used an accelerant to set the two story on fire, likely gasoline. Three police officers were killed, and seven wounded in the shootout. McGraths remains were not found in the charred rubble of the house, and he is presumed to be armed and very dangerous. A manhunt is underway for him.”

“The Electrical Resource Allocation Board today announced new restrictions....”

Dave listened as the voice droned on. Well, he thought, I wonder where the bloodhounds are. He thought about the implications of the news report and decided it didn’t change his situation much. He was committing about 40 felonies as it was, two or three more wouldn’t matter, especially since he hadn’t committed any acts of murder, and the laws he was breaking were unconstitutional anyway.

The activity on the road increased. Dave watched in grim fascination the parade of cars and trucks heading west. “Where do they think they are going?” he asked himself. “No place to go, nothing to do when they get there.” Dave looked at the road below. It was the second time in his life he had seen refuges.

The African sun beat down on the men dressed in their brown body armor and Kevlar helmets. The scout platoon and their attached snipers were in an overwatch position, covering a roadblock manned by men from their battalions B Company. For this deployment they were using armored Humvees, mounting either M-2 HB Browning .50 caliber MG’s or MK-19 40mm MG’s. Dave had his squad dismount their MK-19 and mount it on its M-3 tripod to cover the main road. The second Humvees M-2 was deployed on the top of the Humvee to provide flanking fire on the secondary road that came in from their left. If needed the Humvee could rapidly move to one of three

preselected spots to provide covering fire for the grunts 300 Meters below them. The GI's manning the roadblock were in a tight spot. Their Rules of Engagement prevented them from firing on anyone unless they themselves were fired upon. Manning a roadblock, their job was to prevent people from reaching the capitol, which lay 20 some odd miles behind them.

The mass of refugees was spurred into a panic by reports that the rebel forces were moving towards them on a murderous, drug fueled spree of rapine and destruction. They were rumored to practice a bizarre form of human sacrifice (the specifics of which were left to the listeners imagination), and were known for their brutality to those not of their tribe. As far as the Americans were concerned, they should be allowed to shoot everyone of them they saw carrying a gun. Ironically, that is just what they were not allowed to do. Several times they saw armed gangs of men assaulting members of the approaching throng and drag them, screaming, into the tree line.

"Let me smoke them, Sergeant," asked Specialist Ruiz, watching through his crosshairs as yet another nubile young woman was dragged into the trees, her children left alone and crying by the side of the road. The emotion in his voice was bordering on tears.

"No can do, Ruiz," answered Dave, "I don't like it either, but we have orders."

"Well the orders suck," spat the tall Cuban. Ruiz's parents had risked their lives to take their three small children on a perilous trip in a leaky boat, landing in the dead of night near Miami. They had taught him about the evils of oppression from an early age.

Dave agreed, although he held his tongue. Surely the American government would see what was happening and let them act with honor. Act as soldiers.

The soldiers manning the checkpoint had a harder time. Trying unsuccessfully to stem the flow of wretched, half starved women and children, they saw the fear and desperation in their eyes. Although ordered to not allow anyone passage towards the beleaguered capitol, in practice they only presented token resistance to the refugees, who only had to step around the roadblock to pass by. The Americans had been ordered to block the road, and they did. Their orders did not tell them to block the shoulders of the road. The troops manning the roadblock did what they could for the injured refugees. Sometimes it was nothing more than retightening loose bandages or handing out aspirin. The faces devoid of hope would be something they all would remember forever.

The refugee tide continued as the sun got higher in the sky. Typically, all activity slowed or stopped from close to noon until after 2, due to the heat. As the crowd continued to pulse forward like a living beast with a thousand legs, sounds of gunfire reached the ears of the entrenched Americans. Gradually the sounds of motors could be heard between the bursts of gunfire. The throng scattered as a murmur came up the line. People surged past the Americans, seeking the safety of having the paratroopers between themselves and the gunfire. Finally Ruiz and Günter, his spotter, reported to Dave.

"Sergeant McGrath, I've got three or more trucks coming up the road, big Mercedes troop carriers with Russian 51's on top. They look like they're headed this way."

"Roger that, Ruiz. Keep an eye on them and remember our ROE, even if it does suck."

"Hooah, Sergeant," answered Ruiz, settling the Remington M-24 into his shoulder.

McGrath was in the habit of carrying his own radio, and unclipped the handset to call a

report to Battalion.

“Sierra 5-3, sierra 5-3, this is Lima 2-niner, come in, over.”

Static hissed from the handset.

“Lima 2-niner, this is Sierra 5-3, go ahead, over.”

“5-3, we’ve got at least three troop trucks...” Ruiz waved a hand, “...break”

“I’ve got four trucks with troops and three technicals.”

“5-3, that’s four troop trucks with heavy weapons and three technicals approaching our location. They are attacking the civilians, break.”.....”we request permission, again, to engage them, over.”

A pause, as if the puzzle palace were discussing the merits of that.

“Negative, 2-niner, negative. The ROE stands, You are only to fire to protect the lives of US Forces and US citizens, do you copy, over?”

Dave sounded as dejected as he felt, “Roger, 5-3, I understand. Lima 2-niner, OUT.”

“Listen up,” Said Dave into his privately purchased Marine VHF radio, “If these t*rdburglars so much as point a weapon at you, light them up. Got it?”

“Roger”

“Hooah”

“It’s about time” came the replies from the other Humvee and the troops at the roadblock. Dave had given the NCO in charge at the roadblock the extra handheld radio that operated above the frequency of their heavy GI Issue ones. In Africa, they weren’t worried about what the FCC would say.

The trucks pulled up to the roadblock in a cloud of dry, red dust. From the lead truck a gaudily clad man leapt down, his movements quick and jerky.

A voice came over the VHF “Looks like he’s hopped up.”

They watched through binos and riflescopes as the man approached the roadblock and began screaming at the American soldiers.

“Recon,” said the voice of the B Company NCO, “keep your eyes on these dudes, they’re demanding we give them our weapons and vehicles and clear the roadblock, as they represent the sovereign government of this rat infested sewer.”

“Roger, we gotcher back, Sgt. Gooch.”

The wildly gesticulating “sovereign government representative” turned to the vehicles, waving at the men to come down. Dave saw the B Company Platoon Leader in charge leave the cover of his Humvee and approach the “leader”. As he called out, the convoy leader whirled, pointing his AK at the Lieutenant ever so briefly.

“Take’em,” said Dave. Ruiz fired, and the man started doing another dance as most of his head disappeared in a pink cloud. The Lt. stood there open-mouthed as the nearly headless corpse ran around the road, blood spurting from the remains of his throat. Before the echo of Ruiz’ shot had died another shot rang out. The driver of the lead truck had just shot the stunned Lt. The Lt. dropped heavily onto the macadam. Almost immediately a cacophony of gunfire rang out. The .50’s on the Humvees, two at the roadblock and the one to Dave’s left, opened up. The two Mk-19’s were in action, pumping 40mm high

velocity grenades into the troop compartments and engine areas of the trucks. The troops at the roadblock were keeping up a steady fire, the M-4's, M-203's, SAWs, and the platoons two M-240's were raking the technicals and trucks. Dave saw that the two Mk-19's were alternating fire to keep a constant rain of 40mm HE on target.

Dave immediately keyed his radio, "Sierra 5-3, this is Lima 2-niner, we are in contact, repeat, we are in contact, we need immediate fire support at preregistration point Budweiser, say again, Budweiser, we have seven vehicles full of armed hostiles engaging US Troops. We have one Line 2, over."

"Copy 2-niner, one line 2. Negative on fire support, the ambassador sent them packing, said they were too offensive, break..."

"...we are moving up the reaction force, they should be there in 20 mikes, over."

"Roger, 5-3. We will give you a Sitrep in five, 2-niner out." Releasing his headset, he dropped from kneeling to prone and flipped the covers off of his ACOG scope.

Looking over to Randt, one of two M-203 gunners on the hill. "Randt, take James and Hansen and cover the left flank, I don't want to get surrounded."

"Hooah that, Sergeant," Randt replied, getting up and tearing off down the line.

Reacquiring his reticule, Dave saw that most of the rebels were dead. Apparently one technical had gotten away. He drew a bead on a man firing an RPD in a long burst over the heads of the B Company men at the roadblock, and slowly squeezed the trigger. Dave felt the relatively soft recoil of the M-4, and when he reacquired his sights, the man was laying on his back, the RPD silent. Dave heard the steady fire from Ruiz' bolt gun as he engaged several more rebel troops. Finally, he saw no more movement.

"Cease fire, cease fire," he called, hearing the command get picked up and down down the line.

"Only shoot the live ones... heavies, take turns reloading."

Dave got on the VHF as firing faded at the roadblock. "Gooch, how's the LT?" Silence. Then a voice, "He's OK, got hit in the plate, no penetration. He figured playing possum was safer than John Wayneing it between his p*ssed off men and our new 50 meter qualification range."

Dave laughed. "I'm gonna have my sniper and shooters make sure those toads are dead. Reaction force should be here in fifteen."

"Yeah, we're on with Battalion right now on our push. Thanks for the cover, that was some shot, I thought the L.T. was a goner for sure."

"Thanks, I'll let Ruiz know."

Ruiz looked over at him with a question on his face. "Sgt Gooch says good shot, Ruiz." Ruiz shot him back a grin. "Now show me headshots on any of them that look like they have the strength to pull a trigger."

Ruiz nodded, "My pleasure," he said, and set about his task with a grim smile on his face. Dave called out, "All my ACOG'ers, make sure those POS's are dead. The rest of you, I want casualty and ammo check, now." Dave walked the perimeter as the infrequent shot rang out from Ruiz's position. Checking on his men, he found no wounded, no shortage of ammo (having Humvees to hump ammo sure helps, mused Dave), and good spirits all around.

"About time we did something proactive," said Barnes.

"Hey Sergeant, we hit any collaterals?" asked Weissman, his junior RTO.

“None that I could see. Those people boogied before that last truck stopped moving.”

Charlie Company showed up in the backs of several Humvees and Medium trucks, and secured the area. After policing up the battlefield, they had 67 confirmed dead tangoes, two American flesh wounds, and about one thousand cheering refugees.

After this incident the troops from Daves brigade were relegated to a role on the coast of the country where they were less likely to encounter armed hostiles. The Ambassador wanted them gone, saying that people had a way of dying around paratroopers. Daves men nodded their assent. “Bad people die around us,” said Weissman. Coming as it did from a pimply 18 year old just out of basic, his sentiment was well received by the company.

Dave crawled back into his hooch and leaned back to think for a few minutes while listening to the AM band for any intel. As he looked at the space blanket hanging above him, he paused. If he was going to be here all day, he didn't want to create more of a thermal signature than he had to. Reaching into his pack, he pulled out his lightweight poncho and a few bungees, and strung it up a few inches under the space blanket to provide a heat barrier between his body and the silver blanket. Feeling better, he turned on his Yaesu. Noon was approaching. Being further north and on higher ground, plus being in such tight quarters, he decided against stringing up his 292 antenna. Instead he connected it to the little radio and strung it around his hide. Hopefully it would do its job.

Sure enough, at noon, he heard the carrier wave on today's frequency. Motley Crue's song 'Home Sweet Home' came over the earpiece. Dave smiled. His friends certainly had their sense of humor intact. As the song ended Sandy's voice came on the air. "Hurry home" she said. The signal went off. Dave smiled. I am hurrying, he thought. But speed could kill. Better to get home safe than to 'Go home' to the camp fire in the sky. He still had things to do.

A steady throbbing sound broke him from his reverie. Helicopters. Big ones, maybe Chinooks. He crawled to the lip of his hide and scanned the road and sky.

To the right, towards Boston, the road went up another rise and turned from sight. At the lower edge of the rise, he saw eight figures, four from each side of the road, run out. All were dressed in woodland BDU's and carried rifles. Some dragged freshly cut trees, others donned fluorescent vests. Signaling for the cars on the road to stop, and reinforcing that signal with rifles at the shoulder, they dragged the trees across the road to make a crude roadblock. As they did, Dave saw two men, one carrying an ALICE pack with a long whip antenna poking up from it. The man with him took the proffered handset and spoke into it. The sound of the helos grew louder, the ground beginning to vibrate so that Dave could feel it, his whole body thrumming. Coming in over the highway, from the little valley to the north east, came two huge birds, which banked and turned towards Dave. He recognized them as Sea Stallions or a variant, CH-53's. These bore a green and dark brown camouflage pattern Dave recalled as being German. Viewing them with his binos, Dave saw the distinctive Maltese cross on the nose of the closest one, with a white

rectangle below which bore in black letters 'ISAF'. The helos quickly set down on the highway, on each side, the one on Daves side closer by a hundred meters or so. He saw crew chiefs scramble from the rear of the big birds as two Apache attack helicopters swept over them, a hundred feet from the tree tops.

As Dave watched, he could see activity at the rear of the CH-53's. Suddenly from the rear of one, then the other, camouflaged jeeps of a kind Dave only recognized as being European sped from the rear of each bird. One sped towards the blocking crew, the other headed past Dave to stop just past the overpass to the left of the hide. Turning his focus back to the Stallions, Daves mouth dropped open as a small armored vehicle rolled off the back ramp. Hardly taller than the crew chief, it sported a tiny turret with what looked like a 20mm cannon sticking out from it. "Weasels" said Dave. He certainly never expected to see German Fallschirmjaeger armor in New England in the Fall. Like the scout cars, one Weasel headed for the overpass and one for the crude roadblock. Then troops began pouring from the Stallions, about 30 in all. They carried rolls of wire, steel pickets, and other items. They fell in and started towards the overpass. As they cleared the helicopters, the big birds engines changed in pitch, and they took off one at a time, heading West. Dave watched the troops set up a better roadblock with triple strand concertina wire, engineer pickets, and a growing sandbagged emplacement near the bridge abutments. What the heck was going on, he wondered?

Chapter 10 – Redemption

While Dave was observing all of the activity taking place below his lair, he heard the familiar whine of turbo diesel engines. Looking left, he saw three State Police cruisers and a line of Army 2 ½ ton trucks, known as ‘Deuce and a Halfs’, along with several Humvees coming from the West. Since the active duty forces had changed their vehicles to a new cab over style in the late ‘90’s and early 21st Century, Dave supposed they were National Guard vehicles. Tailgates thunked with their distinctive hinge creak and metallic slam, and the area under the bridge and beyond was quickly turned into a roadblock with a large enclosed area, and a smaller holding area next to a green canvas GP Large tent.

Hearing car engines, he looked right. The team at the far end had removed their crude roadblock and were waving cars through. Dave now understood what was happening. The roadblock was to stop the exodus from the city. This was a natural chokepoint—the high walls of the highway cut prevented escape, as did the steep embankments of the highway over the swamp. Cars had no escape, and people on foot would be spotted if they tried to escape. Dave watched as the first line of cars pulled up to the checkpoint. Standard stuff, papers checked, some cars were searched. There was an unpaved area between the two sides of the highway, marked with the “official use only” signs seen all over America. Most of the cars were reversing direction by crossing there, and headed back east towards Boston and the suburbs. A growing number of cars and small trucks were directed into the larger fenced area, where the people in them were handcuffed and forced to sit as their vehicles were searched for contraband. Dave saw only one or two vehicles that were allowed to leave this area. After the search, the bound people were escorted to the smaller pen, and brought, one at a time, into the large tent. Dave eventually saw a line leaving the tent. Those people, hands still bound, were led up a small steel tailgate ladder and loaded into the back of waiting deuces.

After several hours of this, the traffic died to a trickle. Dave imagined the ISAF forces, who Dave had started referring to the “as if” forces, had set up several of these checkpoints along the Interstate. While he watched, the last of the travelers were led to the waiting Deuces, which drove East themselves. The remaining troops tore down the wire enclosures, and loaded them into the backs of Humvees and Deuce and a Half’s, and packed up the large tent. A detail of men was tearing down the large wire enclosure while another went around siphoning all of the parked cars of fuel. Just as the men finished, two tow trucks pulled up. A German troop in mottle Flectarn camo spoke to them for a few minutes, gesturing towards the large parking lot. Dave could see the drivers nodding in response. They then each hooked into a car and drove off, chains rattling. The little Weasel tanks, which had served as quite an intimidator during the roadblock operation, rolled east, escorted by the German scout cars and the three State Police Cruisers.

Soon all that was left was a lot of empty cars and SUV’s, and one two and a half ton truck. A small detail of Flectarn clad troops carrying G-36’s was sweeping the area for anything left behind. Soon they completed their police call, loaded the truck, and drove off. Silence returned to the little valley. Dave was impressed with the speed and efficiency of the operation. They came in quick, set up fast, and maintained a constant

presence up and down the line of waiting cars, and then were gone, on to the next mission. "Fighting these clowns might be harder than we think," Dave mused. While the soldiers had taken in the roadblock, Dave had paid special attention to the crew and the far end of the valley. As they had come out of the tree line, Dave didn't know whether they had walked in from the next valley over or had been laying up, watching the road. Dave had seen no other troops in the wooded areas, and hoped that some type of patrol unit wasn't keeping the valley under constant observation. He remained vigilant for any sign of enemy activity

As afternoon turned into evening clouds swept in from the south west. Dave grunted to himself. 'At least it will be warmer tonight, if it doesn't rain' he noted. Dave reapplied his camouflage face paint in the fading light, and then started taking down his hooch.

The last thing Dave took down, just before he left, was the space blanket. It was now pitch black. Where before a cloudy night had provided ambient light by reflected back to earth the illumination of millions of electric lights, the cloud cover now merely prevented starlight from reaching the ground. Dave took comfort in the dark. Although he didn't have any night vision with him, even the most advanced light amplification tubes would be barely functional in such dark without using artificial light, usually in integral infra red illuminator. That would severely restrict their operating range, and provide Dave with an edge. Securing his pack, Dave crawled away from his hide. When he was what he judged a safe distance away from the edge, he stood and began patrolling east, towards the little valley. He veered away from the highway, and went deeper into the woods. The darkness coupled with the vegetation prevented him from walking too quickly. Dave found himself wishing he had some kind of eye protection as stray branches found his face in the inky black. As he moved, a light rain started to fall. Dave silently cursed the cold water that made him shiver while at the same time thanking God for the increased security the rain provided a lone traveler.

After Dave decided that the rain wasn't going to stop, he called a halt, and quickly donned his thin Gore-Tex rain suit. Although he was already wet, he didn't want to chance hypothermia, and the insulation effect of the extra material would help him retain body heat. Once again on the move, he found that maybe he was too hot. 'Damned if you do...' he thought to himself, sidling around a large oak that sprang out of the dark, 'damned if you don't.' His course took him into thick scrub oak and bracken that hindered his movement. He slowly made his way around the growths, using his tritium compass to maintain a rough course east. After an hour of cautious movement, he came to a small watercourse that was running shallowly and rapidly with rainwater. Dave felt that the asphalt lined way was likely a drain from the parking lot he had crossed the night before. Bearing left, he followed it down into the valley, and shortly emerged at a wide creek, lined with rushes and cattails. Dave crouched at the edge, straining to hear any unnatural noises above the rain. He gave it a slow three minute count, then slowly stood up, his leg muscles already cramping from the cold, the exertion, and, Dave commented to himself wryly, old age. He turned and stepped away from the edge several paces. Dropping his

pack, he removed the Cold Steel ODA from his belt and started cutting reeds. After a few minutes work, he resheathed the blade and began to weave the reeds through the cover of his pack. After ensuring, mostly by touch, that the pack was camo'ed correctly, he added some material to his boonie hat.

Carrying the pack to the waters edge, he slowly stretched. Then, with a resigned feeling of anticipation, stepped into the creek. As he had hoped, it wasn't very deep. Water tended not to run deep in the Fall in these parts, and during his listening halt he had determined that it was moving slowly, if at all. He backed up to the bank and pulled on his pack, leaving the waist belt open. If he fell into the water and needed to ditch the pack, he didn't want to have to struggle any more than needed. He moved cautiously along the creek, the bank on his immediate left. By his estimation he had between 500 to 600 yards to go to get to the Turnpike. He would walk for a time, then stop and listen. All he heard was the rain on the vegetation and water, until he was what he thought was 200 yards from the highway.

Coming from the other side of the creek he first heard what he thought was a wounded animal. He took off his hat and cupped one hand behind his ear to hear better. Replacing his hat, he crossed the creek, and listening again. This time it was clear. It was a child crying. Naturally this peaked Daves interest. Was it bait for a clever ambush? He then heard a second sound, a female voice. He couldn't make out the words, but it sounded as if she were trying to comfort the child. Dave considered his options. He ruled out ambush, just because it would be far easier for a patrol to watch the creek, the most natural line of travel in the area, unless of course, there was a trail he was unaware of over there. Dave thought it out. The area definitely saw humans in better times. Various detrious was apparent in the woods-paper fast food wrappers, beverage cans and bottles, an old shopping cart. Probably people fishing or kids coming out here on weekend nights. Dave slowly scanned a 360 around where he was standing. Seeing nothing, he moved North a few more feet and listened again. This time he heard another voice, deeper, a male. It was in a lively but hushed conversation with the female voice. Dave crept down stream. Coming to a cut out in the bank, he felt with his hand and found enough room to drop his pack silently. Feeling light as air without the pack, Dave again moved towards the sounds. Moving, stopping, listening, moving again. He came to a clear area, apparently there was a path on the other side, and it or a branch of it led to this fishing spot. Dave noted Styrofoam cups and some cans floating near shore. Dropping to the prone at the extreme edge of the opening, he again cupped his hand to his ear.

The female voice said "...gotten us into this. She's sick, tired, and hungry. We can't do this. We should go back."

"We can't," replied the male voice, "I'll get locked up and what will happen to you then?"

"At least we'll be warm and dry", said the miserable woman.

Dave crept further up the trail.

"But I'll be in jail, you too, I bet. And the kids will go to foster homes. No way. We have to get away."

"But we don't even know where we're going," whined the woman. Dave estimated them to be about 20 feet away. He could now hear them clearly over the steady rain.

"We'll find something. I can always find work," Dave heard the man say, his thick accent dropping almost all of the "R" from work. A thought registered with Dave-the mans a local.

"I've always taken care of you guys, and I always will. We'll find a way around the Turnpike, somehow."

The woman was in full blown 'I feel sorry for myself and I don't care' mode. "Every exit ramp is has cops on it. It's too far. It's raining, for gawds sake, and the kids are shivering under that blue thing. We're all gonna get pneumonia and die out here in the woods. I want to go home."

Dave was close enough now to hear their feet crunching leaves as they shuffled their feet. "No, Rhonda, that's it. We ain't going back. We're gonna find a way to the other side of this thing if it kills me."

Dave stood up and stepped towards them. Startled, they both backpedaled, the woman moving protectively towards where Dave presumed the kids were under "the blue thing". "If you want to cross the highway come with me."

Dave could see the man struggling with something on his shoulder. "Leave rifle there, mister. If I wanted you dead you'd be dead right now. Rhonda," he said, keeping his FAL on the man, "I can get you across safely. Trust me."

"Howdjoo know my name," she threw back at him.

"I've been listening to you for the last five minutes. The kids are under a blue thing, and he's going to find work wherever you're headed."

"Who are you?"

"I'm not a fed," McGrath answered, "I'm heading home to New Hampshire. Under the current situation, this is the only way I can do so."

The couple looked to where the other was standing, not seeing each other in the dark.

"Who are you?" asked the man.

"Like you. I'm trying to avoid being locked up. Like you, too, I'm not a criminal. Look, I left my pack upstream. I'm going to go get it and come back. Make up your minds by the time I return. I have a schedule."

Dave turned on his heel and followed the path to the creek. He heard the couple having a hushed but vigorous conversation as he walked away.

When Dave returned, again approaching the couple cautiously in case they decided to bushwhack him. They were still talking when he returned.

"Well, what's it going to be?" Dave asked directly.

Dave could hear the woman shuffle her feet over the light rain. "We don't know what to do...."

Dave stepped closer to her, remembering a line from a movie. He stuck out his hand to her and said, "Come with me if you want to live." Ironically, she took his hand and said, "How do I know I can trust you?"

Dave was silent for a moment. One more answer and he was gone. "If I wanted to kill you for food I could have already done so. If I wanted to rape you I'd have killed everybody else here first. You have 30 seconds."

Just as he stopped, he heard a child sneeze.

Rhonda said, "Jennifer, quiet," but Dave was already next to the blue tarp, dropping his pack. He pulled out his red lensed light and looked at four bedraggled children, ranging

from what he guessed was three to twelve. “Hi,” he said, in his friendliest voice, “I’m Mr. McGrath. Do you guys want some hot soup and a dry bed?”

The littlest child, a tow headed girl with huge eyes, nodded meekly while holding a plush duck.

“I can get you across the road and then we can camp and have hot food. Would you like to come with me?”

The little girl looked up at Dave in the red light. “What kind of soup?”

Dave grinned, “I have chicken noodle soup, Ramen soup, and beef stew. Do you like any of those?”

The girl nodded, “I like Chicken noodle snoop.”

“Well, let’s get you packed.” Dave stood and turned his light on the parents. “Pack your stuff, you’re coming with me.” The man nodded, “OK.”

The former NCO looked at the man. About 5’9”, average build, no beer belly, long hair, wearing jeans, hiking boots, a flannel shirt under what likely was a blue rain jacket (it was hard to tell in the red light). He had an SKS on his shoulder by its sling. “Why are you guys running?” Dave asked.

Rhonda answered, “‘Cause he sent a letter to our Congressman telling him he wasn’t giving up his stupid gun. ‘From my cold dead hands’ he signed it. My cousins husbands partner at the dart league is a cop, and Tony’s name was on a list of people the were going to arrest for not turning in their guns. He told him and my cousin called me. We packed and left right away, but we ran into roadblocks everywhere. We parked at the Shop and Save and we been walking evah since.”

Dave considered this a moment. “Tony, do you know how to use that rifle?”

“Yeah man, I was in the Navy.”

“What’d you do,” asked Dave, cocking his head in the dark.

“Machinist Mate on the Theodore Roosevelt.”

“OK,” said Dave, “‘The Big Stick, huh?”

He could hear the pride in Tony’s voice,” That’s right, the baddest ship to sail the Seven Seas.”

“Well, Lt. McHale, we have got to move, and like right now. The longer we stand here in the rain, the closer we get to losing the cover of darkness.”

“Right”, said Tony, resolve in his voice, “Rhonda, you get the kids, I’ll get our backpacks.”

Dave watched them, letting Tony borrow his red lensed light. Rhonda was struggling to get the kids ready. Dave walked over.

“Do the kids have raincoats?”

“No,” said Rhonda, anxiety in her voice,” we packed so fast I forgot them. I could kill him for this,” she stated, meaning Tony.

“Well, let me help you then.” Dave turned to get his pack.

“You have four kids parkas (she pronounced it ‘pahkahs’) in your pack?”

Dave gave an unseen nod, “The next best thing.”

Several minutes later they were moving out, Tony and Rhonda carrying surprisingly high quality internal frame packs of purple and blue. Cindy, the little one, was perched on Dave’s shoulders, resting between the pack, which rose higher than Daves head, and his neck. Dave was happy she didn’t need diapers. The other kids held onto either their

mother or fathers hands, and had backpacks of their own-small day packs Dave was sure they used as school bags in less trying times. Clad in rain parkas made out of four of the trash bags Dave had in his pack, they looked like shapeless blobs with heads and legs. On the little girl giving Daves neck a temporary cramp the bag covered her feet, too, if she stood up. The family followed Dave to the creek.

“How are we crossing?” asked Rhonda, a little too loudly. Dave stepped over to her. Leaning to her ear, he whispered, “Rhonda, you need to be quiet.” A little louder, he addressed his wards, “From here on out you need to be silent. No talking. No sneezing,” he felt little hands pushing his hat over his eyes and heard a giggle, “and no fun until I say so. Got it?” He heard a tiny voice say, “Yes, Mr. McGwath.”

He turned to Rhonda and Tony. “Follow me, Rhonda first, Tony, you don’t shoot anything unless I fire first, got it?”

“Loud and clear,” whispered Tony.

“Let’s go,” Dave said with finality, and stepped into the creek. He heard voices hiss as the family followed him into the cold water. The rain had picked up, and was falling steadily in large, quick drops. He turned his head and whispered, “Hey, Cindy Lou Hoo, put my hat on.” Small hands pulled his boonie cap off and a tiny voice whispered in his ear, so close it tickled, “This is a big hat, Mister McGwath.”

They followed the stream without incident until, looming before them in the dark, was the embankment, the Interstate devoid of traffic 30 or more feet above them. They could sense it more than they could see it. As they got closer, the water got deeper and the stream spread out into a large pool. Dave walked to the side, where the land was marshy, and turned. “You guys stay here a minute. Cindy Lou, do you want to get down?” He felt the girl move, but couldn’t tell if she was nodding yes or shaking no. “I can’t see you.” Smiled Dave. The little voice in his ear whispered, “No.”

“OK, hold on,” Dave moved towards the embankment, wading through the pool that had collected. He moved from the right edge of the pool to the left, and soon found what he was looking for. A large culvert ran under the road, big enough to let the stream through if it rained enough, and large enough for deer to cross through of the felt so inclined. He let his L1A1 hang on the assault sling and reached up and grabbed Jennifer under each arm. “I’m gonna take you down now,” and swung her off of his shoulders. He stood her in the culvert and turned his back. Sitting a little, he let the weight of the pack rest on the lip of the corrugated steel and took off the pack. Stretching his neck to each side, he heard it crack. Much better, he said to himself. Turning to Cindy, he said, “you’ll be safe here with your duck. I’ll be back in a minute with your Mom and Dad, OK?”

“What about my sisters and brother?” the little voice asked.

“I’ll bring them, too, Cindy.”

Dave waded straight out. The water never got to his waist, so he was sure the oldest two kids could make it. Finding the family, he took the next youngest, Carolyn, and put her on his now unburdened shoulders. Signaling with his hands to the others, they followed him into the middle of the giant puddle.

Reaching the culvert, he set Carolyn down next to his pack. Turning, he picked up Julia, and then the oldest child, Jake. He then climbed up into the steel cave himself. Moving his pack deeper into the tunnel, he told the children in a whisper to go up to it and wait.

He then helped Rhonda and Tony up.

“How did you know this was here?” asked Rhonda.

“A hunch,” whispered Dave back to her, “let’s get the kids and get out of here.”

The parents reassured their kids that it was OK, and Dave reshoouldered his pack in the tight confines of the steel tube. Leading the way, Dave set out well ahead of the family.

He found a few areas where sticks and debris blocked the way, which he cleared as quietly as he could. The only sounds were his breathing and the footsteps of the six people behind him. Wishing they could deaden the echo more, Dave soon reached the end of the culvert. Another pool had formed here. He sat on the wet edge and lowered himself into the water. When his feet didn’t touch bottom, he quickly sat back up.

Dropping his pack, he waited a few moments for Rhonda to catch up with him. “Wait here,” he whispered, and holding his rifle up high with one hand he again lowered himself. His feet touched bottom at about four feet. Pulling his pack after him, he laid it in the water as silently as he could. As he habitually kept everything in it in waterproof bags of one kind or another, he wasn’t concerned about the contents getting damaged. Pulling the pack behind him like a large green and mottled pool toy, Dave held the FAL in his right hand, keeping the muzzle pointing wherever his head was turned. Reaching the far shore, far in this case being a hundred feet or so, Dave noted that the water was about two feet deep. He placed his pack on the shore, beneath a large tree which overgrew the bank. He then returned to the family. “Tony, I want you to come with me. Peanut,” he said to the older girl, “I’m going to carry you to the shore.” She nodded her assent and when Dave turned she climbed onto his shoulders. “Hold on,” whispered Dave, the rifle in his hands. He felt her hands grasp him. “Not so tight,” said Dave as she squeezed his neck tightly. He felt the hands slacken. Tony sat on the edge and slid right in. His pack took to this badly, and immediately turned turtle on him, dunking him into the frigid and dirty water. Dave felt the small hands squeeze him as he took two steps and reached under, grabbing a handful of black hair. Struggling to maintain his balance, Dave pulled Tony to his feet, and immediately fell on his tail into four feet of water. He went full under, letting his rifle fall free, and felt the girl let go and kick away. Struggling to regain his footing, Dave the super soldier got to his feet, choking and sputtering. He turned and saw a smiling face floating just above the rain spattered surface. “Are you OK?” he and Carolyn asked each other simultaneously. They both grinned. Dave lifted the young girl out of the water and seated her on the edge of the culvert. Tony was stangling next to him, looking like a half drowned rat. His pack was floating next to his waist. “Let’s try that again,” suggested Dave, “Tony, carry our pack over our head.” Tony nodded, and picked the pack up. “Still got our rifle?” Tony grinned sheepishly, and walked over to the culvert. Putting his pack down next to his daughter, he said “No.” Quickly turning away, he walked out a few steps and dropped under the water. It took him several tries to find it. “We’ll clean it up after,” said Dave. “Gotcha,” answered the chagrined man. Tony stayed with Daves pack while Dave ferried the children over. Jake, the boy, was tall enough to make it on his own, and accompanied his mother on the final trip.

Once again burdened with their packs, the small group, with Dave in the lead and Tony again on slack, followed a much smaller stream through a low area of marshes. They moved as quickly and as silently as they could until they came to a spot where a spur of

dry land jutted into the marsh like an island rising from the sea. Dave changed their course and they crossed the dry land and the shelter of the trees overhead. Following the contours of the valley, they traveled in silence for almost an hour until Dave felt a tug on his left ear. "Mister McGwath?" a sleepy voice said, "I'm cold and hungry and tired. When can I have some soup?"

Dave stopped and took a knee, glad for the excuse. He looked at his watch, and pressed a button on the side. The illuminated face told him the time. "Sweetie, the sun will be up in two or three hours, and I need to find us a place where we can be safe from the bad men. It won't be long, I promise."

"OK," she said. Dave felt her shiver, "but my duck is awful cold."

Dave swung the little girl down as her family gathered around. Dave looked up, "You guys need to spread out. Rhonda, check on the kids. Tony, go back 20 feet and watch our trail."

"OK, boss," said Tony.

Dave lowered his pack thankfully, and rummaged around, pulling out his medium weight polypro top. He told Jennifer, "Help me put this on you," as he pulled off her plastic bag. He put her in the shirt, which hung on her like drapery. "I can put my duck in here," She said. Dave gave her a snicker and put the bag back on her. "Do you like the hat?" he asked. "Oh yes, it's my favorite," she said emphatically. Dave laughed more loudly. "Mine too," he said. Checking with Rhonda, he found that all of the kids were cold, tired, and unhappy. He made sure they had warm shirts on, with Rhonda's help, and had them drink water and go to the toilet. He pulled Rhonda aside. "We need to move until we find a good spot to stop for the day." Rhonda yawned in reply. "I know it's tough on the kids, but if we get found it will be tougher."

"I understand," she said, "we can do it. We hike all the time. The kids can make it."

"OK," Dave said, suddenly tired. He wished she hadn't yawned. He was really feeling the extra 20 pounds of peanut he was carrying, "I'm sorry to have to push them so. I'll try to stop more often."

Rhonda nodded. She was surprising Dave, "I understand. You're a good man, Mr. McGrath."

"I'm just doing my job," Dave said, surprised at his answer as soon as it left his mouth.

"You must be a guardian angel, then," said Rhonda, standing up. She turned to mother hen her kids.

'Just a man' Dave thought. 'A man who hopes he doesn't get you all killed.'

The rain gradually tapered off, and with two more stops, Dave found an area he thought would be good. A tall stand of white pine surrounded by grape vines, the leaves still clinging tightly to the only homes they had ever known. McGrath placed a now sleeping girl on the ground as gently as he could, and lay his pack next to her protectively. The other dropped to the ground with soft groans and sighs. Dave spoke to Tony.

"I'm going to check this stand out. Keep an eye on things. If anything happens, go back the way we came for a quarter mile and wait for me, alright?"

"Alright," said Tony, "Look, I want to thank you for everything..."

"Later," said Dave, trying not to be rude. "We can catch up after we've slept, OK?"

"Yeah, sure," said Tony.

Dave placed a hand on Tony's shoulder. "You're a good man, Tony. I'm glad you're covering my back." Tony puffed out a little.

"Thanks. Want me to cover our trail?"

"That'd be great. Just don't shoot me-I'll be coming back the way I left."

"Gotcha."

Dave stopped and let Rhonda know which way he was going and what to do if there was trouble. As he left he added, "Jennifer is sleeping next to my pack."

Dave crept around the copse, and finding no easy way in finally crawled and wriggled his way in to the stand. Just as he expected, the center area was mostly devoid of brush. A little cathedral under weeping boughs that dripped cold water from their tips. He circled the area and again found no obvious path out. He sighed and pulled out his Spyderco knife. Slung the FAL on his back, he cut a small circuitous path out of the thicket. This took him almost a half hour. Rejoining the group, he led them to the entrance. The children crawled right in, Rhonda following. Dave and Tony half dragged, half carried their packs into the glade, the three trips taking their toll on the men's elbows, knees, and energy. Finally ensconced in their new home, Dave returned and did his best to both cover their back trail and camouflage the tunnel.

He returned to the thicket to find all of the children awake, looking at him.

"Can we have our soup now?" asked Carolyn.

"Sure you can. Take off those bags and sit on them. I'll get the soup on."

Dave removed the esbit stove and his canteen and cup. Digging a hole in the moist earth, he placed a full hexamine block in it. Laying on his side and curling around the hole, he quickly flicked his disposable lighter and after a moment ignited the block. He quickly pulled his firefly light out of his t-shirt where the little LED light hung on his dog tag chain, and removed two cans of condensed chicken noodle soup from his pack. These were cans recovered from the empty house what seemed like weeks ago, but was only days. Using the P-38 which hung from the same chain, Dave quickly emptied them into the cup, which was already on the flame. Hissing and sputtering, the soup quickly gave off an aroma that made Dave's stomach grumble. He, too, was hungry. He filled the cup the rest of the way with water, noting that virtually no sign of the burning block was visible. Tony came over. "The kids all have cups and forks and spoons in their packs." "Good," said Dave, "get them out."

Soon, but not soon enough for the chilled, hungry kids, the soup was hot. The children ate hungrily, and soon were yawning over empty cups. Dave helped Rhonda and Tony string up their blue tarp. Dave spread his two ponchos over this to provide camouflage. They barely reached the ends of the shelter. Dave and Tony spread pine needles over the ponchos. Dave told him they would add more when it was light.

Rhonda spread out Dave's pad and the self inflating pads from her and Tony's packs. Spreading out the sleeping bags she and Tony had, she zipped them together to make one large bag. The children, stripped of their sodden shoes and clothes, were dressed in dry sweat suits. Dave was glad to see the kids' things were packed in trash bags in their little book bags. Soon, all four kids were fast asleep. The adults gathered near the little pit Dave had dug. "I've got some Chicken stew in my pack," said Rhonda, "since the kids

ate all the soup, would you like to cook that?"

Dave and Tony quickly agreed. Soon the large can of stew was on another hexie block. They ate in silence, each drinking their own water, the couple from matching Nalgene bottles. Finishing up, Dave said "I'll take first watch. You guys get some sleep." Tony and Rhonda nodded and crawled under the tarp.

Dave gathered his things, buried and camouflaged the fire pit, and repacked as much of his pack as he could. Putting on his recovered polypro top, he put on his warm, dry heavy wool socks, relaced his boots, and leaned against a tree, watching over his wards like the guardian angel he would never admit to being.

Chapter 11

Dawn broke. Dave took this as a good sign. With the dawn came a southerly wind, which quickly went about clearing the clouds. Dave felt a chill in the air, and was concerned that the Indian Summer was done with the whole business, and ready for a little break. He rose and stretched, his back cracking and legs groaning. 'What the hell am I doing here?' Dave thought. 'This sucks.' He smiled. Remembering cold wet days in the Army, he changed his attitude. 'This doesn't suck enough!' He smiled. 'Hooah, and all that. Well, day, I am here and I'm gonna kick yer butt.' With a feeling of defiance towards the fate that had brought him to this point, Dave set about his work.

The family was still sleeping under the crudely camouflaged tarp. Working silently as he could, Dave improved the camou job, trying not to overdo it and cause the whole thing to collapse under its own weight. He then changed into his dry pants and shirt. Laying his wet things in a sunny spot, he drank some water and ate an MRE cake for breakfast. After brushing his teeth, he decided he needed to shave, and he did. Feeling refreshed, Dave carefully reapplied his camo cream and made his morning toilet in a far corner of the clearing, behind two of the great pine trunks. He then took out his cleaning kit and cleaned the Makarov, and then the strangers SKS. Dave idly noted as he cleaned that it was a 1954 stamped Russian SKS. The chromed blade bayonet, in addition to carrying a wicked edge, was spray painted black. Dave decided Tony at least had some sense. It was also equipped with a 30 round magazine that Dave found slow to remove and insert. He cleaned Tony's ammo, drying it, and reloaded the weapon. He then cleaned the FAL thoroughly, and unloaded all of his magazines, cleaned them, and reloaded them, one at a time. He double checked the contents of his pack, making sure his radios and spare ammo were still dry. He then changed into a dry pair of socks and liners, powdering his feet and airing out his boots.

Dave checked the path he had cut in the dark, and decided it was OK for now. Refilling his canteen from the soda bottle he had filled with the rescued spring water, Dave drank a little more. He carefully and deliberately removed the waist belt from the pack, and buckled it about his waist. He consulted his topo map, and using the blade of his Leatherman cut out the two mapsheets that covered where he estimated they were. He used a red alcohol marker to write "I will be back by 8 A.M., McGrath", he propped the open book up on Rhondas pack. He left the clearing by his own path, taking time to cover his backtrail carefully. He halted at the edge, and listened for a bit. He shook his head to wake himself. Last night had been long, cold, wet, and difficult. It was all he could do not to fall asleep.

He circled the camp at about 150 meters out, identifying terrain and locating their spot on the map. He found a small stream that lazed through the wood. As it wasn't on the map he figured that it was seasonal. He hoped it would remain flowing until he could return with his water bladder. The terrain was typical eastern woodland-hardwoods and pinetrees. The undergrowth was prolific, but still navigable. Dave sat under a low Oak for while, listening for any indication of human presence and pouring over his maps. Their route would now take them through areas of widely diverse population centers. Small

towns, rural areas, a few larger cities. Roads crisscrossed the area, which had been settled for over 350 years. Dave plotted a rough route in his head, along with two viable alternatives. He noted obvious danger areas, water and road obstacles, and areas such as state and town forests where he thought they could hole up if needed. Deciding on his route for that night, he considered how much the family would hinder his journey home. He considered and discarded leaving them. He felt responsible for their safety, particularly since they had children. If anything happened to them Dave felt it would be his fault, and he didn't want to bear such a burden on his soul. He then took a moment to consider his mortality, and got to his knees and prayed. He prayed for his family, he prayed for his new wards, and he somewhat embarrassingly prayed for himself, for guidance, safety, and for the wisdom not to get the four kids and their parents killed. Silently mouthing the Lord's Prayer, Dave felt a peace wash over his insides. He hoped it was the Holy Spirit responding to his plea. He was going to need all of the help he could get.

Returning to what Dave thought of as a "Patrol Base", Dave circled the copse again, smelling wood smoke. He struggled to maintain his happy state as he gently wriggled and crawled back into the pine glen, covering his route as he went. He turned to see Tony sheepishly dropping his rifle from his prone position behind Dave's pack. "It's all right," Tony called out, far too loudly for Dave's likings, "It's Mr. McGrath." Tony stood up as his wife, with a 10/22, and his four kids came from behind the trees where Dave had made his latrine that morning.

"Sorry to startle you," said Dave, smiling at them. The look on their faces was one of relief and fear just passed, "but I wanted to check out our AO and see what we were in." "I figured it was like that," answered Tony, "but we had to be sure when we heard that noise in the bushes."

"That's OK, you did the right thing," replied Dave, "you've got good instincts. We do need to make up a way...." Dave's voice drifted off. "First things first, though. Come here." It was basically an order, and Tony followed. "You to, Rhonda." Dave said, pointing.

"What?" she asked, real concern in her voice. Dave walked over to where a fire burned. Taking the small orange trowel from next to the freshly dug pit, Dave began smothering the fire.

"What are you doing?" Asked Rhonda, "We was gonna cook breakfast and dry the kids shoes and stuff."

"They can smell this a half mile away, on a good wind. No fires, got it?" Anger was in his voice.

"Yeah, I guess," said Tony, "But why are you so pissed? It's just a fire."

"You could get us all killed with a fire. And quit talking so loud, cripes. They can hear you in Springfield." Dave finished his work. The entire family stood near, looking at Dave as if we could snap at any moment. Dave stood, readjusting his chest pouch and unbuckling his belt. "I'm sorry if I'm a hard..." his voice trailed, looking at the children, "I'm sorry if I'm short, but this stuff is dangerous. You are not on a camping trip in the Poconoes. You are a fugitive in a war zone. You need to start thinking like that, or you won't make it."

"Well, we don't know all this stuff. Heck, we're just trying to get by. If you want us to do

this stuff, tell us. You don't have to go yelling at Rhonda and scaring the kids, Mr. McGrath. We want your help-heck, we'd still be out in the rain if it weren't for you. But don't go off half cocked." Tony was finished, his arms folded defensively. Dave looked at him, hard. "Put the kids stuff in the sunny spots to dry. If you have dry clothes for them, put them on. From now on, no loud voices." He looked at the four kids. "Especially you guys. Understand?" They all nodded, the two oldest looking a little defiant. "Look," began Dave, taking his rifle off of his neck and standing it on its butt, holding the muzzle with his left hand, "I spent a long time in the Infantry. I can get you through this. But if you start making noise and can't control your kids, I'm outta here. I'm willing to help you, but you need to put out 110%, understand?" The six heads nodded. "You are no longer living in America, you're in the wilderness being hunted by blood thirsty Indians, and if you screw up, you'll get scalped, OK?" More nodding. "Well alrighty then," said Dave.

Turning his attention to the parents, he said "Have you eaten?" They nodded. "Then repack your bags as best you can. Take down the tarp. We're going to leave at sunset, you have all day to sleep, clean up, and rest. How are you set for water?"

Tony said, "We're almost out."

"OK, we can cure that, anybody hurt?"

Rhonda spoke this time, "No, just a few blisters."

"We can do blisters, too. No worries there. I want use use the space behind those pine trees," he pointed, "as our latrine. We bury all waste, every time, right?"

"I'm going to get some sleep. Rhonda, try to keep the kids as busy as you can. Have a watch?" Tony and Rhonda both nodded.

"I have a quarter til." They both nodded their assent, "please wake me at 11:30, OK?"

"Yeah, sure," said Rhonda.

Dave walked to his pack, the couple following. Dave took out his water bladder, which was empty, and his mostly empty 2 liter bottle. "I'm going to show Tony where the stream is. Get all of your water bottles."

"Is the stream safe?" asked Rhonda, "I don't want my kids getting sick and crapping all over themselves."

"Don't worry," said Dave, who didn't need that kind of fun either, "I have a filter."

Tony and Dave walked to the stream together, as silently as they could. Dave looked at Tony. He was pretty good at moving in the forest. "You a hunter, Tony?"

"Yeah, black powder and some archery. Why?"

"You move like a hunter."

After filling their bottles, Tony and Dave went back to the camp. Dave asked Tony to lead the way, and he did, going directly back to the small opening. Dave said to Tony "You go first so Rhonda doesn't shoot me."

Tony whispered "OK. I wish our radioes worked." Dave grabbed him to stop him from crawling, and asked in a hushed tone "WHAT radios?"

"Oh, Rhonda and me got those family radios. The oldest kids, too. But the batteries are dead. We had them off of the charger 'cause the power was off and on."

Dave looked at him. "Let me see them when we get back to camp."

"Yeah, sure, what's the big deal?" and off he crawled, his SKS dragging in the dirt like a

short dogs long tail.

Dave examined the radios. Family Radio Service, or FRS, handhelds, small, but with rechargeable batteries. Dave asked and was told “We kept them on chargers at home, but with the bad power we unplugged them. I hoped they’d work, but the batteries are down. We was hopin’ to get batteries somewheres.”

Dave grinned, removed the solar charger from his pack, and told him “Keep these in the sun today and we’ll try to get the talkies up for tonight.”

“Great,” replied Tony, “this is sweet, and by sweet I mean totally cool.”

Dave gave further instructions to the couple, and suggested that they try to get the kids to rest as it would be another long night. He asked Tony and Rhonda about the kids clothes, and found that they had enough warm stuff to meet Dave’s approval. Knit hats, sweats, fleece jackets. Rhonda was concerned that they didn’t have gloves.

“Do they have extra socks?” asked Dave.

“Yeah, sure,” she answered with a curious look on her face.

“Then they can wear them as mittens,” said Dave.

Rhonda blinked three times, deliberately. “How do you think of this stuff?” she asked.

Dave slept for most of the rest of the day. He was awoken promptly at 11:30, and set up his radio, taking the time to deploy his expedient antenna, since he had the place and luxury of doing so. At exactly noon he heard the voice of his friend Scott come over the earpiece. “Freeland news had learned that the government is once again trying to smear the name of a great American and Patriot. Dave McGrath of Connecticut was framed for the murder of his in-laws and three Federal Stormtroopers. Witnesses to the scene, however, report that a police raid started before dawn. A neighbor, Mrs. Eleanor Buttinski,” Dave smiled wryly. That’s what Sandy and her folks called Mrs. Robidas across the street, “reported that Mr. Peterson greeted the raiders at the door, a “big gun” in one hand and a copy of the Constitution in the other. He got two at the door and fired at the police for several hours, killing at least five, Mrs. Buttinski reports, and wounding a lot more. Mr. McGrath’s wife was interviewed at their home in New Hampshire and had this to say ‘My husband is at work right now, but I can tell you there’s no way he would have harmed a hair on my parents heads if he was even down there. He’s a good, loving man, and I know he loved my parents as his own. I’ll tell him so when he comes back tonight.’” Scotts phony announcer voice continued, “So there it is, people. There are German troops setting up roadblocks on all the main roads and backroads of the New Hampshire border. Yes, Germans. This isn’t a half baked conspiracy theory. Already elements of the New Hampshire State Guard have engaged them at least twice in firefights as they pursued people across the border. 7-3-7-23-54-7-82-543-23-66-09.”

Dave struggled to write down the numbers.

“Now for a little musical entertainment.” Metallicas “Seek and Destroy” came on the air.

Dave shut it off. War was coming, and he didn’t want to hear that song again.

Using a card concealed in the battery compartment, Dave deciphered the message. “use the trails” it said. “The trails”. Dave considered it. He was given direct info that the UN troops were covering the roads. They must be road bound by mentality, Dave figured.

They'd use the trails. Dave took down his antenna, watched by the curious family. Rhonda asked, "What was that all about, Mr. McGrath?" Dave turned. "My name is Dave," he said simply. "OK, Dave. What was that all about?"

"My friends and I have a commo network. I can reach them at any time on our frequency. They broadcast to me every day at noon, because I move at night. It seems I was named as a suspect in a terrorist act in Connecticut, and they let me know, in code, that they knew it wasn't me. They let me know that things are OK back home. Just now they broadcast a special code to me, that I had to decipher. They told me, in so many words, that the UN goons have the roads covered, but that we should be OK on the trails. I know a few trails that are off of the beaten path that lead us right into southern New Hampshire, where we will be safe."

"I see," said Sandy, "Mr. Mc..I mean Dave, are you a survivalist?"

Dave couldn't help but smile, "Just a survivor, Rhonda, like you."

Dave was still tired, so he went back to sleep. Waking a few hours later, he repacked his ruck, and checked on the batteries in the charger. Julia was watching it, and moving it every so often to follow the dappled sunlight.

"My Mom said this was real important to do, but it's really boring," said the girl, keeping her voice low.

"It is important, Julia," answered Dave, "sometimes it's like that. Why don't you ask your Mom or Dad for two radios, would you?"

Julia jumped up and scampered off. Dave repacked the charger, and got the charged set of batteries from his pack. Tony came over with all four radios. "Lets try two out, Tony," said Dave, "By the way, my name is Dave."

Tony nodded, "Rhonda told me. It's nice to meet you."

"And you. Lets load these puppies up and see what we've got."

The radios worked fine. They settled on a frequency, and Dave explained that they would change to that frequency plus three if there was interference or if they used the radio to talk. Dave didn't want to get DF'd. Turning off both of them, Dave placed one near his pack. "Tony?"

"Yeah, Dave?"

"Let's not use the call button that makes the loud beep, OK?"

"Yeah, sure Dave," said Tony as he walked away.

Dave held a meeting shortly before dusk.

"I wanted to go over what's going on. My friends have told me that the only way is on trails, which is what I was going to do anyway. I know of four trails that we can reach in one to two days, we're trying to get to the closest for now. The kids need to move between you guys. I'm not going to carry Cindy Lou Hoo tonight, I need to be on point and it's not the safest place for her. Have Jake help with her. Jake?" Jake nodded. "You need to be a man now, and if anything happens to your folks and me take the kids back the way we came. Tommorrow we should have batteries for your radio, so we can talk to you, but for tonight, follow the backtrail for as far as you can go, then wait. One of us will come for you. If we can't, wait there a day, and walk to the east, where the sun comes up. There's houses and a town about two miles over that way. Follow the road south, towards the sun. It's the best I can do if that happens. It's going to be cold tonight,

but remember it will be warm moving, so start out a little chilly, but keep your jackets in the tops of your packs, OK?" the kids all nodded. "Rhonda, you in the middle, behind the kids. Tony, you're tail end charlie. Watch the rear, watch for straggling kids, and remember, I have a radio, so we can talk. If I make contact..." he looked at their blank faces, "If I get shot at, high tail it past your Dad and go the way we came for 5 minutes. Tony, you let them through, give me a minute, and then follow them. When you hook up, go right for 500 yards and wait an hour for me. We'll try to use the radios, but if you think it's me, make an animal noise."

"What kind?" asked Tony.

"I don't care. A zebra, an giraffe, an owl..."

Cindy laughed. "Giraffes don't make a sound, Mister McGwath. They told us in school."

"Really?" asked Dave, "the only thing I know about them is why their necks are so long."

"Why are their necks so long," asked the child.

Dave winked. "Cause their feet stink."

The family laughed. "You're silly, Mister McGwath," the little girl said.

"Well, what animal?" Dave asked, returning to topic.

"I can quack like a duck," said Jake.

"Fine. I hear you quack- I'll 'moo' like a cow. Don't shoot me, Tony."

"I'll try not to," said a grinning Tony.

"Equipment check in ten," said Dave.

"What's that mean?" asked Julia.

"It means pack your stuff and get ready, ding-a-ling," answered Jake.

"Well, I don't talk Army," was Julia's retort.

Before they left, Dave repacked everything in his pack. He then spoke to Rhonda, who brought over the family cookware. Discussing the kids palates, Dave and Rhonda decided on a large can of SpaghettiO's, to which Dave added a spaghetti MRE. Using two esbit tablets, Dave lit them in a small hole he had dug with his hands. The medium sized enamel pan Rhonda carried was just about full, and after what seemed like a long wait, finally started bubbling over. Seeing that the others were fed, Dave took the remaining food and ate it from his canteen cup. After eating, they cleaned their plates and repacked. The kids put on their bags, Rhonda shrugged under the weight of her pack, and Tony gave Dave a thumbs up from the rear.

Feeling warm and satisfied, Dave led them from their secluded forest getaway and into the perils of the night.

Chapter 12

Dave led the family north. They trekked for an hour when Dave finally called a halt. He wanted to give the kids time to rest and drink. He asked Rhonda to check their feet, and make sure they drank some filtered water. After 15 minutes he headed out again. Movement was slow, as moving in the dark in the woods usually is. The clear, crisp night sky provided a little light, but it was not bright. Eventually Dave cut across a trail that was not on his map. It ran in a roughly northerly direction. Dave looked up and down the trail, then took a knee. Listening for a few minutes, he heard Rhonda and the kids struggling through the grasping branches of the wood. Dave smiled for an instant. The kids were doing really well. It was rough going for a kid in terrain like this in the dark, and they weren't complaining one bit. As they stepped onto the trail, Dave hissed to them "Over here." They walked a few paces to him, and Dave said, "Take a seat." They sat without a sound.

Rhonda came over, and took off her pack. Dave, too, dropped his pack. Leaning close to Rhonda, Dave whispered, "I'm going to scout the trail. Keep the kids warm and have Tony cover the back door." "OK," whispered back Rhonda. Dave, unburdened by his pack, started up the trail. He felt a chill as the damp on his back, from where the pack touched him, was cooled by the night air. Shivering for a second, he followed the trail slowly for ten minutes, stopping twice to listen for unusual and out of place sounds. Deciding he had gone far enough, Dave stepped behind a tree that was on a corner of the trail. He could keep his trail to his immediate rear and look down towards unexplored territory. He stood for a few minutes, the only sounds merely winds in the trees and dead but unfallen leaves rustling from their branches. He removed his hat and cupped his ear, as before. Listening intently, he was about to return to the family when he heard something that caught his attention. He strained with all his being to make it out, but the sound eluded him. Replacing his hat, Dave stepped back onto the track and cautiously moved forward another 50 feet, and again removed his boonie and cupped his hand. 'Clink'. Definitely something unnatural. An e-tool on rock? Maybe. He listened for a moment, and the noise repeated itself. Dave moved up another 30 feet and repeated the action. More noises, another muffled 'clink'. Definitely something. Dave felt he needed to know what was going on. Was it a picket line being set up? Minefield? Were they stringing wire to channel refugees? Road block? Dave knew there was a road ahead. What was going on? He had to find out.

Crouching and duck walking, Dave made his way forward. Soon he saw white light through the trees ahead, and heard the voices more clearly. A loud 'clunk' and a laugh, then a loud voice that said something indecipherable. Dave crept closer still. He considered his options, and decided to keep going. Creeping forward on his knees and one hand, he kept his rifle ready. Dave felt the footsteps before he heard them, his left hand on the ground feeling the 'thump' reverberating through the soil. He dropped silently in place as a shadow loomed over him. Tensing, Dave watched as the man stopped and half-turned away from the trail. Lit cigarette in his mouth, the man unzipped his fly and took care of his business no more than five feet away from Dave. He took a few puffs of his smoke, and flicked the butt out into the woods. 'Dumbass' thought Dave.

Such a careless act could set the whole wood on fire. A voice called out, and the man answered in a guttural tongue that Dave thought was German. 'Son of a (you know what)' Dave said to himself. The man finished and turned to go. Dave was up faster than he realized, bringing the Belgian designed rifle up over his shoulder and before the German's brain registered a noise behind him, Dave smashed the buttstock down on the man's head, where it met the spine. The man dropped like a rock. Dave brought the rifle down again, on his temple. Then he whipped out his Spyderco and stabbed downward using an ice pick grip, and plunged the blade up to its hilt into the mans temple. Breathing deeply, Dave looked down. The man was clearly dead, his head slightly misshapen in the dim light.

He turned as a voice called form the road. "Uder? Uder?" Dave heard a man walking towards him. The man called out with words Dave didn't understand-Hogans Heroes German was all he knew-and kept coming, pausing to light a cigarette of his own. "Uder, was is los? Dumpkof." Finally something Dave understood. Dave shifted right, screened by a small tree, hopefully enough to break up his dim outline. That, coupled with the fact that the man just held a flaming lighter inches from his eye, gave Dave what he hoped was an edge. The man tripped over the unfortunate Uder in short order. Regaining his footing, the man kicked him, laughing. Another blast of unintelligible words, except Dave heard "arshlock", and knew what that meant. The soldier bent over his supine companion, "Uder?" he bent lower and Dave played smash the German, round two. This time he pounded the guy's head a few extra times, as his Spyderco was still embedded in Uders thick Bavarian skull. Dave stepped over them and took a knee, watching the white light. He saw no shadows, heard no noises. Dropping prone, he started crawling and stopping, crawling and stopping, listening for someone else. He finally made the road. Parked before him with its headlights on was what Dave thought by its shape was a German Jeep like he saw on the highway. Sleeping in the front with his boots on the dash was another soldier, wrapped in a parka. Dave stepped towards him. The man stirred at Dave's steps on the road, and spoke without opening his eyes "Uder," he began, and then spoke a string of words Dave didn't catch. Dave looked around, and saw an open tool kit next to a flat tire. Conveniently there was a large hammer lying on the ground next to it. Dave picked it up, a wrench clinking to the ground. "Uder, blah blah blah," spoke the man. Dave walked up to him. "It's not Uder, its Dave," said McGrath, and swung the hammer.

Dave cleaned up the scene a bit, and turned off the trucks lights. He radioed Tony and asked him to come up the path with Daves ruck, if he could do it. Dave would meet him on the path.

Dave took his pack from a puffing Tony, thanking him. He took him aside and said, "I got us a truck."

"How?" asked an awed Tony.

"The previous users no longer need it."

A pause. "OK, what are we going to do?"

Dave smiled in the dark, "Road trip."

Dave led the family back up the trail, encouraging them with the thought of a ride. Dave had stripped the men's bodies of everything. They had three G-36's, 22 magazines for them, and an MG-3 mounted on top of the truck with 600 rounds. Dave would play with their radios later, there were several in the vehicle. Tony repacked and stowed the tools in the back, and then he and Rhonda rounded up the kids.

Dave was consulting some captured maps under the light of the firefly. "I think we can make it a few miles tonight. This road here, " he said, pointing to a spot on the map, "was never paved. It's used as a bike path, and it doesn't pass too closely to any roads. We can take it to here, where it ends in a park. We can ditch it there and keep walking, it will put us ten miles ahead of where we would be otherwise."

Tony spoke up, "I thought the roads were dangerous?"

"They are," answered Dave.

"Then aren't we better off walking?"

"No, for several reasons. One is that at our present rate we'll be out of food before we get there. The other is that the kids are exhausted, and we can cover ground more quickly and hopefully cut a day of travel and cross the river without much trouble. Also, one of the guys here had this map, which showed checkpoints. The next one is a mile from where we are going, but further on. If we meet any other vehicles we'll just wave and keep going. That's why we're going to wear their jackets."

"OK, that's reasonable. I hope you're right."

'So do I' thought Dave.

Dave tuned the German radio, and found that the second one he tried would broadcast on his group's emergency freq. He keyed the mike "CQ, CQ, CQ, this is 2NS1, 2NS1, calling 4P3A, 4P3A, come in, over."

Dave waited a moment to hear the reply. "2NS1 this is 4P3A, read you 7 by 4, go ahead, over."

"Every thing OK, 4 of Spades, 7 of Clubs, and Foxes in the Henhouse. Over."

"Copy you 4 of Spades, 7 of Clubs, foxes, Over."

"2NS1, out."

He changed the frequency on the German radio and sat back. The first number set was his ETA, the second let the group know he had 6 people with him. Clubs for extra personnel (they were hoping for his in laws to be with him), foxes of course were occupying troops. He had kept the transmissions short and to the point for safety reasons. If the military could "DF", or direction find, him, based on his transmission, they could dispatch troops after him. Dave didn't know if they were to that point yet, but he wasn't going to chance it. Since he would soon be several miles from here, he chanced the contact.

Dave hid Rhonda, the kids, and their packs under the German gear. The three Germans had been carrying mermite cans of hot food, probably to the next checkpoint. Dave decided they'd eat later. Driving with lights on made Dave feel especially vulnerable, but he knew that he would be more suspicious driving without lights or under blackout lights would create suspicion. He made the turnoff he wanted in less than ten minutes, and was soon stopped in front of a locked gate. Leaving the vehicle running, he got out and examined the gate. Steel tubes, square in profile, a heavy chain, and a Master Lock. Dave

went back to the rear of the vehicle, where Tony was both speaking to his kids and watching their backs.

“Tony, can you look at the gate and tell me if you think we can open it?”

“Sure,” Tony answered. He kissed his wife and went around to the front.

“How are you guys doing?” inquired Dave.

“OK, I guess,” said Rhonda, “The kids are a little cold, but this beats walking.”

“It sure does. If they need to go let them, but don’t wander off, all right?”

“Sure Dave, sure.” Dave heard a creaking, and turned to look up front. There was no gate blocking their path. He met Tony at the front. “That was quick,” Dave said, “how’d it go?”

Tony laughed, “There was a key under a fake rock at the bottom of the gate post.”

Dave laughed, “I’ll pull through, lock it behind us. Keep the key.”

They drove as far as they could using only the blackout lights. The only iffy part was crossing an old railroad trestle that spanned a steep banked river-Dave had been dreading having to ford it. The truck barely fit, and he had Tony guide him while Rhonda and the kids crossed on foot. Once over the bridge they loaded back up and drove to a small park. From the park the path continued, eventually reaching the terminus where several trails branched out, some going in loops, one a fitness trail, and several connected to longer trails, including two that went to New Hampshire. One of these routes is what Dave had intended to take. He had hiked both ways previously, but this trail was a little more off of the beaten path, and had several side trails that led to scenic vistas, ponds, and a small waterfall. He felt that the side trails would offer escape and evasion routes and better opportunities to find secure campsites. It also had more water sources.

The park where they left the truck, though, was about a mile south of this. From this area, too, several trails broke off, including one that went Northwest to Western Massachusetts and then Vermont.

They went over the vehicle as best they could. Dave disabled the radios, he would have to skip going over them and settle for wrecking them. While suggesting to Rhonda and Tony that they feed the kids from the mermite, Dave drained the oil from the engine into one of the mermite cans lids. He did this by pounding his knife through the oil pan and making a hole. From the deceased Germans backpack he secured two heavy flectarn ponchos. Using the shovel from the trucks tool kit, he had Tony help him dig a hole in the woods. He wrapped the MG-3 and one G-36 in a poncho, after covering them with motor oil. He then wrapped the other poncho over that package, and buried them with the ammo. He camo’ed the hole as best he could under the circumstances. Salvaging what they could from the truck, they refilled all of their water bottles from two cans carried with the food, and added the few US made MRE’s in the truck to their packs. From the packs they also salvaged a Flectarn poncho, some esbit tablets and a stove for Tony, some para cord, toilet paper, a couple of butane lighters, a pocket knife, a compass and fixed bladed knife for Tony, and the two other G-36’s and 14 magazines for Tony and Rhonda. Dave discussed switching their rifles out with those of the Germans, and finally convinced them that they were better off with the H&K rifles. Dave suggested giving Jake the SKS to carry and Julia, the older girl, the 10/22. Julia was reluctant to carry the gun, stating very loudly to her Mother, “It’s heavy and I hate shooting and I don’t want to do it.”

As Dave was nearby, he leaned over and said, quietly, "Julia, we really need you to do this and to help out your folks."

Julia immediately clammed up and nodded her assent, taking the rifle from her mother and hurrying away from Dave.

"You sure have a way with the kids, Dave," said Rhonda, "What did you say to them?" "I don't know, Rhonda, I've never really talked to them outside of yours or Tony's presence. If I find out, though, I'm using it on my kids." They both chuckled quietly together.

They carried the German rucks away from the truck and buried them, too, more to deny their recovery by the U.N. troops than for a real hope of saving them before the ravages of weather destroyed them. Some pieces of gear they used, stuffing them into their packs for later. Ammo pouches, canteens, a first aid kit, two G-36 cleaning kits. A couple of smoke grenades and six fragmentation grenades. Tony quickly poured a few handfuls of sand from a nearby sandbox into the fuel tank of the truck, and they set out up the path. Moving with purpose, they made good time. It took Dave a few minutes searching in the dark to find the right trail, but they were soon on their way. The going got steep in several places, with Dave and the couple helping the children up the more difficult points. They managed about three miles, turning roughly West down a side trail that led to a clear pond, which was another four miles or so. Dave knew of another trail that branched from the one they were on, that led to an old farm site. Nothing remained but a few apple trees and a foundation, and the path to it was nearly grown over. That's where Dave planned on laagering. As they moved dawn approached. First the air got still, and slowly they began to see more of their surroundings, in grey and blacks. Slowly they could distinguish colors, and the birds started their song again. Stopping for a breather for the kids, Dave ensured them that they were a half-hour or so away from a day's rest. Rucking up again, they set off, Dave concerned because of the ever rising sun.

Within 25 minutes they had reached the area Dave had in mind. He dropped his ruck and asked Tony to once again watch their back trail. He did a quick recon of the area, and found a dry spot between a stand of Rhododendrons and a copse of small pine trees. He moved the family into the small area with a noted sense of urgency. He didn't like to be exposed in the daylight like he was.

After setting up shelter with the now three ponchos, Dave ate some of the German food that Rhonda had thoughtfully saved for him in her enamel cook pot.

"I saw you didn't eat, Dave, and thought you'd like some."

Dave agreed that he would, and thanked her sincerely. He was famished. While Dave ate hungrily, he watched the family lay out their sleeping pads and bags. The girls went into the pines for a few minutes, and came back dressed in dry sweats. The men changed while the girls were gone. "Dave," said Rhonda when she came back, "I know why the kids have been so good."

Dave looked at her quizzically. "When you told them about the Indians scalping us if they caught us, somehow they heard that YOU would scalp them. They've been afraid to get you upset ever since."

Dave looked at her confused, "I'd never hurt them..." he began. "I know you wouldn't," said Rhonda, smiling, "but this is the best they've ever acted. Let's not tell them until

tomorrow, all right?"

Dave nodded his assent, yawning, "Sure. Let's look at your rifles and I'll tell you how they work. Then I'm going to sleep. We can make a guard roster and rotate, but I'm going to drop if I don't crash right away."

Rhonda and Tony sat with Dave and he went over their new rifles. One was a G-36K, the short barreled model. Dave hadn't noticed last night in the dark. He made sure that Rhoda was assigned the "K", as it was marginally lighter and more compact with the stock folded. He showed them the dual-purpose sights, and went over loading, reloading, and sighting. He emphasized that they should never use the full auto feature, as it would drain their limited ammo supply and endanger their kids. They worked out a guard schedule in which Dave would be awakened at 11:45 for his daily radio contact. And then, Dave slept, his dreams haunting him with the sounds of Uders skull breaking, the hammer blows, and the smell of burnt flesh from his in-laws house.

Chapter 13

Dave awoke groggily at 11:45, Tony shaking him gently. “Dave, it’s a quarter ‘til. We’ve got a problem, too.”

That got Dave’s attention. “What is it?”

“We keep hearing voices from the main trail. Kids and grown ups, a dog once. Rhonda has a radio, she’s watching the way we came.”

“That’s good,” said Dave, lacing up his boots, “After I make radio contact, let’s make sure the kids are ready to go quickly if we need to.”

Dave fished out his transceiver and listened at Noon. “Got your message” was all the voice said. Then Dave heard the melody of Patsy Cline singing “Walking After Midnight”. Dave smiled. He sure was. He listened to the song he liked so much, and then repacked his radio. No brevity code, no alert song, no problems back at home.

After checking and re-packing the ponchos, Dave explained that he was going to look for a better spot to camp, further away from the trail, as hearing the traffic they were, even so little of it, was unnerving.

He gave Tony a running password, and with his canteen attached to belt loop via a carabiner, reapplied camouflage cream to his face, and left the campsite. He moved easily through the light underbrush of the old home site. He passed the old foundation, the cut granite front step partially covered by a lilac bush, a remnant of forgotten dreams and ambitions. Places like this usually made Dave melancholy, as he remembered the farms of his youth now covered with asphalt, sod, and poorly constructed houses. He had no time for reminiscing now, he was all business as he moved as if back on point in the DMZ, every step a potential trip wire, every movement a potential enemy. He continued for 20 minutes, finding a likely spot partially obscured by a large rock outcropping and a large patch of briars, down slope from the old homestead. As he made his way back to the family, he heard voices-loud voices. It sounded like a large group of people out for a holiday or picnic. Dave hustled over to a fallen log and took a position behind it. He had a fair view of a clearing that Dave assumed was once a barnyard in better times. He saw them come into view one at a time. A dozen or more people, all carrying gaudily colored packs, reds, bright blue, several of fluorescent orange. Dave recognized the cut. All the packs were finest quality and popular with the urban hiker. They were calling out to each other in voices that echoed throughout the forest.

Dave cringed. He heard one call out “How about we stop here and have lunch?”

“Yeah, sounds good,” called a voice from the front.

The group met in the middle of the clearing, and Dave could see that they were armed. AR-15’s with scopes, an HK-91 or two, a couple of what looked like Bennelli shotguns, nothing low cost or second string, from a money standpoint. There were eight men and male teenagers, all equipped with pistols in drop leg holsters. The entire group dropped their packs and a group of them started to noisily collect firewood. One had a small axe on his pack, a sleek affair with a black plastic handle. He started merrily hacking away at a nearby standing Oak tree. Some of the women yelled to the men “How about some rocks?”

“Yeah, sure”, rang a voice. Soon the group had a fire ring with a fire blazing in it, smoke

curling lazily to the clear, crisp Autumn sky. Dave had one thought ‘These idiots have a death wish’. He remembered his friend Scott’s stories from when he spent three months in Afghanistan fighting with the Mujihadeen against the Russians-any sign of camp fires were often bombed from the air indiscriminately. If the U.N. Forces were actually looking for stragglers and refuges, they could conceivably drop in heliborne troops to investigate, or set up blocking forces, or just bomb them, which Dave didn’t think they would do. Yet. He watched as the group below him, who Dave had Christened the ‘Knuckleheads’, started cooking their lunch. Freeze dried ration packages soon littered the area as the ‘knuckleheads’ cast their trash aside with wild abandon. Dave could only shake his head as he watched a few of them construct a makeshift shelter for a latrine. One passed around a bottle of something Dave was sure wasn’t medicinal around. He watched one check what must have been a GPS receiver and discuss the readout with another. They were both pointing in opposite directions. Dave toyed with the idea of making contact with the clown circus, but decided against it. Six extras were enough. These people had no small children, and were making no attempt whatsoever at maintaining a tactical presence. He felt no real obligation to them. Dave slowly low crawled away from the party and almost silently made his way back to his concerned wards.

“Dave, what’s going on?” asked a concerned Tony.

“A group of folks bugging out. Look like big money idiots from the city. Think they can throw money at something and not need experience. I’d take you and your SKS over all of them and \$3000.00 pre bans any day.” Dave looked around. “Call Rhonda, let her know we’re leaving. We’ll recall her just when we are ready to go.”

Tony woke up the kids, and they packed their kit quickly. A few of the kids had to ‘use the woodline’, so to speak. After completing that, they called in Rhonda and rucked up.

Dave led them downhill, away from the party. They were off trail, and moved slowly and carefully, seeking stealth not speed. Eventually they broke for a breather. Tony looked up at the trees and said, “Dave, how about this spot?”

Dave, sitting on his pack drinking from his canteen, looked around and said “Sure.” They couldn’t hear the festival of all fools up the hill, and were under decent cover. Dave told Rhonda and Tony that he would stand watch and they could feed the kids. Dave mentioned the esbit stove they had captured from the Germans, and Tony smiled. “Hot stuff for lunch?”

“Go ahead,” said Dave, “just no fun.”

Rhonda laughed, “Or you’ll scalp us?”

Dave grinned, “Yup.”

Dave took his pack a little ways up hill and laid his pack down. He took out the solar charger and placed it in a sunny spot. Laying behind the pack, he remained alert for unusual noises or out of place movement. He remained there for several hours, enjoying the solitude of the place and wishing he was home and that things were normal.

Eventually, Tony came up to where he was. “Dave, you want a break?”

“Sure, Tony,” Dave whispered back. “How do you like the new rifle?”

“It’s nice, this thing probably costs more than my car.”

“Well, it’s no good if you can’t use it. Those idiots up there are going to get captured or killed, all the fancy crap in the world won’t help them.”

Tony leaned into Dave, “How much longer, do you figure?”

Dave considered. “Three or four days, five at the most. We may be tight on food, but once we get there we can get a ride. Where were you planning on going? Relatives or friends?”

Tony looked away for a moment then back at Dave, “No, we don’t have anyone or anything to go to. We just knew they would come for me, so we split. Kind of figured we’d wing it when we got there. Staying out of jail was the first thing we was worried about.”

Dave looked away. “Well, I can probably put you up for a bit, and introduce you to a few folks. If you are as good a mechanic as you said the night I met you, you’ll have plenty of work.”

Tony brightened, “That’d be great, Dave. That’s really good of you to do that for me and the kids and Rhonda. But we still have to get there.”

Dave nodded. “There is that. Do you want to learn how to strip your rifle?”

“Sure.”

“OK, first, unload and clear it....”

Dave listened with rapt attention as Scott talked about the airstrike.

“We were on a hillside,” he said, his animated style of story telling keeping all eyes in the bar locked on him, “and we were hiding in this cave. Well, these idiots we were supposed to link up with were camped across the valley. We had met with them but I didn’t like the look of them. They had rusty rifles and smelled like hashish. So I told Amir Khan that there was no way I was spending the night with those pirates, so we climbed up the mountain to a cave where we kept the missiles. So here we are, sitting in this cave, shivering in the cold, and these doofuses have a big fire going like it’s bonfire day at the beach. We’re talking to ourselves about the mission—we were gonna ambush a supply column coming to relieve the fort we had under siege—and we hear a jet, way up high, out of Stinger range. Then we hear whistling go past. Walid pushed me down and then WHOOM!” he yelled, splashing beer from his mug, his hands telling the story as much as his words, “the whole freaking hillside across the valley goes up. Musta dropped a whole load from a Frogfoot,” referring to the Soviet SU-25, loosely a copy of the venerable American A-10, “We had stuff falling all over our mountain,” his eyes got a faraway look. “Body parts, rocks, what was left of an RPK-74. Came down like rain.” Everyone was quiet. Then he looked up, “And the next night the group I was with wanted to build a frigging fire in the open! I said ‘What, are people nuts? Do you have any idea why your pals across the valley got turned into martyr hamburger last night?’ and they just looked at me. Inshallah, they said. God’s will. I told them God made them stupid, if that’s how you feel. Half these guys are head and shoulders above any other guerilla fighter in history, the rest are knuckleheads, 144% dumb*ss. The only thing is, they’re beating the Russians.”

A blond from campus spoke up “Why are the Russians losing?”

“Two things,” said Scott, giving her the once over. Potential here, he thought, “One,

they're using draftees who don't want to be there and who's only goal is to survive their tour. The other is the 'Ghanis are too stubborn to give up.'

While Daves mind drifted, events were stirring elsewhere. Back in New Hampshire, his friends were listening to the radio. Most normal work was infrequent now, with society holding its breath. Even in New Hampshire, where the power came from one nuclear power plant and hydro power from Quebec, there was trouble supplying all of the needs of industry. The pressure on the states that had declared themselves beyond the UN mandates and oppressive federal government was substantial. Governors were alternately threatened with prison and lengthy sentences and cajoled with empty promises of Senate seats and more power. Fortunately real men and women of courage had emerged, as they often do in crisis. Dave's own governor was an example of this. Once criticized for being wishy-washy on tough issues, he stood up to the Federal government on TV and declared that he was not going to give up the citizens of New Hampshire and their God given rights for all the power of God.

"I will no more sacrifice the precious liberty of the citizens of my state to the current regime in Washington than I would to hollow mandates from the United Nations. Their freedoms are not mine to sell, for any price. My oath as governor stated quite clearly that my job is to protect the rights of citizens. I have no power to abrogate those rights, under any situation or circumstance. The United States Government in Washington D.C. has no more power to take away or curtail our rights to free travel, free association, or any other blessing of Liberty recognized by our Founding Fathers than it has to sell oil rights on Mars.

As of this morning, I have ordered the mobilization of the State Defense Force and the militia. Right now we are calling for all male citizens between the ages of 17 and 62 to report to their town halls, police stations, fire stations, state police barracks, former National Guard armories, and other places to be announced locally, for enlistment in militia companies. We would suggest that each person have at their disposal one firearm of military utility. Lists of equipment needed are being developed and will be sent to all towns in the state for dissemination. As of this moment I am declaring this state a gun control free state. No citizen of this state is subject to any federal firearms law. The General Assembly is right now passing a law invalidating all state laws concerning firearms.

No peaceable person shall be debarred the right to keep and bear arms. Period.

Further, it has come to the attention of this office that there are a number of otherwise peaceable people trying to reach our fair state to take advantage of our freedoms. We welcome them with open arms. The representative of any agency interfering with the safe passage of persons across our borders will be dealt with in the harshest possible manner. I implore the President and our Congress in Washington D.C. to expel the foreign troops, over 100,000 so far, that have landed in our country. Return our government to a sound fiscal policy. Return to us our Constitutional Republic, that we entrusted to you and you stole. We demand it. We will live that promise of freedom, whatever your mandates, whatever price we must bear.

Our license plates bear a motto, and we will follow that promise- 'Live Free or Die'. And so we will."

“Good night, and may God Bless the Republic, and the great state of New Hampshire.”

Dave’s group was in an uproar. Some wanted to launch attacks against the German troops in Massachusetts immediately, some wanted to go to town and help organize the militia. “We don’t need them,” stated Steve forcefully, “with all the training we’ve done we can operate independently. Taking on a bunch of amateurs will slow us down and compromise us. I vote for leaderless resistance.”

“I disagree,” said Jim, “we need to develop an Army with coordination of effort-decentralized for certain, but without coordination all of our effort will be wasted, effort duplicated. No army has ever won a war without central leadership. Supply, communication, support we will need soon enough, and we can’t do that alone.”

The debate continued well into the night. Eventually they decided they would offer their services to the state, provided they could remain together as a unit. The first concern was their families. They would go around and check to ensure they had enough food and fuel to get through to Spring. They needed to inventory food, medicines, fuel, lamp oil, female hygiene items, everything. Although individually against collectivism, they would redistribute what they had amongst themselves for the sake of their families. They had enough ammunition to fight the war alone, and the number of guns they owned between themselves would have given UN weapons inspectors fits. But they were only 9. For now.

With the night, rested, well fed, and ready, Dave and his charges left the shelter of the forest and again took to the trail. They made good time over the hilly terrain, as the trail was clear and the path well traveled. They proceeded up the spur trail and again headed north. They continued on this path for several hours, taking breaks as needed. The children were bearing the march well, again better than Dave had a right to expect. He hoped their fear of him didn’t manifest itself into hate. But, he reasoned, they had parents that were, by all means, good and loving, and that went a long way too. Further than fear. They cleared the second large hill, not quite in mountains yet, and out front Dave saw something that made him stop in his tracks. A campfire, burning brightly, in the saddle below him, off to the right. Apparently there was a clearing there, and people were burning a fire, or all things. Dave would have bet it was those noisy clowns from the early afternoon.

Dave decided to wait. He didn’t want to detour, but he didn’t want these rank amateurs to draw fire, too. He called the group over to him, and laid it out.

“We can try to get past them quickly, or we can detour. But we’ll have to cut pretty far out to get ahead of these folks. If we go past them we’ll need to push it 100% and still be cautious as we can be.”

Rhonda and Tony looked at each other and nodded. “We’ll try to stay as fast as we can, Dave. Right kids?”

A murmur from the children reinforced their Fathers word.

“O.K. Let’s make sure you kids stay with Mom and Dad. Tony, I’ll have a radio, as will you and Rhonda. I’m going to go first, don’t try to keep up. When I get to the top of the next hill I’m going to check it out, drop my pack, and come back for you guys to help.”

“Sure Dave.”

“If anything happens, I’ll call you. If it sounds like I’ve been taken out, we’ve been over the maps, you can go north, you can defend ourselves. If I hear you in trouble, I’ll come running. Don’t be afraid to drop your packs and run. You can survive without your packs, so remember that.”

“We will” said Rhonda emphatically.

“Drink a little water, go if you have to, and follow me.”

Dave set out at a quick pace, trying to make time without sacrificing stealth. He was sure he’d be up and back before the family reached the bottom of the saddle. As he progressed towards the branch trail the must be there, for otherwise the clown posse wouldn’t have made camp where they did, he slowed. He was glad he did as he saw lighter flare about 200 yards down hill from him. He dropped his ruck quietly and called Tony on the radio.

“Family Guy, it’s Boone” he called.

“Go ahead,” came the reply.

“I dropped my pack short of the saddle. Look for the luminous tape on the inside of the frame, it should be facing you as you come down. There’s someone down here, I’m going to check them out.”

“Roger” Tony answered tersely.

Dave entered stealth mode as he carefully made his way down the hill. He heard them talking long before he got there, two voices chatting in the dark. He cautiously made his way towards them, and took cover behind a convenient boulder.

“Hey!” he hissed. The voices stopped.

“Who’s there?” one called.

“A friend,” was Dave’s answer.

“Well come out, if you’re a friend.” He heard one man trying to sneak around.

“Tell your pal to stop trying to circle me and come out in the open and I will.”

“How do we know we can trust you?” asked the disembodied voice.

“You don’t. But if I wanted to I could have opened up on you instead of hailing you, right?” replied Dave.

The voice seemed to be considering it. “Alright, Mikey, come out and we’ll see this guy,” the voice called out after a minute.

Dave heard Mikey breaking brush and saw him come out onto the trail below him. Dave took a deep breath and stood up. “Over here,” he called, his rifle pointing at them, safety off, finger on the trigger. The two men had their weapons slung assault style but the muzzles were pointed downwards as they approached him. Dave stepped towards them.

“Who are you?” asked the voice in charge.

“Just a wayward traveler, like you.”

“Where you headed?”

“Past you. I just want to go up the trail and no trouble.”

Silence. “We’ll need to check and see what we’re gonna do with you.” Came the reply.

“OK,” said Dave, I’ll wait here.”

The man spoke into a radio.

“Yeah, he just wants to pass by, he says.....no, just a rifle.....I’ll see.”

“Where’s your pack, mister?”

“I left it up the trail.”

“He left it up the trail.....OK, hold on.”

“you military, pal? Boss wants to know.”

Dave answered “I was once, but now I’m just a citizen who wants to go home.”

“Where you from?”

“New Hampshire.”

“Hold on. Boss, this is Roger, he says he’s ex military and going home to New Hampshire.....I’ll see.”

“Who were you with?”

“I was with the 82nd Airborne, and tell your boss I’m getting tired of playing games. Either let me pass or fight.”

“No need to get testy,” replied the man whose name was Roger, “let me tell the boss”

“No need,” said a voice from behind him. Roger whirled “Jeez, don’t sneak up on me like that!”

Ignoring Roger and Mikey, the “Boss” walked straight up to Dave. “I’m in charge here. What is it you want?”

“I want to pass here without your boys shooting at me.”

“You solo?”

“Right now I am.” Said Dave, not wishing to expose his group just yet.

“Roger says you were 82nd Airborne, that right?”

“Yes,” said Dave, his patience getting thin, “Infantry. Who the heck are you and why are you blocking a public trail?”

“We’ll do what we have to to protect ourselves. Look, if you’re alone, you’ll be safer in a group. Would you be interested in visiting with us? We could help you get north and we could offer more protection than you have traveling alone.”

Dave answered quickly, “I’m only interested in passing here. What do you say?”

“If you don’t think we’re good enough...”

”I don’t care if you are all ex-Delta,” cut in Dave, “Can I pass or not?”

“Well, sure, it’s a free country.”

“I’m going to get my pack. I’ll be right back” said Dave. He trotted up the path radioed Tony quietly that he was coming towards them. He found the family crouched around his pack.

“I’m going back down. I’ll break squelch twice as a signal for you to come down the hill, OK?”

“OK” answered Tony.

“I’ll explain it all when I can,” said Dave, “but for now, I need to move.”

Dave returned carefully, but his caution was unnecessary. The three man were still in a cluster in the saddle. As Dave approached, the ‘Boss’ said “What’s your hurry? We have a lot to offer. And we’re traveling in the daytime, it’s a lot easier to see.”

To which Dave answered “Are you going to let me. pass?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” said the Boss, obviously put off by Davis brusque manner, “I was just saying.../”

”Well, I have a family with kids behind me. They are going to pass here,” Dave broke squelch twice, “in a minute. Please don’t disturb them.”

The Boss sounded bewildered, “I thought you were alone?”

“I was.” Said Dave. “But you took so long jawing that they caught up with me. They are

a little nervous, so just let them pass.”

Just then the footsteps of the family sounded on the trail. Watching the three men to ensure they made no moves for their weapons, Dave counted shapes in the dark.....3...4...5....6. After waiting a moment in silence, Dave said, “Let’s give them a few minutes, and I’ll fill you in on something.”

The ‘Boss’ shuffled on his feet.

“I don’t know who you are or why you are bugging out, but you clowns are going to get yourselves killed. You make too much noise when you travel. Your picnic this afternoon was a lesson in how to be found. If you are fugitives or escaping, you need to quit building fires, quit making noise, travel at night, and don’t put your security in the middle of a trail!”

The Boss sputtered, “you don’t understand.;...”

“Oh, I understand, all right. I watched you clowns at lunch, big fire, chopping down trees, and tonight I could see your fire from a mile away up the hill; it’s like a beacon saying ‘find me and kill me’ to anyone in a 15 mile area. You better think if you want to survive. Good luck. You’ll need it.” And Dave turned and stalked off.

Chapter 14

Ideas are more important than guns. If we wouldn't let our opponents have guns, why would we let them have ideas?

-Joseph Stalin, socialist

The next two days of travel passed uneventfully. They refilled their water several times, from streams that flowed free and clear down the hillsides. Dave either treated all water with purification tablets or used his filter. Even the most clean looking water could have Giardia cysts in it. Away from treatment and modern medicine, diarrhea could kill, as it did thousands of kids in the Third World every year.

Dave's radio reports came in as expected, all was well at home. While scanning the AM bands they heard the story of the Governor's speech, and the Federal response, which was to place more pressure on the state to accept foreign "security forces". Several other state legislatures followed suit the next day with declarations of their own. The talking heads from the mainstream media were calling for the removal of the politicians who had so obviously lost touch with 'the needs of the people', not seeing it was they who had lost that touch years before. All over America dividing lines were being drawn. As in the period leading up to the Civil War of the 1860's, this crisis had been brewing for years. The difference this time was that half the country was unaware it was even happening.

The American press, supposed bastion of freedom and truth, had long hence sold its soul. Controlled by a handful of wealthy liberals, and guided at the newsroom level by bigoted editors, the print media rarely offered more than a token glimpse of any viewpoint that differed from their skewed world view. On the issues of gun control, abortion, child rearing, homosexual 'marriage', welfare, taxes, and foreign aid, among other things, the view from the pressroom was vastly different from the view where Mr. and Mrs. America struggled to raise moral, decent families while being bombarded with bromides assailing their values and views daily. The press couldn't even see the irony in how they treated the last war. Mention was never made of the complacency and outright support the Muslim clergy in America gave to terrorists on our soil. American soldiers of the Islam faith who attacked American troops, aided and abetted prisoners, and even gave information to terrorists that allowed them to kill many more Americans were referred to as if they were aberrations, each broadcast and article taking time to explain that these people did not represent mainstream Islam. However as soon as an abortion clinic was bombed, an outspoken homosexual activist was murdered, a strange sect was caught starving their children, the perpetrators were depicted as being mainstream Christians, typically White. Never was mention made that these people were aberrations, never were their acts explained away, validated, or justified by a fawning press. When scandal rocked the Catholic Church, the crisis led the headlines for weeks. Little or no mention was made, however, on the fact that the majority of sex abusers were homosexuals. Don't want to offend the fairies, you know. Or maybe their 'orientation' wasn't really a factor.

Straight folks do it to, they maintained, although they failed to provide any figures for that claim. Better to destroy in institution of faith then offend perverts. When a male 'couple' kidnapped and molested a 13 year old boy, abusing him, killing him, and encasing his body in concrete, little mention was made, again, of the fact that the abuse was homosexual in nature. The story quickly faded to Section B, page 15. However the ups and downs of celebrity love affairs were front page news for weeks.

During the first Clinton Administration serious questions about the finance of his campaign, the Chinese connection, Lippo Group, his whoremongering and drug use, the sale of secret documents by State Department employees, and a host of other scandals were given word play then explained away, the party line never questioned. When he bombed Afghanistan and the Sudan on the same day testimony was being given that would implicate the President in perjury, the timing was not questioned. The press was not only guilty of aiding and abetting, they were the enablers, covering up scandal by giving legitimacy to every alibi or excuse, no matter how outrageous or unbelievable.

As the mainstream news media lost viewers, independent news organizations-'the loony right' according to the same mainstream press-experienced a surge in their audience. However the left wing activists and their well-oiled arapchek were effective in using the courts to their end. Lawsuits for slander, liable, and defamation of character drained the networks of money. The owners of said stations treated them as entertainment sources, not news sources, which undermined the credibility of their stories and employees. Eventually, members of the establishment left would not even appear on shows on these networks. The establishment right, as was typical, had no solidarity against the left and no real game plan to thwart the constant propaganda attacks and misinformation. In the last few years before foreign troops landed on U.S. soil, invited by a sitting U.S. President, it was only half jokingly suggested that the Republican Party was actually run by the Democrats to give the American people hope that there were two parties to vote for. Democrats supported abortion on demand, the Republicans abortion in some situations. The Democrats supported almost all gun control, the Republicans only some gun control. The Democrats wanted total control over Americas health care industry, the Republicans only wanted to nationalize part of it. Oh, and Dear God if the press actually called it 'nationalization'. Too Soviet. They were 'making health care available'. Newspeak. Winston Smith would be familiar with they way things were being done here. Hiding the reality behind a word. Gay went from meaning happy to meaning sodomite in a generation. Making health care available replaced theft. Replaced nationalization. Replaced slavery.

A large portion of America remained oblivious to what was going on around them. Like the characters of a science fiction movie unaware of another dimension sharing space with them, they swallowed the press' lies, or simply tuned out the constant repetition of lies, disconnecting from politics and policy, flotsam and jetsam in the tidal wave of society. Blissfully unaware, they would bleat loudly and vigorously if the obvious were pointed out to them. No time. Too busy cutting the lawn watching the game working to pay taxes pay bills being lobotomized by prime time T.V. to really get involved. Not my job, you know. My father was a democratRepublican apathetic fool and I am proud to be

the same. You're paranoid.

Others could read the writing on the wall. One only had to be a student of history to see the road ahead. When the Roman Patrician class became too self absorbed to defend itself, and the army filled with barbarians, Rome's fate was sealed. How can a society endure when it's own citizens, who reap its rewards, care not enough to defend it? In America, defense of the nation increasingly was viewed, by the establishment, as service one step above abortion clinic bomber. Every sacrifice, every hardship, was denigrated at every turn. The military was assaulted endlessly for the smallest mistake, the tiniest growing pain. Any good the military did was screened by the dust cloud of anger thrown up by the left. Most people had no idea what went on in the military, and had no concept of the military's good points or recent accomplishments. With the destruction of Americas middle class, which was the real strength of the country, America was quickly being reduced to just another socialist state, power being derived from the government owning the fruits of its subjects labor. With the nationalization of health care, the standardization of schools, the nationalization of utility services, and further expansion of the federal government into everything from banking to trucking, the nation was fast slipping into a mixture of socialism (where everything is owned by the state) and fascism (where privately owned companies are directed by the state). And the American public at large had no clue, nor did they care to.

The small percentage of the American public that did care was victimized by the press, but their claims to this truth were dismissed as being frivolous whining by those not concerned for 'the greater good'. They were not being represented by their elected officials. Well, we are a democracy, aren't we? They were elected fairly, weren't they? The schools were not teaching the fundamentals. Well, they are trained educators. What do you know about education? Home schooling? Parents aren't qualified to do that, and besides, it's the states job to indoctrina...we mean teach your kids. Firearms? The Founding Fathers didn't mean assault weapons, they meant muskets. And besides, they're for the National Guard. Of course they didn't mean hand cranked printing presses, too, don't be absurd. We control those, er, who was ever hurt by ideas, we mean?

As history demonstrates, you cannot for long suppress the free man. He will revolt, and either be free or dead. Either is preferable to slavery. You can destroy him, you can even enslave him. But as long as that spark of Liberty remains, imprinted deep in mans genetic code, those who seek it will find it.

"By the sword we seek peace, but peace only under Liberty"-Massachusetts state motto (ironic, no?).

Dave, Rhonda, and Tony were going over Dave's topographic maps, discussing their route for that evening.

"It looks like we'll cross the border tonight, it's about seven miles by the route we're taking."

"Will it be guarded?" asked Rhonda.

“We won’t know until we get there,” replied Dave, “but we’ll continue as before, with caution. I’ll walk point ahead of you, we’ll probably be pushing the range of the radios, but it should give us enough of a cushion should I run into anybody.”

Rhonda and Tony’s heads nodded.

“Before we move I’m going to let my friends know we’re coming. They can meet us as far south as they can go, maybe tomorrow we can ride the rest of the way in safety.”

Rhonda stated “That would be awesome, Dave.”

Tony nodded his assent, “I can’t believe we’re so close.”

They all reflected on the map. They had covered a lot of ground, given their situation.

The kids were holding up well. They had eventually decided that Dave wasn’t going to scalp them, and had warmed up to him again, although at times it seemed they had their doubts. But they had somehow adapted to keeping things as quiet as possible, and suffered the nightly walks in silence. The weather was still bright and clear, chilly in the daytime and cold at night. The further north they got, even at 10 or 15 miles a day, brought them closer to cold weather and higher in altitude. They were glad to be ahead of the cold weather that November would surely bring.

Packed and ready to go, the family, whose name Dave had only recently found out was Antonetti, waited for Dave to send his radio transmission. Dave was sitting on his pack, radio at his side, antenna strung up over a convenient branch. Using the code sheet he was carefully composing a message to his group. Rechecking his work, he put away the code and notebook, stowed his pencil stub, and picked up the radio.

“Angry Fellow 2-2, this is Minstrel 6-6, do you copy, over.”

Static.

“Angry Fellow 2-2, this is Minstrel 6-6, come in, over.”

A staticy voice answered, “Minstrel 6-6, this is Angry Fellow 4, go ahead, over.” Adding the last two numbers meant they were not under duress. Under duress, or someone trying to imitate his contact, would have used 2-2.

“Message follows, break” Dave let up on the key, and pushed a preset button, jumping to another frequency, per their SOP.

“1-547-9-8-15-21-13-13-54-11-75-65-65-33-81-20, over”

“6-6, I copy 1-547-9-8-15-21-13-13-54-11-75-65-65-33-81-20, over.”

“That’s correct. 6-6 out.” Dave shut off the radio, and signaled Tony and his family to move out. He then stowed the antenna, recovered his pack, and followed them into the twilight.

Their movement would take them through the last few miles of the state park they had laagered in that day. They followed another hiking trail for several miles. The further they got from the main park the more unused the trail seemed. After crossing a barbed wire fence into private land, they paralleled the property line, re-crossing the fence where the property line ended. Once again in the woods, they had to break brush for just over a mile to reach the next trail. Before reaching the trail they had to cross a road. Dave broke squelch twice, meaning stop. He then broke it once and after a slow three count again. He heard the family moving up to him fairly quietly. Dave and Tony leaned together so that their heads almost touched. “Road ahead,” said Dave, “I’ll do it like before, I’ll go first, check the road, cross and clear the far side, then let you know with three clicks. You

watch the road to you left, I'll watch it to mine, Rhonda will escort the kids over."
"I'll tell her."

Dave slowly approached the road, what he considered the most dangerous area to cross. They had seen no sign of any police or troops in the woods, although there had been a few helicopters flying over during the day. He stopped to listen. For five minutes he listened intently, hearing nothing. One good thing about the gas crisis-not much false alarm traffic. He cautiously approached the road, and lay down under the brush. Looking up and down the road he saw nothing. Pushing off with his arms, he rose to his feet and darted across the road, slowing before the far side shrubs and entering the wood line slowly. He turned and dropped his pack, and listened again. Nothing. He explored the far side, finding dark trees and silent plants. He keyed the radio, and returned to the road. Shortly after, Tony appeared, he and Dave taking their positions, an adaptation of a technique called "scroll to the road". Normally the security would be relieved by the next man in line, but tonight they would let the kids and Rhonda cross between them. The kids crossed in pairs, Jake leading little Jennifer, then Rhonda, then Julia and Carolyn. Giving them enough time to go into the woods about 50 yards, Tony ran across, his pack flopping against his back. After he passed, Dave left the roadside and entered the woods.

Recovering his pack, Dave again took the lead. They hit the trail after a half-hour of tough going. Dave called a halt to drink and treat more than a few scratches on arms, hands, and faces. They again took the trail as it curved around an old cemetery and then climbed another hill. This one took them across a spur that gave them a starlit view of the land beyond. "New Hampshire" Dave whispered. "This isn't paradise, but you can see it from here" he mused. Quickly crossing the spur, Dave followed the trail down to the first of several steep parts, where the trail seemed to end abruptly at rock ledges. The trail turned here, and the climb, up or down, was tricky. Dave lowered his pack down via 550 cord, and waited at the edge. Rhonda and the kids soon arrived. Dave pointed out the danger, and had Rhonda move the kids off trail a little way. With Tony covering, Dave made his way down the rock face and did a quick scout down the path a hundred yards or so. Coming back, Tony lowered the families packs to Dave, who moved them to one side. Tony then lowered Jennifer to Dave by both of her arms. Dave caught her under the arms and parked her on his pack. "Stay right here, peanut," he said quietly. "OK," came her answer in the dark.

One at a time the kids came down, then Rhonda, then Tony. Saddling back up, they again headed down the trail, crossing several more ledges and drawing ever closer to their goal.

They were running out of dark when Dave conferred with Tony. "I had planned on crossing into New Hampshire here. It's about three miles, we cross a golf course, enter farmland, and then yet another state park, this one just over the border. There's a bird sanctuary on the other side we can stay at if we need to."

"Let's do it, then," said Tony, "we're almost there."

"OK, let's go."

Hiking up their packs for what they hoped was one last stretch, Dave led them around the perimeter of the golf course, it's once manicured fairways overgrown and mangy looking. They crossed through the expansive backyards of several condoplexes, and followed a

dirt path into the woods behind the clubhouse. They saw no lights, heard no noises. They didn't even smell woodsmoke, which would have indicated habitation. The trail wound through the woods, carrying them for a time next to a babbling stream that tumbled past them towards the golf course. The trail wound steadily upwards, taking them up the last hill and the crossover out of Massachusetts.

Dawn was dimly approaching as they crossed the border on a level trail. Dave was in the lead, and crossed by an open area on the right that was a parking spot for day-trippers and bird watchers. The path was partially screened by trees and mountain laurel bushes, but Dave still felt exposed. He quickly passed it and radioed Tony and Rhonda. "There's a parking area to your right, coming up. Hurry past it. Other than that it's a clear shot." Dave heard them acknowledge, and switched his radio to their next frequency.

As Dave turned down the path, he heard a sound from the opposite direction. He paused, then grabbed at his radio, shouting into it, "Tony, Rhonda, get off the trail! I hear trucks! NOW!"

Tony's breathless voice came over the radio "They saw us...two big trucks and ..." the sound of a machinegun firing drowned out Tony's words. The bullets flew over Dave's head, some smacking loudly into tree trunks, the others whizzing through the boughs. Dave dropped to the prone, facing the fire, unbuckling his pack even as he fell. He quickly grabbed the two frags and the smoke grenade off of his belt and stuffed them down his shirt. He heard another burst, this time from a small caliber automatic weapon. He launched himself to his feet, calling out to his wards as he ran to the sound of the guns, "Over here! Tony, Rhonda, kids, over here!"

Another burst of fire, up in the trees again, and the sounds of shouts in German. Dave saw movement and brought up his rifle, skidding to stop behind a large tree. Carolyn and Julia ran from the bushes like frightened rabbits.

They saw Dave, you yelled "Dump your packs and follow the trail. We'll get you later." The girls shed their packs as they ran, and Dave turned his attention to the front. Jake ran down the path, carrying Jennifer. "Follow the path!" Dave pointed. Jake nodded and redoubled his efforts as more fire slapped through the trees. Dave again went forward as he heard a long burst of fire from his direct front. He neither heard or felt any rounds come near him, and charged forward. Breaking through bushes and coming again to the path, Dave dove down next to Tony, who was reloading his G-36. "Where's Rhonda?" asked a breathless Dave. Tony pointed, "Right up there, behind a tree. She's pinned." "I'm going left, I'll hook around that way, so don't fire to the left of her tree," Dave lowered himself and wiggled forward to have a look. More gunfire echoed through the woods. "I'm going to throw a smoke grenade to the left, you throw yours to the right, as far past her as you can. Get her out under the cover. I'll come up behind you."

"OK"

"Let's roll,"

Dave and Tony both ripped the tape off of the pins on the smokes, and then quickly puled them and threw them out, well past Rhonda's tree. They heard another burst of machinegun fire, and then the smoke started to obscure their view. More fire, rounds whizzing over their heads. Dave did a quick rush to the left, and fired a few rounds, his

FAL's deep boom echoing through the glen. Rhonda, not being a fool, started crawling to Tony as soon as the smoke started floating back over her. Tony fired a few short bursts to the right of her, even as Dave fired again from further left. Rhonda got up and ran at a crouch to Tony, saying as she passed him "Let's get out of here!" Tony fired up the last of his magazine, turned, and ran after his wife.

Dave saw Rhonda crawling, and moved to the left again to try to draw attention away from her. He fired a few shots at fleeting figures through the smoke, then dumped the rest of his magazine at a steady pace through the trees to his own left, where he heard what sounded like bodies rushing towards him. Crouching behind a tree and reloading as fast as he could, he released the bolt with his left thumb and then reached into his shirt and pulled out the first grenade. He bit the tape with his teeth, grabbing the end that he had folded over to make untaping easier. He pulled it away, let it go, truned it, and bit again. The tape was free from the grenade. He spit out the tape, let his rifle fall to its sling. Grabbing the smaller piece of tape, he freed the pin, pulled it, and threw the grenade as hard as he could to his right. Putting the tree between him and the blast, he readied another grenade and threw it to his left. He rolled back and started firing back to where Rhonda had been trapped. As soon as the second frag detonated, he took off at a run, his chest pouch bumping against his chest, his lungs burning. He crashed through bushes and bounced off of small trees as he fled the hail of gunfire that peppered the air around him. Leaping over a small tussock, he heard crashing behind him. He dropped and rolled, coming up behind the big rifle. Right in his sights was a Flectarn clad soldier with a G-36, firing close enough in Daves direction that Dave took offense. He pressed the trigger and as the rifle bucked he saw the figure crumble. He fired quickly at several fleeting shapes in the brush, and readied another frag. Hearing the shouted commands, he released the spoon, counted to two, and threw it far and high. The grenade detonated in the air near the source of the shouted commands Dave had heard. With the blast, Dave was moving, rushing to the rear in three second rushes, falling, rolling over, firing at running troops. He prepped and threw his last frag to his right, where a German in Flectarn was firing his rifle in long bursts toward Dave's direction of travel. The man disappeared in the black cloud of the grenades explosion, of wave of leaves and twigs filling the air. Dave rolled to his non-firing side and rose. As he did, he saw another troop struggling to reload his rifle. Dave took a flash sight picture and squeezed. The man flopped to the ground at the same time Dave felt the familiar sensation of the bolt locking ot he rear. Spinning, he rushed once more as his trigger finger released the magazine, which fell to the ground. Dave's other hand was at the same time grasping another magazine from his pouch. As he felt his fingers grasp the 550 cord pull loop on the bottom of the mag, an apparition rose from behind the fallen tree he was headed to. Clad in woodland camouflage, the man held an M-249 SAW pointed just over Daves left shoulder. No time to reload, too far to buttstroke, Dave decided he was history when he locked eyes with the ghostly figure. "Get down!" the apparition said.

Chapter 15

Dave threw himself to the right and landed on his shoulder, rolling to the prone as a long burst from the SAW tore the air over his head. As he finished his mag change, he heard the distinct hollow sound of several 40mm grenade launchers and an increasing cacaphony of small arms fire. From his vantage point he saw a number of Woodland clad men rushing forward firing past him. He rolled over and began shooting at fleeting forms in the woods, even as the first 40mm grenades started exploding beyond the foreign interlopers. The gunners started walking the rounds back towards their lines, driving the Germans forward into the American fire. Dave reloaded as another troop in Woodland ran up and dropped into the prone next to him, immediately firing his M-4 at the trapped forces. ‘Who the hell are you guys?’ Dave shouted above the din. The man looked over his buttstock at Dave. It was his friend Jim.

The remaining German troops were mopped up in short order, with a few die-hards requiring an extra helping of 40mm persuasion. As Dave and Jim greeted each other properly, voices called out through the woods.

“What are you doing here?” asked Dave, still surprised to see his friend.

“We got your last message and decided to come get you. Ran into a partol from the NHDF..”

“The what?”

Jim smiled, “The New Hampshire Defense Forces. We’ll catch you up later. Anyway, they were going the same way, and here we are.”

“I had four kids and a couple with me...”

”They’re safe at the trucks. Listen, we’ve got to clean this mess up and get out of here. They may have called for backup. They’ve been running a few gunships near here.”

”All right, let’s do it, then.”

“We’re gonna take what we can and split.”

Just then a NHDF soldier ran up to Jim.

“Sir, the Captain would like to see you up at the parking area,” he pointed, “we’ve got some trucks we’re gonna take.”

“I’ll be right there. Dave, let’s check it out.”

They walked down the now quiet path.

“I’ve gotta find my pack, if there’s anything left of it.”

“We’ll get a detail-Hey, private!”

The runner turned, “Yes, sir?”

“Secure all the civilian packs and have them brought up to the captain.”

“Yes, sir,” he replied. Calling out, he moved off.

They passed four men carrying a poncho by the corners, straining to carry the rubberized material as it sagged from the weight of the captured weapons and equipment they had put in the center. In the woods, NHDF men were stripping the dead of their gear-weapons, LBE, uniforms, ammo.

Dave stooped to pick up a discarded G-36 magazine. “Who else is with you?”

Jim cocked his head, “Steve, Scott, Rico, Will. We had to leave a few folks behind.

We’ve got 20 or so DF guys. How many Krauts?”

“‘bout a platoon. Thanks for coming.”

“You’d do the same. But no more rescue missions, got it?”

Dave broke a smile, “Guaranteed.”

In the parking area DF troops were loading the captured equipment on the back of a deuce. They approached man who was wearing no rank but was obviously in charge.

“This your friend, Jim?”

“Yeah, Dave, Captain Carlson.”

“Thanks for the help, Captain.”

“Thank you. We’ve been trying to catch up with these guys for a few days. You led them right to us.”

“Well, I’ll try not to be bait again.”

“That’s a good idea if you want to stay alive,” said the Captain, just a hint of irony in his voice, “We’ll be done in a few minutes.” Turning, he spoke to Jim, “We’re gonna rendezvous with your friends up the road a bit. Why don’t you guys take a seat in the deuce-the other one took a hit from a ‘203-and we’ll finish up here.”

Jim nodded. “Thanks again,” said Dave.

“That’s what we do,” replied the Captain, turning away.

They boarded the truck, climbing up the tailgate by pulling themselves up by the safety strap. Stepping over the gear that littered the bottom of the truck, they sat on the bench seats on the outside of the bed.

“Looks like they’ve been looting,” remarked Jim, pointing at the gear.

“Lot’s of civilian stuff, too,” said Dave.

“Good stuff, too,” Jim noticed, turning a pack with his boot as troopers started loading gear in the back. “Lowe packs, H&K 91’s....”

“Crap!” blurted Dave, “I’ve seen those before...” He started rummaging through the gear. Benelli shotguns, USP pistols....blood. “Crap. These clowns were on the trail a few days ago.”

Jim looked at him for a moment.

“They were moving in the daylight, fires at night, thought they were high speed.”

Jim was silent. What could he say?

“There were around 18 or 20 of them, men and women.”

“Load’em up and move’em out!” the Captain called. The remaining troops quickly climbed aboard as the deisel roared to life. The deuce led the German jeep out of the parking area and turned left, following the dirt road to a paved road running left and right. Turning right, they gained speed and put distance between themselves and the battlefield. Dave sat back and closed his eyes, enjoying the feel of the air on his face. It’s nice to be alive, he thought.

They met up with the rest of the convoy in a small town square ten miles away. Dave and his friends enjoyed a brief reunion as Jim and the Captain conversed.

Dave introduced the Antonetti’s to his friends. As they were doing so, Jim came over and said to them, “We’ve got the deuce and some of the captured stuff. Steve, drive the deuce, check the fuel. Dave, you can ride with me in Will’s truck. Let’s go. You folks,” he pointed at the family, “your packs are in the deuce, why don’t you guys hop on in back?”

“Sounds better than walking,” agreed Tony.

All of the assembled men gave their approval too, and moved to their vehicles, helping the Antonetti kids get into the high bed of the captured truck.

Jim looked over at Dave “Why don’t you crash in the back seat? You look like hell.”

“Thanks,” said Dave, “and I wore my best shirt, too.”

“It suits the occasion.”

Dave got in the truck, but was too keyed up to sleep. He had Jim fill him in on recent events.

“The Governor called out the militia and the response has been overwhelming. We have about 130 folks, men and women, in town. We’ve found two other guys who were combat arms, one is a Nam vet, the other Cold War. They’re a little too old for direct action, but they will be great for local staff and training. We’re forming squads according to age and ability, as well as who wants to be with who. We heard from Ice Spring (the next town over-Willard) they had a whole group of guys march into town in formation, all equipped the same. Seems like a lot of small groups of friends had already formed small units well before this broke.”

“That sounds familiar,” Dave remarked, deadpan.

“Doesn’t it, though? The basic idea is that our youngest and most capable will enlist in the DF, the rest will receive training but remain in town to give depth to the states defense. We’re calling them “Minutemen”, and they’ll be ready to respond to an incursion beyond the border or any kind of deep penetration raid.”

”What about comms?” Dave asked.

“We’ve got a net covering the whole state, with repeaters all over. The local HAM clubs are all supporting the effort 100%. We’re trying not to use too much long range stuff to deny their locations to the Feds and ISAF toads. But we’ve got some real radio nuts working for us.”

“How about supply?”

“We’re establishing that. Most folks want to be Joe Snuffy with a rifle and not the delivery driver. We are doing what we can locally. Pretty much everybody has more than one gun, the problem is ammo-not many had more than a few boxes. The state has enough 5.56 and 7.62 to last a while. That AR manufacturer, Pine Tree? They had almost filled an order for Botswana, the state bought it instead, 25,000 M-4 clones, 10 mags per weapon, and their warehouse was holding the ammo-over half a million rounds of M-855 on stripper clips. Plus we have Sig in Exeter running around the clock, and that import house in Maine, just over the border, Millenium? They gave the state the inventory of their warehouses-tens of thousands of C&R rifles, a ton of MG’s in their bonded warehouse they hadn’t cut up yet, bunch of other stuff. So we may have 30,000 guys with M-48 Mausers and Nagant rifles in the hills before too long, as they’ll be the only thing with ammo. Heard they cut a tax deal for the cost. We’ve got the fishing fleet in Portsmouth and Maine working full time again, and with all the farms we won’t starve.

“The old National Guard units had two companies of armor, so we’ve got Abrams tanks, but I hear not much ammo for them. We’ve got an attack helo company, one of Hueys, KC-135’s and F-15’s, and a Marine Reserve artillery unit that knows where its loyalty lies. Also, did you know there was a huge Air Force listening post up north of Jefferson?”

Dave shook his head, “No.”

“Well not many did. I just found out yesterday. Low key operation. They’ve all come

over, so we've got super Elint (electronic Intelligence-Willard) capabilities. They had a mondo security force, armored Humvees with MK-19's, LAWs, AT-4's, and four Stinger launchers and a dozen missiles, which is a coup. All kinds of stuff is turning up, too. One guy in town drove in with a German Maxim in the bed of his truck, said his great grandfather brought it home from the war. We got a bunch of belts and ammo coming from Millenium for it."

Dave grinned. He loved water cooled MG's.

"We're coordinating with the state headquarters, and we'll be training the town, as we're the most military experienced group."

"What about Vermont?" asked Dave. Vermont lay a few miles West of their town, over the Connecticut River.

"Well, they've got tons of folks clamoring to join us and Maine, but the pinkoes in Burlington love the U.N. that they probably would let blue helmets rape their sisters. But we've got a huge support base there, and most of the lefties are burnt out hippies who will just try to stay out of the whole shebang."

"We've got pickets all along the border with Massachusetts, but not enough. That group we whacked today was in and out of the areas for nearly a week, tracking down folks like you. They're mostly former German Border Police from the old days, give the old unemployed East German cops something to do. They're not good soldiers, though. According to what we've heard the regular German forces ARE pretty good."

"Are there any other countries besides Germany here?" asked Dave.

Jim thought, "The Germans are in New England. Brazilians in Louisiana and down south. French in Michigan and Illinois. Mexican, Guatemalan, and Nicaraguan in the Southwest, which has become the largest shooting preserve in the world, according to the Texans we've heard on the radio. The good old boys aren't taking kindly to foreign troops."

"We've got Chinese in California, Long Beach is their staging area, apparently they had tons of stuff prepositioned there. Chinks took part of Washington, the Boeing factory, Bremerton, which was razed hours before they got there by the garrison, all the subs are at sea. Right now the military is mostly sitting on their asses wondering what to do. A lot of desertions, lots of stuff getting stolen, weapons, ammo, vehicles."

"I've missed a lot," Dave noted, "I'll get up to speed soon. Look, I'm gonna try to crash- I'm starting to fade here."

"Sure. We're still a couple of hours away."

Dave dozed as the diesel powered Chevy pickup wound its way up backroads and state highways towards home. Home. What a nice feeling, he thought to himself dreamily, going home.

The convoy of one deuce and a half and two pickup trucks reached Dave's house in a few hours. Taking the back way was slower but safer than the highways. The McGraths enjoyed a tearful and happy reunion. Sandy was still mourning her parents, and the kids were glad their Dad was home.

Chapter 16

Dave watched the truck struggling up the road. He didn't know what grade it was, just that it was a good, steep, New England mountain road. The truck was European, dark green and brown, a cab over design with a soldier poking up from the right side of the cab manning the MG, bundled up against the chill mountain air. Behind the truck was a trailer, a US one, wooden sides up, canvas cover stretched tautly across. This particular truck was a straggler, the convoy it was part of having pulled progressively farther away from it with each twist and bend of the road. Perfect for picking off without much trouble. Through the 24x60 spotting scope Dave could see no tell tale antenna. Only about one in ten of the invaders trucks had them anyway, and any short range hand held would be severely hampered by the rugged terrain.

Turning and nodding, Dave set in motion a hasty ambush that had been planned for weeks. Will, on the 60 Meter HAM radio, whispered a short phrase. In prepared positions near the road the word was quietly passed. A four part ambush team was already in position. A security team to the north, to hinder any relief from the main convoy body. One to the South, for a similar purpose. The Assault Team, on the road, that would execute the actual mission, and a Support Team, in overwatch, made up of Dave and his three friends on the military crest of a larger hill, and two three-man sniper teams, each armed with one .50 caliber rifle and one captured tripod mounted MG-3 a piece. Part of the support team was also below, about a mile away on a logging road. Five four wheel drive pickups with medical crew. They would treat any casualties, secure any EPW's, haul away what they could of the enemies equipment, and carry off the assault team. The security teams were using mountain bikes to egress from their positions, and Dave's teams were using four wheeled ATV's and old logging trails.

The truck wheezed around the corner, pine trees beckoning softly from the far side of the road, a guardrail on the near, blocking closer examination of a mostly dry streambed 100 or more feet below. As the truck passed a particularly distinctive dwarf line, a flurry of shots rang out. From the far side of the road, a Patriot shooter put a round in the drivers ear from a range of about 60 feet. The .30-30 round caused a rapid separation of the drivers cranial components, and the expanded bullet struck the standing gunner in the thigh. Before the gunner could react to that, he himself took nearly a dozen rounds in the upper body. He jerked spasmodically and then fell, leaking badly, into the cab of the truck. The truck itself stalled out almost immediately, and started rolling backwards slowly on the steep grade. Three men leapt from prepared positions and rushed the truck, pistols in hand. Leaping to the doors, they each popped a quick round into the torsoes of the occupants. The man on the drivers side, in better times a CDL driver for a large cross country freight hauler, pulled open the door, pushed the mostly headless corpse over, and applied the brakes. The hiss of the airbrakes engaging filled the roadside. "Send the moving men" came the command from the ambush site. The pickups started up and sped towards the site. On the road the men set up a hasty near perimeter while the search team pulled the Germans from the truck and recovered the contents of their pockets. Stripping the men of their LBE's, they took any documents and paperworks from the cab of the truck, and detached the topside machinegun. All the material was quickly assembled ont

he roadside when Buck, the ambush team commander, suggested Manny, the CDL driver, try to start the truck. Manny hopped in and the truck started right up.

"Just take the truck," Buck called out. The search team quickly threw all of the material back into the cab, one of the men climbing in and starting to remount the rooftop MG.

They had discussed but not really expected to take the truck undamaged.

Buck had his RTO let the others know the truck was secure and being driven by patriots. The captured truck and trailer headed towards the fire road, passing the five pickups heading the other way. Taking the fire road, the team drove the truck slowly and carefully to the prepared site where the five pickups had hidden. The old cave had once been used by a frugal farmer as a cattle pen, and the men had seen plenty of evidence that the natural opening in the rocks had been expanded over the years by pick, shovel, and dynamite. Using a ground guide, they backed the truck into the opening, leaving enough room for more vehicles to get in. The crew then quickly dismounted, and hurried to cover their backtrail as best they could, scattering leaves and pine needles over the tracks, and removing crushed and broken dead fall, and replacing it with unbroken deadfall from the woods.

Back at the ambush site the trucks successfully picked up the remaining ambushers and headed downhill, taking another seemingly impassable road back to their rally point. Seeing the trucks leave and getting a radioed message that the ambush commander had a good headcount, Dave called in his flank security elements. The six men quickly packed their respective gear onto their bikes and walked the heavily burdened bikes down the hill. After waiting ten minutes to give them time to withdraw a reasonable distance from their old positions, Dave gave the word, and he and his two men quickly swept their site for any evidence of their being there, started their ATV's and hastily withdrew. Within minutes even the sound of their muffled engines was a memory.

After Dave had returned home from his long trek, he took a few days to recover, mentally and physically. He caught up with Sandy, and shared with her the pain of losing her parents. His kids needed some Dad time, so Dave took them with him while he visited with his friends. He returned Wills FAL and Makarov, thanking him for their use. Will, naturally, was glad to have played some small part in Daves escape, and even offered them to Dave as a souvenir of his march. Dave declined. He didn't think he'd forget anything about his ordeal until Kingdom come.

In catching up with his friends, he learned that the preparations Jim had alluded to were further underway than he expected. Many of the local youths had already left for service in the NHDF, and to Daves surprise, many girls had answered the call, to serve in support and medical roles. The local minutemen were training twice a week, and Daves group was meeting with one or two teams daily giving instruction and suggestions. Will commented to Dave and the few others present that he was glad he had gone through Special Forces training. Robin Sage, the final exercise of the SF Q Course, dropped a student team into a simulated occupied country to aid the local guerillas, played by other soldiers and Special Forces cadre. They were especially difficult to work with, and to succeed in the course and later as a SF trooper one had to develop finesse in working with men who were convinced they didn't need help. More than once would Daves group run into a team of Minutemen who were convinced they needed no advice from a bunch

of robots trained by the Army. Once or twice quick man on man competitions demonstrated the ability of the volunteer trainers, but mostly it fell to simply showing, through action, the benefits of the knowledge Daves group could provide.

Using captured weapons and firearms from the group, Daves team equipped a small number of Minutemen with modern military firearms. They had eventually found several Minutemen teams that were receptive to the instruction offered, and had in fact asked to be incorporated into the group. Will, Jim, and the others declined, feeling that for what the purpose of the Minutemen were, and without a broader command structure, they should stay formed in smaller, decentralized units. They continued to emphasize, however, the importance of teamwork for planned operations, and managed to hold biweekly joint exercises for the towns forces. The basic plan was for the Minutemen to react to “situations” as teams, similar to how a decentralized local fire department would work. The responding team would coordinate by radio, if they could, with the other teams in the area. The local police department of three full time officers and four reserves would act as the command post, and the radio room would be staffed 24/7. All information would come through there, and it would act as a relay site for messages. During any incident, the Ops Center would notify the surrounding communities of the situation, so that they could prepare to respond to provide aid, or to react to another incident should more than one arise. In this way they could spread the word throughout the area, in an ever expanding circle, calling in militia from an ever increasing region to assist. Most areas planned to send no more than half of their local forces to another sector of responsibility, just in case there was a coordinated series of strikes planned by the ISAF forces. But it was felt that they could turn out a few thousand heavily armed men to any area in about 8 hours. And that wasn’t counting the NHDF response.

Most folks wanted to help in any way they could, and Dave was surprised by the resourcefulness of the locals. He saw members of the small radio controlled flyers club demonstrating how they could provide real time intelligence by using small digital video cameras mounted on their planes, feeding info to laptop computers. They could conceivably turn the small planes into guided missiles, although the payload would be small. Farmers donated large amounts of fertilizer used to prepare improvised explosives. The high school chemistry teacher had a large collection of antique science books that provided information on how to manufacture detonators and agricultural explosives. He quickly went about assembling a team of mostly honors chemistry students to manufacture what they could. The local dentist provided free dental work to the Minutemen, as a tooth problem would sideline a man just as effectively as a bullet. The local Fire Department, already 100% volunteer, provided first aid training to the Minutemen patrols. Local climbers gave instruction on alpine climbing, and experienced hikers and naturalists gave classes on wild edibles and wilderness survival. The local churches established support networks to see that no person went without-during the coming winter the cold could be a real danger to the elderly and children.

As preparations continued, the local elderly activities group provided free day care to parents who were training one or two days a week. The children benefitted by gaining a whole new family of doting grandparents, and the elders benefitted by having new

purpose to their lives. Many of the bonds formed through the babysitting would help form support networks beneficial to both parties. The elderly had a lot of information to offer to an interested person. Many folks who lived alone were invited to live with families who needed extra help. More than a few people were surprised at just how busy they had gotten, and having an extra set of eyes and hands in a house would be worth the extra mouth to feed. Naturally, in a number of other cases people who were in poor positions for survival were invited to live at the home of an elderly benefactor. Many of the older generation still lived on farms, and had large houses with wood heat and canned food. The extra help a few younger hands and backs could provide would make a powerless winter more bearable, and Spring chores that much more manageable. To a person with a family living in an apartment or tract home it could be quite an improvement.

Many families also just moved in with friends. Jim and Steve had members of the group at their places, and the Antonettis had moved into Daves house, taking two rooms upstairs and the upstairs bathroom. Dave and Tony had set up Daves spare woodstove in what was the kids play room but now served as combination kids room and living room for Tony, Rhonda, and their children. They usually ate together, but it was nice for both families to have their own space. It was also good to have the extra security at the house. Jake had been given one of Daves "spare" AK clones, and had been drilled on its use. Rhonda and Tony retained their G-36's, and Sandy had pretty much claimed Daves old M-1 Carbine, which she had, under the circumstances, grown quite attached to. Dave tried to convince her to use one of his CAR-15's, but she was insistent that she keep the carbine. All of the kids attended class in town, at the parochial school, which had tried to maintain as normal a schedule and curriculum as they could. Providing a stable environment for the kids was something they all wanted, even though the kids had demonstrated greater acceptance of the new social dynamic than many adults. The school had, however, added lessons on first aid, fire safety and for the older kids fire fighting, and other lessons on air raids and how to react to occupation and other kinds of attacks. All of the smaller children were matched with an older child as a "buddy" for the purposes of evacuation or emergency. The kids were encouraged to carry what was essentially a small bug out bag, but was called an overnight bag, with comfort items, clothes, food, water, a flashlight, and a blanket.

Dave and his group continued their own preparations, too. They cached many more of their guns, ammo, and military goods. They prepped bug out locations, and stocked them with food and warm gear for their families. With a total lack of gun laws, many folks started going a little crazy. The local machine shop had gotten plans for AR-15 auto sears and lightning links, and were making them like they were going out of style. Any information on converting a firearm to full auto was traded like crazy, and the group had to talk any number of locals out of carrying full auto Glockes, Baretas, and Colts. The groups did have two semi auto 1919 Brownings, and they got the machine shop treatment in short order.

Dave also had a secret. In his vault, he carefully marked a spot on the wall, and picked up his pick. Using the pointy end, he struck the cement wall. Fragments of concrete struck him in the face, and he was thankful for the goggles he wore. Working carefully, he

chipped away at the wall until a metal frame was visible. When Dave had the walls poured, he had inserted a sealed metal box into the framework. He now uncovered the door to the metal box. Using his battery operated drill, which had taken two days to charge via the solar charger, Dave drilled a hole in the upper right corner. He then used a hacksaw blade to cut the sheetmetal. Once he had cut about four inches down, and another four to the left from the hole, he used the pick to pry the box open. Inside sat some plastic wrapped bundles, which he carefully removed. He placed them on a wooden chair nearby, and grabbed a large pile of newspaper and some brake cleaner. Picking up the larger of the packages, he remembered back to when he had received this special gift....

When Dave was in his late 20's Mr. Houston passed away, devastating Dave. He had been a friend, mentor, surrogate grandfather, father, and uncle rolled into one. Dave received the call from his mother, but arrived at the hospital too late to say goodbye. Instead he comforted Mrs. Houston, and was comforted by her. It was a long night for Dave, and he took most of two weeks off from school and work to help Mrs. Houston with the details of the funeral and to come to terms with his loss. He visited Mrs. Houston at least twice a month thereafter, and helped her as he could, as she prepared her house for sale. She had, after the loss of her husband, decided to move to Florida to live with her sister. The sale of the farm house and the remaining acreage would provide her with enough money to live her remaining years in comfort, and she would be away from the daily reminders of her husband. She was having a tough time coping, too.

Several weeks before she was to leave, Dave received a call from her.

"Dave, dear, can you come up this weekend?" she asked Dave.

"Sure Mrs. Houston, I can come up Sunday, if that's all right. Is everything OK?" Dave asked.

"Oh, of course. I'm getting ready to get rid of a lot of junk, and I thought I'd let you go through it first. Anything you don't want you can take to the dump for me, or to Sillivans Antiques. Come up after 2, so I can go to church. You know where the spare key is if you get here early."

.....

Dave showed up a little after 1, and took a walk around the old barn and the remaining fields. So much work for the farmers, clearing land, building the stone walls which still stood after 200 years or more. Memories of his youth flooded Daves mind. It was a lot when you had something as special as what he had, Dave thought. It wasn't the usual prefab neighborhood and neighbors you hardly knew.

Mrs Houston came home and Dave greeted her from her porch swing.

"Come in, Dave, come in," she said, walking up her front steps one at a time, age taking its toll on her, too.

After catching up, Mrs Houston gently clasped Daves hand in hers a the kitchen table. She looked at him with her eyes, which were still clear blue and as beautiful as they had been in her youth. "Dave, I have something I want you to have. It was Mr. Houstons, and I figure you'd like to go through it and see if you'd like anything. He wanted you to have

it," she said, her voice choking, "He said you'd know what to do with it."

Dave was puzzled "What is it?" he asked.

"His old Marine footlocker. Just old uniforms and stuff, junk really."

"It's not junk," said Dave, "I'd be honored to have anything like that of his. But if you can sell it and get more money for Florida..."

"Oh, pe-shaw! I've got plenty enough. And he wanted you to have it, dear. I think he believed that as long as you thought of him he'd never die."

"He'll never be gone to me," said Dave, tears in his eyes.

She patted his hand as only she could, "He loved you to dear."

Dave had loaded the old footlocker into his truck, and then Mrs Houston had shoed him off, saying she had people coming over to look at the house. Dave took it back to his apartment, and sat it down in front of his couch. He slowly opened the trunk. On top, neatly folded, was a sheet of typing paper. Dave unfolded it and read the neatly typed letter, dated nearly ten years before.

"Dear Dave,

I knew you'd get this eventually. I hope you have a long happy life with a wonderful girl like I have had (apparently).

I want you to know that I have always been proud of you, and I wish I had had a son like you.

From one warrior to another, I want you to have this trunk. Do what you want with the contents, I haven't opened it except for today, in 30 years. I think you'll like the buried treasure.

I'll save you a seat by the campfire, but I don't want to see you where I am for a long time. We'll have all the time in the world then, so don't be in a hurry, got it? Jumping out of planes...you had us worried to death.

All my love, and the love of Jesus Christ to you, son."

It took Dave more than a while to compose himself. When he had done so, he looked back in the trunk. There was a faded, slightly musty Marine Dress Blue uniform. Dave picked it up and looked at it. Some ribbons, he recognized a few. Purple heart, Bronze star, National Defense ribbon. He'd look up the others later. Under that his white hat. A Sam Browne belt, and under that papers. Dave went through them. Newspaper clippings about the war in the Pacific, and a few about the China-Burma-India theatre. A brown folder, with a few faded citations. Purple Heart-wounds received while flying over the CBI theatre. Bronze Star for rallying the defense of an airfield in Burma. Dave thought to himself that this was a bit different from being a simple Corsair mechanic in the Pacific. In readin the papers it became apparent that Mr Houston had volunteered to take a temporary assignment in the CBI theatre. The why he needed to wasn't very clear, but Dave was used to the weird and sometimes seemingly nonsensical ways of the armed forces. While there his arifield had come under ground attack by a Japanese company-

likely lost and starving in the jungle, making a last desperate attempt at getting food, it said in a letter Mr Houston wrote but never sent home. There he was wounded and got a bronze star for fighting off the Japanese Marines. Recovery in a hospital, then back to his unit.

Dave then found a diary. Mr Houston had kept a daily journal throughout the war. Dave would eventually read all of it, finding the answers to several questions along the way, and learning that the reason CBI imported people was for a special project transporting Nationalist Chinese into China to block Mao's men from seizing several key areas, and supplying the Chindits from the air. But for now he placed it to one side, and lifted the top tray out of the footlocker. Under that was a folded Japanese uniform and a broken samurai sword, its blade pierced perfectly by a large caliber shell. He hoped the answer to THAT question was in the diary. The uniform itself was bloody and peppered with bullet holes. Dave placed that to one side and removed a Japanese bayonet and a rising sun flag, with Japanese figures scrawled on it, and signed by a number of Americans. Under that was a package, wrapped in brown paper, tied with string. Dave picked it up. Heavy. No writing on it. He wondered if he should open it. Upon consideration, he figured this must be the "treasure". He cut the string with his pocket knife, and carefully unwrapped a cardboard box. He cut the yellowed tape that secured the box, and opened it up. Laid neatly across the box was a familiar tubular shape. Dave's jaw dropped open. He would later find out from the diary that it was from a pile intended for the Chindits or OSS but had been used to defend the airfield, and later brought home.

Dave picked it up, and looked it over. It was in great shape, having been stored since it was just three years old. Dave wasn't quite sure what he would do with it, but he was now the proud owner of a silenced Sten Mk2s.

Dave was lost in reminiscing as he cleaned the Sten of its preservative grease. He cleaned the 12 magazines he had for the gun, three were with it and he had picked up more. It was nice to be able to own it legally now. Besides, he felt he might need it soon.

Chapter 17

The ambush team assembled a week later at the cave. The three man stay behind security team at the cave had started to inventory the contents of the truck right away, and had assembled several distinct piles around the perimeter of the cave.

"There's a full manifest here," declared Thomas, the security leader at the cave, "but basically it's a bunch of ammunition-rocket, M-136, the boxes say, boxes marked 'mine, apers, M-18A1'-we don't know what 'apers' means, figure it's German; a bunch of medical supplies-IV fluids and kits, sutures, hemostats and other surgical supplies, gauze, all the stuff you'd need for an aid station." Thomas was an EMT on his local fire department, and was much more familiar with the medical supplies than with munitions. "The trailer was full, absolutely full, of MRE's. Like 90 cases. A few odd boxes in there, too. Water purification tablets, heat tabs, toilet paper. Bag of mail for the Krauts, we had the runner bring that to NHDF headquarters when we figured out what it was, along with the other papers we got. Take a look."

Jim nodded. Dave and the others were rummaging around the various piles of captured wares. "Thanks. We'll go over this and figure out what to do with it. We brought your replacement team, too, so you have a week off at home."

"That will be nice change. Shower and a warm bed are in short supply here."

"We'll be leaving in an hour or so, so get with your relief over there," he pointed at a bearded man in Realtree camou, "and square him away on your situation."

The supplies from the truck were broken up into bundles for transport. Some of it was left in the cave, which made just as good an ammo bunker as anything in town. Dave's group wound up with a dozen AT-4 84mm anti-tank rockets, 15 Claymore mines, two cases of 40mm HE rounds for the three HK launchers they had recovered when they rescued Dave and the Antonellis, smoke grenades, some medical supplies, and two cases of hand launched signal and illumination flares. What they really wanted was some 3rd generation night vision equipment, but so far they hadn't captured any. Like most survivalists they had tons of ammo, food, and plenty of guns, but no good night vision equipment. In retrospect Dave thought he should've sold a few guns to fund such a purchase.

They held classes for the local units on the new weapons they were equipped with. One of Daves group had a fired AT-4 he had picked up at a gunshow years back, and they used that too familiarize everyone with the operation of the 15 pound disposable rocket. Likewise they had, among their wildly varied stores, three training Claymore 'apers', or anti-personnel, mines, liberated from the military and sold at gunshows by enterprising individuals. Using these and other inert items, they trained to set up mechanical ambushes, booby traps, time delays, and chains, or series, of mines. If they needed to do so, Claymores gave ambushers a great advantage upon initiation of the battle.

Things were fairly quiet in their area for weeks. Other than the lone convoy that had netted them one truck, there was no other activity on the ground in their area. Once or twice a week, never on the same day or at the same time, an aircraft would be heard in

the valley. It was at times a helicopter or a jet. From sightings they ranged from Lynx scout helos to Mig-29's from the Luftwaffe. Some buzzed the treetops at high speed, others flew so high they were hard to hear. From what they put together from information coming from the defense forces and other areas, they were trying to determine where the larger population centers were, and looking for large groups of people assembled away from buildings and roads. Apparently losing a truck in the area made the ISAF forces a little suspicious, particularly since they found the nearly decapitated corpse of the driver and the ventilated body of the gunner laid neatly by the roadside with "Live Free or Die" bumper stickers applied to their chests.

Dave and the team were prepping the Claymores, which were to be distributed among the men to be carried as part of their equipment. They carefully uncoiled the detonating wire from the plastic spool it came shipped on. Working in pairs, one man held up his hands while the other wrapped the wire across his upheld fingers. After getting five or six wraps, they used small elastic bands to bind the ends, and repeated the process until the entire 100 feet of wire were done. Now if they needed to employ the mine they just had to pull the wire and the elastic bands would pop off. Being coiled only six times per section ensured that any tangles wouldn't be too severe. In this manner the mine could be employed quickly and quietly. Using six of their acquired electric blasting caps, they also prepped a half dozen of the firing wires with double caps, with an extra 20 feet of wire between them. If they needed to they could quickly and safely rig two mines for simultaneous detonation. If they didn't they could just tuck the other cap into the second fuse well of the mine, or cut it off and try to save it for later.

Part of the security team's job at the cave was to inspect the truck and its cargo for signs of tampering. The militia couldn't be too sure that the ISAF wouldn't plant a truck like that and booby trap or alter its cargo. As best they could they swept the load for hidden beacons. Then examined the contents for external signs of booby traps. Finding none they emptied the trailer and truck deliberately, one case at a time, each case being given a thorough examination as it was stacked. This load, in fact, wasn't tampered with, but it wouldn't be long before just such things would happen. The militia in Dave's region, due to their diligence, avoided lone trucks or suspicious scenarios and avoided getting tainted arms, but some other units weren't so lucky. They would grab items from an apparently abandoned truck by the road and would blow themselves up the first time they opened a case of MRE's or grenades, or their rifle would explode in their face firing captured ammunition.

Any suspect ammo or supplies were stored at an abandoned house far from any occupied dwelling, with the idea that later they would put it all in an old pickup and leave it by the road somewhere where ISAF would find it, making it look like the truck had broken down.

Chapter 18

In the back of the Chinook huddled a mass of arms and legs and helmeted heads, looking like one large creature in the dark. The head of that creature, Major Mueller, stood huddled under a red light, trying to orient his map with the terrain that was speeding by below and above him. The CH-47 was flying NAP of the earth, or Near As Possible, and the valleys they used to mask their route had mountains and ridges that towered above them. They were a group of Fallschirmjaeger, German paratroopers, and they had been training in action in Afghanistan and Bosnia for several years. This would be their real test-hunting American Guerrillas on their own turf. Tonight's mission was to set up a platoon sized patrol base and send out four man patrols to monitor traffic and activity patterns for this sector. They were developing information first, using this and several other areas of Operations (AO's) as testing grounds and its occupants as lab rats.

They were going to link up with a team from the regiments recon platoon, who had HALO'ed in three nights before and had finally radioed back that they had secured a suitable patrol base. The Major and his intelligence section had met with the pilots and had discussed the route they would take, contingencies, and LZ procedures. The captain was now, however, unhappily convinced that they were on the wrong path. Trouble is, it is very difficult to navigate at night, from the air at an altitude of around 40 feet while flying at 160 miles per hour. If only those damned Jet Propulsion Laboratory eggheads hadn't reprogrammed the GPS satellites before the Chinese occupied their complex and captured or killed many of the scientists.

He depressed the push to talk switch on the aviator's helmet he wore.

"Damnit, I tell you we are two valleys over from where we are supposed to be. You are taking us into Vermont."

The pilots glanced at each other in the dark. The copilot gave a shrug that the pilot couldn't see.

"Major, we are experienced pilots, we know right where we are....see, there are your markers, at 1 o'clock."

Mueller leaned forward and looked out over the copilot's seat. There, in a small clearing, was an inverted "Y" of chemlights, a technique adopted from the Americans. Laid out on an LZ, the helicopter merely had to land between the v shape of the Y, pointing his nose to the long axis. The Jaegers who laid this out were experienced pathfinders and would have chosen an area big enough to allow the bird to take off safely in its direction of flight.

Mueller tore off his helmet and spun in place "Thirty seconds!" he yelled over the noise of the huge counter rotating propellers above him. Throughout the cabin men tightened buckles, gripped their weapons, and readied their packs. The platoon sergeant loosened some of the straps that held down extra equipment mounted on the tailgate. It would be pushed off as the first men exited, and recovered after the bird flew off. The doorgunners looked more alert and swept the muzzles of their window mounted machineguns from side to side, looking for targets and obstructions that might damage the former

Connecticut National Guard helo. The tailgate started to lower as the bird started to flair, gaining altitude and slowing into a brief hover, then settling onto the snow covered field, the tires breaking through the layer of ice pack on top and sinking several inches into powder below. The loose powder on top of the ice layer was churned into a white tornado, blinding everyone in the bird to anything more than 40 feet from the helicopter. The first men in the rear stood and started pushing the palletized container off the ramp. The Major yelled to himself 'Faster, faster!' as the men around the door all seemed to stumble, some staggering, some falling down. More men rushed to the ramp to help them and they too fell, one man spinning a dramatic minaret. Suddenly the fuselage of the large CH-47 echoed with what sounded like large pieces of gravel being thrown against it. The Mueller screamed above the noise, turning to the cockpit "We're under fire! Get us out of here!" The pilot and copilot looked at him quizzically as the right side window imploded, the pilot jerking in his harness. The copilot hesitated and then applied power to the throttle as the pilots windscreen started to sprout holes. The pilot jerked in his harness as more bullets plunged into him.

In the back, one doorgunner slumped at his gun, falling backwards over several fallshirmjaeger troops seated on the floor. His body pumped blood wildly as he momentarily pinned their legs to the deck. The two men struggled to free themselves, and then, taking the initiative as they had been taught, pushed their rucks out the window of the bird and followed after them, landing in the snow and starting to shoot blindly into the dark. Several more troops poured out of the back of the helo, only fall lifeless into the snow as bullets from an unseen assailant swept them off of their feet without mercy. The men still inside the bird felt the engines noise increase, and stayed put even as bullets pierced the thin fuselage and struck them. The abandoned doorgun had been quickly manned and both left and right guns were being fired at their cyclic rates, the gunners sweeping side to side in a vain attempt to suppress the fire tearing their ride apart. Suddenly the rear of the bird tilted up and the men felt the familiar sensation of their stomachs dropping as the bird pulled pitch and lifted into the air. Bullets continued to reach out of the dark and strike the ship, more fire being concentrated on it's two massive engines mounted externally under the rear rotor assembly. Even as the helicopter shuddered it smacked a large pine tree head on. The nose crumpled as the bird climbed for altitude. Another tree loomed before the pilot as he struggled to control the shaking ship. The 'Hook banked to the left as the pilot unconsciously flinched from the tree. As he did the blades struck another row of trees, the blades shattering and tearing as they came up against the irrestable force of two foot thick White Pine. The helicopter lost its power of flight while it retained its forward motion. Slamming into the wooded hillside, the thin aluminum aircraft didn't stand a chance. It landed belly first into a barren, rocky area, causing the rear mounted engines to break free of their mount. As the kerosene fuel spilled from the mortally wounded beast, it sprouted flame, which almost instantly ignited more fuel from ruptured fuel cells. The mountainside exploded into flame as all aboard were immolated in a pyre of burning fuel, equipment, and pine.

As a guerilla force we have the responsibilty to act violently, strike quickly, and retreat rapidly. We cause more damage to the enemy by remaining out of his grasp than by

inflicting large numbers of casualties at the expense of casualties of our own.
-Introduction to Guerilla Fighting, training manual assembled by the White Pine Irregulars, Republic of New Hampshire.

"In addition to surprise, what else is needed for an effective ambush?" Dave looked over the assembled unit. Like most local militias it was manned by an assortment of small town America. The bearded loner, the earnest face of a scared man, the bored look of the man who already knew it all. Dave pined at the man who looked like guerilla war was way over his head.

"If you were initiating an ambush against a numerically superior force, what would you want to have before you fired your first round?"

The man swallowed noticeably, considering his answer.

"An escape route?" he replied. The room filled with laughter.

Dave paced across the stage of the Middle School.

"That's a valid answer. You!" pointing to the know it all, "What would you add to that?"

"I'd want my shotgun."

"Why?"

"Cause I could take out more of them German SOB's that way."

Dave looked at him. "How is that relevant to our general discussion. I want to know what you feel is needed to successfully ambush and destroy these people. What else?" he asked again, scanning the faces. The scared looking guy opened his mouth like he was going to say something, then shut it. Dave pointed.

"Go ahead, don't be shy."

The room laughed again. Dave scowled and it quickly trickled off.

"I'd want the most firepower I could get. Mines, bazookas, machineguns."

"Excellent. Fire supremacy. You initiate the ambush with the most casualty producing weapon you have, that's Army doctrine. Claymore anti personnel mines, machinegun. And you maintain such a volume of fire that the enemy can't return fire effectively. Now, we are likely to be outnumbered and outgunned. What can we do to make up for that? Anyone?"

Silence. Then a hand went up. Good, he wanted them to think. Fresh minds and fresh answers. As much as Dave and the team were travelling around helping to spread the word, they too were casting their nets for new ideas and new approaches to old situations. There were a lot of clever minds out there, they had never been turned on the concept of ambushes and attacks before.

"Go ahead"

"How about using tricks, like decoys and stuff."

"Good idea. Give me a scenario where we could use that....."

The discussion lasted until after dark. Good. After it got good and dark they were going to do night movement training. Most folks, even experienced woodsmen, seldom had experience crossing terrain on a compass heading in the dark. It had to be done to be appreciated.

Dave stood up from his position to the left of the old water cooled Maxim. It was mounted via its sled mount tripod to a toboggan, for easier movement over snow. The gun was smoking now, having fired nearly two full belts straight in the rear doors of the CH-47, and into the engines as it tried to take off.

"Pick up what you need and take off," Dave ordered the crew.

"You got it," came the reply. Lit by the flaming wreck, they quickly cleared the feed block and secured the empty belt. Making sure the gun was secure the three man team, all older than 60, started off through the snow. They would secure the toboggan to their snowmobile which was about a mile away, behind the mountain, and be home in an hour or two.

Dave walked over to the left flank and checked on the MG-3 team. They too were picking up in the firelight, securing the pieces of tripod and gun to three separate plastic sleds, each about 6 feet long. The men would trudge three miles through the snow to their snowmobiles, and be home shortly thereafter. As Dave walked his side of the line he was pleased to find no casualties. The assault team in this case was, except for the Machingun crews, armed with larger rifle. FAL's, Garands, a few HK-91's, and larger deer rifles. The Garand shooters used their relatively few rounds of Armor piercing to try to hit the helo's engines and cockpit, the rest of the men were instructed to fire along the length of the bird (or birds) to keep the inside interesting. Jim led the search team, which swept the LZ for prisoners and collected what they could of useful equipment.

Radioing his overwatch teams, Dave used code to tell them to sit tight, ambush successful. The team leaders organized their men and led them off in threes and fours. Dave met up with Jim in the middle of the field.

"This worked well," said Jim, happy with the night's work.

"Yup. Let's get going. They might wise up and bomb the LZ to get us." answered Dave.

"Right. I'll see you tomorrow," said Jim, shaking Dave's hand.

"OK then," answered Dave, slinging his L1A1, "Let's do lunch."

Jim laughed, "Sure, hollywood. Stay chilly." and he tromped off into the dark.

Dave answered three radio calls, all from team leaders reporting that their men were off of the LZ. They had no live Germans, a few weapons, a radio and CEOI codebook, and a bunch of maps with markings. These would be sped to the NHDF headquarters, so that any german intel could be acted on ASAP.

Dave made one more call, telling the overwatch teams to leave in ten minutes, and calling for his ride. In a few minutes he heard the muffled sound of Steve's snow machine coming up. Wordlessly Dave hopped on in back of Steve, who paused a moment to gaze at the flaming crash site. He then gunned the throttle and headed back the way he came, taking a circuitous route to his house, where Dave had left his truck. It had been a long three days waiting in ambush in the cold. Time for a hot bath, a good meal, and a warm bed.

Chapter 19

After spending nearly a month training local groups, Jim received an invite from the NHDF Command to attend a meeting with the militia liaison. It came through the town select board, which was the local government for the small town in which they lived. The message indicated they were to meet an escort at a small road junction 70 miles away, near the White Mountain National Forest, and they would then be escorted to the actual meeting spot. The message also indicated that they could accommodate no more than three people, so any others coming would have to fend for themselves. It was suggested that in addition to a militia leader they bring a communication person and/or a medical specialist. The NHDF also noted that they would supply anyone attending with fuel for the return trip, and recommended that attendees bring a truck with room to transport equipment back to their towns. After a meeting in the town meeting house, it was decided that Jim and Doc Ivarson would go, along with whoever else they felt necessary. Doc Ivarson was a retired General practitioner who lived in town, and spent most of his retirement time playing with his HAM radios on the family farm his great grandparents had passed on to his parents. He was the de facto communications specialist for the area, as he had the equipment, the knowledge, and the patriotism needed for the job. He had been a licensed armature operator since he was 11 years old, and had held an Extra ticket since he was 16.

Jims group had a meeting, and it was decided that Dave, Steve, Mike, and Gerald from the group would accompany Jim and Doc to the meeting. Steve would drive the captured Deuce and a half, Doc would drive his Jeep Cherokee. They prepped for the trip as if it were a convoy through occupied territory, as they did not have any guarantees as to the safety of the route. Mike would man the MG-3 mounted on top of the deuce, Gerald would ride shotgun with Doc and Dave, Jim would drive with Steve. They set up radio contingencies and practiced counter ambush drills. Jim instructed them to pack enough clothing for five days, food, water, a portable shepherders stove, the GP Small military tent they had purchased so long ago, and extra ammo, loaded in magazines and stored in military ammo cans. They brought one of the 40mm grenade launchers they had captured and two AT-4 rocket launchers as added insurance. All the men were equipped with CAR-15's or derivatives, as well as the MG-3, pistols, and Jim's Remington 700 PSS in .308. As a former sniper in the Ranger Regiment he felt naked without it along. They were glad for the extra rook the deuce provided. They had filled the deuce's tanks from home heating oil tanks, and carried a 55 gallon drum of extra fuel. They didn't want to rely on someone else to guarantee a return trip. On the truck was a collection of pioneer tools-shovels, picks, an axe, tow straps and chains, and a spare tire. They also carried enough wood for several days of burning in the small stove.

The small convoy set off three days later with some painful good byes, especially on the part of Dave and Steves kids, who didn't want their Dads to leave them. Steve realized he had never been away from his kids overnight before, unless the kids were at their grandparents house, and Daves sons were fearful due to the uncertainty they had just experienced with his long trek back to them. They planned to arrive a day early at the rendezvous site, and stake it out in case the meeting was a set up or compromised. Their

trip was uneventful. The truck was marked on the doors with their painted emblem, and on the grill and rear tailgate with boards with the white field and green pine tree of the free militia. It was a symbol taken from the colonial period, when patriots had used the pine tree as a symbol of defiance to the Crown, which had placed all large pine trees off limits to local cutting. The trees were declared property of the Royal Navy, for the purpose of making masts for their mighty fleet, and it was one of the major grievances the northern colonies had with England. Fortunately for all involved the trip and linkup with the guide were uneventful. The guides, two NHDF men mounted on matching Kawasaki enduro motorcycles, led them through the mountains to the entrance of a large old Inn. Their the gate guards waved them through, and the escorts left them. Following the driveway, the Inn and it's grounds came into view. More of a turn of the century hotel, the Inn had four stories and room for several hundred guests, and it's well tended grounds sprawled for acres under the shadow of the Presidential Mountain Range. They were stopped at a checkpoint manned by NHDF troops, an M-113 APC with mounted MK-19 40mm machine gun backing them up. About 100 yards away was an M-1 Abrams tank, providing further deterrent to unwelcome guests. The guard verified them by referring to a clipboard, and directed them to a parking area past the Abrams, where, he told them, they would find space to bivouac. There would be a muster later that day, and then meetings for the next five.

Pulling into the cantonement area, they pulled the deuce up under a sprawling chestnut tree devoid of leaves. A ground guide told them to set up in front of the truck, and indicated that they were awaiting the arrival of more men before starting the festivities. Setting up the tent went smoothly, and the men set up cots and placed some gear in the tent. They took time to turn the truck around so that it faced the way out, which made unloading easier and provided quicker escape should they need to. After this, they set out to mingle with the other militias who were set up all over the grounds. Steve, Dave, and Gerald met men from all over the state and exchanged stories. Some areas, it seemed, were pretty well set with a solid cadre of people with military experience, others appeared top not have any men with any type of military service whatsoever. they met three men who called themselves "colonel", and a few groups of men who used no rank, but wore matching uniforms in patterns ranging from tiger stripe to Realtree. They didn't run into anyone they knew very well, but did see a few men who were acquaintances from gun clubs they had competed at over the years. There were very few women present, and no children. They even ran into a unit from Manchester that was composed of an all black cadre, which caused them to stop and chat for a bit. New Hampshire has a small minority population, but was one of the first states to abolish slavery, and in keeping with the Live Free or Die spirit judging a person by character was a way of life long before Martin Luther Kind suggested it.

"How are you guys today," asked Gerald, whose mother was Okinawan.

"All right, my man, all right. You dudes look serious. Pull up a chair." the man invited.

"Thanks. I'm Gerald, this is Steve and Dave, from the Pine Tree Irregulars."

"How do. I'm Charles, these guys and I represent the Crispus Attucks Militia of Manchester. Where you all from?"

"You know Ice Spring?" Charles nodded, "We're the next town over, little place, but we cover all the county."

"Sure, sure. Way up in safe area New Hampshire."

"How is it in Manch-vegas?" Steve asked, calling Manchester by its nickname, as it was about the only area that stayed open past midnight.

"Rough, man, rough. We get a lot of refugees, and the JBT's like to raid the area. We seen some serious shyte already. Worse than Iraqi Freedom."

"You were military, then?" asked Dave.

"Sure, 2/7th Marines, I was a rifle fireteam leader. We got us a few Marines, some Army pukers, and a guy who was in the French Foreign Legion, too, but he's like 60 now, so he mostly motivates us." The other men in his unit laughed, "How about you?"

Steve spoke up, "Dave here was Airborne Infantry, we got a few others. I was Navy, but a piston engine mechanic."

"Well, that means you can take orders," smiled Charles.

"I can at that. Listen, nice to meet you, but we've got to move along."

"Sure, we'll see you guys around."

They all shook hands and said their see you later, and wandered back to their truck for a late lunch. Jim and the others were back.

"Would did you find out?" asked Jim.

"About half these guys look like they are playing at soldier, the other half seem pretty OK," assessed Dave, "How about you?"

"Same thing. I even met a self appointed general," Jim gave a derisive snort, "who was a cook in the National Guard."

Doc spoke up "But he was a Special Forces cook." They all laughed. While they respected military service, the leap from cook to combat leader was laughable unless the guy was something else. They suspected he wasn't of that type.

The muster was called at dusk, and it was held in a large auditorium inside the Inn. The three invited members from each group were asked to attend the muster. Jim asked the others to mingle with the groups and to find the men from the militias from the surrounding areas. They knew men from them, but hadn't seen them at the bivouac site. Jim, Dave, and Doc took seats in the auditorium, along with several hundred others. Most were, like the three, armed with rifles and at least a chest harness of magazines. This made them feel sure it was not a setup.

"ON YOU FEET!" boomed a voice. Dave, Jim, and others in the hall jumped to their feet, a common reaction among veterans upon hearing the command. Others in the crowd looked at the standing men with mild amusement or puzzled looks. Many stood up after the command sunk in. A NHDF man in BDU's strode across the stage. "Thanks, Sergeant Major. If the rest of you would rise, I'd like to start our meeting off with the pledge of allegiance." The hall filled with the sounds of the rest of the assembled militia getting up. The colonel saluted, the crowd saluted or placed their hands over their hearts. In a voice that projected but was not in a shout, the colonel began, "I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America. And to the Republic, for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

The echo of the voices died in the hall.

"Thank you. Please be seated. My name is Brigadier General Gauvin, I am the

commander of the New Hampshire Defense Forces. Prior to my taking command, I was a General in the National Guard, and the assistant commander of the New Hampshire Guard. First, I want to thank you for coming, and thank you for the service you are rendering unto our great state, and to our republic. Without your commitment, and the commitment of people like you, America would have been lost a generation ago." He paused to look around the room. "Judging by the reaction a moment ago to Sergeant Major Lamoroux's command, a number of you are veterans," laughter spread across the hall, "Good. We need men like you. To the rest, we need you, too, and appreciate your dedication to the holy cause of freedom. We asked you to come here so that we can establish a coordinated militia structure in the state. Many of you from the southern part of the state, particularly the stretch from Nashua to Portsmouth, have already fought in a number of engagements against the forces of tyranny that have taken up arms against us." Dave nodded. This was a good way to look at the situation. "We are, at present, fighting the enemy in a disjointed manner. Our responses to their assaults upon us, while so far successful, have only amplified this. What we are proposing to you is that with a central command and intelligence structure we will be even more effective. We are NOT suggesting that we move you away from your homes. What we are saying is that with information flowing in to one central area we will be able to better collate and disseminate it to you. We have a central supply system. We can help get needed supplies to units that need it. We can help you get what you need, and you can get excess materiel to people who need it and can use it. We can also coordinate medical aid, food supply, and things like gasoline, oil, and natural gas resupply. We have a number of talented people in this state, and we would like to maximize our effort by allowing them to help the whole state, in addition to their communities." A murmur of assent rippled through the crowd. "We will be having meetings all through the next few days-we will try to be as efficient as possible, but please be patient, we only recently came from the United States military, and we're still learning how to be efficient." Laughter again. "We'll let you know how we stand, and we want to hear how you are doing, what problems you are facing, how we can help you, and please, we need you to let us know how you can help us. We have refugees coming in every day, through Massachusetts and Vermont, we had a boat dock in Portsmouth today with four families from Maryland seeking, as they put it, political refugee status." The crowd chuckled, "We need you to interview refugees coming into your area, and find out how they got here, what routes they took, and what we can do to help them. We have an underground railroad of sorts going on right now, and we need to make it work better. The ISAF forces are actively hunting refugees, and we do not know how many they are capturing and interring." he again paused to let his words sink in. He looked around the room, for the most part liking what he saw. All eyes were on him, and many heads were nodding affirmatively.

"Tonight, after we break, I'd like each of you to write a report on your area. Where you are, what areas you cover, what your needs are, what your specialties are. We have boxes of state maps for you at the back of the room. Please take one per unit to mark your AO's, that's area of operations, on it for us. If you don't have long range radios let us know. If you have refugees or a refugee camp, let us know. We need numbers and a list of what you need. We'd like to know, roughly, how many combat effectives you have. Do you have enough weapons, ammo, and equipment for all of them. Thanks to the generosity of several businesses in the state we have a large number of weapons and quantities of

ammunition available. They may not be modern military weapons, but they are functional and effective for the war we anticipate the militia will be called upon to fight. I'd like to thank you for your time, I wish you all a good nights rest, and I'll be speaking to each of you individually before the end of the week."

"ON YOUR FEET!" boomed the Smaj again. This time the group rose as one.
"Dismissed!"

"So how'd it go?" asked Gerald as the trio came back to their tent.

"It didn't, really," answered Jim, "just a meet the commander thing. We're going to get together over the next few days and coordinate commo and logistics. Steve, can you and Dave go over this map and mark our AO?"

"Sure," said Steve, taking the map. He and Dave went over to a footlocker, using a Coleman lantern for light and marking their AO with a green marker. In the margins they made notes about the boundaries for the NHDF cartographers.

The group spoke around the stove for a couple of hours, discussing what the general had broached and what their response would be. Finally, Jim broke it up. "We need a guard roster for the night, guards will keep the stove going, too. Mike, will you take care of that? Put me and Dave on first and last. Doc sleeps all night, and you guys can sleep tomorrow."

Mike replied that he would, and on his pocket pad quickly drew up a list. Dave had first watch, and put on his gear and went outside.

The next morning a runner came by, asking the three representatives to come to the Inn for breakfast at 0700. Jim asked the others to watch their gear and to mingle with the other men around the camp. Personal relationships were important to Jims ideas on guerilla warfare.

Breakfast was a casual affair. They turned in their maps to orderlies at each of the two entrance doors, and they were served a buffet breakfast by the dining room staff. They all sat at a table to eat, and were soon joined by the commander of the Wildes Corner Militia, which covered the area to their south. After reacquainting themselves with the others, talk fell too matters of import.

"What do you think of this?" asked Dave Carlson, the commander.

"I think it's about time," answered Jim.

"Really? I thought independent cells would be the way to go," Dave had done a hitch as a tanker in the Army before Jim was able to drive.

"No. Not for this phase. We are not guerillas, we're defending our homes. If we were occupied by the Russkies a la Red Dawn, maybe. But we are already at the open warfare stage. We need to coordinate state wide, for all the reasons the General stated."

After a brief discussion about the merits of a state wide supply list, another orderly announced loudly "May I have your attention please? We are ready to begin. Will all of the militias from Aroostook County follow Sergeant Lavoie over there?" A female in BDUs waved her hand.

The orderly called off the rest of the counties one at a time. Dave and the group from his table followed a sweating man in civilian clothes down a hallway and into a conference room. Three NHDF men in BDUs greeted them. After introducing themselves, the militia

men introduced themselves to the NHDF, as they all knew each other. Captain O'Donnell, the senior NHDF man, opened up the meeting.

"Gentlemen, we'll get right to the point. We are the staff for your county. All information, all logistics, will come from us. One of us is on call 24/7 for you. When we set up the commo net you'll be able to reach us night or day for whatever you need. Any emergencies will go through the main staff, but anything routine, we are your men. And woman," he quickly added. The Sergeant First Class was quite noticeably female. This is not to say you can't deal with anyone else, but we are assigned to work with you. This way you can know us, and we can know you. Basically we'll be together all week. Now, what are your positions in your unit?"

Doc spoke first "I'm the commo man, but also the third in our medical detachment." Doc was picking up the lingo quickly.

"Great, Doc, we'll do all medical and commo thorough you. We'll be having a few larger get togethers with other medical and commo staffers."

Jim spoke next, "I'm the commander in our town. Dave here is my second in command."

"Good," said Sergeant Moran, her voice a sexy contralto, "We'll be doing all logistics and military ops with you guys. Transportation too."

The others went around and explained who and what they were. They had another doctor present, this one a bit younger than Doc and still in practice. A master machinist, a grocery store manager (great, said Sgt Moran, logistics), a truck mechanic, a private pilot, a police chief, and two other HAMs who were commo chiefs. The others ran the gamut from insurance sales to self employed wood cutters.

Jim had the best military credentials of the group. Dave and another guy were about tied, the other man having served ten years as a Cavalry Scout in the Army. The rest less or no military time.

"Would anyone object to us making Jim here the military head of your county? Jim, you can object, too." said the young Captain.

A string of no's sounded. Jim nodded, "I'll do it."

"Good, good. It's helpful to have an experienced Green Beret on the ground. Let's get started, shall we? Sergeant Moran will pass out notebooks and pencils...."

They spent the next few hours giving the NHDF staff a brief background on their situation. They seemed particularly interested in Dave's walk to freedom. They also covered the military supply situation, the medical accommodations and personnel, and the training status of the local units of militia.

After breaking for lunch, they broke into smaller groups. Doc and the commo men from the other towns went to a communications meeting in another building. Jim stayed to discuss training, and Dave went to another room to be debriefed about his trek through Massachusetts. After answering questions for several hours, he finally asked the NHDF team why they wanted to know all of this.

"Well," started the debriefer, a Military Intelligence analyst named Hodges, "we have a few reports of the ISAF forces killing refugees, also of them interring many more. We want to form teams to go south and help these folks get up here alive. It's really a humanitarian project."

"Well, let's get going. You were asking about the ISAF force that attacked me and my

friends? Well, they were firing up into the trees at first, until they saw weapons....."

Afer four days of briefings, meetings, and brain storming sessions, the group headed back home. The deuce was full of Weapons and ammo. three crates of Enfield rifles from Millennium, along with a large stack of ammunition crates. Also more 5.56 and 7.62 ammo, several crates of explosives and related equipment, a large pallet of blankets, cases of MRE's, and fourteen M-4 carbines, with magazines and web gear. included in the onboard ammo were three cans of 7.62 match ammo, and two of linked .50 call ammo, armor piercing incendiary and API tracer.

Doc had complete codes for use on the radio, a list of freqs and codes, and information on setting up tactical radio nets. Jim and Dave had contact info for the neighboring towns and counties, as well as rough contingency plans for a number of situations. They had received briefings on the national and international currents, and had a much better picture of how things were going.

As a light snow fell, the drove home with a feeling of accomplishment and purpose. Their hopes were high for victory.

Chapter 20

After assisting Doc in setting up his ICOM IC-756 base station in the communications center at the police station, the men from the White Pine Irregulars spent a day with Doc and his local HAM's. They visited a number of residences and setting up radios, both HAM and CB, and going over the basics of the Net. In short, they were told to use the radios for emergencies only, and to keep transmissions brief to help prevent radio direction finders to the south from pinpointing them. The militia wasn't of the opinion that they would be DF'ed yet, but instilling good habits was important. The operators were given a printout with basic information on them. Antennas were set up pointing to town, as much as was possible. Neighbors were connected with neighbors, and it was suggested that folks get to know their neighbors or put away petty squabbles and work with neighbors for the common defense. They also distributed some of the arms the NHDF had provided, and took time to check in on others, to ascertain their level of preparedness and to determine who would need help through the winter.

What they found was encouraging. Most people were pulling together, people were taking care of their neighbors, and the elderly who remained in their homes were all either looked after or old curmudgeons who wanted no help. The hunting that people were doing were probably more effective than any regular picket line would have been, and there were several folks running around at night jacking deer who acted as night watchmen. Overall they found the town to be in good shape, and the only real concern was keeping the batteries charged. Will came up with one way to do that.

"I saw an article once that showed how to make a lawn mower a battery charger," he said during the meeting after the days mission was done, "Basically they hooked up a car alternator to the lawn mower and ran the mower to charge it up."

Steve spoke up "That might not be a bad idea. Most people don't have the gas to use their cars too much, maybe we could fab one up and see how it works. Do you know how efficient it was?"

"Nope, I just remember it was pretty neat looking, and I filed it away in my head for later." Steve nodded, already planning how he was going to do this.

Jim nodded. "OK, Steve and Will, you are the generator detail. I want to know the output and fuel efficiency, see is it's worth the time. If it's worth it we can get plans out to folks. Probably not perfect, but better than nothing."

They went about their normal routine. Snow was falling, and they assisted in opening up the local snowmobile trails, cutting back growth and repairing bridges. Soon the snow would stick and accumulate, and the trails went from Massachusetts to Canada. They would be a snowy superhighway before too long. Time was spent by various team members in gathering wood, patrolling the roads and forests, and training with the local forces. Although they didn't shoot much live ammunition, they did ensure that everyone had good basic zeroes on their weapons. Steve, Scott, and Will set about training those issued the donated Lee Enfields on the finer points of stripper clip reloading and bolt manipulation. The NHDF had included plans for scope mounts, and a number were made up for the Enfields, using "L" shaped angle iron as the mount. They then assisted those equipped with scoped rifles in obtaining a combat zero. The basic idea was to give the

men a zero that would ensure a body hit with a center mass aiming point. That depended upon the chambering of the rifle, to a large extent. Essentially it gave them a point blank zero to three hundred to 400 hundred yards. For anything longer they were told to aim for the top of the head, which gave most another 200 yards of range. It was the down and dirty sniper method. The few with ranging scopes, laser range finders, or long range shooting experience were noted mentally, as they tried not to have too much written material with names, for security purposes. They did not know if any of the locals bore any sympathies to the socialists who had stolen America, and did not want to risk directed attacks or reprisals against loyal citizens.

Little more than a week after the NHDF meeting Jim received a sealed envelope from his NHDF liaison officers. It was delivered by motorcycle courier in the early afternoon, and the courier indicated that she was to wait for his reply. Jim read the letter and made a call on the radio asking for the group to meet at his house *poste haste*. Most of the members arrived within the hour, and an ad hoc meeting was held.

“The NHDF is asking for volunteers to help refugees infiltrate the border and the ISAF picket lines. They are asking us to send a team of three or more, they need military people, medical, comms. We get nothing but ‘the respect of a grateful state’ for doing it.” Everyone spoke at once.

“No way.”

“I’ll go.”

“Let’s invade Massachusetts.”

“Let’s do it.”

“Calm down,” commanded Jim. “We’re not sending anyone yet.”

Dave spoke up, “We need to send someone. They gave us a ton of stuff, and they are asking for our help. And it’s the right thing to do.”

“We don’t need them,” said Mike, “We have enough stuff to make do ourselves. I say we tell them no thanks.”

Steve spoke next, “I’ll go. I think it’s important to help the refugees and it is a good way of giving the finger,” he held up the appropriate one, “to big brother.”

Tony stood up, “I don’t have any of the skills they want, but I’ll go if they’ll take me.

Dave saved my families bacon and I wanna pay that back. Doin’ this would make it even with God.” He looked around self-consciously. He was still a little intimidated at being a mechanic one week and a member of a survivalist group the next. It had certainly been something he never expected to have occurred.

Jim nodded, considering what they said. He would have preferred not to send anyone, as he felt that having the whole team around was better for the overall security of the area. He also realized that dealing with the state could be *quid pro quo*, and they may withhold weapons and support from areas that didn’t display enough support for the home team. Even if they didn’t, supporting this operation could get them recognition that could be beneficial, too.

“What we have to weigh is the possible cost of having staff gone and losing critical skills and not supporting the state. I feel that the state won’t act punitively if we send no one, but there may be benefits if we do send men.”

“I think the state will look on us more favorably if we send a team,” chimed in Scott, “If we send a team in and they totally impress them, maybe we can get them to supply us

with better equipment, like M-113's or TOW's."

The discussion continued under Jim's guidance for another 20 minutes. Finally Jim stopped the chatter. "ALL RIGHT!" Silence descended like a stage curtain. "We'll send a team, five guys, all volunteers. Who wants in?"

Voices again. "Stop it! Dave, Tony, Jim, you guys are going, Dave's in charge, Tony's number 2, Jim, you're the medic so you can use your EMT skills again. We need two more, so we'll ask around town to see. We could use another military guy, though."

Will raised his hand to get Jim's attention. "I'll go."

Jim looked at him. Will was an Army veteran, Infantry, three years. But he mostly kept to himself, he was a very quiet guy. Jim often wondered what made him tick. But he had proven himself a loyal member and never complained about anything.

"All right, you're in. We need one more. Preferably someone with commo skills."

Steve spoke again, "Let's ask Doc who he thinks we should take."

Several voices concurred at once.

"Good idea. Steve, take Jim and go talk to Doc. If you find someone, talk to him, check him out. If he's not suitable, ask Doc for a second and third name."

"Gotcha," snapped Steve, as he got up, "We'll be back. C'mon, medic man."

Jim picked up his coat, "When are we supposed to leave?"

"I don't know, I need to let the courier know we're in on the deal. I guess we'll find out when they know we're coming."

Jim went outside, followed by the rest of the crew. The courier was in the house, drinking some warm cocoa prepared by Jim's wife. When she saw them coming she virtually leapt out of the doorway, pulling on her thick leather coat as she came down the steps. "Do you have an answer?"

"Yeah," Jim replied, "tell them we're in for a five man team, two military, one medic, one former refugee, and a commo man."

"Great," said the courier, reaching into her small backpack, "Then this is for you. It's a packing list, Opord, and other instructions. Do you want to send a message back to Command?"

Jim raised an eyebrow as he took the proffered envelope, "Just give them a big sloppy kiss from me."

The girl grinned, "No way. I'll tell them you send big hugs though. Thank your wife for the cocoa." She hurried to her Honda and kicked it to life, and soon the sound of her engine faded behind the hills.

"Dave, Tony, come on back to the barn, we'll take a look. If you other guys want, would you take a look at the deuce, make sure the fluids are topped and stuff?"

"Yeah, sure," came back the answer.

Entering the barn, Jim took off his jacket and pulled a chair up to the table. He opened the envelope with his Benchmade automatic knife, bought at a shop in Rhode Island that specialized in auto knives. He pulled from it a stack of papers. Looking through the pile, he separated it and handed Dave a thick stack joined by a binder clip.

"Why don't you start on the Op order. I've got some real important Army guy papers here," said Jim with a self deprecating grin.

Dave looked at the Opord. Standard Army format-Situation, Mission, Execution, Command and Signal, Service and Support. The Situation section covered nothing new. ISAF forces, supported by local police forces, helicopters, observation aircraft, and some Federal troops equipped with trucks, APC's, and direct fire weapons were patrolling the border, stopping escapees and interring them at several known and unknown locations. ISAF and Federal forces were launching raids into New Hampshire using vehicles, aircraft, and foot infiltration, and attacking infrastructure targets-electrical pylons, National Guard armories, airports, etc, to deny their use in New Hampshire. Partially to cripple the local economy, partially to make things miserable for the average citizen, to make them unhappy with the state government and undermine its credibility.

Mission-exfiltrate New Hampshire, escort and evacuate people to freedom, protecting them "through whatever means required" from ISAF interference. Gather intel about ISAF forces and operations in occupied areas, and intercept any ISAF infiltrators attempting to enter the liberated zone.

Execution-to be determined by team leaders at NHDF HQ.

C&S-to be provided at NHDF HQ

Svc&Spt-On call NHDF helicopter support, organic NHDF aircraft and artillery, NHDF reaction forces. Supply TBD by available supplies. Suggested teams provide as much as possible to alleviate shortages in critical materials. Individual team SOPs to be determined by individual teams-support provided by NHDF as requested.

The attachments dealt with packing lists, suggested items, and more details that Dave felt should have been included in the body of the Opord. They were basically going to help refugees. Blankets, food, medical support, guides, guards. They would have extra equipment air or ground convoy supplied when they reached their AO, and it was suggested that each team be able to E&E back to New Hampshire on their own if needed. The ISAF forces had trail watchers, motorized reaction teams, and aircraft. There would be recovery teams near the border that could come pick them up when the refugees were close to the state line. More details to be provided at the NHDF HQ.

Jim handed Dave a typed note that mentioned the Ice Spring Militia was being asked to provide a team too. Dave made a note to contact them and determine what they were doing. Perhaps they could travel to the NHDF HQ together. Dave read more of the material, and handed Jim the Opord for him to go over. A message from their liaison, asking them to bring a good long range battery operated radio with the team, suggesting they bring short range radios for team commo. It was also suggested they bring any night vision they had.

Dave and Jim discussed the mission, and drew up a packing list based on what info they had.

Basic load-

Load bearing equipment-minimum

Two one quart canteens, with one steel cup and covers

Three ammo pouches, 3x30 round mags

One ammo pouch, accessories-Compass, lighter, knife steel, jackknife, whatever else militiaman wants

Knife

Pistol (optional)

First aid compress x2, left side of belt buckle

FRS radio and earbud

Snap link

Pack-

Sleeping bag, 0 degree or lower

Sleep pad

Poncho

Bivy sack (if available)

2 quart canteen or water bladder

Right hand outside pocket

Cleaning kit

First Aid Kit

100' 550 cord

Dry socks and powder in plastic bag

Left side-

Poncho

MRE, stripped

1 bandoleer, 5.56mm

Heat tablets

Disposable lighter

Middle pocket (if pack has)

Wet weather top (Gore tex or whatever)

Main pack-

Team equipment

Spare t-shirt

Spare socks

Snivel shirt

Gloves

Wool hat

9 stripped MRE's

Other foods

Team Equipment

Batteries

One e-tool

One hatchet

One folding saw
Commo equipment
Water filter
Toilet paper
Medical supplies
Five Claymore mines
Demo kit
Binos
Zip ties
Duct tape
Sewing kit

Suggested each man carry gaiters, sunglasses, earplugs, parka, extra gloves, lip balm, space blanket, E&E kit, and use wick dry sock liners and t-shirts

Weapons-
AR-15 or derivative, minimum 10 mags, 200 rounds extra
Pistols-personal preference, not felt all personnel need one
StenMk2S+ four mags of subsonic ammo
Grenade launcher, 20 rounds HE
2 fragmentation grenades
1 smoke grenade per man
2 signal flares

Uniform is OD BDU's, soft cap-either patrol cap or boonie, boots-suggested insulated Danners or Matterhorns

Team Leader-Dave
Assistant TL- Tony
Medic- Jim
Scout- Will
Commo- TBD

They sat back.

“That’ll do for now,” said Jim, “We’ll add or remove stuff as needed. We need to see what kind of radio gear you’ll be humping.”

“Sounds good. I’ll write up our warning order and get ready to brief the men when they get back,” replied Dave, “It’s going to be a long night.”

Steve and Jim came back in a few short hours, looking a little chagrined. Steve came into the barn where Jim and Dave were working.

“What’s up?” asked Dave, “did Doc get us a commo expert?”

“Um, yeah, a commo expert and an experienced hiker and winter camper,” answered Steve. He looked uncomfortable.

“What’s the matter, then?”

“Well, uuhh....it’s just that Sam’s....” Steve was hesitating when the door opened up

and a girl of about 16 entered. Shaking hair long dark hair, she looked around.
“Hi,” she said, her voice sounded odd in a room of testosterone filled anticipation.
“Hi.” Said Jim, “my wife’s in the house.” And he turned back to his papers.
“I’m not here to see a wife, I’m here to see a guy named Dave?” she looked around.
“I’m Dave,” said Dave, standing up, “What can I do for you?”
“My name’s Sam. I’m your commo expert.”

After getting over there initial objections, Dave and Jim sent Sam into Jims house.
“Why didn’t you tell Doc to quit sniffing glue?” asked Dave of Steve and Jim.
“We did, but he said she was the best of who was left who could go. All the boys are gone. She’s got licenses like Doc’s, and she’s a complete radio freak, Doc said she dreams in Morse Code.”
“I don’t care if she bleeds dots and dashes, I’m not taking a kid into a possible war zone.”
“Doc said she’s all he’s giving up. They got one boy with asthma, one’s too young, the others still got a cast on his leg. Doc says it her or nothing.”
“Damn.”
“Dave,” said Jim, “talk to her. She’s a total outdoors nut, too. She hiked the Appalachian Trail over three summers, and has done Mt. Washington in the winter twice.”
After a pause Dave agreed. “Let’s meet the commo queen.”

Chapter 21

Dave went into Walts house. Sam was talking to Walt's wife when he entered.

"Hi," she said as he walked in, "Made up your mind yet?" She looked at Dave directly, her gaze not wavering a bit.

"No," answered Dave, "frankly we're against the idea of bringing a girl along..."

"I'm almost 17," Sam defended herself by saying, "and I just found out that Walt joined the Army at 17."

"It's more than that. We're going into a combat zone. We don't want to have to baby-sit anyone."

"Look, I'm half the age of you guys, I can pack just as much as you, and I'm in at least as good a shape as you guys are."

"That's not what we're questioning. If we get hit, you'll be part of a team, and we don't want to risk anyone trying to protect you, or to have you freak out under the pressure. War isn't a game."

"Freak out? My Dad's been taking me hunting since I was seven, and I got my first deer when I was 11! I've seen blood, mister soldier."

"Well, let's talk. Do you know what we're doing?"

Sam considered that for a moment. "I thought it was refugees and stuff, setting up way stations for them, like the underground railroad. But it sounds more like a war patrol or something."

"Well, it is helping refugees, but it IS in a war zone. We're going to try to help folks escape to New Hampshire, and protect them from the 'As if' forces. They've been attacking and arresting folks, and I know that they are killing armed groups of people."

"Dave, I want to help those people. I can be a help on the team, I really can," she wasn't pleading, but she did come across as desperate to go.

"I don't know, Sam. Let's talk a bit, then you'll meet the team. Then the guys and I will talk about it and let you know." Sam bit her lip and nodded. Dave thought she was trying not to say something. Whatever; she could listen a bit.

"Do you have a military style rifle?"

"Yeah, my Dad's SKS."

"Well, we're using AR's and variants-they're M-16 for citizens."

"I'll get one in town."

"Steve said you've hiked the AT and Washington in winter. Tell me about that..."

Same told Dave how she had always followed her brother around. When he was a Boy Scout and her Father was a Troop Leader she went along on their campouts, which were held monthly, every month, rain or shine. As part of a Council project, she accompanied them on a three summer hike of the Appalachian Trail, starting in Georgia and eventually finishing in Baxter State Park in Maine. Her winter hikes of Mount Washington, the highest peak in new England and home of some of the most severe weather in the world was done with her father, brother, and several others as a separate climb. She had attended a wilderness survival school in Alaska the summer prior as a gift from her parents-she had asked for nothing else for her 16th birthday and had gotten straight A's at school. Her parents acquiesced and let her go for two weeks. She then returned home through Wyoming, where she participated in a National Outdoor Leadership School hike of the Grand Teton Mountains, where the students had to carry all of their gear and food

for two weeks in their packs.

Dave considered. She had a LOT of hiking and outdoor experience.

“What about the radio?”

“I have an Extra license and I was taking electrical engineering correspondence courses on the computer before all this happened. I’m going to be an engineer when this is done. I’ve made some radios from kits, and I built one by ordering parts from catalogs and stuff. Doc can set me up with a rig that uses just a little electricity, and he’s gonna give me a hand generator we can carry to power the rig.”

Dave sighed. If she was a guy, he’d have no problem with her going. But she wasn’t a guy.

“Let’s meet the team and talk some more.”

Dave rounded up Will, Tony, and Jim, and led them into the barn. They all sat around the table. Walt sat with them, as did a few of the other guys. Dave went around the table introducing Sam to the men.

“Guys, this is Sam. Doc sent her to us as a commo expert, but we need to decide if we’re going to take her. I want you all to talk to her, primarily the guys going, and then we’ll ask her to step out while we decide. OK?”

All the heads nodded.

Walt took a cigarette out of his pack and lit it, blowing the smoke up and away from the table. “Well, Sam,” he said, “tell us about yourself and why Dave and the others should take you along.”

Sam reiterated her story, filling in more details about setting up radio contacts on her hike in the Tetons using continuous wave, CW she called it, or Morse Code, from a small low powered radio she packed along. She also told them that she was an expert shot with a rifle, and that she felt her skills would be an asset to the team. Finally, she reached across the table, took one of Walt’s cigarettes, and lit it defiantly. “I’m my own person and don’t take crap from anyone, either. If you want the best commo person you’re ever going to see, you’ll take me.” And she got up and walked out. The group sat there for a minute. “So much for questions and answer,” said Jim. Everyone laughed. Despite their reservations they liked the spunky teenager. She certainly had filled her short life with some interesting adventures.

“Tony, would do you think?” asked Dave.

“She’s better suited to this than me. My only qualification is that I walked here from Mass, and I probably would be dead if I didn’t get adopted as a stray dawg,” said Tony, eliciting more laughs from the group.

“Jim?”

“I think we should try her out. But one F-up and she’s history.”

“Will?”

“Bring her. She’s in better shape than a bunch of old has beens,” said Will, looking Dave, Walt, Jim, and Steve in the eyes as he spoke. He was the youngest member of the team at 28, “and she’s definitely capable of carrying her own weight.”

“Anyone else?”

“Is there anyone else who can go?”

“Doc said she’s it. All the other guys are sick or older than us.” Steve replied.

“I don’t like it,” said Walt. Everyone quieted down. Walt was, by more acceptance than

anything else, the leader. “She’s a kid, and she stole my last cigarette. That pisses me off.” Everyone laughed at him.

“Seriously, you guys talk about it. Dave, if you guys want her, take her.”

“How about we talk about this as a team? We can sleep on it if you want,” Dave looked at the other team members. Tony spoke up.

“My minds made up. She can come.”

“Mine too,” said Will, “She’ OK by in my book.”

“I wanna think it over,” said Jim.

“So do I,” said Dave, “Let’s decide in the morning. We’ll meet here with our stuff to pack and prep for the mission. Speaking of which, here is a packing list to copy. And after I talk to Sam we can go over the Opord. I’ll have her sit in on it so if we do take her we won’t have to go over it again just for her.”

The meeting ended later than they thought it would. Sam had a lot of questions, which the team tolerated with remarkable restraint. The team went over maps of the areas Tony and Dave had come through, and did a map recon of the whole border area to look for other likely routes. These they marked for future reference. After ensuring that Sam understood they were going to make a decision tomorrow, the meeting broke up. Will agreed to drop Sam off back in town, as she had radio watch that night as part of Docs commo team, and Will wanted to get a few things from his apartment in town. He was staying at Steves for the duration.

“0900 sharp we start,” said Dave as they pulled on their coats.

The team assembled well before 0900. Except for Sam.

Jim looked at Dave, “Make up your mind?” he asked.

“Yeah. You?”

“Yup.”

“Weellll?”

“I say we try her out. Being out there with one of us goobers on the radio is too risky. But if she’s trouble during training we dump her.”

“That’s what I was thinking, too,” said Dave. He had talked to Sandy that morning over breakfast. She had convinced him to try her out.

“Sandy convince you?”

Dave laughed, “Yeah, how’d you know?”

“My wife ragged on me all last night and this morning about it. If I didn’t say yes I wouldn’t get to wiggle my bean for a month.” They both laughed.

“Well, let’s get started.”

The team layed out their gear in the barn. Dave went over the packing list, to find any deficiencies. He had Will examine his pack.

“We’re going to go over movement, Patrol Base procedures, ambush drills, and all before we go. Refugees or not we’re treating this as a combat patrol.”

The team broke out a few cases of late dated MRE’s and started stripping them, taking out anything they didn’t want or need. Once the MRE bags were repacked they were taped with green duct tape. Dave brought in a case of heat tabs from his truck, and a box of disposable lighters he had purchased in from a warehouse superstore a few years before. He laid them on the table for the team to use.

A few minutes before nine a car horn beeped. "It's Sam," said Steve, coming in. "You guys wanna talk to her?"

"Yeah, tell her we'll be right there."

Putting on their coats the team went outside to see a brown Bronco in front of the house, it's tailpipes spewing white exhaust smoke in the chill morning air. The doors opened and Sam got out, accompanied by a man the team all knew.

"Hi, Shawn," said Will. Shawn was a member of the towns militia, and had trained with Dave and the men many times now.

"Hi. Hear you got something to tell my daughter here."

"Yes we do," answered Dave. Turning to Sam he said "You are in, provisionally. If we like they way you act in training, you can go. We have our reservations, but you've got your chance."

Sams face lit up, "You won't be sorry Dave, really."

Shawn was smiling, too, "Sam won't let you down, Dave. Ever since her brother joined the NHDF she's been wanting to do her part."

"Shawn, she's only going if we think she's capable."

"Oh, you'll see," said Shawn, his confidence in Sams abilities obvious in his voice, "You're gonna want ten more just like her."

"I hope so. Look, Sam, we're going over our gear right now. You can go get your stuff and come back, we'll go over it then."

"Oh, no, I've got it here. Ooops, I have this, too, for Walt." She pulled a manila envelope from her jacket, "It's a message from the NHDF. We have ten days to report."

Dave took the envelope from her, "You read a lot of messages meant for others?"

"I received it last night on radio watch. I have to read it to copy it down."

Dave felt silly. "Jim, will you tell Walt we have a message from HQ? Sam, go get your stuff and come back. We'll be here for the next three days to train."

"I have my stuff in my Dad's truck," she said. Shawn and Sam went to the back of the truck. Swinging aside the spare tire, Shawn pulled out Sams pack, and three large plastic totes. "Where do you want these?" he asked.

"In the barn. Here, we'll help."

"Let me get my SKS for Sam," said Shawn, moving to the front of the truck.

"It's OK, Shawn, we'll set her up with an AR?"

"Are you sure? That's a lot of money..."

"We need her to have the same weapon as we do, for compatibility. It's all right. She can give it back later."

"If you say so, Dave. Let's get these thing in the barn."

Sam had a commercial pack, a Lowe. Unfortunately it was purple. "We'll have to do something about your pack," he said to Samantha, "We've got black dye around here somewhere."

"Do we have to?" Sam asked.

"Yes. We're gonna make snow covers anyway, but yes, purple is not allowed. Got it?"

"Yes," said Sam dejectedly.

"If you're done here I'll get going," said Shawn.

"Sure, Shawn. We'll drop Sam off when we break, it'll be a few days."

"I understand, Dave." Sam gave him a hug and he was gone, closing the barn door behind

him.

“Let’s see what you’ve got,” said Dave to Sam. In the totes were food, clothes, and radio equipment, along with two small 12 volt motorcycle batteries.

“These are the primary power for the radio,” Sam pointed at a smallish radio on the table. “They’ll give us 24 hours a piece. I have a large solar charger and Docs hand generator to recharge them.”

Will placed the batteries on the table.

“I have an antenna, and my handbook to help sizing it for whatever freqs we’re on. Also, I’ve got a handheld 2 meter and spare batteries for it.”

“Looks good,” remarked Dave, “We’ll practice setting it up later. You’ll need to teach us all how to use it.”

At this Sam made a face. “Don’t worry, we’re not going to have you train us and then leave you. If you are incapacitated we all need to know how it works. Also, you’ve got to sleep sometimes.”

Sam grinned sheepishly, “Sorry. I have a lot to learn about this army stuff.”

“We’ll teach you that. I bet it’s easier than the radio is.”

After helping Sam empty her pack, and laying out her things on the table to help her decide what to repack, Jim said something Dave hadn’t thought of.

“So, Sam, where’s your ‘feminine hygiene products’?”

“I don’t need them right now,” said Sam, a little taken aback by the subject broached by a 30+ year old married man.

“Not now, but what about on the trail?”

Everyone looked from Jim to Sam. They hadn’t thought of that.

“I’ll bring them next time.”

”Well,” said Jim, “Bring twice what you think you’ll need. Stress can change your cycle. And as medic I may be able to use some for dressings if we need them.”

Sam nodded, “I will, I will.”

The team discussed their jobs with Sam, and the training they were planning for the remainder of the week.

“I’m going to draw up a schedule for the week, some of you will give us classes on your specialties. If you guys will help Sam with her gear, I’ll work one up now.”

The team agreed. Dave took up his notebook and coat and went to Walts house to draw up a training schedule in quiet. The team was talking up a storm, in high spirits with the forthcoming mission. Dave knew they would get less talkative and more somber as the launch date drew closer.

An hour later Dave and Walt entered the barn. The team looked up as a smiling Dave announced, “We have something for Sam. Sam, will you come up here a minute?”

A curious Sam approached them.

“Since you didn’t have anything decent in the way of weapons, I’m going to loan you this,” said Walt, emphasizing the ‘loan’ part. He held up a short AR-15, “It’s an AR, and it’s got an 11 ½ inch barrel. Perfect for a commo queen.”

Sam took the little rifle and looked at it. “Cute!” she declared. Walt rolled his eyes. “Cute she says.” Everyone laughed. They couldn’t help but agree. It was a cute little gun.

Will held out his right hand, palm facing the rear, fingers pointed up. Stop. The team stopped, taking a half step off of the trail, and took a knee facing out. Jim, the last man, turned and faced their back trail to cover the rear. Will keyed his radio "They're just up ahead. I can see a tent."

Dave radioed back "Roger. Tony, go up with him and initiate contact." The team were all listening and dropped their packs, going prone behind them. Tony was next behind Dave, and scurried past, heading for the front. They were three days into the mission, and this was their first contact with refugees. Will and Tony approached the little camp slowly and cautiously. When they were a good deal closer Tony called out "Hello the tent!" They heard a multitude of sounds coming from it, a child asking "What is it?" and a woman's voice saying "Hush!" inside. Then they heard the distinct sound of a bolt being worked, and a man with a scoped M1A stood up from behind the tent. "What do you want?" he asked, his eyes nervously surveying the uniformed and armed men before him.

"We're from the New Hampshire militia," Tony said, "We're here to help."

"How do I know you're not ISAF?" the man asked.

"Do we look like Germans or traitors to you?" said Will. "If we wanted to capture you we would've circled you. I'll lay down my weapon if you want and come up, if you want to parlay."

The man looked at him. "Why don't you just get the hell out of here?" In the tent a little sneeze and a voice said "Mommy, I'm cold."

"Because you're kids are freezing, you're alone, and there's an "as if" patrol over the next hill waiting for you."

"How do you know?" asked the man warily.

"Because we skirted them yesterday. Look," Tony laid down his CAR15, "Point that thing away from my chest and I'll come up alone."

Tony put both his hands where the nervous man could see they were empty and walked to the tent. "We've got a medic, blankets, and food. How about we talk?"

Feet crunching on the snow, he approached. The man got a better look at him. Unshaved, wearing obviously homemade over white, and using old fashioned web gear, he didn't look like the Army or their accomplices.

"Why are you running?" Tony asked.

"They had me on a list. Arrested and detained twice, I figured I better get before I wound up locked up in jail."

Tony nodded. He knew the feeling. "How long have you been on the trail?"

"About ten days. It's slow with the kids...umm, I've got three friends covering you, you know."

Tony looked around. "We know you're alone. Look, we're not here to hassle you, we've been sent to help out. I escaped a few months ago with my family, and the militia helped me. Why don't you let us help, alright?"

The man said nothing, mulling what Tony had said over in his head. After a half minute or so, he lowered his rifle. "OK. Melissa, it's OK, they're here to help."

A muffled voice from inside the tent said "Are you sure?"

"Well, if they aren't we're toast anyway. C'mon out." The zipper made it's distinct sound and a bedraggled woman came out, bundled in a bright ski jacket. She leaned back into the tent and said "Andy, keep your sister warm. I'll be right back."

Standing up, her hair was a mess, her eyes red, her cheeks pale, and she was shivering. Tony smile disarmingly, as did Will. "Ma'am," said Will, with a nod. She looked around nervously, "Hello. You're here to help us?" "Yes Ma'am. We've got blankets, food, and a medic to check you out. You have any hot food?" "No, we didn't want to risk a fire." "We'll take care of that," Will again keyed his mike, "We're secure, come on up." "OK" came the static filled reply. "I've asked the team to come up. We can cook up some hot soup and check out the kids-how are they?" "Cold and sick, Amy has a cold and their clothes are wet. We're having a hard time drying them out." "Well, we'll do what we can." The team came up, carrying Tony and Wills packs. Sam smiles at the woman "Hello," she said, "can we help you?" With Sams appearance the man and woman relaxed noticeably. The ISAF forces wouldn't have a young girl along. Tony told the man, "This is Dave, he's in charge. Dave, they have two kids..." he turned with a questioning look at the man, who nodded, "who are cold and wet, one's sick, and they need dry clothes." "Thanks, Tony. Can you, Will, and Sam set up a quick perimeter? Put Claymores out, and Will, watch the back trail with the 40, OK?" "OK, Dave, I'm there," said Will, rucking up. The German grenade launcher was attached to the outside of his ALICE pack. "Jim, get your kit and look at the kids, will you?" Dave looked back at the parents, "Jims trained as a paramedic, he's got some medicine and things that may help. Ma'am, can you show him the kids?" The woman nodded, "Of course. Right this way..." Jim walked up and introduced himself to her "I'm Jim, and I only play a doctor on TV..."

Dave stuck out his hand, "Dave McGrath."

The man took it "Pat Woolard."

"Tell me what brings you here, Pat, and I'll put some food on."

"Well, I had this rifle I never turned in, and I told them I sold it, but they didn't believe me....."

Dave prepped his Firefly stove as the man talked. He filled the pot with a can of chicken noodle soup, which he remembered was a hit with Tony's kids. When Pat finished, Dave said "Well, Pat, you've done a good job of getting your family out. But the border is more secure than before, so maybe we can help. We have a few resources available that I think will speed you along."

Jim came out of the tent. "How are they?" Dave asked.

"Cold and tired. I had them take off their wet clothes and put them in a sleeping bag. Their Moms going to get in, too, and warm them up. Is the soup ready?"

"Almost."

"Good. Sir, do you have cups or mugs for the kids?"

"Yeah, in the tent. And the names Pat."

"Pat, I'm Jim. Your daughter has the beginnings of bronchitis. Her tonsils are huge and

her lungs are filling with fluid. I'd like to get her out ASAP before she gets pneumonia."
"I'd like to get her out, too."
"We'll see what we can do," said Dave.

After ensuring the kids each had as much soup as they could eat, Dave sent Jim out to relieve Sam. In short order, she approached Dave. "What is it, boss?" and gave him a mock salute. Dave knocked her hand down. "What are doing?" he said, his voice low but firm, "Trying to attract snipers? Don't do that."

Sam looked chagrined. "Sorry, Dave, I..."

Dave smiled, "Just don't do it again, huh?"

Sam looked slightly relieved, "OK, Dave."

"I need you to get in touch with NHDF HQ and let them know we have four to evacuate." He pulled a laminated map out of his pocket, and then wrote some information down on a small pad. He tore off the sheet and handed it to her. "This is our location, encode it. We have two adults, two kids. We'll need to know how they want them. And keep the transmission brief, right?"

"Just like we practiced, Dave, no problemo," said Sam, and she sent back to her pack and started setting up her radio.

"Pat," said Dave, "Your tent stands out pretty well here. Let's do something about that. I have this white poncho here...."

After covering the tent, Dave told Pat he was going to check on his team. He put two cans of soup on the stove in the largish stainless cook pot, and then sent them back one at a time for a canteen cup of soup. It was cold in the hills in December.

He sat with Sam, who told him the message was received and that she was waiting for an answer. She suggested putting out the solar charger for the extra battery, which Dave did. On the back trail, Dave stood off the trail in a small stand of pine trees that stood about five feet above the snow. Will had shown him the clacker to the claymore was, and where the mine was aimed. He scanned the back trail with his pocket binos, the heat from his body causing the lenses to condense. After ten minutes or so Will came back and relieved him.

"Thanks, boss, that was a much needed boost to my core temperature."

"You're welcome," Dave replied, "How are you doing?"

"Good, this is a great day to be outside. If you want to wait a minute, I want to put on my snow pants."

"Sure."

A few minutes later Will came back wearing a pair of black skimobile pants. "It's getting colder. I think we'll have snow tonight or tomorrow."

"I hope so. It will slow up the 'as if' guys."

Dave made his way back to the tent to talk to Jim.

"How are they?"

"Better. We put their clothes in the bag and they are drying out. The kids are warmer and I gave the girl aspirin for her fever and cough suppressant for her cough. How are they exfilling?"

"Waiting for word now. Could you check the team? Frostbite, feet, you know the drill."

"You got it, cheffie," came the reply. Jim secured his kit and went toward Tony's position.

After an hour of waiting Sam got the message from the NHDF HQ team. Her gloved hands quickly copied down the encoded Morse transmission. She translated and then decoded it for Dave, having learned how to use the code book during the teams three days of prep at the headquarters.

Dave read it and got his map back out. They were to meet a truck, codename 'Pilgrim', at the side of the road three miles into occupied territory and a mile or more to their West. He plotted a route. They had until 7 A.M. the next morning to get there, which gave them over 14 hours. He decided to get moving before dark to try to put some distance between them and the ISAF team to their North.

"Pat, Sam, could you come here a sec?"

The team was using the trail. The snow was fairly well broken by others who had passed before. By the footprints they mostly civilians going North. Will led the way, backed up by Tony. Dave was next, then the family, Melissa and Pat herding their wards, Sam and Jim in the rear. The FRS radios the team had were indispensable for maintaining contact with the front and rear elements of the team, as the point had a tendency to get far ahead, and the children slowed the back half considerably. They marched for a few hours, gaining about two miles map distance. Dave stopped them at a curve in the trail to check his map.

"Point, there's a side trail coming up, we want that."

"Roger," came the terse reply.

"Wait five and move out, do a short recon of the trail and report."

Will broke squelch twice to indicate he understood.

Jim made sure the kids were still OK. He gave them some hard candy to cheer them up a little, and returned to the rear of the column. After ten minutes or so in which the party took time to attend to personal matters (the teams toilet paper was greeted warmly by the family) they again headed out. Will made his report shortly thereafter.

"Looks clear, no traffic signs. Hard going."

Dave broke squelch twice back at Will.

Reaching Will and Tony, they saw that the side trail led down a more exposed hillside, and the snow had drifted in places to a depth of several feet. He could see where Tony and Will had broken through on their recon. Again stopping the team, Dave had them put on their snowshoes, a donation from a local bed and breakfast which had them for guests to rent. Using ski poles, Dave, Will, and Tony took turns leading the party down the hill, breaking a path for the family, which didn't have snowshoes. Several falls later they reached a more level and wooded area, and the going got easier, although it was hampered by the lack of illumination. Only starlight guided them.

Tony looked back at Dave. "How much farther?"

"Not much. I want to closer to the RV point before stopping. We need to cross that road we talked about and then we're home free."

Dave guided them to a stand of pines, walking well past them and then using a technique called 'fish hooking' led them back to it via a different route. He put Will and Sam on a small ambush to cover the back trail, in case they were followed, which with the snow was a likely possibility.

“I want to check out the road ahead. Tony, you are in charge here while I’m gone. Will and I are going, and we should be back in two hours or less. We’ll use the radios when we come back. If you hear gunfire or if we tell you to move out, go back up the trail and take the small spur trail we passed as far as you can. Find a place to lie up and radio HQ to let them know the RV is compromised, and get new instructions. Any questions?”

“No.”

“OK. Will and Sam are on the back trail ambush, I’ll leave Sam. Relieve her in a half hour or so. No fires, but keep the kids warm. And we’re not staying here, so don’t set up camp,” he added for Pats benefit.

Leaving the way they entered, he briefed Sam and Will on what they were doing. Will and Dave moved out, rejoining the path and following it for a half mile.

“We’ll drop our packs here and find a place to cross.”

Dropping the packs, they camo’ed them as best they could. They then moved out, Dave in the lead. The path took them up to an open area. Stopping at the edge, it was apparent that the local builders had been busy. Rows of houses lined the road, smoke coming from many of the chimneys, and weak candle light peaked through curtains up and down the road.

“Well, what now?” inquired Will.

“Let’s go back and go further that way,” he pointed left, “Looks like the houses end closer that way.”

They went back and recovered their packs, and headed through the woods. It wasn’t as easy as the path, as the myriad of small bushes and low tree branches grabbed at their packs and snowshoes with every step. Arriving panting and scratched at another field, they saw it was a glade in the wood, perhaps the remnants of an old field from a long forgotten farm. They skirted the edge, Will turning every so often to cover the rear. At the far end of the field they came to another path, this one a local one, probably used by local people for walking. They again entered the woods, paralleling the path until they reached the road. There were no houses in sight. Splitting up, they checked out the woods to either side for a hundred yards or so, looking for a good place to cross, preferring not to use the path entrance. When they met at the path Will said “There’s a likely looking place back my way. Small stand of Laurel and cedar for cover not far from the road.”

“Good,” said Dave, “there’s nothing my way. Let’s get the rest of the guys.”

Carefully retracing their route they radioed the team when they felt they were close enough. Sam answered, and she was instructed to bring the family and team down the path. Getting the family up and moving took a good 15 minutes, so it was a half hour or more before they met Will and Dave on the path.

Dave told Pat that they had a way to go, but that they should have a few hours to rest before they were picked up. Pat nodded his understanding, which Dave barely made out in the dark. Suddenly Will radioed “I hear something!” The team all stopped in their tracks. “Quiet and don’t move!” hissed Tony to the family. Dave pulled the earpiece out and listened. Sure enough, it sounded like a helicopter-or more than one-heading their way. “Everyone against a tree! Pull your packs over yourselves! If they have thermal it will help a little to hide us!” For few second the thing the team heard was there rustling of packs and crunch of snow as everyone scrambled for concealment. Then all that could be heard was the throbbing of heavy rotor blades as the birds drew near. Suddenly the helicopters were over them and past, a formation of at least five helos, Dave knew them

to be Blackhawks by their sound. Soon the sound of the big helicopters faded. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief as they got to their feet and rucked up.

The rest of their movement was uneventful. They crossed the road without incident, and had to skirt a large platte on the other side. They came to spot not far from the RV point, and Dave called a halt.

“We’ll stay here for now. We have 4 hours until we need to get ready, so I’d like the kids to sleep. We can do a rotating shift for us, so set up two fartsacks, two hours on and off. Will, Jim, take first watch. Set up a claymore on the back trail and one towards the road. Will, hand off the 40 to your relief. Sam, can you and Tony help set up hooches for the Woolards?”

Sam and Tony got their rucks and told the Woolards they would make them shelters. First they chose a spot free from trees. Sam trampled down the snow while Tony snapped two ponchos together, making a tube. They then laid that down, and bungee corded the corners to nearby trees. Using the hood and a bungee, Tony lifted up the roof by securing that to an overhead branch. They then used a ski pole to prop open one end. They used Pats pack to block the other end. They then put down one of their space blankets on the floor, and the Woolards two self inflating mattresses on that. They told Tony to put his bags in their, feet to the open end, and to put Melissa pack at the end to block the wind. They gave them two wool blankets that the NHDF had provided refugee teams, and these went over the bags. It was low tech but effective. They left the family preparing to sleep, and built one more using their sleeping bags. Tony deferred to Sam, and allowed her to go in first. He set his bag up opposite Sams, his modesty amusing her.

Dave spent half the night asleep against his pack, the cold waking him every so often. When he Awoke he checked on the security teams, and resumed his fitful sleep. At 5 AM sharp he woke up the two sleeping militiamen and the Woolards. He prepped a pot of water, heating it to make cocoa and coffee. After packing, everyone got a dose of hot drink and moved out once again. Dave set up security at the spot Will had found. Tony, Will, and Sam were covering their back trail. Dave took a few minutes to make the signal at the roadside, and he and Jim were covering the flanks. The Woolards were in the middle, about 70 feet from the road. At a few minutes to 7 they heard a truck engine coming from their left flank. Dave tensed, his hands on the firing device for the claymore he had put out. A Mayflower moving van slowed and came to a stop just past Dave. The passenger got out of the truck and started kicking the tire and whistling the theme to Gilligans Island. Dave whistled back with the Andy Griffith theme. The man turned to the woods, and then looked left and right.

“The coast is clear, let’s hurry up!”

Dave signaled to Pat, who was watching him. “That’s your ride, get going!” Pat and Melissa got the kids up and struggled with their packs. The man opened the side door on the truck and boosted the kids up. Dave heard him tell Pat and Melissa to push the big boxes up against the doors and to hide in the wooden crates. He shut the door, and whistling again he got back in the truck without so much as a glance back at the woodline. In moments the truck was gone in a cloud of diesel smoke.

Dave called to Jim on the radio and had him pull back. When he got the all set signal he recovered his Claymore and went back to meet Jim at their packs. They then called the

rest of the team, who recovered their mines one at a time and rucked up. They headed back the way they had come, and made camp in a thicket on the opposite side of the trail from where they had spent the night.

They again made a small camp, sleeping bags and a low shelter for two. They crammed three into the shelter for the first sleep shift, which made it a cozy tent. Tony and Will stood first watch. At noon they awoke the sleepers. The guards ate a quick cold lunch (Will had been carrying his MRE entrée in his shirt pocket, so his was at least lukewarm) and rucked out. Dave had Tony and Sam eat, and they all took turns cleaning their weapons. They then cleaned Will and Tony's rifles for them. As dusk approached they woke the sleepers and made a quick hot drink apiece.

Just as they were finished stowing the stove, they heard the sound of voices. They all froze. They were coming from their back trail. As they waited the voices got louder.

"This is so obviously a BS detail," said one voice.

"Well, let's get it done quick so we can go back and get warm. This cold sucks."

"Yes it does," agreed a third voice.

Dave suddenly remembered his Sten and pulled it from his pack. He pulled the bolt to the rear and inserted a magazine. He made a motion to Jim, who passed it on around the team. He made sure the selector was on auto and waited. Footsteps crunched on the crusty snow as three American troops came up the path, following the snowshoe prints. All had M-16A2's, and one had a radio. The team stayed still as the men came to them, intent on the tracks. As the men drew abreast of the team, Dave fired a short burst into the first man, stitching him with three rounds in the torso. He quickly shifted to the middle guy and hit him in the head with one round. The first man whirled and fired a three shot burst into the path even as Dave ventilated him with another burst of 9mm.

"Will, Sam, strip the bodies. Jim, watch the path. Fifteen seconds," commanded Dave, letting them know that they would move in that time. "Tony, take point," Dave saw Sam remove the radio from the first man, "Get the radio from Sam and listen to it. Go!"

Sam was delicately stripping the dead man of his gear even as Will finished with the second of his men. Dave ran up to her and said "Just grab it off him!" He reached under and unbuckled the mans GI LBV, and pulled it off, the mans limp arms flopping as the vest came off. "Take this and cover the rear," said Dave as he passed the vest and rifle to Sam. He then emptied the mans pockets, placing the contents down the front of his shirt. Finishing, he called to Jim "Let's go!" Jim and Sam got up and followed Dave and Will up the trail, moving as fast as they could.

Dave called to Tony on the little radio "You get anything off that radio?"

"Yeah, their sending a team to investigate. They heard the shots and got frantic when the guys didn't answer."

Dave thought fast. "Sam, Jim, give me your Claymores. Did the vest have any grenades?"

Sam and Will dropped the vest and went through the pockets quickly. "One each, Dave, here," and Will handed three frags to Dave. "Leave me one vest and go," said Dave. Per SOP they would go up the trail 300 hundred yards and wait for Dave and Will. They knew what to do if Dave and Will didn't come back in one hour. Dave said to Will "Follow me," and headed up the trail. At a bend they prepped one claymore, making a tripwire with prepared material Will carried in his pack. They quickly tied the base to a

tree using two black zip ties that were attached to the base. Will strung the thin wire across the path and tied it to another tree. Dave screwed the electrical blasting cap into the mine, and connected it the 9 volt battery with the attached connector taken from a child's toy.

"Ready?" he asked Will.

"Yeah, let's go," replied Will, getting to his feet and going. Dave radioed ahead "We're coming, keep going."

Click-click came a reply. The team met at the main trail.

"What now, Dave?"

"We go down the trail and try to move to another path. We'll put up a few signs further on saying this way is compromised. Hopefully that will work. And we'll continue our mission in our secondary area. Let's move."

As they headed up the trail they heard the echo as a pound and a half of C-4, behind a matrix of 750 steel ball bearing detonated. They all hoped it was in the faces of ISAF troops. As a special bonus, Will left five more tripwires, all attached to nothing, along the way. If they were followed it would hopefully slow the pursuing troops.

Four days later the team was again at the NHDF headquarters. They had escorted a group of fourteen people, three families, out of Massachusetts, catching a ride in the back of the same moving van. They had learned that the moving man and his cousin, the co driver, had another cousin in the Massachusetts National Guard who was commanding a border checkpoint. He let them through without inspection every time, and enabled them to save a number of people.

After a debriefing, they were shown shower rooms and given a chance to clean up. They put on clean clothes and met in the main mess hall, where they hungrily ate a second breakfast. Dave reported to them that the liaison had told them to keep the rifles they had captured, as well as filling the pickup they had driven to the inn with supplies. Medicines, ammo, more weapons. They gas tanks were full, and the motor pool staff had changed the oil and filter, as well as repacking the front bearings with grease and lubing the chassis.

It was a quiet ride home. While they felt they had done some good, it seemed like a wasted effort. Two of the seventeen teams had basically disappeared, three more were shot up badly, and only four others had helped refugees. The others gathered some good intel that would undoubtedly help the cause, but while they had been gone a German recon team had been captured near their town by the remaining militia. Even as they sped home a NHDF interrogation team was there questioning them.

Chapter 22 —Winter Doldrums

When the group approached town, Dave called the comms center at the police station using the 10 meter HAM radio in Wills truck. They would let the guard posts on the main roads know they were incoming friendlies. Also, Dave wanted a sitrep on the German recon team they had captured. They were told, after a few minutes wait, to drop Dave off at the police station. As Will was driving and the others were asleep, Dave asked that he be dropped off first. Will quickly agreed, and in short order Dave was standing in the foyer of the police station talking to a patrolman.

“They’ve got him in the isolation cell in the basement. Jim and the interrogation team from the defense forces are there, along with Biatta McGillis, you know, Jacob McGillis’ wife? She’s from Germany, he married her when he was stationed there in the Air Force. She’s listening to the interrogation to make sure nothing is missed.”

“OK, can you show me down there? I want to talk to Jim and see what the scoop is.”

“Sure, Dave, follow me.”

Dave followed the officer through the office areas and into a dark stairwell, where he could hear the sounds of a vigorous questioning in progress. Dave thanked the officer, who seemed to be in a hurry to leave, and entered the lit area. At the back of the room was a cell, with two Flec camo dressed men in it. Both had their hands cuffed behind their backs and were hooded. They were both seated on the floor and had their feet secured to the bunk bed, which was made of steel and securely fastened to the floor, wall, and ceiling of the cell. Another man was in a far corner, tied in the same manner, but he was right next to a hot water heater, and guarded by a NHDF soldier armed with a pistol. Dave raised an eyebrow at the man, who gave a grim smile and smacked the man on the side of his head. “Otto was bad, weren’t you Otto?” Dave nodded. Very bad indeed, it seemed.

Jim was with two other NHDF men, as was Doc, and a man Dave recognized from the state meeting, the commander of the unit to their south. Dave stood back to observe. Biatta was sitting to one side, listening as the man spewed a torrent of German into a microphone held inches in front of his hooded face. When he slowed down the shorter NHDF man would bark at him in his native tongue, and he would start talking with renewed vigor. After a half hour of questioning they pulled up his mask and gave him some water, which he drank greedily. Dave noticed bruises on the mans jaw, and idly wondered where it came from. He didn’t really care if it was down here in the basement or out in the woods, because, confronted with these EPW’s, he really didn’t care if they lived or died. Nor did he care about the conditions under which they lived or died. That was a revelation to him. He had killed a few of them and didn’t feel anything until it was over. He still slept at night, although the guy he killed with the hammer still came to visit periodically. But these guys, he’d just prefer to lock them in the cell and come get their bones in the spring.

Jim walked over to him. "Heard about your mission. How's the team?"

"Tired but satisfied, they did a good job out there."

"Good. Sam work out ok?"

"Yes, in spite of my expectations, she did just fine. Actually, having her along helped anyone know we weren't an 'as if' patrol."

"Well, we'll have to see about recognizing her. Look, we've been questioning these guys for almost two days. The ISAF are planning on launching raids into our territory, and these guys are the pathfinders. I'd like you to take a copy of what they've told us so far and go over it. Get a shower and some sleep, then come back here. I want to know what you make of that material, and your ideas for how to counter the threat."

"Sure, Jim, I can be back in four or five hours."

"No, no earlier than eight, no later than ten. You look like crap. Did you sleep on the patrol?"

Dave grinned, "Not much."

Jim handed him some keys, "Take my truck."

"Thanks," said Dave, taking the keys as Jim turned back to the German, who was weeping and talking in a low voice. Biatta talked to him in a soothing voice. Bet he just spilled the beans on something big, thought Dave. Good.

Dave drove home, greeted his wife and sons, and took a shower. After reading the papers Jim had given him, he took some notes, and spent ten minutes or so with his sons. When he slept, he crashed hard. His wife woke him eight hours later with a cup of coffee, and ten minutes after that, Dave was on his way to the police station with a couple of sandwiches to keep the coffee company.

He mulled the papers over in his head as he drove. The ISAF were planning on launching lightning raids into free territory to take out the militia infrastructure, disrupt municipal services, and then get out quickly. That meant either heliborne or parachute insertions, and probably helicopter exfil. Specifically the German pathfinder teams were looking for LZ's big enough for five Blackhawks or DZ's big enough for a C-130 to drop it's whole load of men in one pass. Dave knew that was pretty big, especially for the 130. They might better off looking for two or three smaller ones.....better consider that as a contingency. They'd need LZ watchers and a QRF, or quick reaction force, to respond. Trackers? Have to see who had hunting or tracking dogs. Need commo for the trail watchers, banging sticks together like the VC was too-primitive? Well, it wouldn't be effective, in any regard.

When Dave got to the station Jim was standing outside talking to the chief. When he saw Dave he said goodbye and headed over to the trucks passenger door and opened it.
“Wanna drive me home? We got some planning to do.”

“What’s up?”

“Well, one of the guys broke and told us everything. Their codes, freqs, the whole nine yards. We have to think about how to use it to our advantage.”

“You mean bait and ambush?”

“Yeah.”

“The possibilities are endless.”

Jim grinned maliciously, “Indeed they are. We’re gonna kick some ass on this one. Or get ours handed to us.”

Several hours later the meeting ended. They had been joined by other group leaders in their area, as well as Kirk and his XO Rich from the Ice Spring Militia.

“OK, we’ll finalize the OPORD and have it delivered to you tomorrow. Just to run down, we’re going to prepare an ambush site and have our German quisling call in the troops. When they land we either destroy or capture them. I’ll need a list of what weapons you can supply. We want as many large caliber rifles as we can get-if they use helicopters we want .308's and higher. Any other stuff, machineguns, .50 caliber rifles, whatever, let us know. Radio us using the codes, let us know how to prepare. We may hit it big on this one, people.” Jim sat back as the assembled group gathered their papers. They had the water cooled Maxim, two Browning 1919A4 .30's, two MG-3's, and a shitload of FAL's, M-1's, and G-3 clones. Hopefully the “as if” forces wouldn't prep the LZ/DZ with an air strike first.

They wound up establishing three LZ's, just in case. The primary, which got an MG-3 and a Maxim, and two alternates, one of which had the two Brownings, the other had the second MG-3 and two H&K 91's that were select fire. These were bipod mounted and the rifleman who owned them were trained to alternate fires, that is “talk” the guns, one firing then the other in turn. This was of limited utility, due to the 20 round magazine capacity of the rifles, but it could still generate a large volume of fire. Jim put most of his men on the primary, as it was their town that was targeted for the recon. Ice Spring had one, and provided men to the third, which was mostly staffed by men from the adjoining town to the East. The remainder of militia were assembled at a local warehouse, where they would act as a quick reaction force if one or more of the teams were to encounter more than they could handle, or if the ambushes were unsuccessful. If the mission was compromised by the German who squealed, they did run the chance of being ambushed themselves, but both Biatta and the NHDF interpreter seemed confident of his sincerity.

Two hard days and one night of preparation were on order before the ambush was executed. The primary LZ was an elliptical clearing in the woods about five miles from town and at least one mile from the nearest occupied dwelling. About 200 yards long and 75 wide, the southern approach was an opening between two small hills, but a large hill loomed at the north end. They built a machinegun emplacement at the base of each southern hill. Their mission was to either sweep the field with grazing fire if parachutists landed, or fire at landing helicopters. If the ISAF landed in multiple helicopters the guns were set to sweep the woodland east and west, and traverse into the LZ. On the northern hill, east and west of the LZ, there were four emplacements, each with two men armed with M-1 rifles and all the .30-06 armor piercing ammo in town. They were positioned out of the line of fire of the MG's, and were assigned with targeting the cockpits of any helo's that landed, or to pick off men on the ground. The west side of the potential LZ was staffed with a motley group, men with heavy rifles-FALs, H&K's, CETME's, M-1A's. A few men had bolt action hunting rifles and small caliber assault rifles for backup. They also had secondary positions about 70 yards behind their primary positions. If the landing took root they would fall back in twos to the secondaries and try to hold the attackers for the QRF. All told there were nearly 40 men and women in the primary LZ's ambush team, and another 10 in immediate support, including three snowmobiles pulling sleds for evacuating casualties.

They built small fighting positions in the woods, digging through the frozen ground one painful pick axe swing at a time. All the dirt was carefully carted away. Each position had to provide room for two men to live in for several days. The wise ones brought plastic buckets for latrine use. A light snow the night after they completed work was a welcome cover for evidence of their labors. Three cold, boring days and nights of waiting took their toll on the men and women. Usually they would switch off sleeping and standing watch, trying to keep activity to a minimum. The first night's expected landing was cancelled due to the snow. Oddly, the storm was hitting the south harder than usual, and even though snow was falling lightly in New Hampshire, Massachusetts was experiencing almost white out conditions. The second night the planned landing was cancelled because one of the Hueys the Germans were using experienced engine trouble thanks to a sympathetic American mechanic, and the platoon aborted. The third night the German quisling reported that the mission was a "go" about twenty five minutes before they were to land. Word on the LZ was quickly spread. Jim was with the west side assault team while Dave was with the Maxim crew on the south east. The man who had inherited the Maxim was an enthusiastic machine gunner but had no formal training; Dave was there to provide leadership if needed.

The throbbing of the rotor blades were masked by terrain until the CH-47 was almost on top of them, then the sound of its two huge engines and enormous blades left room for no other sound. The radio crackled "Wait for it..." said Jim. Dave's Maxim was to initiate fire. The dark shape of the helicopter stood out against the starlit field as it flared for landing. As the bird settled it threw up a cloud of snow that totally obscured all sight of it. Dave gave it half a heartbeat and heard the pitch of the blades change ever so slightly as the rotors were relieved of most of their burden. He tapped Roger, the gunner,

on the leg. Roger lifted the trigger bars with his forefingers and pressed the trigger with his thumbs. The Devil's Paintbrush went to work, less than 300 miles from where Hiram Maxim, it's designer, had fired his first shots well over 100 years ago. The gun never ran better.

Dave knelt next to Roger and watched as he adjusted his fire to pour into the back ramp of the shithook. He shouldered his L1A1 and began firing at where he thought the engines were. In the dark it was more area than point firing, but he managed about half a mag before the bird took off again, limping into the hillside and exploding to the cheers of the militia. On the LZ a few figures moved, and the Maxim and MG-3 swept the field with grazing fire for another few seconds. Individual rifle shots rang out even as first Jim and then Dave blew their whistles indicating cease fire. As the fire stopped ten men in five two man teams moved over the LZ. The pyre of Boeing and German carcasses provided more than enough light for them to sweep the LZ for gear, prisoners, and intelligence material. It took all of two minutes for them to clear the field.

"Pick up what you need and take off," Dave ordered the Maxim crew.

"You got it," came the reply.

The rest of the winter was uneventful. With the onslaught of a fierce New England winter snow and cold kept most of the ISAF forces in the south, dealing with the repeated acts of sabotage in supposedly "secure" areas. While the free states to the north were a thorn in their side, the many acts carried out against them in their own back yard were more of a concern. The militias all throughout New Hampshire carried out patrols but saw nothing except for the rare ISAF aircraft flying well out of small arms range.

Nationally, the United Nations had the ear of President Biliary, and she was a faithful follower of their advice. She declared universal health care for all people within the borders of the United States, outlawed homeschooling and secular schools, and granted citizenship to anyone living or working in the US for a period of 12 months or more, regardless of their immigration status. The in New England Maine and New Hampshire remained unoccupied. Georgia from 50 miles inland and outside of Atlanta, and most of North Carolina and South Carolina outside of the metropolitan areas were essentially independent, as were Tennessee, Kentucky, and most of the south. Washington was free east of the Cascades, and Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and North Dakota had no living ISAF troops in state. In most other states the ISAF only controlled the cities. America was just too big to occupy at once. Besides, there were patriots in every small town ready to take pot shots at the ISAF forces.

The elected leaders of the free states met in a convention in Casper in January. The declaration they came up with and that was eventually approved by the voters in each state simply reiterated the sentiments of the Declaration of Independence- that the only legitimate purpose of government was to protect the rights of its citizens. It also reaffirmed the sentiments of the United States Constitution-and specifically stated that a limited federal government was all that was needed to protect the rights of Americans. It

also stated the Bill of Rights in plain, modern language, and reaffirmed the Ninth and Tenth Amendments thereof. It requested that all foreign powers remove themselves from US soil and immediately ceasing all offensive actions against Americans would allow them a ceasefire under which to leave. The conference also called for a Continental Congress, named in deference, of course, to the first one, to which each state would send a body of representatives. Their purpose would be to present a unified front for the reestablishment of their rights by Washington. By the time they met they were NOT in the mood for compromise.

All across America things were happening. A number of military units just disappeared from their posts, in groups of two and three hundred, stripping all useful equipment from their bases as they left. Air Force bases emptied of planes and trucks, pilots and support personnel. A Navy Roll on/roll off, or Ro-ro ship, part of the maritime supply fleet, docked in Maine, loaded with enough equipment, food, ammo, and vehicles for a Marine amphibious expeditionary brigade for 30 days of combat. The crew was almost unanimously pro freedom, and decided to do their part. The ship was unloaded as quickly as could be arranged, which was fortunate, as it was destroyed and sunk at the dock late one night by an air attack using laser guided munitions. While the New Hampshire news reported that all equipment was lost, the tanks, Humvees, and cannons were being prepped and crews were being trained deep in the mountains of New England.

Chapter 23

Dave leaned his back against a small Birch tree to catch his breath. Spring was here in the north country, the woods were alive with the sounds of birds returning from their winter sojourns in warmer climes. Dave closed his eyes. What a winter. He had spent most of it cutting firewood which he bartered around for the little his family needed. Quite a bit was flat out given to folks who needed it. But he had managed to get a milk cow, fodder for the cow (his boys had named her Bossie), a dozen laying hens, a rooster and twelve more Rhode Island Red hens for breeding, and enough chicken feed to last a year. Having enough gas to make wood deliveries was an advantage Dave hadn't thought of so long ago. He had a farmer who was going pay him in a few weeks with a sow and her piglets, which would mean meat through the year. He had also taken the boys hunting, each of them taking small game with their pellet guns and the .22 rifles Dave had for them, both of which were handed down from his uncle. The time spent with his family was the best of all. The boys had accompanied Dave when he had gotten the moose with his trusty old Lee Enfield, and the moose antlers now adorned the wall in the boys bedroom. Daves pack contained a fair amount of jerked moose meat, and Dave took pride in the fact that he had prepared to provide for his family in times such as these.

Leaves and bark fell down from the Birch tree as it was cut by a stream of heavy caliber machinegun bullets. Dave was shaken from his moment of reflection and rolled over, seeking the protection of the low tussock that the Birch sprouted from. He clicked his push to talk button "Does anyone see that .50?"

Steve replied "Yeah, it's down the hill, on the road. Krauts on a 113," meaning an M-113 armored personnel carrier. Dave sighed, and reached for his large ALICE pack, releasing the straps that held one of two long olive drab tubes to its side. Dave pulled the safety pin on the rear of the M-136 rocket, cocked it, and uncovered the sights, which popped up with small snapping sounds. Gripping the sling with his left hand, he shouldered the rocket. "How far?" he asked.

"About 175 meters," came the terse reply.

"I'm gonna take it, cover me."

Dave's answer was a sudden cacophony of gunfire from Steve's position, which quickly spread up and down the line of militiamen.

Dave rolled to his right and knelt, just his eyes peering over the edge. He heard the fifty firing again, but it was aimed away from him. He raised himself to a crouch, high enough for the rockets fins to clear the earth when he fired, and saw the green and brown camouflaged APC downhill and almost straight away from him. Pressing down the safety he squeezed the "trigger" and the rocket launcher belched flame and smoke as it fired it's deadly 84mm cargo. Dave saw the red trace element in the back end of the rocket as it streaked downhill and struck the APCs hull directly above the second road wheel. The explosion rocked the track as Dave dropped down, discarded the tube, grabbed his pack and pulled it away from where he had fired. Tracers crisscrossed the firing point as Dave crawled away. Moments later the Birch tree was toppled as a 40mm grenade from the

dismount ISAF infantry got their act together and returned some effective fire. Dave popped the straps on the other rocket and abandoned his pack. Shouldering the 15 pound package, he high crawled behind a large Oak tree and peered around its trunk. The M-113 was in flames, the gunner gone, the fifty pointing straight up in its mount, flames and black smoke billowing from the open hatches.

"You are a 'Go' at this station," thought Dave to himself, as he saw an ISAF trooper kneel a little higher to get off a shot from his G-36. Dave snapped his CAR-15 up and the red dot of the Aimpoint sight centered on the mans chest. Dave fired once, twice, and the man fell over. Dave executed a "combat roll to his non firing side" and made haste to another spot.

"There's another track coming up the road," an unidentified voice said in his ear. A Whoosh BOOM told him another AT-4 had found its mark.

"Scratch that one," he heard Will say. Dave smiled. Will was doing all right. He had moved into Sams house shortly after she had turned eighteen, with her parents blessing, and they planned to marry next Fall.

Dave found another tree and did his peek and look. He saw two ISAF troops rushing forward, one carrying a machinegun, another with each hand holding two ammunition cans for the gun. With their flec camo, Fritz pattern helmets, and MG-3 they looked all the world like a WWII MG-42 team on the Eastern Front. Dave shot both at a range of about 40 Yards with five quick shots, as a stream of tracers from their own MG-3 laid a stream of fire across the German line. The ISAF men were being cut down as the volume of fire from the Americans increased. Dave added his fire to the symphony, changing magazines as fast as they emptied. Suddenly their were no more targets.

"Cease fire, cease fire," came the call up and down the line.

Daves radio crackled "Red and Blue Teams, search and clear. White and Black cover. All others withdraw," said the calm voice of Jim. Men and a few women rushed forward, some with pistols and shotguns in hand, their rifles slung. Shots rang out as they approached the bodies-no sense in searching a guy if you weren't sure he was dead. They quickly loaded weapons, ammo, and gear onto ponchos, and by fours returned with their heavy loads. Some were grinning. One unrecognizable camo painted face went by and said "Nice shot, Dave!" Dave nodded thanks and returned to sweeping his sector.

He cocked his head and then stood up and yelled "Birds inbound! Birds inbound! Move the rally point, now, all colors!"

He heard the cry get passed up the line and then heard Jims whistle blow, three longs and a short. Fall back, NOW! Dave dropped the rocket, slung his pack, picked up the rocket, and joined teams in falling back to their prepared positions further in the woods. As they ran they heard the sound of explosions ripping the treeline as the ISAF Cobra gunships fired their 2.75 inch rockets into the recently abandoned ambush site. Dave stopped as one Cobra swept over them and everyone froze, but the bird was flying straight over them. Dave saw one militiaman fire his MAK-90 at the bird.

“CEASE FIRE!” Dave yelled. The man looked at him quizzically.

“You stupid SOB! What the F\$&% are you doing, trying to get us killed? How many times do we have to say it? NO SHOOTING AT HELICOPTERS IF THEY ARE NOT SHOOTING AT US!”

The man looked chagrined. Dave was seriously PO’ed.

“Unload that weapon and help carry a poncho, dumbass,” Dave ordered. The man unloaded the rifle and Dave again took up the flight, moving quickly through the sparse brush. Soon they reached the secondary hides. These were prepared bunkers with interlocking fields of fire, shaped like a horseshoe. If there were pursuers, they would walk into the horseshoe and take fire from three sides. One end of the horseshoe was closed by a water cooled Maxim, and it was into that bunker that Dave finally slipped into. There were four “picket” bunkers, well camouflaged and hidden, basically one person listening posts. They would report enemy movement but would not engage. They were merely early warning posts.

Dave settled in with the others in the bunker, two of the three who had manned the gun during the Chinook ambush. The men nodded to Dave but remained intensely focused on their sector of fire. They were expecting the ISAF to track them, and were hoping to thin the herd shortly. The air support didn’t surprise them-they had expected it. And the ISAF didn’t know, but the free men and women who they faced held all of the aces.

The lead ISAF scout ship flew over the scene. “We have four burning APC’s, and we can see many dead men on the ground-they appear to all be ours,” the observer reported.

Above him, in the Command and Control ship the Colonel swore. The Spring offensive wasn’t starting out as he had planned. “Land the QRF and get me more attack helicopters. Alert the reaction company and Brigade command. We seem to have found a hornets nest.”

“Roger,” came the reply.

Seven UH-1H Huey helos swept in and quickly disgorged their cargoes of warm bodies into a nearby cornfield. 56 ISAF troops swept into a skirmish line as they carefully went over the ambush site. They found no survivors. The passage of the militia was obvious, and the Germans had no trouble tracking them. To their rear another four Hueys landed and German crews set up four 81mm mortars, under the observation of five teams of rebel marksmen.

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The TA-1 field radio in the position clicked. Dave answered.

“Position 1.”

“Dave, LP/OP reports ‘as if’ troops moving up. Have your team wait for the signal.”

“Gotcha,” said Dave, “Guys,” he addressed the two men, “LP/OP reports the Krauts are coming. Wait for the signal.”

Both men nodded their understanding. The assistant readied several boxes of ammo. Dave opened an ammo can and refilled his ammo pouches with loaded magazines, then took the empty magazines from the front of his shirt and refilled them from stripper clips from yet another can. His pack was in a small “pack bunker” behind the one he was in. His other rocket was propped up near the entrance of the bunker. Dave shrugged off his LBE but kept his chest pouch with its ten magazines on. Drinking from one of his two canteens, he shivered as the sweat on his body dried. He thought about getting his polypro top from his pack, but then figured he’d be warm again soon enough. Better to shiver now than sweat like a dog in a half hour, when he might need not to.

Up and down the line militia fighters readied themselves. They had been busy all winter, and were now armed with a wide variety of weapons. There were several long barreled AK’s that had been converted to full auto and were equipped with all of the 75 round drum mags the militia could scrounge. The two Browning .30’s in town were also on the line, as were a large number of fully automatic heavy barreled AR’s and several captured MG-3’s. The state had provided an additional number of M-60’s to the town, and the venerable old gun was also represented. The others were armed with mostly AR’s and the M-4’s supplied by the state, and there were a smattering of captured G-36’s, which were becoming a status symbol among the men. The heavy barreled AR’s were supplied with a large number of loaded magazines, and Dave had contributed his three Sterling 40 rounders to a heavy barreled auto rifleman, a 17 year old fighter. Dave made sure that the gunners had clear fields of fire, and then turned his attention to a long black case on the side of the position.

He undid the four latches holding it closed and looked inside. His Remington 700 PSS lay just as he had left it, its camouflage green and brown paint showing dully in the darkened pit. He picked it up and opened the action. Using a bore snake he wiped the bore and loaded four rounds of Match ammo. Closing the bolt over the top round, he put the safety on and opened the covers on the 10 power Tasco Super Sniper scope. Ensuring that the lenses were clean, he closed them and opened a box of Match ammo. He filled the butt cuff with rounds, and closed the case. Morton, the assistant gunner, hissed to Dave “We’ve got movement!”

Dave moved to the second firing slit to the right of the gun and peeked out. Three men in flec camo were moving in a wedge, spread out about 20 yards, moving quickly but cautiously. Watching through a small pair of binos, Dave noted that all had full size G-36’s, one with a 40mm grenade launcher mounted. All were wearing heavy body armor. All three froze behind cover when a Cobra bearing large black Maltese Crosses roared overhead. Dave crossed his fingers and hoped no one would fire at the buzzing hornet

above them. As the sound of the AH'1's turbine faded, the three men were up and moving. As they moved beyond Daves vision more men came into view, all dressed and armed the same. Moving in fire team wedges, they were staggered, spread from one end of the draw to another. Dave noted two RPG teams. "Must be using old East German ones," Dave mused to himself. Then the command group passed, two men armed with G-36K's and with four RTO's surrounding them. Also with him were two men in GI BDU's carrying M-4 carbines.

Dave picked up the TA-1 and pushed the dynamo that would make the phone at other end ring. "Command group passing, sticking out like a sore thumb."

When he heard the acknowledgement, he returned the phone to its place and went back to the firing port. When he looked out, the Germans were stopped. At an unseen signal the men spread out and took up positions behind trees.

Dave was startled, even though he was expecting it. The simultaneous detonation of fourteen Claymore mines rocked the draw. Almost immediately the sound of several dozens weapons firing covered the reverberating sound of the mines. The Germans tried to return fire, but they hadn't a chance. Swept by six belt fed machineguns and over a dozen magazine fed automatic rifles, the arcs of fire covered all possible hiding spots from at least one angle. In addition, men like Dave were picking off individual targets as they could. The old Maxim next to Dave poured out an almost continuous stream of deadly fire-with water the gun could fire at its cyclic rate indefinitely without harm.

Dave quickly worked through the first four rounds in his Remmy and ducked down to reload. As he did the bunker shuddered and the sounds of chopper blades shook the ground. The TA-1 was clacking, and Dave wouldn't have noticed except that his head was right next to it.

"Maxim," he said.

"Dave, we've got a Cobra making runs on us. Can you guys get a shot?"

"No way,"

"All right, we'll try something."

Dave heard the sound of something being launched and an explosion. Looking through his port he could hear the Cobra hovering and firing its rockets into the bunker line, but he couldn't see it. Dave stood the rifle in the corner and with his CAR-15 flopping went to the bunkers entrance. The Cobra was hovering just over the treetops, and the MG's in the bunkers couldn't bring fire on him. Dave grabbed the AT-4 and at a crouch exited the bunker. Dropping, he crawled over the crest of the hill and then stood up and ran as the Cobra fired another rocket. Following the rockets path he saw it hit one of the .30 cal bunkers directly, logs and dirt flying up into the air. Dave pulled the safety pin as he ran, and cocked the rocket. Seeing a clear view, he stopped and backed up. He quickly aimed and fired. At first he thought the rocket had exploded-he was showered with dirt and debris, and the back of his legs burned. Checking quickly he realized that he had almost been killed by the backblast from the rocket. Looking up, the Cobra was gone. That ought

to keep him away for a few minutes thought Dave as he dropped the fired rocket tube and raced back to his bunker.

Dave returned to see a twisted mass of smoking logs that was the bunker next to his. He ducked into the Maxim bunker to see Morton dressing a wound on Ernie, the gunners, arm. "We don't have time for that," hollered Dave over the din. He stepped over Ernie and grabbed the spades. A cluster of Germans was running past, to the rear. Dave lit them up, the cocking handle on the right side of the gun making a blurring motion in his peripheral vision. All five dropped in a heap as the Devils Paintbrush colored them dead. Ernie came up alongside him and readied another belt of ammo. Dave fired continuously, sweeping the gun from side to side. Suddenly the sound of gunfire was overwhelmed by the sound of rotor blades. Ernie looked at Dave with fear filled eyes.

"Shyte, we're toast now," he said, even as he loaded a fresh belt into the smoking feedblock.

Dave smiled. "No, I think the cavalry is here."

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As the echo from the Claymore blast reached the little clearing where the mortar crews were waiting, the sniper teams tensed. The Germans quickly scrambled to put rounds downrange. As four sets of hands were readying the first of many stacked high explosive rounds, five pairs of trigger fingers tightened. When the sounds of gunfire reached them the fingers tightened, and eight of the German crewmen fell. Looking around in confusion, the other Germans had but a moment before ten more shots rang out. The rest dropped lifelessly to the ground. More shots rang out as riflemen put black tipped reloaded armor piercing rounds through the tubes. And as quickly as that, the teams fell back, melting into the forest.

The German security team near the mortars ran to the men to find most dead and several seriously wounded. Some men fired randomly into the hills around them, but by then the teams were over the crests and safe from direct fire. The air throbbed and the German radio operator handed the mike to his CO, who tried to contact the choppers on the frequency for air ops. Nothing. He turned as the throbbing got louder, and saw a flight of Apaches approaching. He waved to them, and the lead ship with his wing turned towards him. The German Captain waved the microphone at the helo, trying to let the idiot know he wasn't on the correct push.

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"Whiskey lead to Whiskey Two, I have troops in the open. Engage on my lead."

"Roger."

"Tom, you got them?" the pilot asked his gunner, who was looking from side to side.

“Yup. Some idiot is waving at us.”

“Light’em up.”

Tom’s finger tightened on the trigger on his joystick, and the nose mounted 25mm chain gun roared, the high explosive rounds chewing up the clearing. He flipped a switch and sent a salvo of FFAR, folding fin aerial rockets, 2.75 inches in diameter and packing the punch of a 105mm howitzer round, into the clearing. The men in the clearing disappeared in a cloud of black smoke. Another salvo from the trail ship rocked the woodline, destroying a German troop truck.

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The German Captain watched in horror as the Apaches fired at his men, the rounds tearing up terrain all around him. “Idiots” he screamed to no one “We’re on your side!” His final cry was cut short by fragments from a rocket, his voice dying on the wind as his life bled from him.

“Killed by my own men,” were his last thoughts.

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The militia once again swept the field, rounding up wounded men and collecting weapons, ammo, gear, and emptying the pockets of the dead. They captured 7 wounded Germans, one wounded American, and one American who had not even a single scratch. Following the doctrine of “Silence, Segregate, Separate, and Speed” the wounded were taken to different areas to be treated, and the American was bound, blindfolded, and led away. After the wounded were stabilized they would be taken to NHDF HQ for a thorough interrogation. The Americans, too, although they faced the possibility of firing squad for treason.

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“President Billary today announced a new offensive against the areas of America currently in open defiance of the Federal government.” President Billary’s annoying voice came over the radio, “...and we will root out the leaders of this movement of open defiance of the controlling national authority, and try them for treason....’ And she had this to say about reports of mass desertions of US Military units, ‘These reports are merely propaganda designed to weaken the American peoples resolve. These are a few zealots who oppose reasonable gun control, public education, and other progressive programs. It’s hard for some to believe that there were so many racists and domestic terrorists out there, but we will root them out and we will bring them to justice.’

“President Billary’s press spokesperson, Heather Lyalott, denied rumors that entire units of ISAF forces had been destroyed, as reported by the Manchester New Hampshire

'Union Leader'. Stating that the Union Leader was a known mouthpiece for the, quote, 'radical right wing fringe', unquote, she assured America that in the future such irresponsible reporting would be subjected to stronger government oversight. 'We cannot have people abusing the First Amendment in such an irresponsible manner, spreading fear and untruths' she is reported to have said."

"In other news, three more Senators were killed last night as the wave of terrorism continues, bringing to fifteen the number killed since the Spring offensive began two weeks ago. A large number of representatives on the state level have been killed, also. A message put out by an organization calling itself the "America Terrorist Liberation Organization", or ATLO, has announced that the killings will not stop. They are targeting persons who have, in the past, supported gun control, the United Nations, the taking of private property for the public good, and, according to their information, anyone who supports the ISAF presence in the United States, and anyone else they consider to be 'domestic enemies of the Constitution.' The FBI is investigating, and Congress will vote today to let the Central intelligence Agency amend its charter to allow it to operate within the borders of the United States."

"On to sports....."

Chapter 24

Dave grinned as he shook Sam's hand and presented her with a computer printed, framed award-the militia didn't have the wherewithal for medals, and resorted to other methods of recognition. In this case it was an awards ceremony in the gym of the local high school. There wasn't an empty seat in the place. As the crowd applauded Sam blushed and went to join the rest of the awardees on stage. As she did the crowd stood to give a standing ovation to the 23 people on stage, all being recognized for their assistance in the war effort-from Mrs. Magee, the teacher who was instrumental in setting up local schools-with little gas to spare the one room schoolhouse was back in vogue-to Doc, whose commo net was considered instrumental in saving more than one infant whose Mom was having tough labor, among its other successes.

Dave waited a few minutes for the crowd to show its appreciation and for the awardees to bask in the limelight.

As the crowd settled down, Dave announced "That's it for now, folks. If our distinguished guests," he nodded towards the awardees, "would like to sit down, Jim would like to address everyone before we go."

Jim was walking up the stairs to the stage. "Hold it right there, Dave." Jim pointed at the awardees, "There should be one more person there."

Dave looked at the list in his hands. He was sure he had gotten everyone. At least, he had given out all of the awards they had made up.

"Dave McGrath, attention to orders!" barked Jim.

Dave snapped to attention, more out of habit than anything else. After all these years some things were reflex.

"For single handedly destroying the Red Barons reign of terror over our beloved valley, the Pine Tree Irregulars present you with the 'Order of Snoopy, First Class'." He walked up to Dave and held the award up for the crowd to see. Dave grinned. It was a Snoopy pin, the Beagle wearing his aviators hat, with scarf and swagger stick. Behind was affixed a red, white, and blue ribbon.

Jim pinned it on Dave, and then told the town, "As you know, Dave here single handedly shot down a German Cobra attack helicopter with an anti tank rocket, and almost fried himself doing so. In fact, I think his legs are still smoking from that stunt." The crowd laughed. Dave grimaced. His legs did still sting a bit. "And Dave didn't even know he hit the damned thing until we told him at the AAR two days later." More laughter. No one had been more surprised than Dave had been when he was thanked by a man from the other side of the horseshoe for knocking out the snake. 17 people had died in their bunkers from direct 2.75 inch rocket hits.

"All right, enough of that. You guys should all go home and not celebrate. I put you all on patrol tonight!" Said Jim affectionately. The awardees all laughed as they filed off of

the stage.

NHDF had told the units in the southern half of the state to expect a large assault by the ISAF forces. Their moles with ISAF as well as reports from the occupied areas had all reported large buildups of vehicles and men in the last few weeks.

The basic plan was for the NHDF line units to do what they could to stop them, but they didn't have the troops or transports to fight a regular war against a large ISAF army. The plan that evolved was for the militia to fight a guerilla war against the ISAF-hit and run all the way. The NHDF would pick a time and place to dig in and hold, and the guerillas would pick away at the ISAF flanks and rear areas as they could. One contingency even called for militia units to infiltrate south and wage war deep in the enemies rear areas.

To this end the militia worked on decentralizing. They organized as many men and women as they could into two man teams, each armed with at least one scoped high power rifle. They still encouraged teams of friends for organization into larger teams-these ranged from 6 to 32 people. Other teams were organized, too. Medical units, commo, transport, safe houses, caching teams, depending on the capabilities of the volunteers. Some folks were simply not in any condition to fight on the front lines-too old, debilitating illnesses and infirmities, or other handicaps. But a man who couldn't run 50 yards on an arthritic knee could drive an F-250 full of supplies back and forth or work in an aid station.

Dave and his crew, with Jim and a three person staff-Sam for commo, Will, the EMT, as medical chief, and Jims father, Charlie, as supply NCO and driver, planned to operate together as much as they could. To a man they all carried fully automatic CAR-15's or M-4's, and almost all the teams had two scoped precision rifles. Steve had a single shot .50 and his team consisted of three men to support the heavy weapon.

Dave and Tony were a team. Tony had left his beloved G-36 with Sandy and carried a captured M-4 Carbine. Dave had swapped out the three round burst mechanism for a spare set of M-16 internals. As he told Tony, if you need rock and roll, you don't need three round burst-you might need thirty round burst. They carried Daves Remington PSS in .308 as well. Tony carried a camouflaged rubber armored spotting scope that was Daves, as well as a 10 meter radio and battery with solar charger.

Dave and Tony had packed their rucks the same way, Dave using his trusty civilian pack he had humped from Connecticut, Tony using his civvie pack, long hence dyed black. The packs were loaded identically, as were all of the militias.

In the bottom they each carried a sleeping bag in a waterproof bag. In the left side pouch was a first aid kit , bandoleer of .223 ammo, and a poncho or other rain gear.

In the right side pouch was a weapons cleaning kit, a hygiene kit, spare socks and foot powder, and toilet paper.

In the top flap pouch was a Claymore mine, heat tabs, and stripped MRE.

In the main compartment flap pouch was a heavy space blanket and maps of their AO.

In the main compartment they carried, by SOP, at least one spare pair of pants, five pair of clean socks, a spare t-shirt, black watch cap, a jacket or heavy shirt of some type, more ammo, a poncho and 550 cord for shelter, and food.

A two quart canteen was carried on the outside of the pack unless the person had a Camelback type bladder in their pack. Dave and Tony also had a spare SAW ammo pouch clipped onto the outside compression strap that carried between them spare Match .308 ammo, camo creme, a pocket Bible, smoke grenades, three skyrocket signal flares, booby trap wire and seven improvised booby traps, knife steel, duct tape, 550 cord, butane lighters, a sewing kit, and a small mirror.

In their top left pockets they carried a small notebook and pencils. In the right was a small compass.

Additionally they all carried pocket knives and/or multi tools in their pants, along with a firestarter. Dave and Tony each had a magnesium block with a short piece of hacksaw blade attached. These were dummy corded the a belt loop.

Dave and Tony each wore USGI LBE's-Tony being largely equipped from Daves stock of extra LBE he had squirreled away "just in case".

Daves consisted of four 3x30 round ammo pouches, a large accessory pouch (which was sold as a hunting pouch at large retailers before the crisis). Dave found it ideal for empty mags, a small flashlight, his multi tool, camo creme, and whatever else he might need. Also two one quart canteens with cups and a canteen cup stove, three first aid pouches, two with two pressure dressings each, the third with a 20 round magazine of tracer. A buttpack completed the ensemble. When he wore the pack it would be detached and clipped to the pack itself the enable him to wear the pack comfortably.

In the grenade holders of the ammo pouches Dave carried a Buck Nighthawk knife, a roll of black electricians tape, some rolled 550 cord, and hanging from a carabiner a pair of black GI leather gloves. He also carried two fragmentation grenades.

In this he carried 9 AR magazines and two boxes of .308 Match.

Tony's LBE setup was similar, and each carried a small day pack rolled up under the top flap of their rucks. Each also carried a neutral colored ensolite pad for sleeping on or for using in a hide.

Dave's PSS was carried in a GI parachutist's weapons bag that was attached to his pack. It provided protection and relatively easy access. Both packs wore identical camouflaged covers, as Dave had helped Tony make one over the winter.

They had a small night vision scope, which had been made by taking an AN-PVS 5 goggle apart, separating the two image intensifiers into two handheld observation devices. It operated on AA size batteries and was smaller, lighter, and had better resolution than any cheap set they had tried.

Each two or three man team carried one e-tool, a hatchet or saw, a water filter, and if they wanted a small camp stove. Dave and Tony opted for more heat tabs over the stove.

Dave and Tony both also carried .45 pistols, with four magazines apiece. They carried no extra .45 ammo.

Dave's CAR 15 had a lightweight 16" barrel, Vortex flash hider, and tritium sights. He had been using an electronic sight, but opted to take it off for this mission. Tony's M-4 had a flip up sight that it had come with, and mounted a small, 2.5 power scope that had been designed for turkey hunting. Its reticle didn't cross, it formed a circle. Tony liked it because at close range all he had to do was put the target in the circle and pull the trigger. And longer range he had it zeroed so that he could use the bottom crosshair where it joined the circle as an aiming point.

The irregulars planned to stash their packs and use day packs and buttpacks to operate for two or three days away from the large rucks, returning for resupply only when they had to. This would help them remain agile and mobile in the field.

So it came as no surprise when Dave was awakened one night by the emergency tone coming over his two meter base station radio. He woke quickly and when the signal stopped reported in, as did several others. Jimmy, one of the comms volunteers, came over the air. "About an hour ago a large force of ISAF forces launched a coordinated attack against southern New Hampshire in the Manchester and Portsmouth corridors. We know that NHDF forces are heavily engaged at this time. All units are ordered to disperse immediately and begin offensive operations against any and all ISAF forces. NHDF command reiterates the strategic and tactical importance of our..." his voice paused. Dave figured he was turning the page on a prepared script, which is exactly what he was doing. Jimmy again read, "...mission. This message will repeat every fifteen minutes for the next ninety minutes, at which time we will switch to combat communications." Jimmy's voice quivered, "God Bless you all, and good hunting." Jimmy had added the last, and Dave knew he meant it sincerely.

Dave put on sweat pants over his underwear, and pulled on a pair of thick socks. It was a chilly Spring morning. He went up the hall and knocked on Tony's door. After knocking a few times, Rhonda's head appeared. With bleary eyes she said, "Dave, what's wrong?"

C'mon in...."

"That's OK, thanks. Can you wake up Tony and let him know that the ISAF has invaded? They're over by Manchester, but we've got orders to deploy."

"Yeah, sure Dave. I'll have him meet you downstairs."

"Thanks Rhonda," smiled Dave.

Rhonda smiled back sleepily, "I'm gonna be awfully upset when I wake up." She shut the door quietly as Dave turned away. Dave returned to his room and woke Sandy. Briefing her as he dressed, Dave left his wallet and keys on the dresser and put on his old pair of dog tags.

When Dave got downstairs Rhonda was heating water for tea over a kerosene lamp.

"Tony's in the basement getting his gear," she said to Dave by way of greeting, "I'll have eggs going in a minute, the stove was still warm and I threw in a couple more logs."

"Thanks," said Dave. He heard Sandy coming downstairs as he went to the cellar door, where he met a fully laden Tony coming up.

"Why do they have to do this stuff at inconvenient times?" he quipped.

Dave laughed quietly, "Just proves the ISAF are inconsiderate jerks."

In a few minutes Dave's gear joined Tony's by the door, and they sat down to an early breakfast with their wives. It was a quiet meal as they all knew it could be the last meal they ever ate together. As they finished, Dave and Sandy went into the living room to say their goodbyes, leaving Tony and Rhonda to do the same.

Sandy drove them to Jim's house, where the militia was meeting. After watching her go, Dave dropped most of his gear outside the barn, where it joined a large rank of rucksacks and LBEs of those already there.

"We are going to deploy as a unit and set up a patrol base," Jim was saying, "and then fan out to our zones from there. If you run into any 'as if' forces, get on the horn and let us know. We can make a hasty plan from there, depending on the size and composition of the enemy forces. As we've discussed," he continued, nodding at Dave as he came in, "we'll fight a delaying action and try to slow them up until we can amass a force large enough to confront them. Any questions? We've covered all of this before, so I don't expect too many. Sam has a bunch of papers for you, codes, brevities, and such. Remember what to do if you are compromised and forced to radio in to us." Everyone

nodded grimly. They had prearranged codewords and phrases to use if they were caught and broadcasting under duress.

"Remember, we don't know what they will do to us if we're captured. They may treat as guerillas, they may treat us a POW's under the Geneva convention. Our treatment of their prisoners may help us in that regard."

Everyone nodded in assent. "The primary goal is intel, then delay. We've got a few more people on their way, but we might as well start our inspection now. I want you all to spread out your gear outside and Dave and I will inspect it. Dave will inspect me first, and I'll do him. I know he's packed something useless, like fuzzy slippers or something." Every one laughed, and headed outside. Dave stayed behind to speak to Jim.

"What do you hear from NHDF?"

"Nothing new. They are fairly busy right now in their sector, but if we have significant activity they will send us what they can spare. Let's check these guys out. I want to be able to roll as soon as the last guys are done."

"OK, let's do it."

The inspection served more to determine who was short critical equipment. After re verifying their weapons zeros on Jims backyard range, they piled their rucks into two pickups and headed into the mountains. After a ride of some two hours they were dropped of and headed out to their OP.

"Scott, your team has point, Dave take slack. We all know where we are going, but we don't know if there are recon teams out there already. Let's keep our intervals and don't be slack. We could get ambushed on the way in or not see anything for a month. Treat it like we might get ambushed at any time."

Scott and his wingman moved out, the rest of the militia filing in behind them. Dave waited for his pack to get comfortable. He always found the first hour or so the worst, as his body adjusted to the weight of the pack and his legs warmed up to the movement. he also had to get used to being dirty all of the time-he found that the worst for the first two days, then he got used to that, too.

He and Tony moved out last, covering their backtrail. As they knew where they were going they moved slowly, stopping frequently to cover the rear for anyone following them. Dave's inner voice drifted as his consciousness drifted. He took comfort in the familiar feel of the LBE and weapon. This always took him back to his past. How many days and nights had he spent bent under the weight of similar loads? A lot more than he could remember, for certain. Dave smiled. There was something happy about it to him, somewhere inside. Memories of friendships forged in hardship, and validation through

hard work and being good at the work. He looked at Tony, who was fitting right in. What a transformation he had made. in some ways he was showing more moxie than Dave was, as he had begun with no military experience and no survival mindset. But he had acquitted himself well in the three actions he had been in. Dave smiled again. Once again he was reverting to his inner animal, and somewhere in the primordial depths of his DNA it was good.

Chapter 25

After four days of patrolling and LZ watching with no contact, the militia received a call on the radio from their NHDF contact. Essentially the request was for men to fight to ISAF forces in southern New Hampshire. Manchester and parts of Nashua were being turned into battlefields. In fact, an area of Manchester, on the Merrimack river, was being called “Little Stalingrad” by the German “as if” troops fighting there. The defenders were determined to hold true to their state motto-“Live free or Die”. One wag on the front line quipped “Live Free or Kill Germans Forever”, ironic since his grandparents had left Germany over 100 years previously.

The ISAF controlled the main roads, barely. Hit and run attacks were the order of the day in the “pacified” areas. From kids on mountain bikes sniping sentries and escaping on bike trails to old ladies drilling guards at checkpoints with quick shots from their old pocket pistols, the Germans were experiencing what the Russians did when they invaded a country where everyone was armed. Except of course, that the Americans could shoot a damned sight better than most Afghans. As the invasion stalled the ISAF poured men and equipment into the fray. At the same time resistance spread. In Massachusetts independent militias attacked transportation centers and bridges. Fuel trucks were set alight by rifle fire-a few to poke some holes, a tracer or two to set it off. Train tracks were disrupted, causing either delays in vehicular delivery or in the case of tracked vehicles forcing them to drive themselves, which increased maintenance and track wear. They also found that rubber tires on wheeled vehicles burn really well-especially those on the BTR-60 and -70. The ISAF and what the real Americans called a Muppet Government-definitely puppets and Billary was definitely a hideous caricature of someone- stopped sending American troops after the first week, when three battalions of US Mechanized Infantry decided to fulfill their oaths by changing sides and a transportation Battalion drove straight into NHDF lines with truckloads of ammunition. The commander was leaving the ISAF and decided to just order his men to what they were told and drove through ISAF lines. A large portion of those troops decided to “defect”, too, once they got to Free America.

Several squadrons of Air Force fighters had landed in New Hampshire, their pilots loading up with munitions and just leaving for Freedom. These aircraft prevented the ISAF from exploiting their aerial capabilities. Using small radio controlled aircraft and laser designators made in state by a defense contractor the NHDF could “paint” targets in the immediate rear of the ISAF lines and the NHAF pilots could hit them with precision guided munitions (the seekers of which were made and assembled in Maine) launched from stand off distances. A priority target were enemy artillery positions, which could safely shell New Hampshire from the protection of Massachusetts. The American artillery units were referred to disparagingly as “Jane Fonda Brigades”. The Free Americans sometimes used cast concrete laser guided bombs, proven effective during the second Iraq War, to destroy targets. 750 pound of concrete hitting a bridge at 70 MPH makes a mess of things.

Meeting at their patrol base, Jim broke the news to the teams. They were looking for

volunteers to go to “Manch-vegas” and fight. They would be facing the enemy in built up areas, a kind of combat that is labor intensive, and likely to produce many casualties. Most of the militia volunteered. The way many calculated it, having the enemy in one spot gave them the chance to kill them faster. Jim made a quick decision, and the team radioed for pickup. They broke camp and prepared to move to the pick up point, while Jim and Dave “strategized”.

“We need to leave enough people behind to fight an effective delaying action, but send enough people to make an effective unit, like platoon strength or larger.”

Dave considered this, panting under the weight of his pack. “How about we just let some units stay, intact? Then we can go as a unit, and either take a few other teams with us and fill in the spots of folks who stay behind with some folks we trust?”

Jim nodded, “Um-huh, that’s what I was thinking. We’ll need to bring a few support people, too, logistics team to take care of us. Like a micro company trains.”

“Well, we could bring the deuce and two pickups or more, and a driver/logistics person for each vehicle. That would give us a support team in place.”

“Who do we want to stay behind, and who do we want on support? We’ll have to confer later, see who wants to go and who wants to stay, and work from there.”

“Sounds good. We got a whole day to decide.”

“Yeah, about that. I want everyone to take 24 hours when we get back to rest and relax. That means me and you, too. We’re going to split into three teams, I want you to take one, Will will take one, I’ll have the other. That way we can have three maneuver elements in town.”

“Sounds good to me.”

Two days later the Pine Tree Irregulars were traveling in a convoy bound for their assembly area. The deuce and a half, three pickups, and one Suburban carried the unit. One pickup sported a camper, which was sporting several antenna. The camper had been configured as a comms center, and had a small generator and several base station and mobile Ham radios inside. With its propane fired water heater it could provide a shower and hot meals for the militia, if things worked out that they could take advantage of it. Doc was going to use one of the pickups that was fitted with a bed cap as a field ambulance, once the gear in back had been unpacked. He had a driver and two EMT trained assistants to carry litters and help with the grim work that undoubtedly lay ahead.

They are detained and then passed through two separate NHDF checkpoints, one manned by a militia from Maine, which had come down to fight. The men were tired, having been pulled from the line a few days prior, and were working the checkpoint as a way of relaxing from the grueling combat they had engaged in for five straight days. Dave, Jim,

and Doc chatted with them for a bit, to get a better picture of the situation. Arriving at their designated rv point, they parked and went about eating a late lunch. Shortly after, a Humvee pulled up, and three NHDF troops in olive drab uniforms got out and approached them.

“Are you the Pine Tree Militia?” asked the oldest looking of the three, a ray haired man in his late fifties.

“We are,” answered Jim, “what can I do for you?”

“I’m Dan Weeden, I’m your new contact. I’m afraid there’s been some reorganization going on, and the younger troops have been given more...vigorous assignments.”

Jim nodded. Indeed, the other two NHDF people looked a bit over fifty themselves.

After a silence that started to get awkward, Dan spoke again, “After you’re people have eaten we’ll take you to the training area-it’s north of here, a little further from the lines. You’ll have time to train, and we have two Special Forces teams here to do that. One is from the Rhode Island National Guard and the other is from the Fifth Group at Fort Campbell.”

“How do you know you can trust them?” asked Jim.

“Well, both teams have men with family here in state, and we checked them out through friends, teachers, and such. All came back OK. We don’t have a way to do thorough background checks, but we have it on good authority..” he winked slowly and dramatically, “that JSOC about crapped when the teams defected. Could be part of a deception, but since the team from Rhode Island has family now in camps I don’t believe so.”

Jim nodded, “We’ll take our chances. But we’re ready to deploy now. My men...” a feminine ‘ahem’ broke his train of thought, “..my men and WOMEN, are ready to go into the line at any time.”

“I appreciate that you are all experienced in combat, but what we are doing here is training you for urban warfare.”

”My team is trained for urban warfare.”

Major Weeden paused. “How about we let the Special Forces decide?”

“Sure,” grinned Jim back at him.

Steve held up his hand and ticked off fingers...three...two....one....BANG BANG BANG! The 12 gauge in Mikes hands barked as he shot the lock and deadbolt with the cutdown riotgun. As soon as the third shot went off a combat boot clad foot kicked it in,

and a man in OD fatigues whipped into the doorway, his M-249 SAW barking its fast staccato. Immediately behind him another figure slipped into the room and added the sounds of rapid semi auto fire to the din. Before the third man could slip in, the firing stopped.

“Clear!”

“Clear!”

“All Clear!”

The three persons in the room had entered and hit all the targets in seconds. Without worrying about hostage targets, this went a lot faster than the room clearing they had practiced under Jims tutelage so long before. As the rest of the team moved past the doorway, Mike marked the doorway with bright green spraypaint to indicate it had been cleared while the other two cleared the room more closely, looking for holes in the walls or ceilings that the enemy could use to slip in behind them. As the last man moved past, the three man team fell in at the rear of the snake, covering the ‘hallway’ to the rear.

“You’re men move well. They’ve done this before?” asked the Special Forces Master Sergeant.

“Yeah,” answered Jim lightly, “a time or two.”

The Sergeant nodded, “Or two is more like it. I think they’re ready. No reason to waste time and ammo on stuff they already know. We’ll be passing out frags and these workshop stun grenades we’ve got before you go. Resupply is tough at the front, so take as much as you can before the supply Sergeant catches on.”

“I think we’re all set there, too.”

The Sergeant looked at Jim, “Oh, did you bring your own?”

Jim smiled, more to himself than for someone else’s benefit, “We have our ways.”

“They did what?”

“Looks like they took twice what they were to be issued. Left a note, too, saying they only took what they would have used in training, and a little extra.”

The Master Sergeant laughed, “We have our ways the SOB told me. Damned if he didn’t.” The Sgt smiled. They must have a master scrounger with them.

“You got how much?”

“I took what we would have used in training, and about twice what they were going to issue us, which is all from the training stocks, and only about half of what we really need anyway,” Dave answered.

“I dub you ‘slicky boy’,” said Jim, only half joking.

“Oh, and I found out about a bunch of captured stuff, too, from their armorer. Turns out he’s a guy I know from a website I used to hang out at before this started. He lives around here, and got shot in leg while he and some friends were successfully resisting the unreasonable search and seizure section of the Constitution. Another week and they’ll let him back on the line, but for now he’s helping out the SF dudes.”

“Where is it?”

“In the back of his truck. He’s going to bring it by when we get set up.”

Jim shook his head. “You are something else, you know that?”

Dave grinned, “As long as it’s a good something else, we’re cool.”

“You know it, homie.”

The unexpected windfall of captured gear included three RPG-7V rocket launchers and five boxes of four rockets each. Also, thirty blocks of TNT, fifty-five electric blasting caps, 4 Russian Claymore copies, two rolls of double strand electrical wire, and six cases of old Russian F-1 grenades with fuses.

“The Russkie frags have fuses marked with a ‘zero’, and no one wants them. But with an instant fuse they’ll make great booby traps, or you can use electric caps, or whatever.”

“Thanks, man, I can’t tell you how much I appreciate this,” said Dave.

“I told you, don’t worry. Besides, my militia unit has lots more,” and he winked.

Dave smiled, “Well, all right then. I’ll see you on the line.”

His friend shook his hand, “Be right there next to you in a couple of days. Take it easy, Dave.”

They parked the trucks at an old strip mall that was now a field hospital. They would set up here, and from here would deploy as the NHDF needed them. They could hear rifle and mortar fire in the distance.

The teams divided up and started getting ready, preparing LBE’s and packs. The plan was to drive as close as they could, then march to join the units already on the line. They were being integrated into the Second Battalion, Londonderry Rifles, an NHDF unit the included one regular Army company that had defected, a National Guard armor company that had no armor and was fighting as infantry, and two companies of citizen-soldiers-veterans and patriots fighting with their own weapons and equipment. With 28 men entering the line they were either the smallest company or largest platoon in the battalion.

Attrition was eating away at the number of available fighters.

They had brought two garden carts with them, large wooden affairs with bicycle tires, used in more mundane times to move mulch and leaves around the yard with ease. They were just right for hauling ammo forward and casualties to the rear. For now they were loaded with ammo, food, and water.

Will came up to Jim as he was buckling a chest pouch over his body armor.
“Those frags, the Russian pineapples?”

“Yeah, what about them?” Jim replied.

“I remember reading about those fuses marked with a ‘0’, and they’re just a manufacturers mark, I seem to recall.”

“That contact of Daves said they were instant fuses.”

“Well, I asked Dave, he said that no one would use them because they heard they were instant.”

“Well, you can throw the first one, if you want. We’ll either give you a good funeral or buy you a drink.”

“Better not be water,” joked Will, “I’ll find a way to try them safely when we hit the trenches.”

“Just don’t kill yourself.”

“I won’t. Sam would never forgive me.”

They passed into the forward lines after dark, moving up with guides in groups of threes and fours. Eventually they were all in place, occupying a largish apartment building that overlooked the Merrimack River, and four houses on the same street. Voice powered phones linked all five building, and Jim immediately set about checking the lines, repositioning people here and there, walking through with each leader making sure they knew their fields of fire and where the friendlies were. What they had would have to do until daylight, and wait for dark again to make any changes.

The RPG teams were set up outside. They couldn’t really fire safely from inside the buildings. Jim had them set up rear security, and put out some of the Russian F1 grenades as booby traps. Instant fuses or not, they’d do the job.

Their job was to hold this section of the line. Report any movement. There was river access across from them where the enemy could conceivably launch their amphibious BMPs and BTRs against them. The river was fairly low, and they might even be able to get trucks across at that point. After one or two days they’d rotate forward to fight, and

would be relieved by a unit from the line. Two days on, one off was the rotation right now. Fight, rest, rearm, return to the fray.

They took some fire the first night, nothing personal, just harassing small arms fire from across the way. After a large caliber machinegun bullet passed all the way through one of the houses Daves team occupied he had no trouble getting them to fill and stack sandbags inside, against the river side wall.

The sun rose, bathing the far side of the river in the bright red light of dawn. Will and Dave immediately noticed sunlight reflecting from several of the broken out windows in the building across and downriver from them.

“OP’s aren’t too smart over there,” noted Will, “I see at least two guys with binos.”

“Well, are rules of engagement are simple. Let’s get Jim on the horn and see if they have a shot from the apartment.”

Dave picked up the TA-1 phone and pushed the ringer on the side. “This is Dave, we’ve got people in at least two room in the warehouse looking at us with optics.....OK, third floor, from the right, sixth window.....top floor, from the right.....tenth window....yeah, if you can. Might as well be proactive. I’ll tell them.”

Dave replaced the phone. “Will, tell your people we are under observation, and that we’re going to be engaging the ‘as if’ guys with sniper fire. Tell them to stay under cover and don’t shoot unless it’s an all out attack or we tell’em it’s all right.”

“Sure, Dave. I’ll spread the word to all the houses.”

“We don’t know what they’ll do, so we may get shot at in return.”

“No prob...” Wills voice was cut off by a single shot from the apartment. They both grabbed their own binos and looked at the warehouse. They saw movement in the room on the top floor, shadows rushing back and forth.

“Must’ve hit him,” remarked Will as the TA-1 jingled.

“Dave....right....we’ll see what we can do.” Hanging up the phone, Dave turned to Will, “Jim wants us to see if we can’t get a 40mm or two through the window.”

Will smiled, “Let’s see. I’ll be right back.”

Will left the room and Dave could hear him giving instructions in the hallway. Several minutes later he heard the hollow ‘thunk’ of at least two 40mm grenade launchers firing- they had three with them-and the window erupted in a ball of black smoke as two high explosive grenades detonated nearly simultaneously across the river-a shot of about 250 yards. Gunfire sprouted on the occupied side as German gunners lashed out in retribution.

Red tracers skipped across the river and ricocheted over their heads as at least two hidden machineguns swept the opposite bank. A roar and whoosh indicated a militia RPG team had spotted something. Dave watched the PG-7 rocket leap across the Merrimack and strike a pile of rubble in a blinding flash. A half second later the sound of the strike rolled across the river. Another long burst of machinegun fire came from the position in defiance of the rocket attack. After a few more minutes the machinegun fire tapered off, as did the fire from the free side of the river.

The order went out-feel free to shoot anybody on the other side of the river at will. Keep the enemy off balance. The militia took to the order like ducks to water, and kept up fire all day.

As the sun set, the Militia counted no casualties on their part-and several confirmed kills across the way.

Dave was crossing from his right flank positions back to the main command post, or CP in the early morning twilight. He had just checked the lines again, making sure everyone on duty was awake and alert, bringing what little coffee they had to a few of the troops. As he crouched over to run from behind a storage shed to the cover of a small ranch house, he heard a roar in the air that sounded like a freight train. "INCOM...!!!!" he started to yell, but he was cut off as exploding artillery shells started to burst around the militias' lines. The first blast was a hundred yards away, and back behind their forward positions, but it was still enough to make Dave get down. He curled into a ball as more explosions tore through the early morning, in and around their positions. As he hugged the ground another explosion, this one much closer, picked him up and slammed him into the ground. Wood splinter and painted shingles fell around him as the small ranch house disintegrated from a direct hit. More explosions, some from smaller weapons, light mortars through 155mm cannon, worked a two-mile stretch of the New Hampshire Line. The barrage lasted for about 20 minutes, which to those on the receiving end felt like an eternity. As the last echoes of the explosions drifted away, small arms fire erupted from the far bank. Dave quickly leapt to his feet and looked around. The house in front of him was splintered and the remains were burning. He could hear small arms ammunition cooking off in the fire, and could what he assumed was burning flesh. He faintly heard cries of wounded men, but he quickly put those sounds aside. With machinegun tracers crisscrossing the sky over his head, he had to get ready for what was next.

He took off at a run to the right flank positions. Diving more or less head first into the nearest fighting position, he was caught and set upright by its occupants. The two militiamen had stunned looks on their faces.

"Everyone all right?" asked Dave, giving the men the once over for obvious injuries.

"Yeah," mumbled the older of the two, "The house is gone, man."

"I know. I know," replied Dave.

"We gotta find Steve. Steve was in there," and the man put down his SAR-1 AK clone, as if to climb out of the hole.

Dave put a hand on his arm, "Chuck, we can't right now. He's either OK or not, and we can't change that. Hear the machineguns? We need to get ready, I think the "as if's" are

coming over to play.”

Nodding his understanding, Chuck picked up his rifle.

“Chuck, Mike, I need you guys to stay here. Shoot anyone bad. If they get close to crossing the river, get out of the hole with weapons and ammo only and fight a delaying action for as long as you can hold out, all right?”

Both men said “Yeah” simultaneously.

“I have to go check out the rest of the squad.” And Dave climbed out of the hole even as Chuck and Steve started shooting sparingly, waiting for targets.

Dave was running across what was once a well-tended lawn when dirt kicked up around his feet. He fell as if hit, but immediately rolled to his right, tucking in behind a large Oak tree whose top was torn and tattered from a mortar bursting in its high branches. Several more short bursts thudded into the thick trunk before the gunners attention was caught something else to shoot at. Even as he ran forward again, Dave’s ears picked up the telltale sound of tank engines and squeaking tracks from the far side of the river. He ran even harder, if possible, for the security of the last house on the right.

Reaching the corner, he saw that there was already a medical team working on a wounded militiaman. He waved to Tony, who came over right away.

“Stew was hit by shrapnel, in the legs and chest. Docs working on him, says he should survive. “

“How about everyone else?” Dave asked, panting like a dog after his strenuous run.

“We’re OK...”

”Good,” said Dave, cutting him off, “Get all the anti-tank stuff we’ve got ready. I hear tanks.”

“IS that what that was...”

“MOVE!” Dave urged Tony. Joining Tony, Dave helped place the team, using trees and terrain for cover, handing out last little tidbits of advice.

He heard a shout, and turned to see Sonya, one of his late additions, pointing across the river. Dave turned in time to see an M-1 Abrams poke it’s snout from behind the large brick building. The turret scanned left and right, and the monster lurched forward, its tracks squeaking making more noise than the relative quiet of it’s turbine engine. As the Abrams cleared the building, it angled towards a low spot in the opposite river bank—a good place for a tank to attempt to ford the river. A second 120mm smoothbore gun sprouted from the corner, followed shortly by a second Abrams, which also pivoted its turret. But this time the gun turned to the tanks left, towards the occupied mill. So startling was its cannon firing that Dave blinked in surprise. A large hole was blasted into the wall of the mill. Suddenly the enemy line opened up, and Dave could see tracer bullets ricocheting wildly up in the air as small caliber bullets bounced off of the Abrams Chobham armor. Behind the second M-1 came a Bradley IFV, its turret pointing to the rear, spitting rounds from its 25mm cannon. From behind the building came an explosion and a column of flame and smoke that rose over the roof.

The first tank clambered down the embankment, and Dave could clearly see the turret was marked with a black Maltese Cross. Its main gun flashed smoke and flame as it fired into the militias lines. The second Abrams was worked its way down the riverbank, turning its turret. When the muzzle of the main gun was properly aligned, and too spoke,

this time firing an Armor Piercing Fin Stabilized Discarding Sabot (APFSDS) round into the rear of the first Abrams' hull. Traveling at a speed of over one mile per second the depleted uranium round tore through the engine compartment. Another round followed, throwing up a shower of sparks as it violated the armored sanctuary of the turret. The tank immediately ground to a halt as black flames poured from the engine bay. After a brief moment the hatches on the turret blew open, even as the blast doors on the back of the turret spouted red fire and black smoke as its ammunition burned. An "As If" RPG gunner leaned out of an upper story window, trying to get a shot at the turncoat tanks turret top. Dave quickly threw his CAR-15 to his shoulder and started shooting. He wasn't the only one, and the gunner tumbled out of the window in a cloud of red brick dust thrown up by rounds from a dozen weapons. The Bradley entered the river with a spray of white foam, the coaxial machinegun working the upper windows of the factory. Dave could hear the staccato roar of individual weapons firing from his side of the river as the shell-shocked militia forces regained their equilibrium and picked up the fire. Yet another Bradley appeared, it too firing over its own rear deck at unseen forces.

From the far side of the factory a T-90 appeared, one of the many tanks acquired by Germany when the Berlin Wall came down. The Abrams fired again, and the T-90's turret flew off in a blast that sent a shockwave across the river. Small black objects started appearing from the brick buildings windows as the invaders dropped grenades, trying desperately to kill the armored monster in their midst. They exploded in impressive black clouds that did little more than scratch the paint of the tank. The first Bradley waddled ashore near to Dave, and quickly pivoted in place, its tracks tearing up black earth as they turned in opposite directions. As soon as the rear of the Bradley was out of the ASF fires, the rear ramp dropped and nearly a dozen US troops poured out of the back, quickly taking up positions facing across the river. They added their firepower to the militias in short order. The second Bradley fired its smoke canisters and disappeared behind a wall of white smoke, which it quickly broke through as it too headed for the ford.

Even as the Bradley crawled forward, the front wall of the building erupted in a large explosion. The familiar shape of an A-10 roared overhead, and several more large explosions came from the far side of the river as it passed. From Dave's far right an RPG roared across the river and disappeared behind the factory. Another ball of fire billowed upwards as the shaped charge rocket found its mark. German troops clad in Fleck camo started charging from the factory, shooting desperately across the river. Rifles, machineguns, and 25mm cannon fire made short work of them. Flame and black smoke was hurled from the windows of the factory as the A-10 made another pass, this time on the right side. Debris rained down on the remaining M-1, which quickly lurched forward and turned towards the river. Up and down the river similar events were unfolding, American units were turning on both the ISAF forces and the turncoat Americans in their midst.

Dave's heart leapt. Pausing to reload his CAR-15, he heard the sounds of firing up and down the banks of the river. "The whole line must be doing this," he thought as he slapped the bolt catch with the heel of his left hand. Using the burning, shattered house as cover he raced to his left, to where the second Bradley was disgorging its cargo. Dave

noted that each dismounting man carried two or three AT-4 rockets in their left hand, and deposited them on the ground well to the rear of the tracked behemoth. A pair of men broke away from the others, one man carrying a radio on his back, the other looking at Dave and moving towards him.

“Captain Goins, Alpha 3/15th Infantry, at your service,” he announced himself to Dave. “Hi. I’m Dave, the XO here,” replied Dave, taking a knee “We’re glad to see you’re on our side.”

“Well, most of us are, actually,” said the Captain. He and his radioman both took a knee with Dave, “We had to...take care of a few on the way over. Is this Jim’s sector?”

“Yeah, why?”

“I’m supposed to meet up with him and take his unit across to counterattack.”

“And we’re supposed to trust you?”

The Captain smiled, “Let’s see this Jim.”

“OK, follow me!” said Dave, as he propelled himself to his feet. Whirling, he took off toward the militia’s CP. He saw Jim on his own radio, and stopped in front of him.

Jim smiled “Is that Captain Goins?” He asked with a wink.

Dave grinned “You scroungy turd, you arranged this and didn’t tell me?”

“OPSEC,” Jim said. Dave nodded. He could accept that.

“Captain, I’m Jim. Are your men ready to take us across?”

“Yes, we are,” answered the Captain. A series of explosions and a flurry of small arms fire sounded from upstream, “But if we don’t hurry we’re going to miss the fun.”

“Dave,” said Jim, “Get you half of the line ready. Weapons and ammo only. If you see Doc tell him to follow us when he can.”

“He’s down my way, I’ll tell him.”

The Captain spoke into the radio handset and then spoke to Jim and Dave, “I’ve got three M-113’s ready to cross.”

“Send them over,” answered Jim, “send one to the left and right, one in between the Bradleys. Did you bring the AT-4’s?”

“Yeah, they’re behind that Brad,” Goins said, pointing at the closest one.

“Dave, have the men grab those and distribute them to the M-113’s.”

“Right,” said Dave, and he was up and off, rallying the militia.

The rest of the day was a blur to Dave. The hurried river crossing in the box-like M-113’s, shooting over the top of the open rear hatch. Pausing to reload magazines from stripper clips in the back of the M-113. The hurried assault on an artillery battery, the guns attached to the back of German trucks, the bodies slumped over the trail legs of the cannon, laying where they fought a desperate holding action trying to buy time for a hasty retreat. And finally, as the Noon hour passed, more and more American units joining the fray. And finally the ISAF units surrendering en masse, the momentum of the American advance catching them completely unaware. By the end of the day, they had completely destroyed the force assembled to literally invade New Hampshire.

By the end of the week they had liberated almost all of New England, and were fighting desperate units bypassed and trapped in Hartford, and could see the towering buildings of New York City from the Connecticut shore.

The victory of the New England forces weakened the resolve of the ISAF forces all over the country, and encouraged action by other Americans. All over the country resistance cells sprouted, and occupation forces from a myriad of countries suffered their wrath. The units from the New England region slowly approached Washington D.C., but did not move into the area itself. Laying siege to large cities was preferable to battling it out house to house against a lost cause. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff got the “football” that contained the codes for all of Americas nuclear weapons, and managed to convince the Air Force Chief to place all nukes on a standby status, where they would only fire upon confirmation of weapons launch from hostile powers-no nuclear weapons would be used on American soil against Americans.

The ISAF countries were at their wits ends. Their already shattered economies, already weakened by the global crisis and their socialist nanny policies, would not support the military buildup that would be required to deploy a force large enough to have any affect on the situation in America. One by one they reached agreements with the provisional government in Concord, New Hampshire, and gradually cease fires were arranged throughout much of the country. After being disarmed, the foreign troops were treated firmly but fairly, and were eventually returned to their homelands. The cost of housing, transporting, and guarding the troops was billed to their respective governments, and were used as leverage for the forgiveness of the original defaults that had been the excuse for their invasion in the first place.

Most of the traitorous Congress was imprisoned or shot. The President and her Vice President were found in the Oval Office, victims of an apparent murder-suicide. There was little mourning when that was announced.

We all know the rest. How a true Constitutional Republic was reborn. How the Constitution was rewritten in layman’s language and the courts were changed to prevent lifelong tenure. Congress, too, had limits on how many consecutive terms a person could serve. The rule of law was restored, and the rule of “legalese” was, hopefully, cast aside forever. The legal system again became a justice system, and social welfare again became the domain of private organizations, where it should have always been.

And how the sacrifices of the brave patriots, men and women, who freed this great nation from the tyranny of global socialism, inspired others in far away places, to establish free Republics of their own. Poland, first, with the help of many Americans of Polish descent. South Africa, where a long, bitter, and bloody war finally restored freedom and true equality. Kenya, and eventually England, all became free at last.

And that is the story of my Grandfather, David McGrath, Governor of New Hampshire, Senator to the Republics Congress in Kansas, and in my eyes, the greatest hero of the war. I have assembled this narrative from the letters he wrote to my Grandmother, the stories my Dad and Uncle, his sons, have told me, and interviews with my Grandfather, who

lives out the remainder of his days in peace at his mountain cabin, just the way he wanted to in the first place.

The End