

# *The Hills Went Boom!*



*A Novel By*

***Hank Acker***

Acker/The Hills Went Boom

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## **The Hills Went Boom**

By Hank Acker

## Chapter One

### January 1952, Hung bong, North Korea

The roar of the explosions was overwhelming, terrifying and deafening.

The six startled US Marines, each a newly minted Recon demolition man, looked at each other trying not to show any surprise or fear.

Equally terrifying and violent was the concussion, all of the men reacted clown-like, swaying and hopping sideways, foolishly looking at the huge plume of dust, rock and dirt they had just dislodged.

Covered completely with debris, their utility uniforms stiffened and went from green to ash gray. Weapons suffered the same effect of being coated with the ash of the explosion. The heat and force of the exploding C2 plastic explosive made a plaster of the debris and the surrounding ice and snow while exiting the mouth of the tunnel.

The next sound anyone heard was that of the mission leader, Corporal Jim Cunningham, yelling out the names of each of his demolition team. "Hayes, Cook, Morgan, Longo, Grazioso, Ormond, Sound off dammit. Doc, go check 'em out."

So went Recon Unit One's mission number one, their part of the Korean War had officially begun.

This was the first experience in a war zone for all of the members of this newly formed Recon unit of the United States Marine Corp. Each of the six looked at the others while holding his breath for fear of losing control of his bladder. The blast pushed their gut so hard that the urge to pee was fierce.

Navy corpsman Otto Schmidt went from man-to-man and gave his "thumbs up" to Cunningham. This was war and they were now in middle of it. Aarogah, Semper Fi. Oh shit.

Reflecting back in his mind, Cunningham thought not one single day of the yearlong training, had prepared them for this moment. All of their demolition training explosions had been kind of fun and under controlled circumstances. Kind of exciting but this one was truly breath taking, outstanding yet scary.

From the beginning of this first tour of combat to the actual explosion itself, it had been surreal. Each member of this team had gone through the first mission in his head,

each having a different point of view, expectation and fear. No one wanted to be the one who screwed something up.

“So make sure you check and double-check every item on your checklist and your partners stuff too,” yelled our “Gunny,” when we were getting ourselves prepared to go on this mission.

Trained, tough and cocky each marine knew what the “order of the day” was and wanted to get on with the mission.

“Gather your gear, check your weapons, check radios, distribute the ammo, grenades and smoke markers. Divvy up the rations and extra toilet paper.” The “Gunny”, Gunnery Sergeant Paul “Pappy” Papushka, seemed to be everywhere at once, grizzled and tough he had seen lots of action in the South Pacific in WW II. His instructions required no comment or agreement. Privates, privates first class, corporals and sergeants too just said “Yes Gunnery Sergeant” and kept on doing whatever he had told them to do.

Next on the checklist, each team member had to requisition the explosives and parachutes. It amused some of the group that they had to request, on paper with the commanding officers signature, the equipment needed to do the job. Their job was to jump out of an airplane into the bad guys’ backyard and blow things up and do it again and again.

Just more of the UN and US headquarters red tape, BS and SNAFU. Bet the gooks don’t have to go through all this crap, or do they?

The Recon teams each slept in tents with twelve guys, twelve cases of grenades of all types, all kinds of ammunition of every size and caliber, bazookas and a flamethrower. Yet each jumper had to request his parachutes and cases of explosives just like school kids in the library, and sign for them too.

Neither the parachutes nor the plastic explosives would ever be returned to the quartermaster, whether the mission was a success or failure.

So why sweat the inventory?

## **The Mission**

Mission specifics had been issued and discussed numerous times and while the nature of the assignment was extremely confidential the number of departments and units involved made it virtually impossible to keep it a real secret. The US Army oversaw the whole plan in concert with the Army of the Republic of Korea and the United Nations Joint Operations Commission (JOC).

The JOC had the final word, “go or no go” as to what, when, where and how these missions were to be conducted.

USMC Reconnaissance units existed in a limited form until the Korean War. They like many other small units were either dismantled or reduced in size, scope and mission with the end of World War II. The second “War to end all Wars.”

The Korean conflict saw the need for USMC Recon services again, which led to a focused recruitment program and another rise in their numbers. There was a great need for intelligence on North Korean and Chinese forces and the USMC Amphibious Recon Company was called to make amphibious landings in Northern Korea and report back their findings and also perform small raids against rail lines and tunnels.

Some of these missions took place in excess of 100 miles north, of the recently concocted Demilitarized Zone or DMZ, in North Korean territory. Reconnaissance team members operated closely with US Navy Underwater Demolition Teams during some of their missions.

Some amphibious landings along both of the northern shorelines of North Korea were essential in slowing the advance of the Chinese Communist and North Korean Armies. These clandestine Recon raids successfully interrupted the use of the rail system in the north continuously.

Amphibious assaults by these Recon units proved to be very time consuming for gathering information. Each unit of 12 members had to lug their equipment and support materiel into the targeted area. Adding a new dimension to these missions by the use of parachute teams flying in troop carrier aircraft could get to the target area quickly and accomplish more.

The problem with this new method was, getting the teams out after gathering whatever intelligence they had gained. A combined effort using the US Navy Frigate fleet with the Marine Reconnaissance units was deemed a significant improvement.

The US Marine Corps was selected as the implementers of these new assignments; the US Air Force was assigned to take the Marines to the drop zone in Air Force C-119 cargo and troop carrier aircraft. The US Navy provided each jump team with a Navy corpsman, who had successfully completed two weeks of jump training and who would remain unarmed but permanently detached from the Navy to the Marine Corps. He was a team member until relieved of his assignment.

The Army, Navy and Marines each had spotter aircraft to verify the success of the missions by over-flying the zone of activity using map coordinates and grid locators. Low-level aerial photos were taken of the target area for further evaluation and reference.

Each Recon team, after completing the demolition part of a mission and before leaving the targeted area, were to set up a low-frequency homing beacon so aircraft such as these could locate the target site.

Every escape and evacuation plan was unique to each mission and required even more units involved and yet secrecy was a major emphasis for each unit.

The general plan for all of the missions was to locate and verify the coordinates of tunnels that the Japanese had used during their thirty-five year occupation of Korea, previously known as Choson. The purpose and ultimate use of the tunnels were varied; some were for the construction of aircraft and weapons. Others were for food storage and some provided safety from air attacks and others were used for internment, to house prisoners captured by the Japanese in other war zones.

According to most of the Korean locals, Japanese prisoners, along with slaves and the undesirables from many Japanese conquered nations, hewed these tunnels out of solid rock. Recons' job was to locate, verify the site coordinates, the size and configuration of the tunnels and determine what purpose they may have served.

In most cases the ultimate job assignment would be to destroy the tunnels by using C2 and the newly developed C3 plastic explosives carried in via an airdrop. The US Air Force developed a two-pass system. The Recon unit would jump only when the aircraft cargo master confirmed the first or cargo drop was successful. Then the Marines would jump when the plane was back over the target area.

The C series of plastic explosives, developed for WW II Army engineers and Seabees, are stable, with no detonator inserted, and do not explode on impact. Even when parachuted from an airplane from a thousand feet or hit directly with a hammer. Most airborne jumps and cargo drops were made from between nine hundred to eleven hundred feet altitude to minimize the team's exposure to possible local ground fire or detection. This altitude left just enough time for the cargo chutes to open as well as the chutes the marines were wearing. Not too close, not too far.

Some of the civilian North Korean population did not support the United Nations effort of freeing the people and the merging of the two Korea's. Of course no one told the Recon teams this until after the civilians had fired on and injured some US and UN troops.

### **Evacuation**

The time had come to evacuate the tunnel site.

This was the fifth day of this patrol, one day getting in, one day of reconnaissance and two days of setting the explosives in the tunnel complex. Today was the day of reckoning; the igniters would be set off in a series of explosions starting at the deepest end of this multi-chambered tunnel.

Mapping the tunnel had taken a lot longer than expected. There was more to these tunnels than just someone had dug a hole in the ground. These were massive projects, designed for "who knows what" but prior intelligence did not cover any of what the unit discovered. The total patrol time was set up to be seven days; they had already used up four and a half days and were not done yet.

The WW 2 era plastic explosives, just like the team members, did not like the frigid North Korean weather. Some of the explosives crumbled like poorly made clay bricks, some of it refused to stay stuck on the cold-damp rock surface of the tunnel. The team did what they could with what they had and made a mental note to not take any of the older explosives on the next patrol or mission.

But first things first as they say. Let's get this thing blown up and sealed and get our butts out of here.

The two sniper scouts had, for the most part, an uneventful time of it, until the explosion. They each were half-frozen from being on watch since the beginning of this



mission. Both were startled and shaken. They were prepared for an enemy assault or rifle activity, but not having the ground they lay on raised up a couple of feet.

After gathering their wits about themselves they scrambled to the tunnel entrance to see what had happened and laughed at how the six demolition guys looked covered in frozen soot.

Being certain that no one was injured, Doc had OK'd the six demo guys. The squad leader, Corporal James Cunningham, shook his head and told the six to get ready to "move out" while he set up the radio beacon with the help of his radioman PFC Murphy.

The unit had at least a twelve to fifteen mile hike to get to the recovery site and be transported by boat back to the Recon units base of operation. It was going to be a long afternoon and night. Luckily not one of the twelve-person team was injured.

Some were just embarrassed.

Before Cunningham and Murphy could set up the beacon, a US Army Grasshopper spotter plane made a pass over the site. The sound of the engine of this little airplane surprised the hell out of the entire team. The US Army pilot had been forewarned of their activity and was to be ready to lend assistance if tactical support was necessary. Tactical support meant either field artillery or low-flying aircraft strafing and bombing support or both. Neither would be needed this time.

The pilot used his handy-talkie to contact the unit on the ground and reported several smoking exits on the hill above the tunnel. After a quick inspection, the exits turned out to be air vents carved out of the hill and into the tunnels to provide outside fresh air for anyone using the tunnels.

Another hour lost checking those vents out, Corporal Cunningham was becoming antsy. Those air vents were very cleverly disguised. Not one of the demolition team noticed them while in the tunnel. Then again it was not something the team members were looking for.

As the mission and patrol leader he made a mental note of that point for the missions to come.

## **Extraction**

The Recon unit would travel mostly in radio silence, except for the handy-talkie, which had a lousy range on the ground but seemed pretty effective in this situation. The pilot was going to do a fly over again and take notes for later use. The Recon unit waited until he completed his fly over and then mustered up to get out of the area.

The corporal figured they could travel for about an hour or so and split into two six-person groups and grab a K Ration break. Need to make a note of that too, seven days on K rations is not very good. There has to be something better. No smoke allowed, no fires or any kind and no cigarette smoking either.

Six of the unit would watch for gooks and six would eat. PFC Bruce Strong was the team BAR man and he would eat first and then take the highest point with the best view, the two snipers would split up, each with one group of five.

Both snipers were PFC Sniper-Scouts, a new designation in the Marine Corps, and very good with their Springfield '03's. Neither man used a scope. Mario Ortega was a marksman back in high school and naturally gravitated to this sniper assignment. His equal, Charlie (Mel) Ott was a city boy but found shooting came as natural as strolling down Broadway. Mel didn't know where he would use these skills after the war, but that could be a long way off.

Chow break was uneventful except for the constant complaining about the age of the rations, some were dated July 1944. This was January 1952 in the frozen north of the Korean peninsula. The group wanted hot chow, not jungle rations.

The exit route would have been fine in summertime but this was the dead of winter, literally. The route was treacherous in the ice and snow and the wind; good God, the wind was awful. It was biting and swirling, kicking up chunks of ice-like snow. The unit was going to have to requisition arctic weather gear if more of these missions were to continue this far north.

There is a limit on how much "extra" can be transported on one of these missions. Extra stuff meant extra weight and having to deal with any excess when it was time to pack up and leave. Leaving stuff was not an option; it was either taken with you during extraction or destroyed and rendered useless.

One of the niceties of working in the tunnels was they were warmer than outside. The ice that had formed on the mouth of this tunnel's entrance soon became dripping

water inside. Cpl Cunningham had made mental notes of this for the “after action report” that would be filed as soon as the unit reported back to HQ. Jim had never written an AAR report, but Jim was sure the Gunny would help him.

At the next rest break he would ask each of the members for their input. It was always better to see things through many eyes as opposed to only his. Jim really wanted to make this patrol and mission a success. He had been a Corporal for a lot longer than he felt he should be and getting into Recon was going to be his “ticket” to sergeant and higher.

Jim reminded himself to bring a pad and pencil to make notes on the next mission. Memories were not always reliable.

The exit route, mapped out by a team of HQ staff members, seemed simple enough on paper, but in reality it was way off. Compass readings and the map coordinates did not agree with the planned route. Cunningham had no one to check with. He was in charge.

Instinctively he knew the unit was heading in the right general direction but that wasn't good enough. This unit had to meet the Navy extraction team at precisely the right coordinates, no excuses and no second chances. The Recon unit had enough time to try a couple of different routes through the mountains, but there was only one exact spot and time frame to meet the Navy.

The window of opportunity was just two hours long.

Map reading and orienteering training at the Marine training center, Twenty-nine Palms, was much different than trying to extract a group of Marines over ice and snow covered trails. Luckily the weather was clear and the stars gave him good sightings for knowing where the team was, it was just a matter of having all the information jive.

This team had successfully completed every challenge the recon training had thrown at them; this mission would be no different. Keep following the rules and it will be all right. So far no enemy troops of any type had been seen and Cunningham wanted it to stay that way.

More than five hours had passed without incident, the silence was eerie. The corporal had expected to hear the sound of surf by this time. “Be patient” he told himself. As he started to ask if anyone heard anything, a familiar voice said...

“Hey, no sweat, there's the marker,” point man Hayes, whispered. “Pass it on.” Tony, next in line, gave the good news to Cunningham.

The closer the unit got to the coastline the colder it seemed to get. The Wonson Reservoir was about 60 miles south of this operation and Cunningham remembered all the stories of the 1950 Marines evacuating that area and humping to the Hungnam harbor for the lift out of Korea. We don't want to repeat that bit of history, ever.

The Sea of Japan which was just in front of them on the other side of this sheltered cove, seemed cold and unfriendly. Except for the blinking signal from some type of boat bobbing close to the shore.

Using flashlight communications, the radiomen quickly identified the signals as coming from the US Navy. Authentication works two ways. The Navy crew was not anxious to take on some North Korean patrol posing as friendlies and getting caught in a trap. “Who won last year's World Series?” was always a good way to be certain either group was “talking” to an American. Each team member knew that the NY Yankees had clobbered the NY Giants in six games in the 1951 World Series. It was “Jolting” Joe DiMaggio's last season as a Yankee and Mickey Mantle's first.

Cunningham split the unit back into two groups of six. Schmidt, the Navy corpsman, Strong and his BAR and himself would be in the second group. Just in case of problems and the need for a medic. He was never sure where to place “Doc” since he was unarmed and carrying a bulkier load than anyone else. Medical supplies were not exactly lightweight stuff and Doc had not used any of his supplies. Thankfully.

At five count intervals the first group headed for the beach and the waiting boat. The first Marine to reach the boat found it to be an LCVP landing craft. Its ramp was down and bobbing in the shallow water Cook stepped onto the ramp suspiciously and was met by two sailors in life jackets who grabbed his armpits and propelled him into the craft. “Welcome aboard, Marine.” Five seconds later Longo came aboard. He followed Cook to the deepest part of the landing craft. Since there were only twelve team members there would be plenty of room, these landing craft were built to hold 36 fully loaded assault personnel.

### **The Sea of Japan**

In less than 10 minutes everyone was on board the landing craft and the Navy coxswain put the boat into reverse and slowly backed away from the shoreline. The ramp was quickly raised and they were on their way, not knowing to what or where. The LCVP's officially named "Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel" are not built for speed, top speed was about 12mph, but it is for transporting troops to beaches from large troop carrier ships or returning to these mother ships for more troops. The crafts flat-like bottom did not make it a very sea worthy vessel.

Nothing like that was in sight, so just how are we going to go a couple of hundred miles back to our base of operations. In this slow moving little landing craft?

They headed out to sea after the driver turned the craft around 180 degrees. The Navy guys passed out coffee and rolls to each man of the unit. "My God it tasted good. Black coffee and hard rolls with jelly in the middle." Ten minutes later one of the landing craft crew let the marines know that the LCVP was headed for a US Navy Patrol Frigate. The Frigate was holding in deeper water to avoid the shallow coastal waters. The Marines would meet up with the vessel shortly.

An LCVP crewmember explained the process of getting out of one of these vessels while in the open sea. "The landing craft will pull alongside of the Frigate and each of you will climb onto the landing craft's top rear deck."

"Crap." Came a voice from the assembled Marines.

"And catch the trailing ladder on the side of the Patrol Frigate." He droned on.

"More crap." Another voice echoed.

"Deck hands will be there to help." The sailor continued his instructions.

"Like Hell," Morgan grunted.

"Do not take your gear, packs or weapons," ignoring the unseen faces below.

"Are you shittin' me" yet another voice from the dark bowels of the LCVP?

"They will be lifted aboard when the landing craft is snatched from the water and deposited on the after-deck of the ship." The sailor's job was to inform, not debate.

"Marines don't give up their weapons to anyone, anytime, anywhere. Got it," yelled PFC Longo from the belly of the landing craft.

"Take that up with the Chief Master at Arms," yelled back the boatswain's mate from the drivers seat. "We just deliver the messages."

“Sling arms,” shouted Cunningham. “Secure for disembarking.” Each Marine was to shoulder his weapon and secure it in the prescribed manner. The same as going over the side of a troop transport, when executing an amphibious landing. The M1 rifle or the Springfield, lies across the back at a 45-degree angle and won’t slip off because your head and helmet are in the way. The weapon is totally useless in this position, but it won’t fall off either, and that is the point. No one was going to take the weapon from you while it is on your body in that position.

Everyone had taken the ammunition clip out of the weapon and put it in their ammo belt. Better safe than shoot somebody by mistake. The ammo belt was put with the gear they could not bring aboard.

Cunningham checked his watch. It had been almost an hour and a half since they got on this landing craft. “Where is this Navy Friggit?”

Friggit, that was one awful name for any kind of a ship.

To answer his unasked question, the boatswain’s mate yelled down from his perch on the upper deck of the landing craft that the vessel was in sight. Now comes the fun part continued Cunningham’s thoughts. I got these guys through our first assignment and now we are all going to fall into the icy cold water of the Sea of Japan and die. Damn.

The moment of truth arrived sooner than expected.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Patrol Frigate 166, USS Olympia**

The LCVP pulled alongside of the Patrol Frigate Olympia; hull number PF166 smoothly and with a little bump. "He drives this thing better than I do my '39 Ford Coupe," commented Longo. Instructions came from the frigate.

A bullhorn roared into the quiet night. "Tie off a line fore and aft of the landing craft." Two heavy ropes thrown from the deck, appeared on the floor of the landing craft, the Marines all moved to the outer edges of the small craft's interior, not wanting to get in the Navy's way. The two lines were secured to something on the upper side of the LCVP and the little craft stopped bobbing. Instead it mimicked the motion of the larger ship. Even though the frigate was small by Navy standards, it looked big to the Marines hunkered in the bowels of this little boat. A ladder, literally a regular ladder, was pushed into the craft and one of the on-deck sailors slid on down into the assembled Marines. "That was really slick," commented Hayes.

The newly arrived seaman held the bottom of the ladder and told each of the Recon team to climb up, one at a time, using two hands. No kidding. When you get to the deck level, clear a path as quickly as possible, then the next man will do the same. Corporal Cunningham volunteered to be last. Hayes went first and was on the frigate's deck quickly and hustled out of the way by a Navy deck hand. Schmidt went next. The corpsman made it up in no time flat. From there on it was pretty routine and Cunningham jumped aboard, it took less than ten minutes to complete the boarding. It turned out that the ship's crew had practiced this exercise three times a day for the past week; they got real good at it.

Once on board the Olympia the Marines were hustled inside a cabin alongside where the ladder had been. It was warm, smelled of food, coffee and cigarettes. "My God, the Navy had the life." A Chief Petty Officer took charge and told us to remove all gear and weapons and secure them in the corner of this room. All any one had on them was a canteen and some ammo pouches and their M1 Garand rifle. He acknowledged we can keep our weapons, but they had to be unloaded and all ammunition and grenades had to be in a secured area. No exceptions.

This was a US Navy warship and no loose munitions were tolerated. The Chief continued his instructions. "Any explosives would be under the supervision of the Chief Master at Arms and his storage area is two decks below this one." Once the weapons,

ammo, grenades, bayonets and smoke markers had been dealt with, the rifles were stacked in groups of four, butts down, barrels up and checked for safeties "on". Standard Operating Procedures for transporting a rifle or carbine in a wet or dirty area was for a new, dry prophylactic (rubber) be put over the muzzle, and forward sight of the weapon. So they did.

The grimy, tired and smelly Recon team were getting more hungry the longer they stood in this room, actually it was the ships officers wardroom. For this occasion the ships captain deemed it necessary to use it to welcome the ships visitors. "The ship had limited meeting space and accommodations must be made in such circumstances," drawled the Chief. This space was normally "off limits" to him and the rest of the crew. "This was officers' country." The next instruction surprised every one of the team. He told them to take off all their clothes including underwear and socks. Keep your boots. The Navy would provide them dungarees, tee shirts, underwear and socks until the "utilities" and other stuff they were wearing could be laundered and returned.

Every Soldier, Sailor, Marine and Airman has their name or the first letter of their last name and the last four digits of his service number printed inside of each and every piece of clothing so nothing would get lost or "go missing."

"Now for some chow. Follow the mess cook outside the port hatch", the Chief said, while pointing in the direction of the gray painted door. "Be careful on the ladders," he added quickly. "One of the ship's officers will be responsible for your weapons. His name is Ensign Sparrow." Almost in unison everyone looked at Cpl. Cunningham who shrugged his shoulders and said, "Let's eat."

And eat they did, this little boat had a real cook and baker, sailors, called mess men, were assigned to do the cleanup and stuff. Not like the Marine Corps, all, except non-commissioned enlisted personnel, drew "mess cooking" for thirty days at a clip; you helped in the prepping, cooking, serving, cleanup and disposal of all garbage and trash. The arrangements on this PF166 looked pretty darned good.

The cook made eggs, "any way you want 'em" and steak, with toast, muffins and juice. Coffee, real coffee, not the crap that is in the K or C ration packs. And jelly, lots of jelly. They also had oleomargarine, a substitute for butter. It's greasy and tastes oily, but better than nothing and a lot better than they had been used to. The Chief joined them



during the meal to announce that sailors had given up their bunks so the Marines could sleep in some comfort for the twenty-four or more hours they would be on-board. Wow, real bunks and real sheets, "Thanks."

Cunningham stood up and started applauding the crew of this US Navy vessel. The rest joined in enthusiastically. Looking around at each other in Navy blue dungarees and white tee shirts it all seemed unreal. One day they are blowing the hell out of a Korean mountain and a couple of days later, here they are, safe and sound and enjoying the hospitality of the US Navy. Jeez, what a war.

The Captain of the ship had told the ship's crew not to ask questions of the Marines, since their missions are classified "Top Secret" but each of the crew was anxious to find out what these Marines were "up to."

It is weird on board a Navy ship. Bells ring all the time, and someone is "piping" through the loudspeaker system all hours of the day and night. The Marines were so tired most only heard one or two of the messages. When they were awakened it was broad daylight and the ship was a beehive of activity. All were advised to stay put until someone paged them to report on deck. "No problem mate."

Then came a knock on the door "Come on in, it's open." A navy seaman came in with their utilities, laundered and folded so neatly they looked as though they had been pressed. They were stacked by serial number in a large canvas bag on wheels, the kind seen in hospitals. Amazing.

Even the previously soot covered ones were clean. The seaman left the basket and told the Marines, "Drop the navy dungarees and tee shirts in the basket. When everybody finished changing clothes, someone will pick it up later."

The unit heard all kinds of announcements pertaining to work aboard the ship. "Secure from this work party, secure from this and that job, secure from loading the landing craft." That caught their attention. All of their gear had been left in the landing craft when they came aboard last night. What was happening to it, each had their own concern or interest, but they were told to wait, so wait they would.

Soon the loudspeaker in their compartment blasted out. "All Marines report to the fantail to gather your gear." "All" assumed the message meant "Doc" too; they left the compartment and headed for the rear of the ship. What a surprise they got, the LCVP

had been lifted out of the water and placed where originally had been three 20 mm gun tubs. The depth charge racks and the “Y” guns that shoot the depth charges had all been removed to accommodate the davits and rack that the 35-foot landing craft fit into. In the center of this rack was a very large crane-like boom shaped like a double S, lots of pulleys and heavy wire rope running through them. The LCVP looked bigger setting in its cradle then when they had first seen it in the dark on the Korean shore.

### **The Skipper**

Each man’s gear, backpack, empty ammo belt, empty K-Bar sheath, equally empty bayonet scabbard, grenade bag and belly pack, were stacked neatly waiting for the unit to deal with it. The gear for the radiomen was there also. The two unit backpacked VHF communications set stood out like a sore thumb. It was so heavy it had to be carried in two pieces by two men. Crazy.

The CMA had had his way with the ammunition and stuff, getting it back was going to be interesting. Doc’s satchels were there as well. A Chief they had not met before strode up to the unit and introduced himself as Chief Ed Bednarik the “Chief of the Boat.” He welcomed them aboard and said that the skipper of the Olympia would meet with them at lunch, in one hour. In the meantime it would be appreciated if the Marines would stay in the compartment where they had slept, until paged.

The crew had been advised again to not interact with the Recon unit. So it was pretty uncomfortable not being able to thank these sailors for taking charge of the units’ gear and stuff. The Chief continued. “Uniform of the day is Green Utilities with Utility Cap. No helmet or helmet liners, they can stay in the bunk area.” Arrangements were being made for the Marines to clean and service their weapons, no ammunition, just bore cleaner, oil and towels. The Chief said the ship would be arriving at our debarkation point late this evening or early tomorrow morning and another team of Navy personnel would see that the Marine unit got to its final destination after the ship docked.

He did not comment or add that the ship would not be taking the shorter route close to the Southern tip of Korea by Pusan because of newly discovered anti-ship mines in the water. A longer route was to be taken, just being very careful.

The ordnance that the team had brought on board would be returned to them at docking time. This was all new news to the unit but everything that was happening was a first, so just go with the flow.

After being paged, the unit was escorted to the ship's mess. The meal was great, again. These guys could get used to this kind of life. The Chief informed them that the Captain of the PF166 Olympia would be meeting with them shortly. Uh oh.

Cunningham had surveyed the team for input to his "After Action Report" that he would have to fill out when they got back to base. There were several bits of information that he was not aware of and were being added to his ability to make a good if not great AAR. This time he did have paper and pencil and was busy making sure that everyone gave him input. He also noted, for his own use, who gave what about what. Better too much input than too little. God he thought, he was beginning to sound like M/Sgt. Kennedy the Operations NCO, a real paper and detail guy.

Jim figured he could do a lot worse than being like the "top."

"Attenhut on deck," shouted Ortega as the ship's Captain had arrived with two of his officers and the Chief of the Boat. "At ease, Marines, as you were." "I really love the way Marines react to ranking personnel, it is a pleasure to have you all aboard, you too Petty Officer Schmidt." "Thank you, Sir," everyone said in unison. The Sir came out as a large puff like "SUHH." "I understand that you have been treated satisfactorily," "Sir, yes sir" was the reply. Even though the unit had all been reseated, no one was sitting casually; each had a ramrod stiff back, including Doc.

The captain introduced Ensign Sparrow, the officer responsible for their weapons. He nodded and gave a thumb's up. Cunningham nodded back at him, then felt foolish having done so. Jeez, you'd think I never saw an officer before. Grow up. The other officer was the operations and maintenance officer Lt (jg) Howton; he had the responsibility for the landing craft and its recovery. The Captain asked if the Marines had any pertinent information about the extraction and landing craft please let Mr. Howton know. "We want to improve each and every operation when it comes to recovering troops from situations such as you have just done. If there are no questions, I will get back on the bridge and do my job. Thank you again, for a job well done." "Let's go Chief."

As he turned to go, Ortega shouted “Attenhut.” He really liked to do that. The skipper waved and left the mess hall. Lt. Howton gave the unit an “at ease.” Everyone including the Ensign took a seat; the Lieutenant sat down and spoke first. “Relax men, I am here to see if you have anything that I can help you with. I understand that the Corporal here has to fill out an AAR when you get back. Make sure each of you give him as accurate account of what you saw, did or did not do. We fill out an AAR after every time we go out to sea and come back to port. We have plenty of experience with them, so sing out if you want our help.”

Cunningham felt as though a great weight had been lifted off his back. Here was help and all he needs to do is ask this Navy Lieutenant. No one back home would ever believe this was happening to him, maybe he could tell his grandkids about this someday. Whoa, one day at a time Jimbo.

“Sir, I have several pages of notes I have gathered from my unit. If you could find the time to help me sort it out, I would be most appreciative.” Oh crap, I sound just like some high school ass-kisser asking for the teacher’s help. The Lt. smiled and the Ensign looked away so as not to laugh. “Bastard,” thought Jim, the Ensign knows I’m embarrassed. “Corporal Cunningham, why don’t you and I get together in the wardroom after lunch and we will see what can be done with your notes.”

Changing his focus, Mr. Howton announced. “The rest of the unit will have a tour of the deck and bridge after you’ve had lunch. Ensign Sparrow will be your guide. Just be very careful, this is a Navy warship and things happen very suddenly, thanks and to echo the skipper.” “Well done, Marines.”

### **After Action Report**

After Lt. (jg) Howton and Ensign Sparrow departed the mess hall, everyone was talking at once. One of the officers was going to help Cunningham with his After Action Report and another one was going to conduct a tour of the ship. We are being treated like movie stars and celebrities. What is that all about? In a few minutes of chatter one of the deck crew showed up to escort them back to their compartment. The funny part of this was that the unit had not been taken back to their compartment the same way twice. Getting lost on this ship was indeed possible. Some of the sailors had mentioned that this ship was one of the smallest in the blue water navy.

Cunningham conducted a survey of the unit just to make certain that no one had misplaced anything and that their field packs were in good order. Daily inspection is a reality check to let everyone know they were still on duty in the United States Marine Corp. and not on a vacation.

Interrupting the after inspection chatter was a blast from the speaker, "Corporal Cunningham was to report to the Operations Officer in the Officers Wardroom." The voice continued with "exit your compartment, turn left, two hatches on your left is the wardroom, there is a brass plate on the door. Knock and wait for a response." Jim looked confused, even though he was expecting to meet with the Lt. Howton, being paged like this was embarrassing. These guys would never let him live this down. He just knew it.

Jim grabbed his note pad and checked himself out when he stood up, brushing imaginary crumbs off his utilities. Should I wear my cap? Yeah, better do that, class B is uniform of the day. "Okay, I'm outta here. Enjoy your tour, gentlemen. Don't steal anything."

In his head, Jim repeated the message. "Turn left, two doors down, knock and wait."

At the Wardroom hatch, he knocked. Immediately came a reply from behind the door to "Come on in, corporal."

Lt. Jg Howton, the ship's operations and maintenance officer, was sitting at the table with two mugs of coffee and a pack of cigarettes. Before he could salute, the exec said "At ease, have a seat and relax." "I see you have brought your notes, that's great."

"The ship's yeoman has copied some AAR forms for us to use. These are specific to our ship but the process of all AAR's are basically identical. The folks that read them want to know quickly what the mission was, who was involved, did it meet the objectives and was there any difficulty. That is called the Executive Summary, fancy name for a synopsis." "It is one paragraph and general in tone."

"Corporal, I don't mean to be personal but what is your level of education?"

Jim was not really surprised by the question and quickly answered that he had a two-year college degree in geology from Rutgers University. He wanted to add that the draft board had been breathing down his neck, even though he was in the Inactive

Marine Reserve, so he went full time and enlisted. If the truth be known, he thought, with the exception of the two sniper PFC's, each member of this Recon unit was at least a two year college graduate, with an engineering, science or math major, Jim decided not to mention this fact to the officer. Doc too, had a college education, he was in his third year of medical school when a family hardship led him to join the Navy and become a corpsman. Stuff happens. But then again it is not anybody else's business.

"My reason for asking is to let you know that the AAR should be written as a real document and not a piece of literature. Some AAR's are so full of flowery wording that they are almost useless as a source of constructive criticism." Howton explained that most missions planning was an exercise by folks who tried to think of everything and may not have, so they really want to know what needs fixing.

The good AAR is one that helps the next mission planner." Wow, Jim had never heard anything like this before and was impressed with Mr. Howton's frankness.

Jim was overwhelmed by the amount of detail requested on the forms. Mr. Howton explained that most of the "boilerplate" was meant to be memory joggers, to help the author of the AAR complete the report effectively. He showed Jim that the "conclusions" section was a summary of all of the sub-titles on the report.

Where the "executive summary" was the synopsis, the conclusions portion were the recommendations for fixes or corrections. Jim immediately thought of "Gunny." How in the world did he ever-complete one of these? Hmmmn, I wonder if he ever had to do one.

Jim, felt foolish as the Lt. was looking at him quizzically, so he shared what he had been thinking about his gunnery sergeant. Mr. Howton smiled and then laughed knowingly. This Marine was going to be a good leader; he knew how to think, mused Howton.

"Well Marine, let's get back to your AAR. Here is the format, condense it to what really took place and make notes referring to individual circumstances. Such as, what if anything you found that had not been previously expected. How good was the intelligence, What about the explosives, were they effective, hard to handle, that kind of stuff."

"Anything that will make the next mission easier for another Recon team. The

Acker/The Hills Went Boom

objective is the help someone else with new and updated information. You will also include how each man performed the tasks assigned; criticism is okay, if it is constructive. Leave personalities out of any report you make, it makes you an independent observer, and fair.”

## **After Action Report**

Executive Summary

## Acker/The Hills Went Boom

### Chapter 1: Exercise Overview

- Exercise Name
- Duration
- Exercise Date
- Sponsor
- Type of Exercise
- Funding Source
- Program
- Focus
- Classification
- Scenario
- Location
- Participating Organizations
- Participants
- Number of Participants
- Exercise Overview
- Exercise Evaluation

### Chapter 2: Exercise Goals and Objectives

### Chapter 3: Exercise Events Synopsis

### Chapter 4: Analysis of Mission Outcomes

### Chapter 5: Analysis of Critical Task Performance

- Task
- Issue
- Reference
- Summary of Issue
- Consequence
- Analysis of Issues
- Recommendations
- Action Steps

### Conclusions:

“Jim, let’s cover the Summary first, that is going to be the part that captures the tone and merit of the rest of the report. It can’t be “I came, I saw, I conquered” but it can be concise and pointed. How was the loading of the aircraft, OK? Was everything loaded on time and correctly? Did each of the team have what they needed before takeoff? Did you take off on schedule? Was the flight satisfactory and did it arrive on schedule? Was the initial drop of equipment and materiel satisfactory? Was your jump



on target and was the altitude selected correct? If you can remember each of these details and how correct each one was to the plan then you will be able to do a good summary.”

“Remember this, the pilot of the aircraft filled out his own AAR when he landed. If he had difficulties that did not affect you, that is one thing. If something occurred in the transport and delivery of you and your unit. That becomes your responsibility to report it. So you need to think back to the loading, the flight and the delivery of you and your men.”

Christ, thought Jim I'll need a secretary to take with me on the next mission. That is if there is a next mission. If I screw this up I will be the orderly room clerk working for M/Sgt. Kennedy.

“Okay, I just checked my watch and we have about seven hours until we arrive at our rendezvous point, and I need to be on the bridge right now. Why don't you stay here, have a smoke and some coffee and start thinking about what you are going to write. I will be back in one hour.” With that Mr. Howton took his coffee mug to the sink and left through a forward hatch Jim had not noticed before.

When Howton reached the bridge, the deck tour for the Marines was still underway. He informed the Officer of the Bridge that he had left Corporal Cunningham in the Officers Wardroom to work on the AAR. The OOB chuckled remembering his first AAR. “Seems like a nice young man Mr. Howton, I wish him luck” “Yeah, he is. And he can use all the good luck he can find.”

Ensign Sparrow was in his glory. At first he didn't want to be a docent for a bunch of Marines who had landed on his ship but he quickly got over that. The enthusiasm of this group of men when they were able to see what the Olympia had on it was both amusing and pleasing. They loved being on the bridge. Only three additional men at a time could be there since it was so small and the ship was, after all, at sea and underway, as they say. The Marines made certain not to get in the way of the sailors who were busy doing their work.

Everyone greeted each other cordially. I'll bet this is one of the few times jarheads and swabbies will be this nice to each other. Usually it is a big harangue between these two groups. Sparrow was remembering his days as an enlisted sailor

and the contempt the sailors felt for the Marines stationed on board the cruiser he served on.

None of these Marines had ever done sea duty aboard a ship, so none of the animosity that normally existed between the two groups ever surfaced. Even the Navy corpsman “Doc” had never been to sea. He was as much a land based Marine as anyone in the unit.

The interest the Recon guys showed in the re-worked fantail was rewarding, since that was MY project thought Sparrow.

“We scrounged a derrick and boom assembly from an old destroyer, and the davits are from the scrap heap at Yokosuka Naval Depot. Removing the depth charge racks and “Y” guns was a lot easier than getting rid of the 3-gun guntub that is normally in this entire space.” Sparrow paused; he was sure the Marines could not visualize what all he was talking about, what the hell, let them ask me.

“The Hedgehog launcher came off the fantail in one big piece.”

No questions. “The welders and cutters worked tirelessly to get it all removed and the davits and hoist installed. There was concern that the addition of this modification would be too heavy for the fantail.”

The new additions and the LCVP combined, weighed less than the stuff removed. Sparrow’s calculations had proved correct. He did not add this last part in his comments to the men.

During the recovery rehearsals that the Captain had insisted on, the frigate’s crew had developed a sequence of launch and recovery with the landing craft that was impressive in its uniqueness and improvisation. The Chiefs were even complimentary of the deck hands success. The Chief of the Boat was a crusty machinist mate guy and he was especially nice in his praise for the success of the adaptation.

He also confessed that he was not in favor of most changes, “change for change sake was nuts.”

During the tour of the ship, Ensign Sparrow relayed to the Marines the history of the Patrol Frigates that were currently being used in the Korean waters. The sailors of the Olympia were anxious to tell the Marines of the shape these ships were in when they arrived at the Yokosuka depot.

The ships had been on loan, during the Second World War, to the Russian Navy until 1949 when they were returned to US Navy control, in terrible shape. Most of the ships had to be towed from Russia to Japan by a mother ship. Only four of the twenty-nine that were returned, were able to steam that distance under their own power. Disgraceful.

The amount of sabotage and malicious damage was unprecedented. The Japanese workers, most of them former Imperial Japanese Navy veterans, were very vocal about the disrespect shown for a naval warship, regardless of whose navy it was in. The diligence that these former IJN personnel showed in getting as many of these Patrol Frigates ready for service, said a lot about the character of the Japanese. It also said a lot about the Russian Navy.

Funny, a couple of years ago the Japs were the bad guys and the Russians our friends and now it was the opposite. How times change.

The Marines were asking the forward gun crew about the three-inch guns. It was apparent that none of the Marines had any artillery knowledge or experience. They were skeptical when one of the gunners told them the three-inch gun at 30 degrees up angle could throw a projectile up to four miles.

Each of the sailors in their own way was asking themselves. Just what were these Recon guys trained for? Why are their missions so hush-hush? They seem like a pretty ordinary bunch of Marines, except, they are less boisterous and bossy. Since Mr. Howton is doing something with the Corporal, maybe he will share what he has found out. Then again, maybe not Mr. Howton was not exactly the chatty type. He was all business, no wasted motion, and he wanted you to do it right and do it now.

## Chapter Three

### Jim's AAR Notes

*Our twelve-man unit, mission code name Eye Poke Able, was airdropped on time and at the correct coordinates. The aircraft and crew were US Air Force flying a C119 boxcar. The unit consists of 6 demolition men, 2 snipers, and 1 US Navy Corpsman, 2 radio-electronics men and myself as*

*patrol leader.*

*There were no loading or in flight problems. The departure K6, Pyongyang was on time, the flight flew east to the coast of Korea and the Sea of Japan. The aircraft then flew north close to our mission latitude and turned west to execute the airdrop. Total time in the air was two hours and thirty minutes. The cargo drop was satisfactory and the unit jumped on the next pass. Portage of explosives and other material was difficult due to snow and ice. Backpack racks worked well for hauling the material. The radios all survived the drop in good shape. Handy-Talkies' were okay also. Parachute and other jump equipment were hard to dispose of so we took it all with us to the tunnel site. Our distance from the drop zone to the tunnel opening was less than 1 mile for most of the team. The tunnel intelligence was good about the location. The interior of the tunnel was not as described.*

*The tunnel opening was twenty feet wide and fifteen feet high. Fifty feet from the mouth of the tunnel expanded to thirty feet wide and twenty-five feet high. The roof of the tunnel was arched, Gothic like, and supported by columns of existing mountain. These columns were each about six feet in diameter and spaced thirty feet apart down the center of the main tunnel. One hundred and twenty feet into the tunnel it branched into two ancillary tunnels each maintained the twenty-five foot height but reduced in width to twenty feet. No support columns were in either branch tunnel. An obvious geology study had been made prior to the tunnels construction. The tunnels extended for three hundred feet each and were damp from ceiling moisture seepage. The floor of each tunnel had between two and four inches of water accumulated. No drainage channels or cisterns were found. The branch tunnels contained rows, along the walls, of wooden frames with some steel supports. Appears to be for bunks and sleeping. A latrine or head arrangement was at the end of each branch tunnel*

*Some human remains were scattered throughout both tunnels. Most were clad in robes and not uniforms. Some minimal rodent activity was also present.*

*After reconnoitering an explosives plan was made. The plan included using all of the C2 that had been brought to the site. Excess or crumbled C2 was hand packed and placed at the base of each support column with a detonator.*

*Due to the excessive height of the tunnels' ceiling, it was decided to put all the good C2 along each tunnel wall at a height of five feet, eight pieces to each site, with a primer-detonator. Wiring was done per SOP, serially, 32 blocks total per circuit. The new C3 was better in the cold than the older C2 but still was fragile if dropped or any pressure was applied when trying to adhere it to any vertical surface. I worked really well at floor level. Keeping the correct igniters with the C2 or C3 was a pain since both C2 and C3 are the same color.*

*What is needed are better flashlights, I suggest an angled flashlight or one with a swivel head. Trying to hold a flashlight and stick explosives to a wall in a dark environment is very difficult and dangerous. A lantern with at least 25 candlepower is a minimum need. The US Navy has emergency lanterns that look like they could do the job well. They are quite heavy and require a large battery. They do put out a lot of light.*

*Working in a large tunnel without a communications method is hazardous. A sound powered system such as miners use could be put to very good use. We had to use a runner to communicate. Stringing communications wire is not a good option, tangles and water make it less than a satisfactory solution. This added several hours to the work being done.*

*Using the snipers as both lookout and sniper worked well on this mission. No enemy was encountered so the lookouts were able to take an occasional break. If any hostile action had taken place we were ill equipped to support them. When in the tunnels no one is aware of what is happening outside. Large multiple tunnels such, as the one we encountered requires that all personnel be available for demolition duty.*

*I recommend that a full day be set aside to inspect and diagram the tunnel system. A minimum of 10 men would have made Eye Poke Able less tiring for the men. A six-man unit has to inspect, draw and judge the quality of the tunnel rock. Tunnels vary widely in the character of the rock through which it is hewn. The mostly granite of site Able made the assessment a modest challenge but in the haste to place the explosives the source of outside air supply was missed by all the members of the team, including the leader. This is a dangerous oversight as an enemy can use the smoke and debris discharges to observe the units activity and intercept the unit during extraction.*

*The following were our mission choices. The primary site was successfully destroyed for all practical purposes cannot be used for any military use. With some major effort it could be used as a shelter from air assault or bombing. The secondary site is still available to interdiction and additional mission planning.*

Primary Objective

Mission Name- Eye Poke Able

Objective: Tunnel or tunnels located in the area of Hagu-ji in Hamgyong-Nambo Region

Location: Latitude - 39 degrees 22 minutes 6 North  
Longitude - 127 degrees 2 minutes 43 East  
Altitude - 1666 Feet

Secondary Objective

Mission Name- Eye Poke Baker

Alternate: Caves and tunnels located in Hagon-pa in Hamgyong-Nambo Region

Location: Latitude- 40 degrees 36 minutes 18 North  
Longitude- 128 degrees 26 minutes 57 East  
Altitude- 3001 feet

*A lack of familiarity with the required After Action Report has lead to the unit attempting to remember details and timelines for various activities while in the tunnels. Some method should be prepared for succeeding missions so they maybe able to catalog activities and problems as they arise. I do not have a recommendation for any specific fix to this problem. This unit has done a very good job of putting together the framework of this AAR.*

*Prior to departure and before setting off the munitions, all extra gear, parachutes, backpack for explosives, ammunition cases and explosive cases and hardware were all placed inside the tunnel between the second and third support columns. It is expected that nothing remain of these items. Their destruction instead of these items being buried, per SOP, was deemed more efficient. Digging with entrenching tools in frozen dirt and rock was not practical. Departure from the tunnel site was accomplished with minor difficulties. Maps were not updated to show several streams that were frozen but could prevent warm weather crossing. Celestial navigation was used; the weather had cleared enough to use sitings. The rendezvous point was very well marked and accessible. The unit had a good vantage point for surveillance and protection.*

*Once the Navy craft was identified and signals acknowledged the extraction went without a hitch. The crew of the landing craft did conveyance from the shore to the waiting US warship quickly and professionally.*

### **Lt. (jg) Howton**

Corporal Cunningham was deep in thought when a tap on the wardroom door got his attention. "It's open." In walked Lt. (jg) Howton. It surprised Jim that the officer would knock on his own wardroom door. It says a lot about the man and not just the officer.

"Well corporal, have you finished your AAR?" "God no, sir" shot back Jim with a big smile on his face. "The more I write the more it seems needs to be written. I am going to have to weed out some of this stuff, and get down to the meat of what actually happened out there."

"Good, that is a nice start, having more info and data than you think you need is a good thing. Keep at it, you'll get there."

"You know Sir, that this has been an unreal experience for all of us in this Recon unit." Jim went on. "Each and every man in this unit appreciates everything that has been done for us. Specially me."

"Jim, I want to share something with you before we arrive at Inch'on. I am being promoted to the rank of full Lieutenant and will be transferred to Yokosuka for three months and then I am going to the Naval War College in Newport, Connecticut for one year of intensive education." Jim was wide-eyed at this revelation. "This is my last sea duty assignment for a while. Mr. Sparrow is being promoted to (jg)) and will take over my duties and assignments aboard this ship."

Howton paused momentarily.

"I would like to stay in touch with you on a personal level, if you care to. Here is my mom and dad's address in Lexington, Mass. They forward my mail to me wherever I am stationed. My wife moves almost as often as I do, and they forward her mail also." Jim was stunned; this Navy Lt. is inviting me, a lowly USMC corporal to be his friend and pen pal. Wow."

"Of course I'll write to you. I use my parent's address to do the same thing. They live in Newark, NJ and dad works for the Post Office. My mail gets very good treatment." Haltingly Jim said, "Sir, I am flattered that you want to stay in touch; I really don't know what to say, except thank you and best wishes on your next assignment."



“I was looking forward to meeting you again after one of our next missions. I guess that won’t be possible with what is on your agenda for the coming year. You mentioned your wife. Is she in the military also?”

“No, not hardly. She is a manufacturer’s rep in the textile business.” He wished he could just hold her one more time. Ah memories. “She is on the road, literally, five days a week and if she takes a plane somewhere she is gone on Sunday afternoon as well.”

“I was going to ask Lieutenant, if you had any kids but I guess with each of you away a lot that isn’t very practical or a good idea.” “You’re right Jim, it would not be practical but we sure don’t want to wait too long either.” Thoughtfully Howton added, “Young people should have kids so they can enjoy the growing up stuff. Hell, I’ll be thirty in a couple of months. Time really marches on. How about you Jim, any young lady in your future plans?”

“Plans, yea, but with this open ended hitch, I don’t know if she will be there when I get back. You never know though.”

“Sir, tell me about this Naval War College gig.” Jim wanted to forget about whether or not Peggy would be waiting. He hadn’t written to her in over two months. Well hell, there’s a war going on. She will have to be patient. Howton described the entrance requirements for NWC and who attends and for how long. It sure sounded tough not Marine Corp tough, hard like a lot of studying and research type of stuff. I’ll bet Mr. Howton is real smart. “Admiral Bull Halsey and General Curtis Le May each graduated for NWC.

“They take Air Force officers too. How about Marines?”

“Yep, them too, if they are qualified, not just academically but career wise as well. I have no idea how much the government pays for this education, but we will all be involved and away from our assigned duty station for well over a year.”

“One good thing is that my wife has located an apartment in Newport, so we will be able to see each other occasionally. Looking forward to that, for sure.”

A boatswain’s pipe blasted the compartment with the news that “we have the Inch’on light in sight and will be docking in about ninety minutes. Secure all trash and give a clean sweep down fore and aft.” Mr. Howton suggested that Jim wrap up the

paper work and join his unit in their compartment. He reached into a cupboard and handed Jim two large envelopes for the AAR paper work.

“Thank you sir, for everything. I had it all played out in my head as to what it would be like on our next mission, being picked up again in the landing craft and reuniting with all of this ship’s officers and crew. It was almost as if you and the crew were a permanent part of our recon team. Is that being childish?”

“Not in the least,” Howton replied. “Sometimes stuff like that is what gets us through the days and weeks.” He reached out his hand and firmly shook Jim’s, “Marine it was and is a pleasure to meet you and be with you. You have a bright future, regardless of what you end up doing. I am proud to call you a friend.” “Semper Fi.”

Jim laughed and said “Semper Fi” to you too sir.”

“ Do I now refer to you as Full Lieutenant or how does that work?” joked Jim. They both smiled and almost hugged. They got to their feet and as Jim stood up, he saluted and asked permission to depart. “Permission granted and God’s speed” replied Howton as he returned Jim’s salute.

Damned sharp Marine, he thought as he smiled appreciatively.

Jim went back to the Recon unit’s compartment with his head spinning. What a first mission this has been, not at all like he had thought it would be.

### **Foredeck ceremonies**

Cunningham returned to quarters and interrupted a very spirited discussion in the compartment with his unit members. Doc had been talking to his counterpart onboard the Olympia and had some scuttlebutt to share. It seems that the captain is going to hold a special ceremony on the foredeck after the ship ties up at the new pier. The skipper wants to make sure that the entire Marine Recon unit is present to hear the presentation.

Wonder what that is all about. They all wanted to know. The Navy crew had been alerted to “man the rails” after the presentation to see the Recon unit safely off the ship.

Jim couldn’t get it out of his head that he knew what the presentation was, Mr. Howton’s promotion. He wanted to tell everyone but thought it better to be silent, after all Lt. Howton didn’t tell him it had been publicly announced. Go with the flow Jim, and he would.

“Detail Attenhut” called Jim. Everyone stood up. “Let’s do a first class job of leaving this ship; we want to be sharp and make this crew proud to have had us aboard. We have about half an hour until they dock this ship; we want to be ready for any call that may come our way. Either to attend or not attend the expected ceremony or whatever, we have been well treated by this crew and we want them to feel good about having had us aboard.” “Stand at ease.”

Jim asked, no one in particular, “Has anyone come across the men whose bunks we have been sleeping in? I would sure like to thank them for all of their hospitality.” Doc answered, “These are the deck petty officer’s quarters and they have been bunking in the spaces vacated by the crew that is not needed when the afterdeck armament and stuff was removed.”

“I have thanked them each for their bunking area in exchange for telling them a little about what the unit does, nothing specific, but they are American sailors after all.”

“That’s okay, Doc. A little horse-trading goes a long way, especially among Navy and Marine units.”

“Anyone have anything to discuss about what you have heard or seen while on board, or what you expect later?” Radioman Thom Morgan piped up with how the “Gunny” will be pissed that we were treated so well, I think he hates the Navy.” Everyone laughed because all anyone had ever heard out of “Gunny” about the navy was always punctuated with profanity and sea talk. Steve Hayes said that he would be glad to see “Gunny” because then I will know that I am on dry land. This ship duty is not for me.”

Jim told the group that he had planned to recommend Hayes for duty aboard an aircraft carrier as a signalman. Hayes looked him right in the eyes and said, “don’t even talk like that Jim, I am very happy doing what I am doing in the Corps.”

“Jumping out of airplanes and blowing things up suits me just fine, serving aboard a ship in the middle of an ocean scares me, no end.”

Just as they were about to get into a Navy versus Marine Corps discussion the speaker erupted with a boson’s pipe blast. “Now hear this, now hear this. All off duty personnel report to the foredeck for a Captain’s ceremony, the entire Recon unit is

invited to attend. Uniform is “class b” utilities, with cold weather gear, white hats for Navy personnel and soft cover for Recon. No weapons or helmets.”

Just at the end of the speaker message the Marines braced for an equipment check. They conducted an inspection of each other. When one was finished checking, he turned and checked the back of the other person.

Jim gave the okay and they lined up in two columns of six ready to depart the compartment. The knock on the hatch, told them that they were to be escorted to the “foredeck.” Hell they knew where it was from the tour Ensign Sparrow gave them. This part of the ship is a pretty small place to hold a ceremony though.

A slight bump got their attention as they reached the open hatch, a Navy tug had come alongside to help the Olympia dock at the newly built pier. From their vantage point they could see part of what they thought was a dock or pier. It looked like a string of pontoons lashed together between pilings driven into the harbor floor. Indistinguishable flooring had been put on top of the pontoons to facilitate walking. You know if the Seabees and the Army engineers built it that it will still be standing fifty years from now.

The trip to the foredeck was tricky. Jim had not been on the tour so he missed the part that said only one person at a time goes past the lower deck house. Sean Murphy gave Jim a push back so the corporal would not go over the railing. Jim was stunned at first since he was not really paying attention to where they were walking.

He was thinking ahead to the ceremony. Knock that off Jim, stay alert, you don't want to die falling into the harbor. “Thanks Sean, I wasn't looking.” Murphy just shrugged.

When they got to the foredeck it was filled with sailors in pea coats and white hats all standing at ease. Mr. Howton called for “attention on deck” The sailors “hit a brace” as did the Marines. Captain Correy came forward toward the row of officers, some of whom the Marines had not met; the total crew of this ship was 190 officers and men. No wonder they didn't meet them all. Twenty-four hour duty keeps at least one third of the crew sleeping, the Navy watches are each four hours long everyday seven days a week. Lt. Howton motioned for the Marines to occupy a space along side of the forward gun turret between two groups of sailors. Good deal.

The Captain spoke using a bullhorn, which made his voice very deep and monotone, but at least everyone could hear him. “Gentlemen of the Patrol Frigate Olympia and our guests, I am pleased and proud to make the following presentations to two deserving officers under my command. First let me present to Ensign Sparrow, front and center, Mr. Sparrow, a United States Navy Special Commendation of Merit.”

“It reads in part “He overcame bureaucracy and outmoded tradition to accomplish a task so necessary to the US Navy that he risked his career and rank to get the job done successfully.”

The Skipper continued, “I requested of the CincPac that I be permitted to present this special commendation in the presence of the US Marine Reconnaissance Unit that utilized this modification so effectively a few days ago.”

“The Admiral deferred to my request, so Mr. Sparrow, congratulations on a fine job, well done.”

“The US Navy does not take change all that well, the Captain was adlibbing at this point; “the use of an LCVP stuck on the ass end of my ship was not something that was easily agreed upon. You are a credit to the United States Navy.”

“In view of his fine work the Admiral asked me also to announce the promotion of Ensign Charles W. Sparrow to the permanent rank of Lieutenant (junior grade). Again, Mr. Sparrow, congratulations.” The newest Lt. (jg) stepped forward to receive his commendation and to have his new rank pinned on by the Captain. “As some of you old salts know, this vessel requires an Ensign to be assigned to her. Waiting at pier side is a brand new Ensign just waiting to assume Mr. Sparrow’s cabin space and duties. The Captain cleared his throat right into the bullhorn lots of chuckles on the foredeck.

“This brings me to my next announcement. Lt. (jg) Howton is, as of this moment promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in the United States Navy and will be leaving this ship for the comfortable climes of Connecticut and Naval War College. He will start classes in August and in the meantime the US Navy has work for him in Yokosuka preparing him for his new assignment. Lt (jg) Sparrow will assume Mr. Howton’s assignments as this vessel’s operations and maintenance officer. Mr. Howton has six days in which to show Mr. Sparrow everything he knows. Good luck to both of you fine officers, I have enjoyed being your skipper and your friend.”

Funny, thought Jim, how these WW II officers are so much more relaxed and, if not informal, certainly not some hardass as some of those newly minted senior officers. These guys had real civilian jobs before they were recalled to active duty, to serve and they do it well, but with a relaxed manner. Jim liked that.

Expecting to be dismissed, the sailors let out a cheer for both of the officers and started to drift toward the bridge area.

The skipper requested the crew to “stand fast” and that the Marine Recon unit come to “front and center” to be acknowledged by the crew they were not allowed to fraternize with prior to today. He informed his crew “This was only the first mission of this type for FP166. We as a crew may one day come across this fine USMC Recon Unit again. If we don’t I want each of this Marine Corp Unit to know how much we appreciate the risks they take in helping a country, other than our own, achieve sovereignty and independence from an invading enemy. Your efforts will bear fruit, because the cause you fight for is right.”

“How about a FP166 cheer for these brave young men and their US Navy Petty Officer Corpsman? Hip, Hip Hooray and God’s speed.”

“Thank you fellow crewmembers. This meeting is adjourned, you are dismissed.”

“Chief, take charge of your Marines and get them ready for departure.” “The boatswain will pipe the “man the rail” call in thirty minutes, be ready.”

“Aye aye, sir”, “follow me Marines.”

## Chapter Four

### Off the ship

As the recon unit walked back to their compartment they checked the new pier to see if the transportation that was to meet them was here. As far as they could tell, it was not, since the deck area was clear of any vehicles or personnel. What they couldn't see was the large gate that was erected at the entrance to the new pier that prevented any kind of traffic, foot or otherwise. The pier size was limited to ships the size of a destroyer or frigate, no larger than three hundred and fifty feet in length. The Olympia fit in there nicely at three hundred feet long.

Back in the compartment everyone gathered what gear had been returned to him. No one had any munitions or bayonets and knives given back. How in the world do I leave here without ammo and the other stuff, who do I ask? Jim did not want to press his welcome by asking Mr. Howton but "Gunny" will "skin me alive" if I walk away without our personal munitions and ammo. Again the bosun's pipe intruded their conversation; it informed the Marine unit "all munitions, weapons and ammunition would be on the pier deck when they disembarked. The ships armorer's and the Chief Master at Arms would be at the foot of the temporary gangway. Disembarking would start in 15 minutes, the Officer Of the Deck, OOD, and the ramp to the gangway is just outside your compartment hatch."

Each man grabbed his gear and pack. The rifles were still stacked in groups of four all cleaned and safeties "on." The Browning automatic rifle, BAR, stood by itself resting against the bulkhead on its' bipod support. As was the normal practice, each Marine stood up and checked his buddy's pack and gear. Then he turned around and reversed the process. They all wanted to "look sharp" when leaving the ship. The low level talk in the compartment was interrupted by the ship's call for a " "Man the rail" uniform is class B with white hat." The sound of running echoed through the ship. "I reckon it is time to leave, guys. Let's do it right. Remember to request permission of the OOD to leave the ship. Salute the OOD before asking permission and after he grants permission move one step and salute the flag. Then you can go down the gangway, got

it? OK let's do it. Line up in two columns, six to a row and cover down when we get to the pier. Let's look sharp."

"We will find our transportation once we get on the pier. They can't be too far away. Jeez I hope they're here. Remember to be sure to retrieve your ammo and stuff; we can sort it out later. Grab what you can let's not look disorganized."

"Okay, everybody ready, let's move out. Doc would you open the hatch please, and off we go." Jim did his best to sound confident but he sure did not feel confident at the moment. The blast of cold air was biting; strange it seemed so much milder just a short time ago. Well maybe it is just nerves. Keep on going; do not stop until you get to the OOD's station at the ship's railing.

The ship's railing was lined with pea coat clad sailors in their white hats all at parade rest. Was this for us? Every sailor not on duty was there to see us off, what a compliment. We owe them a real debt of gratitude for these past two days and they are doing this for us. My God, it has only been two days; can we ever repay the courtesy this crew has shown us? And if so, how?

When Cunningham reached the OOD's station there stood Lt. (jg) Sparrow and Lt. Howton. A sailor Jim did not recognize had a roster sheet on a steel clipboard. Mr. Sparrow had requested to be Officer Of the Deck for this transfer of personnel. This is going to be a tough departure. Jim brought his body to a perfect attention position and saluted Mr. Sparrow.

"Corporal James Cunningham USMC requests permission to leave the ship, Mr. Sparrow." "Permission granted Corporal Cunningham" Sparrow shot back authoritatively, as he returned the Marines salute. He then extended his hand to shake Cunningham's. "Jim it has been a pleasure meeting you, I hope that we can meet again. Semper Fi Marine." "Anchors Aweigh to you Sir, I certainly would like to see you all again." As Jim started to move to his left to step on the gangway Lt. Howton stepped forward to shake Jim's hand but instead of shaking the outstretched hand, Jim hit a "brace" and saluted. Mr. Howton. "I am thankful for all of your help and courtesy while we have been on this ship. I will never forget how nice you have been and the rest of the crew as well." Howton crisply saluted the rigid saluting Corporal and wished Jim and his men "God's speed." He couldn't think of anything else to say. He was that emotional



at that moment. Howton looked Jim straight in the eyes and patted his breast pocket; with a shaking voice he said, "I have your address." "And I have yours," echoed Jim. With that brief interlude Jim did a left face and stepped onto the down-sloping gangway. Legs don't fail me now he prayed under his breath.

Jim realized quickly that the gangway was really not very high, the Frigate was only about ten feet higher than the dock and the gangway was not very steep. After a few steps he heard a voice behind him. "Sir, Petty Officer Otto Schmidt. United States Navy detached, requests permission to leave the ship." "Permission granted, Schmidt, nice to have met you. Please take good care of your Marines." "Aye aye sir, will do." Jim had reached the dock level and found it quite firm. Hell, he thought, they used pierced steel planking as a deck. No wonder it is sturdy. PSP was used as a temporary emergency runway for airplanes.

A somewhat familiar voice called his name and Jim turned to see the Chief Master at Arms and two sailors standing about twenty feet away toward the middle of the dock. Stacked neatly were all of the ammunition, grenades and the other weapons of war that had been removed from them when they boarded the FP166. Jesus was it only two days ago? It seems like a lifetime and yet the time had flown by. "Thank you Chief, I was wondering how I was going to explain to our "Gunny" how I lost several hundred pounds of arsenal materiel." He put the emphasis on the last syllable, a hard el.

"Oh not to worry Marine, we take good care of our guests." They both laughed. "I had my men label what belongs to who but I suggest that you grab something and sort it out later. What do you think?" Jim was not about to argue with a Chief Petty Officer who had just saved his backside with his "Gunny" so he replied firmly, "good idea chief."

"Now all I have to do is find our transportation back to our base." "Not to worry Corporal, there are three weapons carriers and a deuce and a half idling just the other side of that gate." He pointed to Jim's left and Jim immediately spotted the Gunny up on the hood of one of the weapon's carriers. Jim almost waved but thought better of it. His attention went to the gangway as the rest of his unit descended and assembled as he had told them earlier. Two columns, dressed down, each had armor belts of ammo and

grenades and their K-bar knives and bayonets. Only Doc Schmidt did not have himself draped like a Christmas tree of ammo.

The chief leaned into Cunningham and quietly asked him if he could march the unit to the gate area. Jim readily agreed and took the lead or guide-on position and called the unit to attention and gave them a “left face” so they all faced the ship. Jim gave the order to “hand salute.” Each unit member saluted the officers and crew and received a return salute from the assembled sailors. “Order arms, right face,” he barked.

“Take us home Chief,” Jim said, and the Chief with a voice accustomed to giving orders shouted, “Detail, forwaaarrd haarch. Your lefft, your lefft, your lefft right lefft.” The familiar strain of “You had a good home but you left.” The unit in unison shouted, “You’re right.” The Chief continued with “Sound off one, two three four, one two.” “Three four” was the unit’s reply, and they marched the five hundred feet to the waiting trucks. Behind them was the sound of the ship’s crew applauding and shouting to them. What a war, thought Jim. Now all I have to do is face the “Gunny.” Christ, what a thought that is.

### **Gunny and the Chief**

When the unit arrived at the gated area the chief shouted, “Detail halt.” The sound of boots slamming into the PSP surface created an echo. “Great sound” muttered Longo. “Corporal, take charge and dismiss your men.” “Aye aye, Chief” Cunningham did an “about face” and rather firmly ordered, “Detail, at ease, dissss missed.” They were back with their own once again, familiar trucks, uniforms and the ever stern looking “Gunny.”

The sound of the Chief’s booming voice came above all the other noises in the area. “Have any of you jarheads seen a grumpy old gunnery sergeant by the name of Papushka?” Everyone looked at each other and swallowed hard, no one called Marines “jarheads” and lived very long and certainly didn’t call out the Gunny like that.

“Who the hell wants to know” came a shout from the front end of one of the weapons carriers as the voice of the Gunnery Sergeant Papushka came closer. “My God you look old,” said the Chief. “Well you’re no spring chicken either, you old sea bag,” bantered the Gunny. “I thought you had retired, or was it retarded, after the war.” “I did, but I heard you couldn’t win this one by yourself, so I decided to come back in and give you Marines a helping hand.”

The observing Marines were unable to speak or even think what it is they had just witnessed. The Gunny actually had a friend and it was a Chief Petty Officer in the Navy. Gunny hated swabbies or so he kept saying to anyone that would listen. So what is this all about? Before they could attempt to “figure it out” the two non-coms walked off together, still shaking hands and the chiefs other hand on the Gunny’s shoulder. Watching the backs of the two seemingly old friends they looked as if they could be brothers, both just over six feet tall, broad shouldered, narrow in the waist, even in cold weather gear, each with a firm and measured walking pace. No wasted effort for these two men.

“Paul, I’d like to show you something on board our ship. She is a Patrol Frigate, old like us, but still working just like us.” How long has it been since somebody called me by my Christian name? Years, he figured. Hell even Abby, his wife, called him “Pa.” “What is it Cal? A new prison you have had built on board to lock up all the Marines that may be after your daughters.” They both laughed at that one, it was a memory jogger. “Nope, you’ll see, be patient” always in a hurry still, eh.

“I heard that you left the Corps and were retired, what happened?” “ Well it wasn’t really a retirement. I took six months of accumulated leave to try my hand at civilian life but it didn’t work.” “Cal, I quit school in the eighth grade and the only skills I have are in the Marine Corps, so Abby and I decided it was better for me to be in the Marines instead of at home and unhappy. She has done a great job of raising the kids, two boys and my girl Susie. Abby bought a house in San Diego not too far from the base and the kids are doing great in school. She works part-time in the Navy PX. Abby has been the rock of my life, I had no future until I met her at the USO where you and I first tangled.”

They had reached the foot of the ship’s gangway and the chief asked Gunny if he remembered the protocol for getting aboard a US Navy vessel. Gunny just grunted “efff you chief.” As they reached the OOD who had watched this whole scene in mild amusement, the Gunny snapped a quick left turn, saluted smartly and bellowed “Gunnery Sergeant Papushka, United States Marine Corps, requests permission to come aboard at the invitation of Chief Calvin X. Matthews, US Navy.”

“Permission granted Gunnery Sergeant, welcome aboard,” replied newly promoted Lt. Sparrow. The yeoman made a note on one of the pages on his clipboard. The Chief said quietly while saluting. “Mr. Sparrow, Chief Master at Arms Matthews request permission to come aboard.” Both non-coms saluted the colors at the same time. I’m impressed, thought Sparrow. The chief looked at the Lt (jg) and asked that he advise the skipper that the Chief was back on board with a friend and they will be on the fantail.

Chief Matthews then asked Lt. Howton if he would be kind enough to relieve Mr. Sparrow as OOD so the (jg) could explain his “invention” to the Gunny. Howton quickly replied affirmatively. “Pleased to do so Chief. Yeoman, make a note of the time of exchange.” “Aye sir.” The Chief led the way toward the fantail with the Gunny along side and Mr. Sparrow trailing behind. After only a few steps the ship’s Captain appeared and greeted Gunny with an enthusiastic handshake with his other hand on the Gunny’s forearm. This prevented the Gunny from saluting. It frustrated the Gunny but he was very happy to see Ensign Correy again. Not Ensign, you old fool, look at that insignia, he’s a full commander. “How have you been Gunny? You’re looking great, for a Marine of course.” The three men laughed and continued aft, “I want to show the Gunny Mr. Sparrow’s invention that the Recon men used so successfully.”

“When your men mentioned that their Gunny was called “Pappy” we both knew whom they were talking about. I checked your units T.O. and your name on the list.” The captain sighed quietly, “It has been long time; hell I was just an ensign when you and I first met back in WW II. You know that the Chief still thinks I am still an Ensign at times and he treats me that way too.” They all chuckled at this, bringing back memories, some good and others that should stay forgotten. The skipper looked over at Mr. Sparrow and signaled him to come closer. “Lt., these two gentlemen saved my candy-ass many, many times when we served together on the cruiser Milwaukee back in the war. They have mellowed and I have matured. Make a note to be nice to everyone you come in contact with in the service to your country, you never know when they will come back into your life.”

“Gunny, I will see you before you depart, this ship is taking on fresh water and fuel and I want to make sure they don’t mix them up.” As he backed up to go the Gunny

hit a brace and saluted smartly. Commander Correy returned his salute grinning and thinking about the “old days;” he then went below deck.

“Mr. Sparrow this is your show, tell the good Gunny here all about this contraption” the new Lt. (jg) came front and center.

### **Gunny Gets an Earful**

“Gunny, contrary to what the chief said, I did not “invent” this contraption but I saw a need for a better way to recover infantry and other personnel from shore positions. The shoreline of both the Koreas are filled with natural coves, which are difficult to defend but offer us the opportunity to use shallow draft vessels to extract troops after their missions. The LCVP is a natural to get into these shallow coves and also have enough firepower to defend or protect themselves and the troops. They have the power to haul up to 36 fully equipped troops either in landing or doing an extraction. Granted they don’t go very fast but the trade-off is that we have them and they are sturdy.”

“The original plans called for using small inflatables for this purpose. I thought that was madness of the greatest order. When I was an enlisted seaman I spent eight days in an inflatable and would not wish that experience on anyone.” The Gunny was paying close attention at that last comment. “I became aware that the Navy was rethinking the available methods of inserting combat troops into difficult situations and they also needed a method to safely extract these troops later.”

“The US Navy had many dismantled ship components all over the Pacific Islands. One of the ships I served on had the old seaplane lift cranes, we used it to load cargo and ammo but never had a seaplane on board.” Pappy remembered those old airplanes, two wings and a single centered pontoon. “It could lift tens of thousands of pounds of anything from the water, which was quite an accomplishment. My thoughts were, we could attach that to some sort of ship of the line and that would provide both security and safety for the troops and be a “close to the action” vehicle.”

The Lieutenant was talking non-stop. “Your Marines proved that this system works and works well. Based on some of their input we will make modifications to the landing craft. These guys came aboard the LCVP after surviving many days of hard work and lousy food and then had to sit on a work deck, the floor if you will, of a landing

craft for an hour or so ride out to sea. Spaces will be added to store their gear and weapons and add some creature comforts and a rack in the event someone needs medical attention.” Mr. Sparrow finally took a breath.

“When I proposed this to the skipper he thought I was just another nutty Ensign trying to not go to sea by keeping the ship in dry-dock for some extended rework. To Cmdr. Correy’s credit he did bring this idea to your mission planners in Tokyo, they committed the engineering time and effort in exploring this idea. When I was asked to present the idea and give an eyeball tour of the ship and where the modifications would take place, they agreed.” Pappy and the Chief both noticed a pride in the Lieutenant’s voice. “The Patrol Frigates use as a minelayer and submarine chaser was long past and the Japanese Navy had ship refitters who were more than capable of making these engineering changes.”

“Since your Recon Unit was going to be the first ones using the air drop insertion and extraction by sea methods, we had the right equipment at the right time, to add to your team’s effort.”

“In reviewing the notes your men accumulated and the detail of the mission, the locating and linking of the sea and land forces worked very well. According to Corporal Cunningham the navigation and orienteering information needs some rework. What worked was, knowing where the extraction point and beacon locator were. Gunny was amazed at Mr. Sparrow’s praise of the Corporal and his Recon unit and how much he knew about the difficulties of these missions. This new Lt (jg) had his shit together, even if he was a swabbie, his enthusiasm for the changes and how they affected troops was impressive. The chief was enjoying this too. He doesn’t know anymore about how to do any of this any more than I do thought Gunny, he just enjoys impressing me. This old turkey hasn’t changed one bit since the old days. Too bad he’s still a cop, a Navy cop but still a cop. There I go again belittling somebody I should really respect. Stop it Gunny, act your age.

Mr. Sparrow had spoken directly to the Gunny but he did not respond and when Gunny realized he was waiting for a response he stammered over his words. “Sorry Lieutenant, I’m surprised by how much you know about our mission and our operations. I missed your question. Sorry sir.”

“That’s okay Gunny; I get carried away when I get on the subject of this modification to our Patrol Frigate.”

“What I said was that we think that your Corporal Cunningham has really good leadership qualities and think he would make a good Marine officer. What do you think?”

Cunningham an officer? Christ, I don’t know. He’s only in the Corps a little over a year and a half. Yes he is bright, has some college too, but I would want to see first hand his leadership skills. His unit likes him; I’ll give him that much, but ahhh, I just don’t know.

What Gunny was concerned about was that Cunningham had spent two days with this officer. He could see officer material, and I have been Cunningham’s Gunny for six months and didn’t see it. Hell, just ask him straight out.

“Lieutenant, I have known Cunningham six months and did not see the qualities you have seen in two days. Am I blind or what?” “Whoa Gunny”, said Sparrow while raising his hands in a “stop” motion, “wait until you read his AAR, it is impressive. It’s not just me. Mr. Howton and the skipper noticed before I did. As a former US Navy enlisted man I can tell you what early recognition can do for an EM’s morale and overall attitude.”

Sparrow laughed and added, “It’s not like he’s joining the Navy or something that outlandish Gunny.” Gunny laughed too.

Gunny went back inside his head for a moment. I wonder what Matthews thinks of all this? He obviously was part of these officers’ discussion. Maybe later I can get the chance to ask him, I’ll bet he has been in this situation before. “I see now why the skipper ducked out so quickly before. He wanted Mr. Sparrow to “carry the water” about Corporal Cunningham.”

“You Navy guys are real smooth, or so you think.” Sparrow and the chief, smiled at each other, not at all surprised that Gunnery Sergeant Papushka figured them out.

“Okay, the three of you have made your point, I will have his AAR reviewed and discuss any promotion and advancement with Master Sergeant Kennedy. He’s my boss and very smart when it comes to judging people.” Gunny wondered to himself if Cunningham wanted to be an officer, I know he wants Non Com status; that was very

clear in their last performance review. Hell, Gunny, just ask him after you talk to the “top.”

“Lieutenant, Chief I have to get back to base pretty soon. Is there a good way for me to contact you for more support or input to the Cunningham thing?” Gunny was acting anxious. “My head is really swimming with information right now and I had better get these Marines back to quarters.”

This was the first time he could remember that he had admitted to anyone that he had any kind of confusion. I am usually the one completely under control. Pappy did not like this feeling.

“Mr. Sparrow, Chief, could you get a hold of Commander Correy? I’d like to say goodbye and thank him for what you have done for my Marines.” “No problem Gunny” the Chief chimed in “He’s headed this way now”, looks in a hurry too he added silently.

“Gunny,” said the skipper, “I wish I had more time to spend with you, but we just received a message to get back on station off the Hungnam coast. If we hustle we can be there in fourteen hours.” He turned and was once again the skipper. “Mr. Sparrow, will you please relieve Mr. Howton at the rail and when the last crewmember is back aboard, prepare to take the deck and cast off. I have called for the tug to aid us out. We don’t want to chance destroying the new pier and deck on our first visit.”

Assignments taken care of, the Skipper reached out and hugged the Gunny. “Gunny you be safe, I want to see you again, maybe over a few beers and dinner. Please stay in touch. Life is way too short to lose people we care about.”

“Now get the hell out of here, we have a war to win.” All four laughed and saluted, then the Chief and Gunny headed for the gangway. At the gangway, after the US Navy protocol was adhered to and Mr. Howton said his “goodbyes” to the Gunny, each non-com shook the other’s hand and departed.

Neither looked back



## On The Dock

Cunningham was glad that he started adding to his AAR material, when he saw the Gunny and the Chief walking towards the frigate, he knew it would be quite a while until Gunny Papushka returned.

There was plenty of coffee, cokes and snacks, real snacks not that ration crap. Wonder where they got 'em? Just enjoy them and stop fidgeting. Okay, where was I with this report? I would like to get more information from each of the team but I think they are tired of me asking. I would rather ask them now than wait until the Gunny gets back and it may be uncomfortable for the guys to speak up. I'll just ask and see what happens.

"Hey guys, I think Gunny is going to be gone for a while, so I am going to use the time to "flesh out" my AAR info." Looking from side to side he continued, "Is there anything else you want to add? I don't want to keep bugging you with this. I know it is my responsibility, but don't want to overlook anything." "Hey Corporal," came the call from the back of the first weapons carrier, "are you going to include the time on the ship and the tour of the frigate and all that stuff?" It was the quiet one, Morgan Cook, MJ to all who knew him. There was mirth in his voice. Was he teasing or was he serious?

"I don't know, MJ, what do you think I should add?" "I wrote down everything we had at every meal," MJ retorted. "We could make all the other units jealous when they hear what we had to eat and compare what they had on their extractions." Jim had forgotten about the other teams' missions. He hoped they were okay; they had the "Interdiction and Interrogation" mission profile. Definitely would rather be blowing things up, less personal and probably safer.

Jim thought a few moments about what MJ has said. Should that too be in the report? After all it is part of the extraction phase and part of our time aboard the Patrol Frigate. "Hey MJ, can I borrow your list or do I have to get Longo to beat it out of you?" From the darkness of the vehicle came a terse reply. "Longo, you're gonna send some NY guinea to do a man's work. If I remember right he didn't pass the "hand-to-hand" offense course until the third try, Jeez Longo!"

MJ moved from his sitting position and walked over to where Jim was standing. "Here's the list Jim, I got a notebook from one of the deck gun sailors." He handed Jim a

US Navy radio operator's daily logbook; apparently the gunner got it from the radio shack. "I'll get this back to you before we leave here. Probably won't use all of it, just enough so the CO can get a flavor of how we were treated."

"Damned well," came MJ's replay. "Keep it as long as you need to."

Jim looked at the logbook. My God, he thought, we ate seven meals while on board, and those two days went fast. Okay, now down to brass tacks, this is almost like cribbing for an exam. Read MJ's notes, jot some of mine, read more notes, jot down some more. Some of this might be too much detail for the AAR, but I'll include it in my general notes. I'm sure someone is going to ask me for my original notes, to see if they correspond to what's distilled into the final After Action Report.

Wonder what Gunny has going on while aboard the frigate, kept running through Jim's head. There was no possibility that this Gunny could ever have a friend in the US Navy. Nope never happen, Jim thought.

Get back to the AAR. If Gunny wants to tell us about his visit to the ship, he will, if not don't mention it. Now, where had he left off in his notes? The last entry was way back this morning after breakfast. Then came all of the getting ready to leave the ship, better to look over the last days' entries so they don't sound disjointed.

*Life aboard the Patrol Frigate Olympia has been outstanding. The officers and crew of the PF166 have gone to extraordinary lengths to make the unit welcome. The ride back to base was anything but usual. Well fed, well rested and cleaned up.*

*This use of US Navy extraction is encouraged on future operations. The two-vessel method allows for small cove use with the larger vessel holding safely and stealthily off shore out of radar and sentry sight. Changes to existing operations are recommendations based on the experience of this*

*team only. Exchange M1 rifles for either M1 carbines or Thompson sub-machine guns. Provisions should be primarily C rations with K rations as supplemental, no emergency parachutes, they are not needed, the extra bulk is hazardous and wastes time when recovering parachutes. Succeeding missions should take only one (1) type of explosives, it is confusing to sort out primers and detonators that are specific to each explosive our mission carried C2 and C3. The US Navy is making physical changes to the landing craft some for troop comfort; details are not available as of this writing. A major review of the maps used is necessary for any follow on missions, maps should be verified by Japanese topographers and mapmakers. A review of map and terrain topography with the USAF is recommended also. Acquisition of larger and longer lasting flashlights or emergency lighting is highly recommended, as stated earlier in the detail section, the US Navy has large emergency lights available in Yokosuka.*

Okay, that seems up-to-date; I'll ask the Gunny if I should include MJ's menus of the day listings. He may or may not find that funny.

“Hey guys, it looks as if the Gunny has finished his visit with the Navy. Don't anybody ask him anything. If he wants us to know something he will tell us, we don't need a long ride back to the base. Heck, he may even make us hoof it back to Pyongtaek.”

Nah not really. Oh yeah, really.

**The Gunny returns**

“Okay gentlemen, if you are all set, we can go now. Cunningham, you’re with me in weapo number one. You and I need to talk.”

“Jeez don’t look so worried. Can’t we have a pleasant conversation on the way back to base, or are you guilty of something I don’t know about?” Jim decided not to say anything and just grunted, “Aye aye, Gunny,” and got into the front seat. He wound up in the middle since there was already a driver behind the steering wheel. With Gunny holding the door for him, there was no other thing to do but, get in, sit down and shut up.

Weapons carriers are not built for comfort or speed; the base vehicle has many purposes, when it is used as an ambulance duty and has an all steel body. Some are modified with no top cover and twin 50 caliber air-cooled machineguns mounted behind the covered cab. The one Jim and the Gunny were getting into was rigged out for toting personnel around and could hold 8 fully equipped Marines, four on each sideboard seat.

This trip, with three vehicles for personnel there was four men in each “weapo”, as Pappy liked to call the Dodge Weapon’s Carrier. The deuce-and-a-half truck held all of the unit’s weapons and equipment and included several riflemen for protection while underway.

There is no way the Recon team was going to travel the seventy kilometers back to their base wearing all of that stuff in one of these vehicles. Surprisingly each vehicle, except for the deuce-and-a-half had a Staff Sergeant driving. Non-coms usually rode, not drove. Wonder what is going on?

## **Chapter Five**

### **On the Road**

Slowly the little convoy pulled out of the dock area. Cunningham was surprised to see additional vehicles lined up on the side of the narrow road to escort them back to their Base of Operations. “Hey Sarge, I thought we had secured this area from the bad guys.” “Well I was making sure you all made it back safely and I brought as much firepower as I could sneak out of the gate. If any of your unit is injured it will be because I kicked their ass, not because some gook from China was sneaking into the south.”

“We heard that some North Korean regulars had infiltrated some of the units working the west coastal area. Any truth to that?” Jim asked both the Non-coms. Each of them grunted.

Oh boy, thought Cunningham, this is going to be a long seventy plus kilometer ride back to Pyongyang. I have two real conversationalists to ride with. Let’s see, seventy-five times point six two five equals forty-six and a half miles at 20 miles an hour. That is one heck of a long ride sandwiched in between Staff Sergeant “no name” and the Gunny. Should I start the conversation or wait until one of the Non-coms says something?

Bravely Cunningham asked Gunny, “Why are Non-coms driving the weapons carriers?” “Two reasons, Cunningham. One is I said so, the other is each of the sergeants is getting info from each of your unit to see if what we have gathered is the same. Sort of a cross-check.”

“Wouldn’t the AAR do the same thing?” “Not for me, I want to hear it from the troops. Who knows what will be in the After Action Report?”

“Isn’t Sgt Kennedy going to take my information from the AAR that I submit and send that on to HQ.” asked a bewildered Cunningham?

“Could be or it could be not” added the previously silent driver. “Cause I thought that the information I am to submit when I see Master Sergeant Kennedy is what made up the official AAR.”

“What info do you have for the report?” This time the question came from Jim’s right where Gunny was sitting? “Well I have my report outline in my utility jacket if you want to see it now. It’s what the skipper and Mr. Howton used to send HQ and the battalion CO, the mission summary, they copied Sgt. Kennedy and you Gunny. I saw the message when it was sent.”

“What the hell is going on? I wonder if Kennedy knew, but did not send me a copy of the report. Nah, he wouldn’t do that.” Gunny was thinking aloud, and Jim was not going to interrupt his thoughts, but he couldn’t resist. “Gunny, the Commander asked me to spell your name and asked if we called you “Pappy” because he knew a Marine by that name back in WW II.” “Is that you, did you know the skipper?”

“Yes, Corporal we knew each other, as did Chief Matthews. We all served aboard the cruiser Milwaukee a whole lifetime ago. And to answer your next question, Kennedy set up this convoy and asked me to lead it and see to the safety of this unit.”

Gunny was still puzzled why he had not been told about the ship to shore communications. “Cunningham, give me that damned report so I can read it before we get back to base.” Pappy looked at the size of Jim’s report and exploded. “Christ, Cunningham this report is longer than the Bible. Did you include every time someone took a dump?”

“No, Gunnery Sergeant, just the essential facts are there.” Jim wanted to explain, but felt awkward. “I was hoping you could give me a hand with the AAR when I got back, I’d hate to screw up in front of Sgt. Kennedy. What do you think?”

Pappy was still not settled down. “Me help you? I have all I can do to read this. Kid you have a college education. I dropped out after the eighth grade and joined the Corps during the depression. Most of these words I have never seen before. I’m flattered that you thought I could help you but this is way over my head.”

Jim felt embarrassed at the Gunny’s statement and wondered what he could do to make Gunny less self-conscious about his lack of education. The Staff Sergeant driving suggested that Jim read the notes and let Pappy make his own mental notes to add or delete something. Or better yet the two of them could comment or ask questions as they drove while Jim was reading.

Gunny liked that, and added that he had never shared his lack of education with any subordinate before. “It’s embarrassing,” he added. “Also don’t spread that around or I’ll kick both of your asses.” They laughed but knew that the secret was safe. All of a sudden the hours spent on the road did not seem like enough to cover the entire report. Jim figured to let the Gunny and Staff Sergeant Perry control that.

“Since the Air Force has already sent in their AAR about the flight, I figured I had better echo what I think they said. That is where this handwritten report starts.” Jim started to read his writing and was glad that he had a good handwriting. Thank you Bergen Avenue Elementary he thought.

“Our twelve man unit, mission code name Eye Poke Able, was airdropped on time and at the correct coordinates. The aircraft and crew were US Air Force flying a C-

119 Boxcar. My unit consisted of 6 demolition men, 2 snipers, 1 US Navy corpsman, 2 radio-electronics men and myself, a USMC Corporal as Mission and patrol leader.”

Pappy wanted to know if the Air Force felt the same way he did about the drop. Jim answered, “I guess so, we landed just where we were supposed to.” Jim continued reading and neither Non-com interrupted. When Jim arrived at the part about the tunnel, he showed them his diagram of the tunnel. “Pretty complete” said Sgt. Perry. “How did you measure the distances inside the tunnel?” “Before we left on the mission I borrowed a mortar team’s focusing range finder. I used a flashlight to highlight the farthest end of the main tunnel. The range finder gave me the distance to the stone piers that supported the ceiling of the tunnel. Since the side tunnels were so deep we measured them in stages of one hundred feet.”

“Shit, that reminds me, the next time we go out I need to find a focusing flashlight.” “Watch your mouth Corporal.” Gunny smiled as he commented. “Aye Gunny,” Jim replied. As Jim continued reading he noticed an increase in the attention Gunny was paying to his reading. Jim did not make any attempt to explain any words he had used in his notes. If either of them wanted something explained they would most likely ask or comment. The part about the tunnel seemed to fascinate Sgt. Perry. He asked how I knew about what kind of rock the tunnel was made of, and I told him of my geology degree. “Convenient,” he replied.

“The part you just read about the snipers, they did that duty all day and night?” “That is so, Sergeant Perry, when the tunnel crew broke for sleep, one of the snipers came down into the tunnel to rest, usually for an hour. Sometimes Doc, our Navy Corpsman, went up the hill to keep the remaining sniper company. I deliberately left that out of my notes that the Navy Officers saw. I didn’t want to jeopardize Doc’s non-combatant status. I just thought it was a good use of manpower.” “Good call,” said Perry. “What do you think, Gunny?”

“Yea, I agree, I was thinking about how the team may need “beefing up” since the rest periods were not a part of the original plan as I remember it. How tired was everyone during all of this Jim?” “We were so intent on doing the job, sleep was not really a factor, and I knew that occasional periods of rest were needed but we had to get the job done too.”

Cunningham continued reading and the next paragraph addressed what the three Marines had been discussing. Gunny accused Cunningham of setting them up for that part of the report. "Not me Gunny, I wouldn't do that."

The mood in the cab of this weapons carrier had mellowed from what it had been in the beginning of the trip. Jim went on to read his recommendations. The part about the danger of missing things when trying to assess and demolish a facility caught the ear of both Sergeants. That is where they need to comment to senior Non-coms and the officers doing the planning.

"Do you want to stick with your statement of not having any suggestion to fix the note-taking ability of these missions?" Gunny asked. Jim looked up, smiled and said, "Mr. Sparrow and Mr. Howton both suggested leaving something for the planners to fix. I left that out. On any mission I go on after this one, I'm bringing a small easy to carry pad. Even if I have to send for them at the Tokyo PX, I will."

"I met those two officers when I was on the frigate. They really like you. I don't know why, but they do." Gunny was smiling from ear to ear; Jim had never seen that before.

Perry said, "That was a good idea, destroying all of the excess gear by blowing it up. Some of the mission planning sounds like they thought it was summer up there." Sgt. Perry was really getting into this whole thing. Not to be outdone the Gunny piped up with comments about the trip from the tunnel to the extraction point.

"What's all this crap about being "extracted" from a combat mission?" Gunny looked at Perry. "The missions were always one-way. You fought, you won and you stayed until the Army got there to relieve the Marines." "Hey Gunny, was that in the big war?" Gunny did not answer but put a single digit into the air. So much for any Marine Corps Non-com formalities.

Jim read on and both Non-coms wound up wrinkling their foreheads when Jim mentioned the part of celestial navigation and verifying the location of the expected rendezvous point. Cunningham had reached the point of meeting up with the LCVP and then getting onboard the Patrol Frigate. He told the two Sergeants, when they got on the ship he polled the rest of the unit and added details that he either forgot or wasn't able to write at the time.



Jim mentioned that at the rest breaks each of the team shared what they had observed from their different positions and assignments. The good and the bad plus the impossible to do stuff were included. He also told them about Morgan writing down what they had to eat on board the ship. MJ had an entry for every meal we ate and every pogy bait break we took.

“Had we left you on that frigate you all would have gained twenty pounds and would have needed cargo chutes to make your next jump. It’s a good thing we came along when we did.” Gunny was really smiling again.

Jim continued reading. When he got to the part about what weapons to carry, Gunny chimed in with, “All of that stuff is available. You only have to requisition what you think you want and take it. Just remember carbines and grease guns are for close in work. So you still need the snipers and a BAR guy.”

Perry commented, “I like the part of using the Japanese topographers. Our intel guys are so afraid that the Japs’ will give us lousy info that for the most part anything they say is weighted on the “not a fact” side of the ledger. Maybe we need to see how correct their information is before making negative judgments.” Apparently Sgt. Perry had experience with our intelligence people thought Cunningham. He could very well be right. Well we will soon see, now won’t we?

“The last part about the flashlights,” Gunny asked, “how do you know that they are available and how many can you carry?” Jim told him frankly that he did not know because one of his recommendations was for an increase in the number of Marines in the mission package. “Just maybe the Marine Corps and the Navy could put aside their differences and make the right tools available to do the job as best we know how.” Jim thought he sounded like a preacher. I’d better be careful or the smile will leave the Gunny’s face and I will be doing mess duty.

“Well Sergeants, that is about it. Anymore questions? If not I will relax and listen to what you have to say. Please don’t worry about hurting my feelings with your comments, I am here to learn.” The two Non-coms punched the defenseless Corporal on the upper arm. Each one hit as hard as anything Jim had experienced but he refused to wince.

The three men laughed and decided to take a break from commenting any further. The sound of the governor-controlled engine was all that could be heard. The engine was revved up to max rpm's and the vehicle was not going over thirty mph.

Jim looked out the side window; the familiar Pyongtaek River was along their right side. Yep getting close to the base. Maybe someday we can use the river to transport our units to the Inchon harbor instead of taking the weapons carriers on such a long ride. We'll see.

### **Back At The Base**

Their truck and weapons carrier convoy was approaching the main gate entrance to this hastily reconstructed Marine Air Wing Base of Operations. The sound of propeller aircraft "running up" became increasingly prominent. That's strange; we usually go to the east side of the base. That's where our stuff is. Now what's going on thought Cunningham?

Jim realized that he had only been on the base for a month and barely knew his specific area of the place. I know where the mess hall is; I've found the base chapel, the showers, the heads and the laundry and the motor pool. I'd better take some time to find out what else takes place here. He wondered how long they would be on the base until his team's next mission. When and what mission?

The K-6 Marine Airbase's "Pierced Steel Plank" (PSP) runway had been completed years ago and used by WW II Grumman Corsairs and Douglas built AD4 Skyraiders, both propeller driven aircraft. The only jet aircraft assigned here were a dozen or so Douglas F3D SkyKnight night fighters that were used mostly for reconnaissance. A few Panther jets, F9F's, come to K-6 from time to time for emergency landings. They were usually repaired, refueled and then flown back to their home base in Taegu.

The new 8000 foot long concrete runway was almost completed, as was the new Control Tower located smack in the middle of the POL (petrol, oil, lubricants) dump. The dump is where the lubricants and fluids for all types of vehicles and aircraft were stored. The tower was located with the exact mid-line of the runway's length and 600 feet from the runway centerline and elevated 40 feet, a very convenient location. Albeit, a very dangerous environment for someone to work in.

All ground and air traffic as well as ground personnel could be observed and directed from the tower. The tower had places for air traffic controllers and their consoles as well as ground traffic controllers managing truck and lubrication vehicles inside the POL facility, both coming and going.

The “wheels watch” personnel, stationed at the approach end of the runway, can now be seen by the tower operators. “Wheels” job was to verify that a landing aircraft had its’ wheels down and the tail hook was up and locked.

Not only was the tower a busy place, it was noisy and in bad weather very cramped. Directly in front of the tower complex were the ever-present “pierced steel plank” taxiways used by aircraft and all of the authorized vehicle traffic accessing the tower and POL area.

The aircraft taxiing area was so busy that “follow me” jeeps, painted bright yellow with a large white with black letters, sign hanging on the back end that boldly said, “Follow Me.” These jeeps were used to get aircraft from the active runway to their designated squadron parking areas day and night.

Directly below the tower was the “Base Communications shack”, it was far from a “shack.” Most of the communications equipment was new and “state of the art.” The manufacturers of this equipment had sent tech reps (“technical representatives”) with the equipment so they could teach those in the field who needed to service it and how to best utilize the equipment.

The roof of the control tower bristled with all kinds of antennae most of which had never been seen by any of the people who would eventually use this new equipment. WW II had produced many people with new and modern technology training along with electronics fundamentals. The fruits of all that training and military education was coming of age.

There were rooms in the “shack” where radio intercept operators spent their entire work shift copying what was called “Russian Weather” the actual coding was in 5 character groups called “psycho” and were typed on heavy manual typewriters that had only capital letters.

To an outsider the typed pages looked strange, but to message analysts it told a completely different story. Not just the weather, but embedded in the “psycho” code was data about troop movements, personnel strengths and future plans.

Ferretting this information out of a mish-mash of code characters was the job of highly trained intelligence people, some in uniform and some in civvies. Some were U.S. military and many others were representing most of the other participating UN forces.

Rumor had it that former Japanese Army and Navy Intelligence were processing some of the intel. The Japanese military was never fond of the U.S. military, but they really hated and despised the Russians. This once small base, built long before WWII, was taking on a new major role in this war or “conflict” as it was now being called.

Some newspaper people back home even referred to the war as a “police action”. No one here in Korea knew where any of the cops were hanging out though.

Cpl Jim Cunningham had no way of knowing how he and his unit would be affected by this modern communications era. As the convoy entered the gate area each of the drivers identified the purpose of their trip to the armed sentries. Each vehicle passed through without incident, and continued into the barbed wire complex.

Something Jim had not noticed before, there was a K-9 unit here, something else to get to know about. Jim was surprised when all of the trucks in the convoy, instead of heading straight up the slightly elevated hill, all turned to the right onto a newly paved, really just oil and crushed rock, road. About a mile ahead were several rows of new Quonset Huts behind barbed wire. He was soon to find out that this was the Recon Units’ new facility.

The entire Marine Corps Far East Reconnaissance Operations would be located here, offices, housing, and vehicle motor pool. The armory for the Recon Battalion had been moved inside the barbed wire, inaccessible to the casual observer.

There was even a newly painted sign with the Marine Corps “Eagle, Globe & Anchor” along with the Recon’s emblem of gold wings with an open parachute in the center of the wings. The words “First Recon Battalion HQ.” was painted underneath the Recon emblem like a big smile. Very nice, Jim thought impatiently, their missions were

all a big secret. Some secret; every Marine on the base would want to know who and what we're doing.

"Sorry, can't say, and I would have to kill you if I told you." How stupid did that sound?

At a gap in the barbed wire fence the convoy stopped for another sentry, this one opened a pair of gates to let the vehicles enter. The convoy pulled directly behind the first row of Quonset Huts, to the last building, and stopped with the ever-constant squealing sound of GI truck brakes.

This was to be their new home for the duration of their tour of duty. It sure looked better than the old WW II tents they were living in just before this current mission. Speaking of tents, all of their seabags were there. Their personal stuff had been packed in boxes in the tents, how do we get a hold of that stuff? Jim did a quick count of huts in the complex, it looked like twenty something, that is a lot of people, what is this new unit going to develop into?

The weapons carrier he was in with the Gunny and Perry stopped and Gunny jumped out, spryly for an old Marine. Jim followed the Gunny out the door and felt the frozen mud under his feet, yuck. When this stuff thaws it will be really sloppy here thought Jim, hey be glad you're not going back to the tents.

Again, interrupted thoughts, "Corporal, form up your unit in front of this building, number 15, these are your new quarters and your seabags and personal stuff are inside."

"Advise your team that each man will pick a bunk, the patrol leader has a cubicle area with a desk, chair and single bunk just to the right of the forward hatch. Weapons will be racked as usual; footlockers are with each bunk. Unload all weapons and put the clips in the footlockers. Unless you have something to hide, don't lock the footlockers."

"Okay, Unit One, fall in on the road in front of this hut, number 15" barked Corporal Jim Cunningham loud enough to be heard over the din of these idling truck engines. "This is your new home, no more tents and pot belly stoves. Let's get lined up with your gear, the quicker we do this the quicker we get out of this cold and inside."

"Roll call, gimme an Aaroogah if you're here, Schmidt", "Aye corporal", everyone chuckled, Doc never gave the Marine Recon yell of Aaroogah, "Cook Aaroogah, Longo

Aaroogah, Grazioso Aaroogah, Ormond Aaroogah, Ortega Aaroogah, Ott Aaroogah, Strong Aaroogah, Hayes, Aaroogah, Morgan, Aaroogah, Murphy, Aaroogah”, Jim turned sharply to his left and barked to Gunnery Sergeant Papushka, “all present or accounted for Gunnery Sergeant.”

“Well done Corporal, now dismiss your men, I will be back in half an hour with instructions on where, when and how we go to mess. Hold your questions until then, got it?”

“The entire unit including Doc, yelled back “Yes, Gunnery Sergeant.” Gunny secretly smiled to himself, God it is great to have these young Marines back here and excited.

Before Jim dismissed the unit he explained about the bunks and footlockers, the only thing he added was that his bunk was the first one on the right as you enter. “Recon Unit One, you are dismissed.” One by one each man climbed the four steps from the road to the hatch, it really was just a wooden door, but the Corps called it a hatch, so it was a hatch.

Getting through the door was only practical if one guy held the door from outside and each man entered carrying his ammo belts, packs, helmets and weapons. They had already put their grenades in the grenade bag when they were loading up back at the dock area. My God, was that only a couple of hours ago?

Inside the Quonset hut #15 it was toasty warm and smelled of new construction, the lights were already “on” and along with footlockers there were racks and shelves along the wall behind the head of each bed. It was easier to go to the bunk that had your seabag and personal box on it rather than jockey for any particular bunk.

This hut had twenty-two bunks on the main floor plus the two cubicles at the front entrance. It was obvious that the unit’s patrol leader had the one with the desk and lamp but what was the other cubicle for?

Maybe when Gunny gets here he can tell us what is going on, yeah sure, good ole chatty Gunnery Sergeant Papushka.

These huts were larger than the ones they saw in training, the sidewalls of these were raised up about four feet high and the hut itself placed on top of that short wall. Makes for a lot more usable floor space, wonder what the other buildings are used for?

As far as anyone knew there were only three Recon Units in this Battalion. That meant a total of about 50 or 60 men including staff. It was just more questions for the Gunny.

## **Chapter Six**

### **The New Quarters**

The Gunny returned in exactly 30 minutes, “Okay gentlemen we have some ground to cover. First I will try to explain where we are with regards to where we used to be on this base.” When Gunny spoke like this it was best to sit back, shut up and listen. “Due to the delicate nature of our mission, those are the CO’s words, not mine, this entire Recon Organization is to be isolated from the general population of both military and civilian personnel on this base.”

Okay.

“The mission of the base is changing and as more people move here the more likely questions will be asked.”

“You’ve noticed how close we are to the gate area, that’s for a reason, that gate will no longer be the main entrance to this air base.”

Again, okay.

“It will be closed and off limits to all but those who have a reason to be in this more secure area.”

What has that got to do with us?

“I am aware that you noticed the K-9 detachment. That unit is to make certain no infiltration occurs on this Air Base, especially at this side of the facility.”

“Sarge?”

“No questions let me finish and then you can ask, there’s zero guarantee that I will answer.”

“That’s a joke son”, quipped the Gunny, ever the stand-up comic. “First of all, I would like to get all the information to you before we go to chow. Meals are served in the farthest building in the last row of Quonset huts, it’s numbered 32-36, and our compound has its own mess hall and kitchen facilities inside this complex.”

The Gunny looked at all of the pleased faces, Hmmm, I wonder what they’re thinking about. “The CO’s quarters are in Hut 10, it’s in the row of huts behind this one.” “All the huts look alike so don’t go looking around for any fancy gardens and shit like that.”

“The heads and showers are in the center row of huts and clearly labeled, Officers, Non Commissioned Officers and Enlisted assuming you can all read there should be no problems.”

The Gunny stopped to take a breath and check his notes.

“Tomorrow morning, first thing, at 0800, we are going to hop on a bus, yes a bus, with a guide to take us around the entire air base to get us familiar with the new layout and base facilities.” Oh good, I see questions; well they can find out tomorrow what is going on. “As this base grows and its’ mission takes on a more aggressive tone, your



input will be needed, so other missions that follow yours will complement the ones you guys do.”

“The effort, as I understand it, is to eliminate duplication. Apparently there is a lot to be accomplished in a short period of time and by getting rid of doing something twice, much more can be done in a shorter timeframe.” The Gunny was struggling to keep his own opinions out of the material he had to cover with these men.

“The negotiations in Panmunjon are not going well from the UN side, the Chinese and Russians are being stubborn. They are trying to gain some military and political foothold in the North. We must stop their build up or we will be in this war for several more years if not a generation.”

Hang on to your mouth Gunny, just finish what you have to say.

“In the afternoon, after lunch in the base’s main mess hall, you will all join the CO, the Exec and the Intel guys at a debriefing and AAR review. The meeting place will be in the security area, and is located in buildings beneath the new control tower. I have seen Cunningham’s notes for the AAR. You all did a great job of making him look good, congratulations.” No visible response, I am not as funny as I thought, just keep talking.

“After the meeting we will return here to the compound and will meet in building 22, it is two of these huts put together side-by-side. That is where most of the mission details will be given and planning done also. As I understand it, the modifications and improvements to the next operation will be discussed and decided at that time.”

“Oh, I almost forgot, in two days, all Marines and sailors holding jump status must re-qualify for this months hazardous duty pay. The jumps will be made over at the Osan Air Force Base, K-55. The Air Force is participating and we can use their facilities and aircraft. It seems they want to sharpen the aircrew’s skills in low-level drop and skedaddle flying. Just so you don’t panic, it won’t be a bus ride. We will fly from here in a Marine Goony Bird and jump from one of the Air Forces C- 119’s.”

“We will carry our own chutes and minimum equipment.” “The Air Force will recover our chutes and mark the accuracy of the landings. Gunny took a breath and checked the faces of these young Marines. He did not have even a glimmer of what they were thinking.

“When we go to chow, use the rear door, not the one you came in, the rear door. That road is Avenue B, Baker; it’s been paved with PSP and stones. The road in front of this hut will most likely be completed by the end of this week. The Army engineers and Seabees have been working long and hard to complete this area. Did a nice job too.”

“We go past the shower and head areas on the way to chow, wait until you see the wastewater and sewer systems these Seabees have developed. Okay, no questions?” It was not an offer to answer any, “let’s go, soft covers, no helmets, no weapons except side arm’s if you carry one.” Everyone did, with the exception of Doc.

The Gunny kept up his dialog “we won’t march to the mess hall but we won’t look like a bunch of civilians either. The rows of huts you are in are the odd numbered ones, the row in front of, as you exit your hut are even numbered.” All the guys looked to see how high the numbers got. What they saw were signs on each hut saying who and what occupied each hut. No one in the Unit had noticed the small sign over their front door that said “Recon Team One”; they did notice the sign over the hut directly behind their hut, “Recon Team Two.”

Both buildings were the same size, 20 feet wide and 48 feet long and setup on the four-foot high wooden wall. Gunny was explaining that the Enlisted Men’s Head and Showers are directly behind Building 16; the building numbers were 24 and 25 even though it was only one building. It consisted of two huts put together side-by-side. That particular row of huts were mostly doubles, one for the EM’s, one for the NCOs, one was for the Officers.”

Perpendicular to these are two single size huts, that is them on our right, one is the BOQ and the other was Officers Mess, there was a 20-foot wide path between them. As Unit One moved toward the Mess Hall, Ortega noticed a sign that said “Broadway”, “what’s that Gunny?” “Guys, the CO wanted to have all the paths named so he named the main road into the compound “Broadway”, it’s his attempt to make you feel less homesick. All of the other paths were named Avenue A, B, C, D, E, F, and the path behind the Motor Pool building when it is finished will be Ave G.

“The CO will most likely have a contest to rename the streets from alpha characters to something more back home like. After Ave G is where the barbed wire fencing will be, two rows of it ten feet apart and nine feet high.” For the dogs most likely

figured the Marines. "This entire compound will be surrounded by wire and the gate manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week. No you will not have to pull guard duty, there is a contingent of Military Police, all Marines who are billeted in a very large steel building directly behind the NCO and EM heads and showers."

Dogs and guards, yikes. "The brig is located in that building also." "A brig Gunny, what is that for?" It was Morgan Cook getting up the nerve to break into the Gunny's non-stop speech. "PFC Cook, if you don't know what the hell a brig is used for then maybe we should give you thirty days in there to find out exactly what it is."

MJ came back real quick with a "No thank you Gunnery Sergeant."

"Ya know, for a bunch of college guys you sure can ask some stupid questions." Gunny had shown a side of himself that he'd rather keep to himself.

"Sorry Gunny, this is a whole new setup and it is hard to digest. Is there more going on here than what we have already been told?"

"Yes, Corporal Cunningham, there is." Cunningham jumped right in and defended his subordinate, good going Marine, I like that mused the Gunnery Sergeant.

"Tell you what gentlemen, why don't we save some of the questions for either at chow or later in your quarters," Gunny had their attention, "It may be inappropriate to talk in the mess hall." What Gunny got was what he expected, a lot of nodding heads.

Chow was good, hamburgers, cheese, rolls and all the fixin's. It was well after the regular lunch or the mid-day meal but the cooks had been expecting the unit just about this time. The mess men had made a big batch of milk shakes to go with the burgers, just like "downtown at home."

This Units' schedule was all screwed up. From the time they were rousted out of the bunks, earlier today, aboard the Frigate Olympia, meals had been an on the fly. Maybe by tomorrow they could all get back on some kind of schedule, maybe?

Jim, thinking about tomorrow, should we take notes, should we ask questions and what is a security center and what is it doing under a control tower? Be careful of asking stupid questions, Gunny will have our collective Asses for lunch.

Let's just wait until we get back to "quarters" as Gunny called it. No body asked any questions in the mess hall, most of the chatter was about the new digs.

Back in building 15 the Gunny continued his lecture. "I want everyone here to write a letter home. I don't care who it is to, your wife, your girl friend, mother whoever you wish. You will write and let someone know that all is well. No specifics, you know better, just let them know you're okay. If you have a pastor or priest you may want to drop them a note. It never hurts to let folks know that you are still in one piece."

"Cunningham, I suggest you go over your notes and tidy up that summary and conclusion parts of the AAR." The Gunny got up and so did everybody else. "Get some sleep gentlemen, it is going to be a long but informative day tomorrow. Breakfast is at 0600, utilities and soft covers. Only sidearms are permitted."

With that, he put his campaign hat on his head and left by the back door.

"G'night Gunnery Sergeant" was the message sent by PFC Longo. Gunny was long gone.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Base Tour and AAR Review**

Quonset hut 15 had reveille at 0500 hours. Recon Unit One's leader Corporal James Cunningham had set his old wind-up travel alarm clock for that hour when going to bed last night. It was still dark outside but he expected everyone in his Unit to follow him to the "head" to shower, shave and get ready for this first day in their new habitat. He informed everyone last night to have clean utilities and be ready for a "Gunny

inspection” in the morning. It would be either here in Hut 15 or at the mess hall. Gunny inspected when and where Gunny wanted to, not by some predetermined schedule.

If you have seen one “latrine or head” you have seen them all; that is until the Unit arrived at the “EM head and showers” in building 22-24. Brand new fixtures, actual hot running water and no multi-holed wooden plank seating like an outhouse. These were actual toilets and urinals, just like back home. The showers were like those in a college gym, a center post with six heads and plenty of room to move around. Three separate shower areas. Sinks were at both ends of the very large room, eight on each end wall.

It looked to them that they were the first ones to use this facility. The mirrors were polished steel plates and not glass. Safety probably. There were whistles and hoots as each of the members of the Unit moved into the room from the doorway. In order to see the entire head you actually had to be in the center of the room.

In the center of the room was a large rack for hanging towels, clothes and benches to sit on. “If this is what we have, what the hell do the Non-Coms and Officers heads look like?” Ortega was very vocal about their new “home.” “Why don’t you run next door to the NCO’s head and find out,” MJ taunted him? “Okay guys, lets get showered and dressed and to the mess hall, we can talk about this on the bus.”

“You know that someone is setting us up for some kind of purpose, no enlisted gets this kind of treatment without an expected payback.” That was Longo putting in his two cents worth.

In the mess hall, the Gunny asked if everything was to their satisfaction, just the expression on his face told them that he was laughing at all of them. “He knows something and ain’t saying,” whispered Longo to Doc. Doc just shrugged, he was not going to get into a Marine Corps pissing contest. Whatever they give me to use, I will accept, went through his mind. His quiet mind continued; this is going to be a long tour of duty, if the Marine Corps wants to treat me well, so be it. I am not going to comment let alone complain.

Gunny made his presence known by commenting “I see you ladies are all cleaned up and ready a “hot time in the old town tonight.””

“Y’all smell soooo good I had better not sit here, I may be too tempted to give one of you a kiss. Let’s see now, who is my favorite?”

“Gunnery Sergeant Papushka, we would like to thank you for the upgrade in accommodations here at our new facility.” Cunningham had jumped in so no one of his team would piss off Gunny by saying something stupid back at the Gunny’s comments. Gunny once again was impressed with how quickly Jim assessed a situation and stepped in and stopped any kind of disrespect. I guess it comes natural to the kid, I sure wish I had that kind of skill. Maybe that is what Lt. Howton saw in the Corporal, I’ll be damned.

Okay Marines, “I will stop the teasing. You all look good, and I just want you to know that I noticed.” That for “Pappy” was an apology. “The bus will be at the Orderly Room which is directly in front of the mess hall.” “I suggest after you eat, go back to your billets and make your racks and get everything shipshape. The XO likes to check on each building every day, this is his responsibility and his pet project.”

Back in 15 Cunningham did a thorough check of the bunks, footlockers and cabinets. As expected all was okay. He was still pondering, he liked that word too, about the cubicle across from his. It too had a desk, bunk and chair. Oh well, if the Marine Corps wanted him to know they would tell him. In the Corps good time not his.

He went into the open bay and told the Unit they would march in ranks to the bus, just to stay in practice. Actually he was considering that either the CO or the XO might be observing them. After all Unit One was the only tactical Unit on site. Better to err on the side of formality than to be seen as too casual.

The guys all agreed to play it smart.

Jim commented, “We don’t know what the hell is going on, and no one is telling us anything. So let’s be on our toes and prepared for whatever comes up.

The Unit was sharp and at the orderly room at 0750 as “Pappy” had suggested. Cunningham had marched them in a column of two’s with Doc in the guide-on position; Jim was going to make a Marine out of him yet.

Gunny appeared out of the side door of the orderly room and nodded his approval of the Unit. Just as he was about to speak, the bus rolled up to the entrance

and the Marine guard went on board to check credentials. He got off the bus, stepped back and saluted, then waved them through the counter weighted gate.

Gunny looked puzzled but put on his DI face, no one sees the emotion, ever. The big green vehicle stopped at the orderly room platform and the driver leaned out to the Gunny and asked were these enlisted Marines his passengers? "Yes, and so am I." he quickly replied. Now why would Gunny want to go on a tour of a base he has been on for over 6 months? Let's find out.

The door of the bus opened and a Marine Corp Captain stepped out on to the platform. "Detail, Attenhut, barked Corporal Cunningham; everyone including the Gunny hit a brace, and Cunningham saluted, as did the Gunny. "As you were men, I am Captain Werner and I will be your escort and guide for the bus ride", he did not say tour.

"I have a list of your names and I would appreciate it if you would take the seat assigned to each of you. Gunnery Sergeant Papushka, you are in seat 20, it is in the back on your left as you enter, Petty Officer Schmidt, you are across the aisle from the Sergeant in seat 22. When he was done reading the names, each of the Unit was sitting next to an officer and was in an aisle seat. "Corporal Cunningham you have the dubious honor of sitting next to me."

On board the bus, the door closed and the driver pulled into the compound straight down Broadway to the Motor Pool, made a "U" turn, and headed back to the gate. What in the world is this all about, each of the Unit asked himself silently. Captain Werner grabbed a microphone and welcomed everyone on board.

"None of you has been told the reason for this ride, yet each of you possesses information the others onboard need to do their jobs more effectively. My job is to have you Recon Marines tell us in your own words what your last mission was like. The officer sitting next to you is an Intelligence Officer and the information you used on that mission was put together by most of these men."

"To answer the question of meeting with security and post-operations debriefing personnel, that you will do right after lunch."

"Each officer has a copy of your Units After Action Report," Christ thought Cunningham, I had just turned that into Master Sergeant Kennedy last evening. How did all these guys get a hold of it?

“This is not a quiz, we have a lot of strategic planning to do and if we screwed up anything we need to know it as quickly as possible.”

“Your team leader, Corporal Cunningham did a fine job of detailing a great deal of information. Our job today is to fine tune what each of you needed that you didn’t have when destroying the tunnel complex.”

“Oh, one more thing, everyone on this bus, including the driver, has a Top Secret or higher classification so there are no secrets here,” the Captain paused to take a sip of water from a canteen. “You will have to excuse me, but I am a FBI agent by training and in the intelligence Unit of the Marine Corps. Public speaking is not very high on my list of fun things to do.”

“My purpose is to assist you Recon Team members in doing a very difficult job more successfully.”

“Jeez, muttered Longo, how much more successful can we be?”

“Good point,” countered the Captain. “The feeling is that this team was very lucky as well as successful. You see, the intel we had, said the tunnel complex you destroyed was being used as a storage area for munitions of a specific kind.”

“Obviously, that intel was bad. We cannot afford to be sending units’ out without having better information.” He took another deep breath and a loud clearing of his throat. Gunny had the feeling that this FBI Agent turned Marine Corps Captain was holding something back, what the eff is it?

The Captain sensing some unrest decided to have some assistance with his presentation. He introduced a Navy Lt. (jg) Chisholm who had more to add to the group.

Chisholm stood up, turned without getting into the aisle and cleared his throat. “Gentlemen, there was a very high level meeting in Tokyo last week. The essence of that meeting is that the Commies are stock piling biological and chemical weapons. These bombs and artillery shells are in caves and tunnels along the East coast of North Korea.” A dramatic pause, to let that all sink in. “The tunnel complex you hit last week was supposed to be one of the places selected to hide this stuff.”

“Your report indicates that was not the case, so where does that leave the intel community?” Another pause. “I’ll tell you where that leaves us, up “shits creek” with not only no paddle but no canoe either.”



The Navy (jg) continued on, "We in the intelligence business like to think we get it right most of the time, but to miss the mark so badly, says that our sources are lousy."

This guy is getting down to brass tacks, thought Cunningham; pretty soon he will be asking for a transfer.

"Our job is to protect you in the field, not send you out there on wild goose chases hoping that you will be all right." Gunny raised his hand like a school kid, the (jg) said "Shoot Gunny, what've got?"

"Why are you telling us this on a bus and not in some fixed location like our compounds' meeting room?" "That's an okay question. We felt it would be less conspicuous if a bus tour of your base were arranged for a Unit that had only been here for a few weeks. That it would draw less attention, as you can see we have eighteen intelligence officers here in one place."

"As far as anyone knows this entire bus is filled with newly arrived Marines touring the upgraded base facilities? You will notice that most of the officers are wearing inconspicuous rank insignia."

"It just seemed like good cover," added Captain Werner.

"I would like to continue with the review of the AAR." Werner was all FBI agent now, "If each officer sitting next to a Marine would share your concerns with that Marine, maybe we can help do a better job on the succeeding missions."

"Corporal Cunningham, you are all mine", and he put the microphone back into the holster hanging on the wall of the bus.

This pissed Gunny off no end, but he held on to his impatience, this guy is an investigator and probably good at his job or they would not have recalled him. My anger is because I want to protect Cunningham from some slick talking Washington type.

Who am I kidding, Jim can handle himself, relax.

Jim felt ill at ease, more so then when he first met Lt. Howton. My God, that was only a week ago, my life is going too fast. Well let's see what this officer wants and get on with it.

"Captain, I don't know what I can add that is not in the AAR, I covered it pretty well with Gunnery Sergeant Papushka and Master Sergeant Kennedy. So far as I know it is all there."

“Yes, I’m sure it is. What I am looking for are the intangibles, What can you tell me about the terrain versus what you were expecting, how about the weather, the soil, the smells, the tools that worked the ones that didn’t. I read about the flashlights, what else was screwed up?” ‘Scuse me Corporal, I just sounded like an interrogator and not someone trying to be friendly and help, old habits die-hard. Sorry.”

“No sweat Captain Werner, I was being defensive of my report, maybe we both need to reset and try again.” “It’s a deal,” Werner, added quickly, wow the info on the Corporal was very accurate; he is sharp and very professional.

“Take me back to the explosion, was it one big one or a series of smaller ones?” Jim immediately remembered that he did not include the part about the demo guys getting all of that soot and crap all over them when the tunnel blew. “Well sir, I did not include the antics of the demolition team at the moment the plastic explosives were set off.”

Oh God, Gunny is going to kill me for not telling him first, oh shit, oh no, damn. “What antics were they” probing, but not accusing? “You obviously considered it unimportant or you would have included it in the AAR, right?” “Yes sir, it was funny after it was determined that everyone was okay and Doc made sure of that.”

With that said, the Captain stood up and asked to see the hands of the demolition team, six hands went into the air slowly and with some real caution. “Now what the hell is going on,” asked the Gunny to no one in particular?

“I would like for each of you to share with the rest of us, what happened at the moment of the explosion. Why don’t we start here with, what’s your name Marine?” “PFC Helmut Strong Sir, Demolition and BAR Marine” my team knows me as “Bruce.” He had the urge to stand at attention but the officer sitting next to him pressed down on his arm keeping the PFC in his seat. Bruce looked over to the officer quickly and nodded his thanks.

“Sir, the demo team was checking the wiring to the detonator and we were all pretty happy. We had enough “bell wire” to extend past the snow and ice of the caves entrance. It was decided that everyone, the two snipers and the Corporal and Doc were at a safe distance. We could see the two radio guys, since they had supplied the last

hundred feet of wire and were below the level of the opening. Then we blew the SOB sky high.”

As soon as he said it he knew that Gunny was going to be all over his ass, shut up Bruce. In spite of them selves the busload of men burst into laughter. Bruce blushed, but couldn't see “Pappy” sitting so far in the back of the bus.

“Sir, it really wasn't sky high, the roof of the tunnel raised up some, the snipers told us that. The explosion spewed debris and ice out of the mouth of the tunnel. It got all over the six of us and hardened like plaster or concrete. Have you ever seen stucco? That is what it looked like.”

“Jim, uh Corporal Cunningham had the Doc look us over but everyone was fine.”

“Anyone have anything to add to this last comment?” “Sir PFC Ira Hayes, I'm not sure about the others but I had received such a punch in the abdomen that I thought I was going to piss my pants. The concussion was a lot stronger than we had been told it would be based on the amount of plastic we put in there.”

“Sir, PFC Tony Grasiioso, I also had the bladder problem, it only lasted about a minute, but the ache lasted quite a while. It's not something you feel like telling other folks.”

“Captain, PFC MJ Cook, I also had the same feeling, I had my back to the tunnel looking for a place to hide. We could not go any further away from the tunnel or the caves mouth. The lack of wire kept us within fifty feet of the opening. Even if we had more wire I don't think we would have gone much further from the spot where we were standing.”

Captain Werner asked if the other two demo men to add anything to add, Longo volunteered that he was “Holding all of the teams weapons, except for the BAR, that's Bruce's. I had the same gut feeling the others had. The weapons got hit bad but we cleaned them up right away, you never know when you need them up there.” Before Longo could continue on “I'm PFC Danny Ormond Sir. The fact that we all felt the direct impact of the concussion says more about how we are told to place these old and new plastic explosives. Corporal Cunningham has comments in the report about the two types of explosives.”

One of the officers raised his hand and proceeded to comment about how the unit needed to question why they were equipped with two different kinds of plastic explosives. Most of the old stuff should have been eliminated from any inventory because of its instability.

Oh crap, thought Cunningham, we could have all been hurt with the old C2 stuff. I know Gunny will not let that happen again, good.

The officer continued on and stated that senior officers need to know that the Marine Corps is still using obsolete explosives and the practice needs to stop. Easy for you to say thought Ormond, I can just see me telling the CO that I am not going to take any old ammo or explosives, yeah sure. I would be in the brig, on bread and water.

“Captain Werner, I think this explains the observation photos of the mission site. The size of the explosion should not have caused all of that damage except the over flash. The older C2 plastic explosives may have produced a secondary series of minor explosions, causing the mountain to collapse.”

This was the first time anyone of the unit heard that the mountain had collapsed, how the hell could that have happened pondered Cunningham. “I think you may be right Major, you would know better than most of us, you are the tunnel maker of Colorado.” The Major laughed and waved at the Captain playfully.

“If any of you young Marines want to know about explosives and stuff, ask the Major here. Before he too was recalled, was busy in Colorado creating tunnels through the Rocky Mountains. He was blowing up the Rockies and getting paid well to do it too, great job if you can get it.”

A bit of laughter went through the officers seated on the bus. It appeared that most of the officers had been recalled to service from very lucrative positions in private business. Some like the Major were owners of the companies they left, to come to the Korean War.

“Okay, back to the subject at hand, we have a scheduled “pit stop” for a leg stretch and coffee break. There are head and latrine facilities for both enlisted and officers, all I ask is that you keep your conversations to something not related to our AAR topic.”

The planned stop was to be for thirty minutes, then back on the bus and to the new flight line, and tower complex. Lunch will be in the meeting room, buffet salads sandwiches and stuff, nothing fancy but better than C Rations. That got the expected response from the enlisted men in the unit.

At first it was awkward getting off the bus, all of the enlisted Marines were in the aisle seats and tried to let the officers out first. Those efforts created a massive traffic jam in the aisle. The officers all held back and encouraged the Recon members to leave first. They need not concern themselves with military protocol; on a bus in the middle of Korea they were all equals.

Most of the bus passengers reached for their cigarettes before going inside, it felt good to stretch and grab some nicotine and caffeine. The mingling of officers and enlisted did not turn anyone's head or draw any comment. In a Marine Air Group such as this base was, enlisted and officers often mingled casually. When it came time be formal both groups knew the rules.

On the way to the buildings called Base Operations or Base Ops, the bus drove past the area that had formerly been the Recon Units tent city. It was all gone and in its place was a huge concrete pad at least as long as a football field and equally as wide. "Jeez, they did that in less than two weeks, amazing." Longo had a way with words and everyone laughed.

Captain Werner stood up again and stated that, "We will hold off any more discussion until we get to Base Ops and meet with the Intelligence team members." This was one very well coordinated bus ride.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **At Base Operations**

After a pretty complete tour of the newest part of Marine Air Group 12's base the bus pulled into an enclosed space that led directly to a large building. The building had

no windows and its doors were painted the same color as the walls, dull green. This was only one of the buildings in the complex called Base Operations. The real base ops building was where pilots and crews met to file their flight plans when flying around Korea. Fighter pilots, flying combat missions, did not have to file their plans here.

The control tower dominated the view. It was really tall and was reached by the wooden ladder fixed to the side of enormous legs. They seemed to stretch forever.

The group of men could not see it from where they stood. Directly across the new concrete runway were the newest Ground Controlled Approach radar vans being installed. GCA would allow this base to be an all-weather facility and conduct landings in very inclement weather.

They entered as a group, this time the Officers were ushered in first, then the Non coms and finally the twelve enlisted men of Recon Unit One for which this party had been thrown. Now, was it going to be a party or a lynching? That is the way Cunningham's mind was working at this moment. Why am I so worried? We did our jobs and got back safely. Well we will all find out soon enough.

Captain Werner waited for the Recon unit to make it through the door and into the meeting room.

This room was one of many inside this building. The clatter of typewriters and crypto machines was present, along with the faint smell of what seemed like sewing machine oil.

The Captain gathered the group including the Gunny, he told them that the intelligence unit wanted to verify their data with the Recon Unit's information and that this was not some kind of a "witch hunt." He also shared that his younger brother Joe was Cunningham's counterpart as the team leader of Recon Unit Two.

Jim was dumbfounded, he had never put Captain Werner's name together with Joe's.

They both, Jim and Joe had their difficulties in early NCO school for Corporals. Jim was looking forward to seeing Joe again and comparing notes. Captain Werner broke into Jim's thoughts with the statement that Joe's unit was getting its' ass ripped on the Northwest coast of Korea. It seems that things were not going so well and that Unit Two's return is several days overdue.

“They should have come back at the same time you men did. Keep them in your prayers please?” He asked that as easily and naturally as if he knew each member of Unit One for a long time.

“I thought I’d let you know before you go in there that many of us know how hard your job is. Sometimes waiting is harder than doing, right Gunny?” “Yes sir, I agree.” My God Gunny worries about us. Can you believe it? With that a Marine Corporal held the doors open by pushing in the middle of them and walking out into the hallway, both doors opened simultaneously.

Waiting inside the room were several tables and chairs forming a large square, each side had eight chairs. There was no real “head” of the table, but a ruddy faced Marine Major and a pale faced Navy Commander sat together side by side at one table. Obviously these two were the questioners. As the team entered the room the Corporal escorted them to the chairs and suggested they remain standing until told to sit. More persons would be joining the discussion in a few minutes.

When the rest of the intelligence team arrived each stood behind their chair waiting to be told to sit. “This meeting will come to attention. Attention on deck” came the call from the other side of this large room. Into the room came a very brisk walking Navy Captain and Marine Corps Colonel. Each was in starched class B uniform, sharp as all get out. “Stand at ease men, I want to welcome the men of the First Recon Unit to this meeting. What you have provided us is real honest to goodness hands on facts.”

“This After Action Review is a cause for celebration; due to your efforts we can now better plan subsequent missions. I applaud each and every one of you,” and he applauded, as did the rest of the room. Gunny was stunned and slightly embarrassed too, he did not deserve any recognition but he couldn’t refuse it either.

When the applause stopped, the Colonel called for all to sit and one more thing. “There is no smoking here, we are in a building in the middle of a POL dump, need I say more?” There were many chuckles among the assembled servicemen after that comment.

The Major sitting at what now had become the head table, started with “This meeting is to be a two-way one. The Marine Recon members will further elaborate on

the AAR we have and we will share with them what problems we face in supporting their missions.”

“Let me begin with this point, you have been here in Korea for a little over four weeks and you have successfully discovered and eliminated one tunnel complex, great work. However, there are at least sixty-six, or possibly more, tunnels and caves, to either incapacitate or make unusable. Do you see our problem gentlemen?” Unit One members looked at each other and nodded, Doc was doing the math in his head.

“At the rate we are going it will take all you of this decade to get them all done. With good intelligence we can eliminate the ones that are not a threat to be used for any purpose. I for one do not wish to be here in Korea in the 1960’s and I don’t think you want to be here either.”

“What you have told us in your AAR, confirms what our Japanese counterparts have been saying for a while now. Not all of the tunnels are candidates for military use. Some Jap haters dismiss the caution of these assets but others feel that the Japanese Intelligence Office has a lot to offer us. Based on your descriptions and drawings we concur with the Japanese.”

“Our intelligence gave you their idea of the tunnel and what you found and reported was exactly what the Japanese intelligence provided us, that ended that controversy.” The Major indicated that he was neutral in the decision process but was now an advocate of integrating the Japanese input with Recon Unit data. The problem is getting the data without duplication and doubling the effort.

“You Marines may not be aware of this next fact, but the Marine Corps is not turning out very many of you Recons every month. Last months’ effort only produced 40 new graduates. It seems that finding college men with math and engineering where— with—all, willing to jump out of a fast moving aircraft from one thousand feet is not a simple task.”

Smiling at his thoughts, “When they are told that handling explosives to blow up tunnels and bridges is also part of the job and to then fight your way back to your home base, many decline the offer. I don’t have a solution to that problem, but it is being worked on.”



“Currently, your brother Unit is overdue from its mission. Their missions are on the western coast of North Korea. We have lost communications with them but are hoping for the best. Your CO will have the latest on them when you return to your compound.”

“Now let’s get down to business. Lt. Schrader, you have the report on the plastic explosives problem, do you not?” “Yes sir I do have that data” was the reply. “Please share it with the rest of us.”

“Further use of Plastic Explosive C2 is discouraged, it should be eliminated, but in some munitions stores, that is all they have. C3 is the explosive of choice as is the use of braided communications wire instead of the solid “bell wire” previously specified.” He continued reading from his report, “The hand held electromagnetic igniter is to be replaced with a more powerful, also hand cranked, unit that weighs less than two pounds.”

The demo guys almost cheered. The old unit was cranky and temperamental. Most were manufactured during the early war years of 1943 and ’44 and weighed in at ten pounds. That maybe okay if you are traveling by truck to a demo site, not so good when jumping into enemy territory and every pound counts, nice upgrade, thanks.

Next was another Lt., his specialty is communications. “It seems that your voices have been heard and new VHF and UHF radios will be on hand for your use and training tomorrow. You can see them when you are finished here. The radios and the tech reps from the company that manufactures them are down the hall. They are expecting you.”

“Man this is just like Christmas,” Ortega had a way with words; the laughing broke some of the tension in the room. “I believe the next person on the agenda is Capt. Friscoe, go ahead and give these men some more good news.” The Captain cleared his throat as if he was going to give a speech and his voice was a whisper at best. Everyone strained to hear what he was saying; he was talking into the tabletop.

“Captain I can’t hear you” yelled the Major, the Captain looked startled and harrumphed again and started over. “What I am trying to say is the maps that you have been given previously were never verified as correct or current.” He bowed his head

again and spoke into the table. “Newer, more accurate maps provided by the US Air Force have been sent to your Commanding Officer.”

He looked up and very sheepishly muttered, “I am very sorry for the error my department made. We will do everything in our power to keep your maps and coordinates up-to-date and accurate.” Pushing back in his chair, he apologized once again.

This was all very new to these Marines and to Gunny, what the hell are these officers driving at was “Pappy’s” question, asked only to himself. The Major was on his feet now and addressing directly the Recon Unit. “To us in the Intelligence Community you men survived well in spite of a lot of mis-information and faulty explosives. You may not be aware of the impact your AAR has made upon several departments in Korea and Japan.”

He added, “It also looks like the most effective part of the mission was the extraction process. Word has it that you were treated royally aboard the Frigate Olympia.” “Yes Sir” was MJ’s aloud comment this too drew some chuckles.

“One other point I want to make before we move on, the explosion you created not only destroyed the tunnels. It caused the entire mountain to collapse into itself thereby closing the tunnels forever. Post-mission aerial photos confirm the original assessment by the observer aircraft.”

“From the air, the photos show exactly what your report indicated, a main tunnel and two ancillary ones extending out at ninety degrees from each other. The mountain now has three valleys, courtesy of the United States Marine Corps.” The major was clearly enjoying himself.

“Corporal, I get the impression you have something you wish to add to this discussion, what is it?” Cunningham had unconsciously been mouthing what had been running around in his head for a couple of days.

“Sir, in preparing for our alternate target on the last mission the men of this Recon Unit saw an opportunity to utilize UDT or frogmen to supplement our demolition team. There is a sizeable river that runs right at the base of this mountain, this one is over 3,000 feet high. The UDT unit could slip in using the river. When we airdrop with

the munitions and stuff, they would meet up with us and we could get the job done sooner and possibly more effectively.”

“Both units would extract using the same route that the UDT men used coming in. Now that we have a practical extraction method using the LCVP aboard the PF 166, it can accommodate this large of a group safely.”

Knowing full well that this method was not applicable in some cases Jim just paused and let the “brass” mull it over.

“You know something Corporal, Lt. Howton was right, you are bright and you present tough situations in a very understandable manner.” Good God thought Cunningham, he knows Mr. Howton, are all these guys connected?

“Gunny raised his hand and the Major acknowledged him with a firm nod. “Major, I would like to take the Corporal’s teams’ idea and run it through our planning office before you assign it to someone here. We may have an opportunity to practice this idea in the coming weeks.”

“Sounds like a workable solution since I don’t have anyone free to take on any new planning assignments. Thanks Gunnery Sergeant, I see where your men get it from.” Gunny shut up, was that a complement or a snub, who knows and who cares.

“If everyone is finished with the AAR review I have a disturbing bit of information to deliver, this is of the highest priority secret. Since we all know the penalties for blabbing, I will presume to continue.”

“A plan has been hatched in HQ Japan to use germ or biological warfare tactics in the coming months. This MAG unit is one of several selected to deliver, by air, canisters of this material. Since the material does not sustain itself, it dissipates within four days time depending on weather conditions, thereby requiring frequent refreshing. The VMF 513 Squadron, the night reconnaissance jet squadron, has been selected to be the distributor of these chemicals.”

“Unfortunately for all, these plans may be put into action very soon. Several of the areas to be targeted are also ones we are looking to infiltrate and destroy. Our people, in the form of Recon, UDT and the I & I units are scheduled to be working in these areas. The General proposing this may be over-ruled by Washington, but for now their plan is viable.”

Looking directly at the Recon team he stated. “Personally I hate the idea of these types of weapons. I am an old “ground-pounder” and I think that is the way to fight and win wars. Slug it out and the winner takes all, not all this poisoning of an entire population. That being said however, as a member of the armed services of the US and now the UN, I will follow orders.”

“I did not wish to dampen anybody’s day but you need to know the other dangers we all may be facing. If there are no further discussion pertinent to the AAR, then Gunny take us home.”

Gunnery Sergeant Papushka immediately stood at attention and ordered the attendees to “attenhut.” When the Senior Officers had departed the room Gunny gave a barking order, “this meeting is disssssmissed.”

A low but discernible sigh was heard from all sides of the tables. Everyone knew not to talk about anything they had just heard but they can’t stop you from thinking about stuff. Cunningham broke the silence by asking Gunny, “where do we see about the new radios and electronic gear?”

Gunny pointed to the officer who had covered that part of the meeting. “There he is Corporal, go get ‘em, he looks just like you guys do, ready to bolt out of here.”

Each member of the unit, including the Gunny, grabbed a boxed lunch that was on a table by the exit. Nothing fancy, but stomachs’ were growling after sitting for such a long time.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **The Tour Ends**

All members of the unit followed Lt. No name, the Electronics/Radio officer, and Cunningham, to see the new radio equipment. Gunny trailed behind amazed at the interest in the radios from men who may never use one. Now that is the difference between we old Marines and the new generation, these kids are interested in everything. Gunny was even interested in his own interest in this team of Recon Marines; they are smart, outspoken and yet very respectful of authority.

Whoever picked this group and made them a Unit was very smart too. He hoped the new members that were being merged with these guys are just as sharp. I had better save those thoughts for later when this Unit hears about the new changes that Battalion has cooked up for them.

There was a new excitement in these Marines, what they each had supposed to be some kind of witch-hunt turned out not so. No one had ever explained how broad reaching this assignment was going to be. The “brass” really has a lot riding on these teams’ success. This job is so different from any other they could imagine. Now each of them was invigorated to do even better than they had tried to do.

Before today, each of the team, in some way, was fearful of failing. Not from some lofty ideal but because Gunny would have “ripped them a new one.” After today each of them realized that a larger picture had been painted for them in doing the job the Marine Corps had selected them to do, yep, selected.

With a new spring in their step and a new focus on their next mission, this group of men would never be the same. A confidence never before shown by them has sparked new energy and determination. How to channel that energy was something each of them had to deal with over the next days, weeks and months.

First things first, let’s get the new gear, learn it, and make our team better than even we thought we could be. To be more informed and more focused on the teams’ success. If the Corporal succeeds then we all succeed, we all have to get behind him and make sure he knows that we know this is a team effort. Yes he is our leader, but this is a team effort, strange we knew he was our leader because the Corps said so, now he is our leader because we want him to be. The funny thing about collective thinking, it not only works well, it is pervasive.

The room they went to was quiet and eerily absent of the usual ambient noise that radio rooms are noted for, or at least radio rooms either of the radiomen had been in. Murphy was the lead radioman, but Morgan had the real electronics knowledge, together they usually figured out how things worked and how to best use them. "I don't know what I am supposed to be looking for," said Thom, "me either" offered Murphy; "Lieutenant what does our new equipment look like? Nothing here looks familiar."

"That's because none of the equipment you will be working with has been used by the military up until now." His manner indicated that this was a kind of field experiment for these radios. "As soon as the tech rep gets back he will demonstrate how you can use these radios to your best advantage."

The Lieutenant barely got the words out of his mouth when two men in civilian clothes came through one of the outside doors. 'We're all set gentlemen sorry we weren't ready before you got here. The demo will take place mostly outside, but first let me tell you who we are. My name is Chuck D'Agostino and my partner is Boyd Arnold we are representatives of the Gilbarton Electronics Company."

"You've probably never heard of them, we hadn't, until we were recruited by Gilbarton while in college."

"Their engineers have developed a new series of personal communications devices that are using a new solid state technology that was developed at Bell Laboratories in New Jersey."

"These new devices let's us build radios and other communications equipment, smaller and lighter. Plus they are able to reach significantly further using terrain hugging ultra high frequency radio waves."

"Aren't UHF and VHF line of sight stuff?" asked Murphy. "Usually that is correct. What Gilbarton has overcome is this. You will be able to communicate around and over mountains and hopefully, in caves or tunnels with this new stuff." That was Arnold jumping into the conversation, "Usually we only give this stuff to the OSS types, but what we have been told is, your needs are perfectly suited to real field testing."

D'Agostino jumped in and assured us that were not guinea pigs, "This stuff really works. Let's go outside, we have some demos set up that all of you will like," Boyd was anxious to get this show on the road.

“Gunny, may I call you that,” he asked and stuck his head in Gunny’s direction? “Sure can Mr. Arnold, call away, I want to see how this stuff works too.” “Great because we are going to transport you and two men who are not radio types to the other end of the POL Dump. Out of sight and behind some sand bag revetments.”

“How about I take the two snipers with me, that will keep them busy and I can keep an eye on them at the same time.” A little more Gunny humor, the two snipers grinned and went over to where Gunny was standing. “All set Sarge, we will follow you.”

Outside the door the two men had come through, was a jeep ready to drive the four of them to the spot where a part of this demo was to take place. Boyd was the driver and Gunny jumped into the front seat, the two snipers dutifully squeezed into the notoriously narrow rear seat. Climbing in from either side, so as to not disturb either the driver or Gunny. “All set” came the word from the back seat, and off they went, the jeep made a very tight “U” turn and headed for the revetment area.

The scariest part of the ride was being so close to moving aircraft; the taxiway for aircraft was also the roadway for all types of motor vehicles. Crazy.

They passed the Control Tower, which seemed even more imposing as they went beneath the overhanging platform forty feet above them. Christ, what a climb that was, “No thanks I’ll keep my ass on the ground thank you” muttered Ortega to no one in particular.

“This is from a Marine who parachutes into hostile territory and thinks climbing up a ladder on the side of a perfectly sturdy tower is dangerous;” Gunny was talking to Boyd Arnold, Arnold smiled and kept on driving.

The drive to the testing site was further than either Gunny or Ortega figured it would be, but they did get there. The destination was a depressed revetment for large 55 gallons drums of something, it was all well below the ground level. Instead of a stairway entrance a ramp of PSP and stones led to the bottom of this quite large and deep hollowed out area.

“We figured if we can communicate from below ground and among all this steel and stuff that should be a good test of these radios,” Arnold was very much into his role of cheerleader for this new gear. “What I hope to show you is how we can be below ground level and still reach the communications room and also your battalion HQ.”

“Sergeant Kennedy has one of these on his desk; I presume he has it turned on so I can demonstrate the range and clarity of these things.”

“Recon base, this is Boyd, how do you read me?” With excellent clarity came the reply “loud and clear.” Boyd turned to Pappy and handed him the hand held radio and said “Try it Gunny, without the speaker on and hold it to your shoulder not your ear.” Gunny felt foolish, but he would not show any kind of embarrassment. “Hey Kennedy, you on this thing or are you snoozing?”

“Gunny, where the hell are you, we have been waiting to hold the review meeting here. The BCO keeps asking me and I told him you went AWOL. Over.”

“Advise the Major that we are just beginning the demo of these new radios. Seems like a good piece of gear, and if I was going to go AWOL it wouldn’t with Ortega here.” Kennedy laughed and Pappy was surprised at how clear the circuit was, “Tell you what Gunny, when you finish at Base Ops give us a call. I will leave this on my desk, the clerk can pass along the message.”

The Gunny pressed the talk switch twice as acknowledgement. “Great range hey Gunny? How about you Ortega? Try it, just call in the blind and wait for responses.”

Ortega took the radio that the Gunny offered and spoke into the mouthpiece, “Anyone on this net give me a short count and your location, over.” Quickly came a reply that identified the user as someone working at the GCA installation. Another came from the communications room from Ott, each was perfectly clear. Next came a voice with jet noise in the background. “Hi this is Eagle Seven at two-five thousand feet over Kimpo airfield, who do I have here?”

“This is PFC Ortega US Marine Corps testing some new equipment at K-6 Pyongtaek, I assume you read us loud and clear.”

“You assume correctly Ortega and Semper Fi to you son. Since your radio is working okay I’ll go back to looking for stragglers. Eagle Seven going back to “Guard Channel” good luck with your test.” “Thank you sir and Semper Fi to you, Ortega out.”

“Gentlemen, just to put this in perspective, this is our hand-held unit. The other unit back in the Comm Center replaces the two-piece backpack model the radiomen are now carrying in the field. The new pack weighs in at 9 pounds including the harness. It has both a handset and a headset-microphone for hands free use.”



“Both units cover 80 crystal controlled channels with a dial switch. No crystals to change they are all built in. Oh yes, the hand held unit you are using weighs in at 4 pounds including the headset and the carry case.” Pappy was aware of the pride Boyd had in this radio. He was equally impressed with Ortega’s attention to Boyd’s every word. “Each man in your unit would carry one so everyone’s in touch at all times. Sure beats a walkie-talkie or handi-talkie.”

“We are hoping that your Recon Unit could take them on some sort of maneuver or field test and give us some feedback,” continued Boyd. “Sure, how about tomorrow?” asked the Gunny. “We have a jump training exercise at K-55 over in Osan in the AM and could use these as part of our exercise. How many do you have for us to use?”

“Well we have 48 in house, most are ready to go, and that’s the hand-held units. Boyd was doing a quick mental inventory, “And you can also have up to six of the pack units.”

Gunny gushed, “Good we will take whatever you can spare and give you a report tomorrow night. Better yet, why don’t you guys monitor our exercise? We take off from here at 0900 so we can be here at 0800 and get fitted out. Our day will be a little longer than we had originally planned, and we will be coming back to K-6 when the jump exercise is over.”

Ortega asked the Gunny “Do you think it would be a good idea to leave a pack unit with Recon HQ so they can see how well this gear works?” “I agree with Ortega Gunny, that would be a good test on both ends of the exercise.”

“Okay Mr. Arnold, can we get the hell out of this pit, it is starting to stink in here. What the hell is this stuff?” “Dunno Sarge but you’re right it does stink” added Ortega.

The ride back to the Communications Center felt good, the fresh breeze helped clear the odor from the pit out of each ones head. Funny thought Ott, this country always smells like shit, but compared to that pit, it is fresh air.

Mr. Arnold was explaining to the Gunny about the guy over at the GCA site. “He is basically underground in a 20 foot deep trench installing electric cables, water and fuel pipes to the GCA units.”

Looking directly at Gunny while he was driving “I felt that it would be a better test than being just farther away. Our job here is to make certain that these devices work the way our company says they do. We aren’t salesmen.”

Back inside, the rest of the team was trying out all the stuff they could get their hands on. Everyone liked the hands free part of both radios, a great idea. To the returning four it looked like it was still Christmas, all they needed was a tree. The presents did not have to be wrapped. Gunny looked around for Cunningham and finally spotted him in a corner with a headset on talking on the radio.

“Corporal, who are you talking to, your girl friend in Yokosuka?” “No sergeant, I and Master Sergeant Kennedy are discussing your next assignment. The “Top” concurs that you should go on our next mission. I am still the patrol leader and you will be my assistant. At least I think that is what the Sergeant Kennedy is hinting at.”

Gunny just snarled at the smiling Corporal. “Okay, let’s get back to our HQ, we have a meeting to attend and according to HQ you are late.”

“Get your unit together and we will see these two gentlemen in the morning to take some of this with us on tomorrow’s exercise.” Jim knew when Gunny was serious and this was one of those times.

“Okay, assemble on me,” yelled Cunningham. “We have a meeting to go to and planning to get done for tomorrow’s jump.” Jim looked over to the two tech reps “Thank you both for all of your help, we have plans for tomorrow and they include these new radios.” Jim added, “Our Gunny promises not to break any of them. If you would be kind enough to show us where our bus is, we will get out of your hair until tomorrow.”

When they arrived at the sheltered parking area, the bus was gone and in its place was a deuce and a half what a come down. “Okay, everybody but Gunny, in the back.” Gunny smiled, Jim was really in charge of this group. Good for him.

A half hour later they were pulling into their new HQ driveway. The truck halted at the gate area for the sentry. Their next destination was #15, then on over to the conference room.

First, a pit stop in the EM’s head, Jim was concerned that he was going to have trouble “dialing back” all this enthusiasm. This meeting they were headed for was with all of the Battalion brass. We had better be sharp and respectful.

“Hey guys’ listen up; take the enthusiasm down a notch or two. We are going in to see the brass so let’s not muck this up by being all giddy and crap like that.”

“Gunny suggested we be there in twenty minutes, that leaves us exactly eight. Finish what you’re doing and meet out front, we will march to the meeting hall, column of two’s Doc you’re the guide on.”

“Aye aye Corporal, today has been a whirlwind, my gosh.” “It sure has, I wonder what lies ahead at this next meeting” was Cunningham’s reply? With that everyone fell in on the road in a neat column of twos and Jim gave a quick inspection and all was well.

“Detail, Attenhut, right face, forward harch, your left, your left, your left right left.” Unnoticed by the detail, the CO and the XO were watching their every move, “A sharp bunch these Recons” offered the CO, the XO nodded and said he was proud to see this. “You know we could have gotten a bunch of miscreants instead of these two groups of fine young men.” “Yep” was the CO’s candid reply.

Once at the meeting hall the detail was met by the Gunny, “looking sharp Marines, keep it up.”

“I will announce you to the assembled meeting and when we get in there, follow me around the table and when I stop, you stop and stand, at attention, behind the chair in front of you. Got it?” “Got it” was the echo.

“Cunningham you are the trailing Marine.” Cunningham just nodded as the detail walked into the larger than expected meeting room. Wow all this “brass”; what the hell are we doing here? Oh yeah, the AAR follow up, my God don’t let me screw up now. All of these thoughts were echoing through Jim’s head at once.

### **Recon HQ AAR Follow Up**

The CO stood up as the detail moved into their places, the rest of the officers remained seated, strange but who is to say, Jim is trying to take this all in and be calm at the same time. No way. The Major looked pleased at what he saw and told the assembled enlisted men to stand “at ease.” In unison the sound of shifting boots on the deck from a rigid position of attention to a less formal but rigid at ease, feet apart, hands flat behind the small of their backs with their utility cap between their hands.

“Men of Recon Unit One, I am proud to introduce to you the staff of this Recon HQ, I am Major Roger Wallace the Battalion Commanding Officer, to my right is your Recon CO, Captain Llewellyn Sinclair to his right is your Recon Adjutant First Lieutenant James Northcutt, you know him as the “XO”. We are your command and control; as such we are responsible for every thing you do, whether it be here on base or out in the field.”

The Battalion CO was used to being in command and it showed. “If we screw something up it will reflect right down to each of you, so don’t let us do that. I have heard that you are pleased so far with the accommodations. Also I’ve heard that you are getting used to good accommodations.” Smiling warmly he added. “The skipper of the PF166 sends you all his best. You men have made a good impression on him and that is not an easy thing to do.”

“Please be seated, the rest of this meeting will be a lot less formal, up to a point, this is after all an After Action Review. We are going to take apart each and every action and fix the ones that did not work.”

Looking directly at Jim he stated. “Corporal Cunningham, this is one of the finest AAR’s I have ever read. It is complete and detailed and you unselfishly gave credit to the Unit that made this mission, your first, and a success. Congratulations are in order.” Jim, unaware what to do or say just nodded. Good move.

“When the commanding officer of another branch of service, rings me up to say what a good crew of men I have under my command, I swell with pride. It doesn’t happen often but when it does, it makes a lot of the sleepless nights worth it.”

“The Gunny tells me that you owe it all to him,” a lot of nervous laughter, including the officers.

“Okay, lets get down to business. Lieutenant Northcutt, you have the floor.” With that the BCO sat down and the “XO” Northcutt got up with a pointer and opened the flip chart’s cover page. “First of all, no longer will any Recon Unit use C2 as an explosive. We have secured enough C3 for a lot of missions. Next the weapons, the radiomen will carry Thompson’s and a side arm, as will the Patrol Leader.”

“The other Marines will carry M1 or M2 Carbines except for one who will carry the BAR. Each carbine carrier will have a minimum of six 30 round clips. Each member will

also carry a minimum of 6 anti-personnel grenades. The snipers will continue to use the rifle of their choice, the '03 bolt action refitted weapon or the Garand Sniper rifle, and it's your choice. The unit's medic will remain unarmed. Sorry sailor." Doc returned the smile of the XO.

"Now on to the tools for use in the tunnels. You have all seen the new radios. This should overcome the in-the-tunnel communications problems as well as the obvious outside the tunnel range difficulty." He was talking rapidly but clearly. "As to the flashlights, we have secured from Yokosuka several of the excess shipboard emergency lanterns. In addition to those, the Japanese have made available to us the same helmets they use in their mines. These helmets are equipped with a battery powered light and provide falling rock protection as well as very high visibility lighting."

After the briefest of pauses, he continued on, "The helmet shell is made of bamboo and a phenolic material, it's very strong. Your comments about the maps and details have been responded to by HQ Japan and we now have more up-to-date topographical maps as well as newer rivers and roads maps. We are still working on the plans that utilize your efforts combined with the US Navy UDT men. It is not an inter service thing but rather one of logistics."

"That is all that I have to contribute, let me introduce Captain Sinclair. He is the "supreme commander" of USMC Recon Missions', Far East. As such he is the boss of us all, with the exception of the BCO, of course." Sinclair stood up, smiled and looked directly at the enlisted Marines.

"Thanks XO." Looking at his audience the CO added, "Some day this man's smart ass mouth is going to get his butt on one of your missions, except he would probably like that."

"When an officer gets a command in the Marine Corps, he hopes that the personnel assigned to him have faith in his judgment and decision making. I have been privileged to assume command of a number of Recon Units that exemplify that hope. What you men have accomplished in only one mission is extraordinary."

Jim could sense a lecture or history lesson coming.

"The reintroduction of Reconnaissance Units was not met favorably early on. Many outside the Marine Corps felt that your role as Recon's was unnecessary and a

waste of time, effort and funding. You men have proven what we field commanders felt we needed for the situations we currently face.”

“We as commanders would be remiss if we overlooked, or worse yet, did not recognize the professionalism of your team’s work. Having said that I want to congratulate Recon Unit Team One on being awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Meritorious Service Award with a “V” for valor. Well done.”

“As I call your name, please come to the front of the room for the formal presentation by our Battalion CO. “Petty Officer Third Class Otto Schmidt. Corporal James Cunningham” as the complete list was read each man stood behind his chair pushed it to the table and executed a sharp left turn and marched to the front of the room. When the roll call was completed all twelve men were standing in the front of the meeting room at a very rigid position of attention.

After the pinning ceremony, Captain Sinclair gave the unit a “stand at ease men.” He added looking directly at the standing team “As your Company Commander this is one of the proudest moments in my career. You have continued and added to the history of the United States Marine Corps, Semper Fi.”

“Detail, attention, please return to your seats, we have a little more to cover. Lt. Northcutt will you continue with the meeting?” “Thank you Sir. Effective at 0800 hours tomorrow Recon Unit One will be increased in headcount by five Marines, four are demolition men, and one is an added sniper. I am certain that you can make room for them in your new accommodations.”

“Corporal Cunningham will you please come forward.”

“In view of your leadership and ingenuity while in command of a difficult mission, the United States Marine Corps is proud to promote you to the rank of Sergeant, with all the specific honor and respect that goes with this rank.” The beaming Lieutenant added, “congratulations and best wishes.” Jim’s response of, “thank you Sir, and thanks to my team as well.” The XO shot back with, “Jim you have before you a great career if you chose to pursue one in the Marine Corps, think about it.”

“I will Sir, but in the meantime we have work to do.” “Well said Marine” and with that the Lieutenant put out his hand to shake Jim’s.

“You may return to your seat, Sergeant.”

The Battalion clerk interrupted the meeting with a message for the CO, who immediately thanked the clerk and turned to the assembled group while reading the message from the US Navy.

“Now this is great news. It is from the Frigate Norfolk working in the Yellow Sea and the message reads as follows.”

“Commander, USMC Recon Battalion, K-6, South Korea

*“We have your Recon team in tow,  
all injured are being taken care of aboard,  
no wounds are life threatening but some are severe,  
all are present or accounted for,  
your Patrol Leader is one of the casualties, a shoulder wound.  
All are suffering from exposure, dehydration and lack of food.  
Our ETA for Inch on is 1100 hours 23 Jan. 1952.*

*More to follow, Communications Center USS Norfolk PF169.”*

“I think with this good news and information we can close this meeting. Again I want to add my best wishes to all of you and congratulations to Sergeant Cunningham.”

### **Jump Practice and More**

The trip to Base Ops was uneventful, the deuce and a half took the Unit to the parachute rigging shop where they picked up and signed for their parachutes. This time they would be bringing them back and they also had to check out a reserve chute. Something they don't take on mission jumps, too bulky and extra weight, they will have to practice with them today though. The parachute rigging shop was pretty close to the flight line so the trip to Base Ops was a short one from there.

The two Gilbarton tech reps were there with the radios. They had the pack type for the radio guys and the hand-held ones for each remaining member of the team. Doc was all excited about having a radio; it made him feel more a part of the team to be able to hear what each member was doing and to monitor in case of an emergency.

Jim still had his Corporal stripes printed on his utilities; Gunny had made a point of “Sergeant Cunningham was out of uniform.” Jim said he did not have any of the

laundry permanent marker stuff to add the third stripe. Gunny promised to take care of that when they arrived at Base Ops, they always had the marker packages he declared. Sure enough, as soon as the truck pulled into the parking area, Pappy got out and went into the building and brought out two marking packages. Jim had to take off his field and utility jackets and the Gunny did the honors.

Pappy was getting a bigger kick out of Jim's promotion than Jim seemed to. When the deed was done Jim looked embarrassed, but on him the three stripes looked good. The two tech reps congratulated him and made a fuss by saluting Jim when he put his jackets back on, along with the salutes were very large smiles. Jim's team applauded, "go ahead make matters worse" he mumbled.

When everyone had checked their radios, they were too close to each other for radio checks so, they each called the tower and got a "five-by-five" response. All were okay. Now to find the R4D "Goony Bird" that was going to shuttle the team to K55 for the practice jumps and some exercise Pappy had mentioned.

Pappy also insisted they bring K-rations for two meals, "What the hell is that all about?" The driver and helper were unloading the parachutes when a weapons carrier and a jeep squealed to a stop in front of them and asked if this was the group going to Osan, "Yes we are, but you'll need more vehicles than these two to get us to the ramp." "Oh don't sweat that, the bird will be pulling up right in front of Base Ops, this is for the chutes and other carry on stuff."

The Master Sergeant in the jeep was taking charge now; he would see that everyone got on board and that all the equipment was there too. "All I need to do is give the bird pilot a buzz and away you go." It was so amazing; everyone was being so nice to us, what is going on?

Pappy said, "You guys are the worst kept secret on the base. We intend to just let it play out rather than make a major fuss and add to the chatter. Just go along with it." The gathered Marines just nodded, they liked the celebrity status though.

Within minutes a loud rumbling penetrated the air, around the curve in the taxiway came this green painted airplane. No one of the Recon Unit had ridden in one of these since jump school.



Most of the unit decided to hug the building, just in case. How does the pilot see to drive one of these things? The nose was way up in the air and the tail was dragging on its tail wheel. The twin side doors were already open and a crewman was standing in the opening. When the plane stopped he dropped a short ladder over the side of the aircraft and from the other side of Base Ops a stairway was being wheeled bumpily over the PSP to the side of the aircraft.

The plane's crewman hooked the small ladder to the stairs and held the two units fast to the side of the plane. The weapons carrier guys hauled the chutes and packs into the rear of the plane and the unit members were to sit toward the front of the plane, "for balance" he said.

Everyone climbed on board; the Gunny was the last man in.

## **Chapter Ten**

### **Mission Two preparations**

Morning came too quickly. Jim had set the alarm for 0600 so everyone could clean up and get to the mess hall but also get some needed shut-eye. No one had ever mentioned what hours the units' were to maintain. Jim did not know what the mess hall schedule was nor was there a PT and formation schedule. Back at the old tent area, everything was posted, better find out when we go to chow. I will pop into the Orderly Room and see about a schedule, the clerk of course will know.

Breakfast chatter was all about the exercise that took place yesterday; Doc sure enjoyed the chopper ride and being able to hear what each person was doing and when. Because so much distance separated everyone, each had a different perspective on the overall success of the exercise. "If it had not gone well Pappy would have us out there still," was Longo's contribution to the discussion. Jim excused himself from the table and headed to the Orderly Room. Jim was talking to himself at high speed; gotta make sure what the expected schedule for the unit is.

"Oh God the note," he said out loud. It was still unread in the top pocket of his field jacket. "I'd better read it before I go in there, it may be from the Battalion Clerk." Actually the note was from the XO, he wanted me to go over the "time in grade" for each member of the team. Promotions were in order and the XO wanted to make sure Jim agreed with the evaluations. Good thing I read the note. If I had run into the Lieutenant and hadn't read it, he would be pissed, and I would be on his shit list forever.

Jim stopped talking out loud and spoke only to himself. Okay, now go in there and see the clerk, get the schedule and find out if the XO is at work yet. First, I need to get the guys back to 15; they had all decided to call their hut, just 15. Nah, go see the clerk, the guys will be okay, they don't need a mommy.

Inside the Orderly Room was less than orderly, several clerks were at desks typing and a few Marines were in benches along the front wall waiting, for what Jim had no idea. He walked up to the counter dividing the clerks from the waiting area and announced that "Sergeant Cunningham for the XO." A staff sergeant looked up and said. "The XO was expecting Sergeant Cunningham but not until 0900 or so. They had heard that you and your unit were out late last night." A bunch of chuckles from the other clerks made Jim smile too.

“Yeah”, Jim said, “our Gunny throws a whale of a party alright, no expenses spared. All the K rations we can eat and all the Halezone treated water we can drink.”

“Just so you know Sarge, the Gunny is with the XO, they were in a closed door meeting a while ago. You can knock on his door and see if they are ready for you.”

Jim tried to sound as if what he was about to ask was something he always did. “Do you have this weeks duty schedule?”

“Yes we are just completing it now, you can get one on your way out after you see the Lieutenant.” “Great, thanks I’ll do that.”

“Sergeant Cunningham, do want us to post one in your office in Building 15?” “Sure that would be great.” Jeez Jim how many times are you going to say great? He said my office in building 15; I guess that’s my cubicle.

“Thank you gentlemen, I will now throw myself on the mercy of the XO and take my punishment like a man.” The orderly room staff laughed as Jim walked down the hall to the XO’s office. Thankfully Lt. Northcutt’s name was stenciled on the door. It saved Jim from looking like a fool trying to locate the lieutenant’s office. As he was about to knock the Gunny opened the door and welcomed him to the XO’s office.

The Lieutenant stood up and stretched and welcomed Jim into the office. Jim hit a brace and saluted and held it until the XO returned the salute. “Sergeant, we tend to be more casual around here except when the BCO is in house; but I welcome the salute.”

“Gunny do you want to hang around or can we do this without your input?” “Sergeant Cunningham has all the input you will ever need. He’s been with these Marines for over a year. If he doesn’t know what they are capable of then no one does.” With that the Gunny turned and waved farewell.

As the XO sat down he motioned Jim to a seat. “The Gunnery Sergeant thinks the world of you just in case you were not aware of that fact.” Jim was stunned; he knew Gunny was always aware of what he was up to. Pappy made suggestions that were always constructive, but he likes me, I had no idea.

The XO looked directly at Jim and said. “Maybe we should get one thing on the table before we go into our discussion about the men in your unit. The officers and NCO

staff here have recommended you for OCS. I must also add that there were no negative votes.”

What, me for OCS pondered Jim, what do I know about being an officer, oh God, what do I do now? Jim’s mind was racing, here he was prepared to talk about the team and the first thing being discussed is OCS and me.

“I don’t know Lieutenant, it never occurred to me. Mr. Howton, on the Olympia said that I should consider the Marine Corps as a career as part of that career, becoming an officer. I thought he was just being nice to me.”

“You do know that Lt. Howton’s recommendation is also part of this whole deal. When experienced officers meet and identify subordinates that have leadership skills it is their responsibility to make that known. Just as you ID the skills of your team as individuals, you also see their teamwork attributes. Making those skills known to your commanders is key to building a strong organization. One of the skills that got you promoted to Sergeant is your ability, to not just lead men, but to get the best out of their own skill package.”

With all that said the XO finally took a breath and Jim just stared straight ahead speechless. “Sir, would I have to leave my unit or can I accept the offer and defer going to OCS until this tour of duty is over?”

“Oh you can accept and defer. As a matter of fact, the CO was concerned about that. We would have a tough job replacing you since we are short of Recon Non-coms to lead these units. Deferring would be best for the Battalion. However, we want you to make the decision that is best for you.”

### **Mission Two Readiness**

Tomorrow came with a lot of excitement built in. The announcement of Jim’s acceptance of OCS and his deferral was met with many positive comments. The promotions for his Unit One members were also met with a large amount of congratulations and comments. “Now we have a Unit of all Chiefs and very few Indians.” All delivered with best wishes and in good humor.

The announcement by the XO of additional men to be added to Unit One was met in staff meetings with a variety of discussion and concern. What was going to be

the eventual size of these units? If they get too big, then we lose a large amount of tactical freedom that the smaller units have.

It was the age-old argument of stealth versus expeditious hit and run operations. The Unit's primary purpose has little to do with hit and run. However long it takes to destroy a targeted area is however long it takes.

Recon Non-coms and commanders felt that the additional manpower and equipment would lessen the time on site. That would diminish the risks involved with using a larger force to accomplish the job. HQ in Japan had the last real say, but was leaving the final decision to the local Recon Commanders.

Twelve Recon Marines had always been a good number to begin operations with. Twelve men were enough to manage personnel-wise, and sufficient enough to execute the demolition of the sites chosen.

The first mission proved the placing of explosives to be much too time consuming. The result was insufficient rest afforded to the team members. Secondary discussions lead to the adoption of an additional sniper. This was for scouting and lookout work as well as providing rest time for the other snipers.

Because the tunnels now appear to be larger than expected; and the end result had to be total destruction. The final vote determined the added demolition personnel are necessary.

The Air Force did not see a significant increase in the time over the drop zone, they estimated five to six minutes for each run. The first run to drop munitions and support supplies and the second run to drop the troops. The grouping drops could be closer together, two seconds between jumpers instead of three. Most of the jumping terrain was still snow and ice covered and that could mean more difficulty in retrieving the dropped resources.

The extra hands would minimize the risks associated with gathering the cargo drop. The discussions went on for hours like that, back and forth. Finally the BCO asked for a decision and the Recon CO opted on the side of the larger unit. Thus making eighteen the total in each newly formed Unit. Unit One's second mission results would be a good benchmark as to whether the increased number was correct or not.

Modification was the hallmark of good planning. Amen to that.

“Sergeant Cunningham, meet your new team members; PFC Walter Adams, PFC Julian Gonzales, Corporal Luigi Rossellini, PFC William Cottie and PFC Charles Dreyer. Gentlemen this is your Unit One team and patrol leader Sergeant James Cunningham; he will introduce you to the other team members shortly. You men have picked a tough assignment in Recon; the men you are to serve with are experienced and will be good partners and trainers.”

“Unit One has a mission coming up in about two weeks. A series of high altitude fly-overs are being done as we speak. From that data we will have tactical plans drawn and a specific assignment delivered.”

“Of course we expect the Unit members to make their own plans, as needed” With that said the XO broke into a wide smile. “We just ask that you all make a sincere effort to follow ours.”

After the assembled were dismissed, the new members and the Unit members shook hands. The Unit member’s offered to give the newbie’s a hand with their seabags and stuff. After the gear was gathered, Jim gave a yell to follow me. With that the doors of the meeting room opened and the cold January air hit them all head on. Welcome to Korea in wintertime.

On the way to #15 Jim told the five of new members that rather than everybody tell their story multiple times a better idea was being hatched. The existing members decided that each of you would give your background and tell the rest of us any novel things about yourself. We’ll do this one at a time while standing on your footlocker.

The five not being new to hazing or Marine Corps harassment, agreed that would be a good idea. Corporal Rossellini wanted to know if the original members would do the same so we could all be on the same footing. Great idea, thought Jim, I’ll promote that after the new men tell their stories. “Let me think on that, it may just work.” Jim already knew he was going to do it.

Once inside #15 each of the new members went to a bunk. Jim and the other members of the Unit had arranged it so the newbie’s were not isolated but were included; bunk wise, with the rest of the team. Getting them integrated into the Unit would be a lot easier if they felt accepted as a part of the team and not isolated from the older members of the Unit.

It was probably better for the existing members too; they would get to know their next bunk person faster this way. Rather than wait. Jim seized the opportunity to introduce the new members with the original members by dragging his footlocker out of his cubicle and stood on it. Everyone got quiet wondering what was going on.

“Okay, listen up. I heard a suggestion on the way here that we have the new members introduce themselves by standing on their footlocker. So I thought I would go first, thank you Corporal Rossellini for the suggestion, it is a good one.”

### **Jim’s Story**

“My name is James Cunningham, Jim to all of you. I am a newly promoted Sergeant in the Recon Unit of the US Marine Corp and your mission and patrol leader. Newly promoted, that means I have been a Sergeant as of yesterday. Prior to that I was a Corporal for eleven months and itching.”

“Before becoming a Marine I was a college student at Rutgers in New Jersey, majoring in geology. Due to draft board pressure to go into the Army, I left college when I completed my AS, and joined the Marines.”

“After boot camp at Parris Island, I was recruited to be a Recon Marine; being from Newark, NJ and not too bright, I said sure. As each of you knows the training is tough, exhausting and special, but I loved it, and I still do.”

“The guys you see around you, well, we all went through the entire Recon training program together. From advanced infantry, amphibious training to jump school and on to demolition and survival schools at Twenty-nine Palms. It was after demo school that I was appointed the team leader for this unit. I am the leader but not the boss; we all contribute equally when it is called for. For the most part we have no secrets from each other. Except for those that our commanders tell us directly not to repeat.”

“What we would like is to have each of you recent arrivals blend in with us as a team. Yes we have one mission under our belts, but one mission does not make a career. I believe that each of us on that first mission knows that we were damned lucky, damned lucky indeed.”

There were a lot of nods of agreement from the Unit's original members. Some had thought so but never verbalized it; others just wanted all the missions to be as successful as that one. Screw the medals and commendations; lets get out of this war alive and in one piece.

Jim continued his intro to the group of new men. "If your demolition school was anything like ours, then you are in for a treat. We almost lost our demolition team because the mixture of C2 and C3 created a whole new explosive compound. Something like a very large exponent in an algebra equation. We do not want to repeat that experience again, ever."

"I wanted this session to be more personal but I seemed to have lapsed into stuff other than telling you about myself. I was raised in Newark New Jersey and my folks still live there, Dad works for the US Post Office at the Main Office in Newark. He came up through the ranks and now has a supervisory position. Mom recently joined the Essex County Clerks Office in the tax collection department."

"I went to all the local schools and played most of the varsity sports, I skipped lacrosse, way too violent," chuckles all around. "I went to church in Newark as well, The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, for those who know what that is. I only practice my religion sporadically. With this job I guess I had better get back into the program."

"Speaking of which, the chapel schedule is posted on the wall just outside my cubicle. We have transportation available, some restrictions of course. But if you want to go, just let out a holler."

He paused to check out the faces, no one asleep yet. "So let me finish up with this. I do have a girl friend; at least I did up until the last mail call. Nothing serious we both would like to finish college before making any commitments."

He had surprised himself with his last statement. "You know something, I have never told that to anyone else before this, amazing what sharing will do."

Changing his stance on the footlocker Jim suggested one of the new members "come on up, or stand where you are on a footlocker and tell us a little about yourself."

## **Louie's Story**



“I’ll go if it is alright with the rest of you I’ll go.” Corporal Rossellini stood up and looked around at the fairly large group. “My name is Luigi Rossellini and I am a sniper, been in the Corps for three years and have changed MOS’s just as many times. I think I will keep this one.”

“My background is similar to some of the other new members of this Unit. Two years of college in HRI that is Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management. Plainly speaking it is cooking and baking for large crowds of people. Hateful work at best. It’s hot work and long hours and very little positive recognition by anyone, either the diners or your management.”

“Lucky for me I had joined the ROTC when I got there. Oh yeah, there is Kansas City, Kansas although as you can guess I am a New Yorker; in case you couldn’t place the accent.” That got a laugh and thumbs up from Ortega and Ott. “I figured there would be other ones from “the city” around in a unit like this.”

“When the drafters came looking for me in NYC I was way out in Kansas, so they shifted my draft board to KC.”

“There was no way I was going into the Army so I checked out the Navy and I was staring at 3 years of cooking and baking. The Marines offered me a chance to go to Advanced Infantry School, after boot camp, so I took it. My ROTC record was spotless and my rifle skills were above average and after AI school I opted for sniper training and then Recon school.”

“Demolition school almost did me in, I had never heard an explosion let alone set one off, exciting as all hell, I knew then that this gig is for me. So if you ever need an extra demo guy, I’m your man Sergeant.”

He cleared his throat a couple of times and continued. “About the first name, just call me Lou or Louie or as they called me in AI, “Rossi” either way I answer.”

“As far as girls go, I guess I’m too shallow, I get one for a while and then poof they are gone. No loss, I just never have had a lasting female relationship, my sister tells me I am too self-centered, whatever. Oh, my folks live in the Bronx and I have two sisters and two brothers, I am the oldest at 21. My dad works for the Post Office, inside work, he did ten years with the bag in all kinds of weather and moved up for the last ten plus.”

Cunningham smiled knowingly, the two dads should get together and tell PO stories they are only a train and subway ride apart. "I want to end this introduction with, I am happy to join this Unit. I need to belong to a group that wants to succeed not just do their job."

"Gunnery Sergeant Pappy said you were the best," he cocked his head trying to remember something. "What the devil is the Gunny's last name anyway?"

"Papushka, Luigi remember it or you will be with the permanent mess men down the road, that a way." Sean Murphy offered that comment while pointing towards the mess hall. "P a p u s h k a, got it" with that Louie shrugged and sat down.

### **Doc's Story**

"Hi everybody, welcome to the newest members of our Unit, yep I said our unit. My name is Otto Schmidt and I am your US Navy Corpsman. My reason for wanting to tell my story is very simple. I have never been a part of any group before joining this Recon Unit. I have been accepted by this Marine Unit as a peer and not as an outsider."

"I was told in Navy boot camp at Great Lakes Depot that the Marines were animals. Uncouth, loud mouths and a whole bunch of other negative stuff that obviously was not true."

"When I was offered the opportunity to become a combat medic after completion of Hospital Corpsman School with a newly formed unit within the Marine Corps I literally jumped at the chance."

"Let me go back a bit and give all of you a glimpse of who I am, where I came from and how I got here."

"On February 1, 1927 I was born in a little town in the eastern part of Germany. My father was a mechanical engineer in Hamburg who refused to join the Nazi party. My mom was a lab technician working at the same company. Because of political turmoil they took my sister, who was 12 years old, and me at 10 and immigrated to Madison Wisconsin. It was there where they joined a growing German Lutheran community who had moved to America earlier."

"My whole family, including me, became US citizens in early 1941 my parents were so proud to finally be Americans. But 1943 was a bad year for my family. After

graduation from High School my sister became ill; she was diagnosed with poliomyelitis and there was no cure, only treatment.”

“That same year my father was drafted into the Army as an interpreter for some military tribunals that would take place later in France, Belgium and Germany.”

“This took a terrible toll on him personally and he became a heavy drinker. When I was 13 years old and until I graduated from High School in 1945 I worked by delivering newspapers in the early morning. In the afternoon, I worked at a butcher and grocery store, mostly delivering orders on a bicycle.”

“My mom took everything I earned and put it in a savings account for my college education. I was still living at home and after I graduated high school, I enrolled in the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I was in their pre-med program, convenient to home and also a good school.”

“When I started my third year of pre-med my sister took a turn for the worse and my father was unemployed because of his drinking. So I left school to stay at home and work locally to help out, only a few months into 1949 my sister died of the disease.”

“Staying at home was not an option for me. My savings were all gone and my always drunken father and I were not getting along, so I opted to join the Navy. I qualified for pharmacy school and while in school I was introduced to the medical corpsman program and joined it.”

“Later the opportunity came along to become a combat medic with the Marine Corps, which was forming new Reconnaissance Assault Units. The training would include special warfare tactics as well as airborne jump training, demolition and orienteering training was also involved.”

“Now how in the world could I not accept that offer?”

“I would still remain in the Navy but be on detached service to the Marines. The major attraction at the time was hazardous duty pay plus jump pay if I completed my qualifiers each month.”

“My mom is still banking my money in a savings account in hopes of me returning to med school.”

“I trained for ten months with this unit; you know what the classes and training were like so I won’t go into that. Demolition school at Twenty-nine Palms was a real revelation; I had never been that close to an explosion before, it was scary.”

“Just before we went on our first mission early this month I learned that my Dad had joined a group called Alcoholics Anonymous and is in recovery. My mom has a job selling real estate and has already made her first sale. Both apparently are doing okay.”

”Now a PS, yesterday I was promoted to Petty Officer Second Class and in two days I will be the senior citizen of this unit as I will be 25 years old.”

“Thanks for listening and thanks to Sergeant Cunningham for the chance to share my story. It felt real good.”

### **Julian’s story**

I’ll go next if it okay with everyone. My name is Julian Gonzales, ends with an “s” not a z. I am from Puerto Rico, which is New York City south; prior to coming into the Marine Corps I was studying architecture at CCNY. I am 20 years old and have been to the mainland, which is what we, PR’s call the US, many times.”

“Puerto Rico is a protectorate of the US and we have all the rights that the states have without the taxes. Both my parents hate the idea that I am in the Marine Corps, they are fearful of me being killed. I keep telling them that as good Catholics they should relax, we are all in God’s hands and what will be will be.”

“As someone who is supposed to build buildings the idea of blowing stuff up is mind blowing. I have several sisters; five to be exact and have been spoiled rotten by them, I am the only son.”

“If anyone would like to meet my sisters let me know, my father is anxious to marry them off. Thanks I like this outfit already.”

### **Walter’s story**

“Thanks Julian, I will go next, my name is Walter Adams and I was studying Civil Engineering at MIT when the cold breeze of the draft was calling. My grades were only average and I decided to enlist in the Marine Corps. A recruiter at our school was looking for science or engineering students to be part of a new Marine Corp Recon

Brigade. Since I did not need my parent's permission, I was nineteen at the time; I joined up with the agreement of going to Recon if I passed boot camp satisfactorily."

"I was a pampered kid, not allowed to play real contact sports like football or rugby so the USMC sounded great to me. I only knew what I had seen in the movies and the recruiting stuff. I have loved it from the first DI that chewed my ass out right up until the Gunny chewed me out in the Orderly Room for chewing gum yesterday."

"I am a PFC and twenty years old and am willing to learn how to do my job and be a team member and a team player. Oh yeah, I have an older brother who dodged the draft by joining the Massachusetts National Guard, can't blame him too much, Dad pulled those strings."

"He did teach me about the BAR, he took me over to the Armory many times to show me stuff. I used to clean about ten or twelve every time I went there, I loved those visits and the BAR. If you ever need a backup on one, I'm your man. I also have a younger sister who thinks her brother looks sexy in his Full Dress uniform. And no you can't meet her. Thanks."

### **Willie's story**

"My turn, my turn, that's what my sister's children are always saying so I thought I would use that line too."

"I am William Cottie; please call me Willie, thank you. I was a science major at Penn State. My family lives in College Station, Pennsylvania and it would have been a sacrilege to not go to PSU. Like Walter I too was approached in college about the Marine Corps Recon program. I had joined the competitive rifle team at PSU and we had a lot of contact with recruiters."

"The Marine Staff Sergeant not only made the best pitch but also had experience in WW II in the South Pacific with both the Recons and the Navy UDT guys. He did not puff it up into something glamorous, he did tell me honestly about the casualties. He also stressed that this was a different kind of war and a different kind of Marine Corps. To me it was a matter of not going into the Army, and so I joined."

“I am twenty years old and am the youngest in my family. My brother and sister are both married she and her husband have two kids. He doesn't have any yet, he and his wife are studying theology and want to become missionaries.”

“Well that is about it for me. Charlie I guess you are up.”

### **Charlie's story**

“Thanks Willie, I like Willie am twenty years old but I have no college education. The draft was blowing hard in Athens Georgia, where I am from and going into the Army was not high on my list of things to do. I worked for and with several WW II Marines and listened to all their stories and escapades and they would have killed me if I had not joined up with the Marines.”

“The guy I worked for owns a tunneling company. Everything from tunnels for trains and subways to huge water projects through the Appalachian Mountains. I have almost four years of experience with high explosives and detonators.”

“Working in tunnels as a mucker and driller is hard tiring work, it is all about teamwork. My dad got me the job with the company. My dad is one of the sales people that show folks how a tunnel can make life easier for them and their community.”

“My high school grades were okay for college but my interest wasn't there and besides, the money tunnelers make is fantastic. Sure there are risks but shit, crossing the street in downtown Athens ain't no picnic either. Being a demolition's guy in the Marine Corps is a perfect fit for me. I sure had fun in demo school, this plastic stuff is good, but someday I will show you all how to use dynamite. Now that is explosive shit, let me tell you.”

“From what I hear you guys had some experience with the after explosion nature of plastics in a confined space. Quite an experience hey guys. At least you all survived that experience; some other people were not so lucky. It's one of the reasons the commercial explosive folks don't use that stuff. Maybe someday it will be made safer, like everything else improvements happen through trial and error.”

“Oh so far as religion is concerned I am a Southern Baptist and am a choir member too and love to sing hymns. That being said, I will now sit down and listen to the next guy.”

## **Bruce gives his story**

“Before joining the Marine Corps I hardly volunteered for anything, now I am going to give all of you a look into my past, scary all right.”

“Hi, I am Bruce Strong, my given name is Helmut but I never go by that. I am twenty years old and from Analomink, Pennsylvania. I was graduated from Stroudsburg High and studied chemistry for two years at Stroudsburg Junior College. I was hoping to join E I Dupont Chemical Co. My dad worked there in shipping and receiving, mom works at the County office as a clerk in the recorders office.”

“I have one brother and two sisters; the older sister is married with two kids. Her husband is a PA State Fire Fighter for the Forest Service. The younger brother and sister are eleven and nine. Dad calls them God’s surprises.”

“We attend the Church of Christ in East Stroudsburg and usually spend the entire Sunday in church activities. Analomink is a small very quiet town; we have two main buildings, a General Store and the Fire House. It is mostly a tourist vacation spot for New York and New Jersey folks.”

“This Quonset hut we are living in, well my family and I lived in one for almost a year while our new house was being built. Dad bought it from Navy Surplus after the war for one thousand dollars. He put it up way behind where the house was being built so it could be used later for whatever they wanted.”

“As kids we played in it after school on bad weather days. Our friends loved coming over to the house just to play in the Quonset hut. Visiting family still use it to stay in when they come to town.”

“My dad did not go into the military during WW II. Dupont was considered a war materials company, and many employees were exempt from service. He and the friends he had that did go always were talking about the events, some good, a lot of them bad. Several of his friends were in the Pacific as Marines and described the war part as hellish. The camaraderie within the Corps was always talked about as being special.”

“In High School I played most major sports, not real great, but okay. Joining the Marines was just like the team sports in high school. I love the camaraderie and knowing that someone always has your back. Semper Fi.”

With that he looked directly at Ira Hayes and without saying a word to him, Ira stood up.

### **Hayes and his story**

“Hi ya’all I am Steven Hayes, I prefer being called Ira. My hometown is Tyler, Texas, I am twenty years old and played championship level football in high school that earned me a scholarship to Texas A&M. A&M is a military and Aggie school. Farming was not for me, I majored in physics, not specific but leaning toward nuclear as a specialty.”

“Our family is Baptist and I attended Sunday school and later taught the little kids; I enjoy the music and the singing. I avoided being in any of the many plays the church puts on every so often. My girlfriend also goes there, she is involved with everything at church. Her name is Sue Ellen I just call her Susie.”

“My dad was in the Marine Corps in WW II and survived several assault landings on South Pacific islands. He did not talk about them until after I had enlisted. In the last semester of my sophomore year, the draft was breathing down everyone’s neck and like many of you, I was not going in the army.”

“Dad approved, but had some hair curling stories to let me know it was not a game I was getting into. My girl friend also goes to A&M, she is one of the first women in the class, and she is determined to be an officer either in the Air Force or the Army.”

“I had never been out of my county let alone the state of Texas until I enlisted and met most of you at Parris Island. It has been a blast, literally and figuratively.”

“Some of you guys sure looked stupid covered with all that crud and stuff in front of the tunnel.” The rest of the Unit was laughing because it was Ira who had been the hardest hit by the melted ice, snow and tunnel debris. He also took the longest to clean up so the unit to leave the site.

“Oh, about the name Ira, my dad knew Ira Hayes, one of the Marines who hoisted the US flag over Mt. Suribachi on Iwo Jima. That is such a sad story. Ira suffered much because of that incident. I took his name Ira as my nickname and to honor his memory.”



## Chapter Eleven

### **New addition to the unit**

The noise in #15 was extraordinarily loud with all the questions, some answers and the ever-present question, what is going to happen next. The problem with big group meetings was that they generated as many questions as they did answers. A runner from the Orderly Room knocked on the door. Nobody ever did that, so no one answered. Jim finally went to the door and the runner had a message from Sergeant Kennedy requesting Jim's presence in the OR in 30 minutes. Jim of course agreed and went back into the main area of #15.

Jim told the guys he had been summoned to the Orderly Room by Sgt. Kennedy and would most likely be back shortly. "While I'm gone put together a list of the ammo, weapons and any other munitions that we know we will be taking out of the armory before mission day. We also have to have 30 rounds each for the firing range, keep that separate from the mission stuff. Okay?" "Got it sarge," was Ott's response. Jim could tell that the Unit was now anxious to get going. Missions are scary but sitting around is creepy, especially for specifically trained Marines.

"Sergeant Cunningham for Master Sergeant Kennedy" Jim said at the OR front desk. The office was strangely quiet, at least compared to the last two times he had been in here. Where are the newer replacements and new team members, we only have one functioning team, us? There is supposed to be at least four units and possibly six, a lot of guys still not here.

"Hi Jim" was the call from behind the last desk, it was S/Sgt. Holloway. "He was just here, maybe went next door to get coffee. We don't have a setup here yet, for coffee and stuff. We will soon though, the boss is getting tired of going next door several times a day. He sure won't ask us to go, but we always ask if we are going. He hates the idea of being waited on." Jim smiled, "Sounds like a good guy. I knew that from the very first time I met Sgt Kennedy, a real Marine's Marine."

"Oh yeah" was Holloway's response. "This guy lives for the Marine Corps and takes everyone into his personal consideration, regardless of your MOS or rank."

Holloway came closer to Jim and said quietly, "The Top" thinks the world of you. He talks about how you treat your men and how you are the future of the Marine Corps."

Just as Holloway finished talking, in walked Master Sergeant Joseph Kennedy. He was carrying a tray with a steel mess hall pitcher and pints of milk on the tray and 6 no-handle mugs. "Coffee is here. I had to promise that one of you would bring the tray and pitcher back before evening mess."

Holloway volunteered to do that since he was mess NCO this week. A chorus of "thanks Top" came from behind the clerk's desks. Kennedy is one good guy Jim thought. This is how to treat subordinates; and do it without expecting anything in return. Jim made a mental note to make an effort to learn more about stuff like this from Sergeant Kennedy.

"Do you take your coffee black Jim?" asked Kennedy, putting a mug in front of Cunningham and pouring from a now half full pitcher. "Yes I do, thank you." Jim pulled his chair closer to the table and in an almost confidential manner said. "This is so different than when we had a tent city to live in. It's hard to get used to but also real pleasant. It almost doesn't feel like the Marine Corps Sarge."

"No it sure doesn't but HQ Far East has dubbed Marine Recon an elite battalion with a special and elite mission. All this goes with that status. I think if we take all of this on a day by day basis and avoid getting used to being pampered then we can survive this whole ordeal."

When Jim looked up from his coffee Kennedy was standing in front of him with this huge grin on his face.

"Down to business Sergeant Cunningham, as you may have noticed we lack several Recon Units, instead of six we have two. One of which is shot up and in transit to a hospital ship in the Yellow Sea, the uninjured ones are due back sometime today. I have a dilemma, in as much as I have a Non com with no unit and no experience. I proposed that we attach Sgt. Ken Daro to your unit for this next mission. I want him to be assigned as the assistant patrol leader with you Jim as the Mission and Patrol leader. Daro's job is to learn your job, on the job; he is not to make command decisions those are for you to do."

“I understand that he technically outranks you, he has been a Sergeant for almost a year, but he has no experience in the field, as a Recon. His combat experience highly qualifies him. He is a survivor to the Chosen debacle, but his Recon experience is nil.” Jim noted that Sergeant Kennedy spoke in long continuous sentences. He does not wish to nor will he permit any interruptions while he’s talking.

“Am I supposed to jump up and down Sarge and make noises that I won’t go now that you have assigned this highly qualified combat Marine to my little Unit?” Kennedy was so surprised by Jim’s statement that he reached out and swatted Jim on the shoulder. “Jim you got me on that one. I was not sure how you would take having an assistant, even a guy like Ken. I should have known you would do whatever we asked of you. Thanks, for the laugh and also being a good Marine.”

“If you like I can introduce you to him now and you can do the same with your Unit at mess, what do you think?” “Excellent idea, I wish I had thought of it.” Jim was still in his kidding mode and Kennedy was not going to interrupt him.

“Then it’s done c’mon, he is in the NCO billet. There was no sense in putting him in a hut alone so he has been contending with the likes of the Gunny for over a month.”

“Moving in with us will be a whole new life for him, the Unit gets pretty rowdy at times, but I think he will like them. The new guys fit in just fine too. We had a “tell us who you are” session and it worked out well, even Doc opened up.” Jim was obviously pleased with the sharing. “Sergeant Daro can use the other cubicle, it has a bunk, bedding, a desk and a footlocker.”

The “Top” was ready to go and so was Jim. “Should I leave the mug here or bring it out to the front?” “Oh no just leave it, the staff have to come in here when we leave. Holloway will get things ready for tonights after action meeting with the uninjured Unit Two men.” Kennedy noticed an interest on Jim’s face and added. “Most likely tomorrow Gunny will fill you and your men in on what happened to them over the last three weeks. I am going to keep the meeting small, just the XO and some Non Com’s and the returnees. I don’t want these guys to feel that they screwed up or to feel that they are on the hot seat.” Kennedy’s demeanor changed quickly. “There is always plenty of room for criticism of any mission. When one goes bad the hawks are out looking for blood. Not this time and not on my watch, ever.”

“Let’s go meet Daro.” With that Master Sergeant Kennedy stood up, straightened his shoulders and once again became the Recon Operations NCO, “The Top.” Jim was so in awe of this man it was almost religious. The two Marines exited the Orderly Room without saying a word to anyone, even each other.

Jim made a note of that this is how you can tell who the guy in charge is. No wasted words or wasted effort. Remember that, Cunningham told himself.

“Ken I want you to meet Jim Cunningham the Unit leader of Unit One. We had a brief chat about you joining them temporarily. Jim gets an “Aide de Camp” and you get some Recon and jump experience.” Both Sergeants looked at each other and laughed at Sergeant Kennedy’s humor.

Each of the three striped Sergeants knew that Jim couldn’t carry Ken’s jock when it came to combat experience. Keeping the moment light was the “Top’s” way of making an awkward moment of introduction an easy one. Jim broke the ice by suggesting that he help Ken with his stuff so they could get to #15 and introduce Ken to the rest of the Unit. This way they could all go to mess together and get better acquainted. All eighteen of them were now Recon Unit One.

Ken Daro’s bags were all packed and ready to go, so Jim grabbed the seabag and Ken deferred and let him. Ken carried his weapons and winter gear and off they went, all of a quarter of a mile to #15. When the two sergeants came through the door of hut #15 there was silence. Everyone had a question but no one asked it.

Jim told them that Sergeant Ken Daro was now a part of Unit One for the next mission. Daro is going to be the assistant patrol leader and will be occupying the other cubicle in #15. “How far did you get with the laundry list for the armory?” Jim figured he had best get these guys thinking of the mission and not who and what this new “assistant” was going to be doing.

“All done” was Ortega’s reply. “Yeah you’re done but the rest of us have to figure out how many clips we can stuff into the new ammo sleeves. Hell you are still lugging around WW One equipment; this more modern stuff requires thought and finesse.” Ira Hayes had a way with words all right. “Jeez, I leave you alone for 30 minutes and you probably squabbled the entire time, Jim was getting into the playful mood of the group.

Ken just looked on and wondered when he would get a chance to have a squabbling Unit of his own.

“Did anyone make a list for the range ammo?” “I did Sarge,” it was Willie Cottie one of the newly added men. “No big deal, 30 rounds times the number of weapons of each type, piece of cake. Oh I also added twenty-eight rounds for each forty-five we are carrying. Actually I added twenty-eight more to that, so Doc could practice too. He may be Navy but he may have to defend us at some point.”

Oh yeah thought Jim. Willie was going to fit in just fine. Doc had the happiest look on his face he really did want to fire on the range. I had better ask him about his skill level. It is one thing to want to fire a Colt 1911 forty-five, but a whole other thing the first time. Firing one can numb your arm when it is fired.

Jim decided to make a mess call. Everyone got up, brushed off and lined up to go out the door and fall into formation.

Sergeant Daro was duly impressed, even the new guys picked up right away and fell in and dressed down. Jim asked. “Sergeant Daro would you be kind enough to march us to the mess hall?” Jim took up the trailing position and Doc was in his usual “guide on” spot.

Usually at meals most of the guys moved a couple of tables together so the whole group sat together, like a family. Today with such a large group, eighteen in all moving many tables around seemed like a dumb thing to do. No one person did it, but the Unit somehow broke into two groups and put three tables together in two separate places and the two groups ate separately.

Jim was impressed with the ingenuity but was concerned that there would be clichés starting. What a worrywart you are he told himself. Jim decided to not interfere but to grab an open chair at one of the tables. It just so happened that Ken spotted an open chair in a group other than the one Jim sat down in. I can find out a little about some of the Unit’s men casually instead of in some formal arrangement.

“Do you guys eat together at every meal or is this just a coincidence?” Ken decided to break the conversational ice. “Yep, ever since we got back and have been located in this compound we go everywhere as a group.” Ott was the first to speak.

Ken replied, "So you were over in the old tent city area last year. Eating over there was an adventure. Here it's like eating in a real restaurant." Ott kept up the dialog, "Sarge, I'm Ott one of the snipers, friends call me Mel. We have been so spoiled in the past five weeks it is hard to figure what is going on."

"Well, Mel, I for one am not going to bitch about it. But yeah what's going on is a great question."

"Sarge, I'm Rossellini the new sniper in the Unit, Louie to all who love me. Does this seem like a very large group to making these kinds of missions?" "Hell Louie, when I was in the trenches I wanted as many weapons as I could get around me. Does anything about this large of a unit concern you specifically?" "Not really, but listening to the guys who went on their first mission the smaller group got in, did the deed and got out. As the Unit gets bigger, large numbers are harder to hide."

"You're right of course. The AAR indicated that sleep was hard to come by because the job was bigger than the planning has assumed." Sgt. Daro continued on with, "By the time we have done thirty or forty of these missions, the planners will get the number right."

Wallie Adams looked at the smile on Ken Daro's face and thought he would jump into the conversation too. "Sergeant Daro, what got you into this Unit?" "Well, that is not a very long story, but I got lucky when I inquired about joining a Recon Unit. Major Wallace heard about my request and here I am."

"I don't know if we are going to continue introducing ourselves tonight or not, I sure hope so. If it is okay with you, I would like to hear your story." "PFC Adams I think that would be a good idea. We had better run that by Sgt. Cunningham first before I commit to it."

"Commit to what Ken?" Jim had overheard that part of the conversation. "Adams asked if I would be willing to share my story with them this evening. It seems like I missed hearing some personal stories yesterday." "Yes you did, if the guys want to continue that, then we can do it after evening mess. Are you okay with that Ken?" "Yep."

## Chapter Twelve

### More People Stories

#### Mario's turn

After eating, the Unit reassembled in #15, sensing that everyone was waiting for Ken Daro to tell his story. Mario Ortega pulled his footlocker out from in front of his bunk and stood on it. "Hello everyone, I'm Mario Ortega from Brooklyn NY, I am 22 years old and before the Marines I was a taxi driver in three of New York Cities Boroughs. I did graduate from High School but school for me was a pain in the ass."

"I worked after school at a garage, cleaning up and stuff like that. I was taking auto and engine mechanics in my senior year. That's how I got my taxi job. The garage owner had done a lot of repairs on their cars, I asked for a job and got one. Driving all kinds of people all kinds of places was fun and educational. Strangers tell taxicab drivers lots of stuff some is even useful. But that came to an end like a lot of things in life do. Can you spell draft?"

"Not being particularly fond of being in the Army. When the draft board sent me a letter, I went to see the Marine recruiter. A lot of people I looked up to in my neighborhood were in the Marines in World War deuce. I took their advice and joined up. In high school I had spent some time on the rifle team, and when I went to the rifle range in boot camp I scored really high with several weapons."

"The new sniper school had openings, as did the Recon school. So I signed up for both of them and lucky for me, I got 'em both. That's where I met Mel, my partner in the sniper business. We are a team within a team."

"Oh yeah, my mom and dad live in the same house where I was born. I have a brother and two sisters all of them younger than me. Mom's a housewife and dad works for Brooklyn Union Gas Company. He works daily in a lot of the tunnels under the city. He and I can compare tunnel stories some day. Hey partner how about your story. Here is my partner Mel."

#### Mel's Story

“Thanks Mario and hi everyone, my name is Charles Ott from the real NY City, Manhattan. As Frankie Sinatra calls it, the “Big Apple.” Please call me Mel after the NY Giants player and coach Mel Ott. He’s no relation but I like the name, Mel. What the hell, so what’s in a name, as they say?”

“I am 22 years old and majored in Art and Design in Bronx High School of Fine and Industrial Arts. That got me a job at the NY Museum of Natural History. I was there learning to design and build lifelike dioramas for the various exhibits. Since this job was not some vital part of the war effort my draft board sent me a notice just like Mario’s.”

“I too had joined the rifle club when I High School. There was no other way I would ever see a rifle or pistol and they fascinated me. Teams I was on won a couple of local tournaments with both of these weapons. When the notice came I decided to enlist in the Marines. My parents were not very supportive until after I got in the Corps and saw how happy and proud I was.”

“Boot camp was far from a breeze but I got through it and was successful on the range too; the Range DI told me about Sniper and Recon schools. I signed up for each of them and wound up, like Mario, getting both. Recon school is where I met Mario and the rest of this unit and I am glad to welcome the new guys to #15.”

“Now I would like to take the opportunity to introduce Sgt. Ken Daro. The footlocker is all yours Sergeant.” Ken was totally surprised; he was expecting to be the last and not the next guy to share his story. Well here goes.

### **Ken Daro’s Story**

Ken stood up and walked over to Mel’s footlocker and stood on it, he wanted to acknowledge Ott’s invitation to join in the dialog; he did so by using Ott’s footlocker.

“Thanks Mel, Hi ya’ll. I am Ken Daro of Richmond Virginia, and 25 years old. I was born in Leesburg Virginia, in November of 1927. The depression came along and my birth parents could not care for me. When I was seven years old they put me in a County Home for Children.”

“When they did not return for me in over one year, I was put up for adoption. Now some people would be pissed if something like that happened to them. In reality it was the best thing that could have happened to me. A lady who worked at the home and her



husband had no children. They foster cared me for a short time and then adopted me.” Ken paused ever so slightly, while picturing his mom and dad, he sighed.

“My mom Anne Daro was, as I said, a worker at the home and my dad Tony was a truck mechanic; both had full time jobs during the depression. I had a great childhood in their home, lots of love, attention and just plain fun. And then came the war. My dad Tony was drafted into the Navy and was killed in 1944 in the Pacific.”

“I was 17 that year, and when I graduated from High School I enlisted in the Marines specifically to kill Japs.” Another quiet sigh and a catch in his voice, but he continued. “I got my chance, the Marines sent me to the Pacific. I was involved in the Okinawa campaign and stayed there as part of the occupation forces. Our job was cleaning out tunnels and caves of fanatical Japs.” He breathed slowly and caught himself from racing through his story. He fought letting his emotions show.

“After a few months of that I was moved to Japan as part of the surrender slash occupation forces. From there I was sent to Parris Island as a Drill Instructor. This was a welcome change from being in a devastated Japan and a lot closer to home too. My Mom became very ill with a heart condition in early 1949 and died in November of '49. I thought my life was over no family, no real friends no nothing. So I volunteered to go to Korea as a trainer for the ROK Marines. That was January of 1950; you all know what happened that summer.”

“The so-called North Korean Army invaded the south of Korea and all hell broke loose. Training had barely begun and we had to support a bunch of Koreans that were not sure if they wanted to fight, let alone die.” Ken looked at the young faces in front of him and thought how he must have looked to the veterans of the island fighting. When he arrived for duty in the Pacific he was angry and full of hate.

“In September I became part of the Inch'on invasion forces and we began the march North, what a debacle. On the day after Thanksgiving the “Home By Christmas” push back got underway. That was November 24<sup>th</sup>, the ROK and US Armies headed for the Yalu and beyond. They were both on the western side of North Korea. The Marines were in the central valleys and hills of North Korea with no communications with the Army. We had no idea what they were experiencing.”

“From November 27<sup>th</sup> until December 10<sup>th</sup> we fought hordes of Chinese and North Korean soldiers. There was something like eight thousand Marines of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions against thirty or so thousand Chicoms. We were stuck in Toktong Pass, very low on ammo and no way to set up defenses. We were screwed.”

“This was the coldest winter in 100 years, it turns out that the temperature reached a whopping minus fifty degrees. We were stealing ponchos and gear off of the dead to stay warm.” Do I continue this way or just cut it short and step down? Nope, you need to get this out of your system they are your new family. These guys understand, suck it up and get on with it.

“Then came a career changing moment and decision. Our platoon leader was a Second Lieutenant who thought we should surrender and save as many lives as possible. As his platoon sergeant I was supposed to obey. Instead, I punched him out and took charge of my platoon. There were one hundred and twenty men just as scared as I was but unlike the Lt. were willing to fight.”

“We made a plan to encircle the Chicoms and out flank their support and make our way back to Haguru-ri. The weather cleared just in time for us. US air strikes stopped the slaughter and gave us good cover and we regrouped back out of the mountains. Fighting every inch of the way, twelve miles took us twelve hours. The Cavalry literally arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup>, the British 41<sup>st</sup> Royal Marines hooked up with us. They had to fight their way out of Koto-ri to come and help us. Fine soldiers those Royals’.”

“The Chicoms had attacked with one purpose, to annihilated the First Marine Division. Of the eighty of us to escape forty-five were wounded, fifteen critically. The rest of the platoon was dead and they left where they died. HQ in Japan denied that the Chinese were involved. We had taken hundreds of them prisoners and still they denied any Chinese involvement.”

“When we were evacuated at Hungnam we were returned to Pusan. That is when I met Major, then Captain Wallace. I had to stand a Captain’s Mast for assaulting an officer. My punishment was a loss of one stripe to Corporal. My time in grade would restart after I completed ninety days of mess cooking plus a loss of one months pay. The Lieutenant was asked to resign and leave the service with a General Discharge.”

There, I got through what I have never told another living soul, should I be more remorseful? Shit just finish the story and let what happens happen.

“After my punishment I requested a new assignment to the Recon Units being formed up. They sent me to jump school in Japan with the Army’s 101<sup>st</sup> airborne unit. Sgt. Kennedy was selected to lead the new battalion as operations NCO and he referred me to Major Wallace at Battalion HQ.”

“The Major gave me a fresh start and here I am. I have taken a long time to tell my story; I did not want to leave anything out. I am not proud of my hitting an officer, but if another one makes the same remark I would do it again.”

“What was it mom always said about confessing something? “It would be mind and soul cleansing.” “Yes it is mom, thanks.”

“Yes I was wounded, several times. I have several holes in my lower body, you will see them when we shower. I just don’t want you to be disgusted with what you see. I can’t see them because most of them are on my ass and back. I’m told that they add character to my butt.”

“Thanks for letting me join your Unit, however temporary. I will do my best to earn your respect.” Ken became very serious for a moment. “You know, a lot of respect has to go to Sergeant Cunningham. He has taken another person of equal rank into your Unit for the benefit of a better battalion. That gentlemen is a man secure in his own leadership.”

With that he sat down on the footlocker and sighed heavily. That was tougher than I ever figured it would be was going through his mind.

### **The Firing Range**

After a good nights sleep the new larger unit was ready to tackle the planning and preparation part of the up coming mission number two. Before marching off to the mess hall Jim had informed the unit of rifle range practice between 1100 hours and 1230 hours. “We have a lot to accomplish, since many of us are using different weapons than before. It is essential that we learn to use them well.” Jim looked to Ken Daro to see if any disagreement was there, there wasn’t

“Everyone will fire the new M1 Carbines for score as well as the Thompson’s. There is no point in having these things if we all don’t know how to best use them.” Ken

made a hand gesture that Jim caught right away, "Ken you have something to add?" "Yes, I do Jim, every man must know how to reload every weapon we carry. I went through a time when some Marines were unfamiliar with other types of weapons and ammo." "Great point, the last time I fired a carbine was in boot camp and never had to reload a clip," responded Jim.

The trip to and from the mess hall was just like always, guys stayed in groups of two and three. Funny how that is thought Jim, he wanted to get the last eight guys who hadn't shared their story to do so tonight. Or depending on how much time they had at least by tomorrow. He was firm that "lights out" be at 2100 hours, no exceptions. The more rested these guys are, and me too, the better we can perform when it comes jump off day.

He broke the news to the unit that lunch would be at the rifle range. This meant a cardboard box lunch from the mess hall with a sandwich; some juice and maybe a piece of fruit and the chocolate brick from the C ration kit. Immediately after the rifle range would be the grenade range and then the exercise course.

No one had been able to use the new exercise equipment in the compound since the cold weather made it too difficult to erect the poles and stuff. "We can't be in too good of shape for this next job. Were at a lot higher elevation and larger terrain to cover on the way out, let's over prepare."

"Hearing no questions, then lets get our butts to the mess hall. I will order the lunch menu," he added jokingly. "You know the routine, Ken will do the drill I will drag and Doc is guidon." At the mess hall Jim was deciding how to break the Unit into smaller groups to exchange the M1 rifles for carbines and the sub-machine guns. He decided to divide #15 right down the middle aisle, have Ken take one side and I'll take the other.

Whoever needs what exchanged will get it, they each know what they need and how much of what ammo to get. We'll see how that works out. Jim leaned over to Ken's shoulder and told him what he had planned, Ken nodded and remarked "sounds like a plan to me, we'll do it."

Jim should not have worried so much about the exchange it went very smoothly. The MP's were impressed with how clean all the equipment was, nice touch. The range

ammo was in cases as were the grenades. The MP's suggested coming back for the range stuff after the exchanged gear was brought back to our hut. Another good idea. We can check out two deuce and half's and haul all this stuff to the ranges and still have plenty of room. Ken suggested that he walk to the Motor Pool and get a truck and come back to the MP station, Jim nodded and off went Ken.

Shortly, there was the undeniable sound of a pair of GMC two and a half ton trucks outside the door of the MP station. "The motor pool is supplying the vehicles and the drivers for the rest of the day. Each truck has an insulated cooler chest filled with ice and sodas and another with hot coffee. Complements of the transportation detail." Jim commented, that he would be sending Ken on a lot more trips after this. Jim was gratified in the thoughtfulness of the Motor Pool guys.

The surprises never seem to stop, how can we ever thank so many people. Jim had to confront the fact that everyone wanted to contribute. No matter how small in the success of these Recon Units. He remembered the words of the Gunny. "Everyone can't serve but everyone can contribute" Gunny claims he saw that on a "War Bond Poster" during WW II.

The trucks were loaded and after a stop at the mess hall to pick up the box lunches the unit moved to the rifle range for practice. "It's now ten hundred hours we can be at the range in thirty minutes and get setup and ready to fire by eleven hundred. Let's be careful and get this done right." "Yes sir, Sergeant Cunningham" came the agreement from both vehicles. These guys are ready for a mission; I can just feel it in my bones, thought Jim. He would check with Ken when they get back about preparedness and how to best assess a group this large.

The unit showed its prowess with weapons at the ranges. The sniper range of course had targets at one thousand yards, for the show offs according to Longo. The range had an unusual setup. The control room or tower, to be precise, was set in the middle; three ranges fanned out like fingers on a glove. The center range was for long-range shooters, snipers and such. The left range was for short range arms like the handguns and Thompson's and the right range handled the long rifle or infantry weapons including the BAR.

The range instructor assigned each Marine to a location and target slot. The guys in the trenches behind the targets would keep score and radio in the individual achievements. "I will pass the scores on to your squad leaders." He presumed there were two squads since Unit One had to buck sergeants. No one bothered to correct his thinking.

They started to fire exactly at 1100 hours and fired for ten minutes. The horn sounded and all weapons were set on "safe" as the range monitors checked the targets. "Lots of great scores guys" shouted the gunnery sergeant of the range. "The snipers hold the title and the submachine gun guys drag up the rear, but all together some fine shooting." Jim was pleased to hear this, particularly about the new men.

"Sounds like we have a winning team here Ken. I guess I need more time with a Tommy gun, practice, practice, practice." Ken nodded and made the comment that "The range is one thing being under fire is way different." "Yeah I guess so, you know we never fired a shot on our last mission." Ken looked Jim in the eyes and told him. "Let's keep it that way too."

When the second firing session was over it was lunch break. The range had a sheltered area in which to sit and get somewhat out of the weather. It was still after all February and tops was about 40 degrees. At lunch it was decided to continue with the team introductions and not wait until after the evening meal. Not only the unit members were there but so were the two drivers and some of the range people; it did not make any difference. Danny Ormond stood up and said he had to tell his story next. "I may never be able to do this again." So Jim said, "go ahead Danny it's your show."

### **Danny's Story**

"Hello friends, my name is Daniel Ormond, I call you my friends 'cause I have never had any friends until I became a member of this Unit. That was right after advanced infantry school. I am 19 years old or so I am told. You see I never knew my parents; I was abandoned at a charity hospital in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I have spent my entire life going from home to home with whoever would take in boys the state could not place for adoption. My childhood is a blur. I do not remember ever going to a birthday party or to a church or a real school."

“Later on in high school are my first good memories, I did okay in school because a few people cared about my successes and me. Team sports were only for kids whose parents could afford the additional insurance and travel fees to go to the away games. Nobody I knew was going to do that for me, so I stopped going out for the teams.” Dan took a deep breath, the cold air made the breath even more pronounced when he exhaled.

“All my life I have created a fake family since few people really care. I made up all kinds of stories. No one probably believed them, that’s okay I did and that is all that mattered. I wound up at age thirteen living on the Pine Ridge Lakota Sioux Reservation with an Indian family that was so dysfunctional my life seemed normal. I have never had a girl friend. Hell I have never asked any girl even to go to the movies. I was ashamed of my life until I joined the Marine Corps.”

Danny sighed again, long and loud, a giant weight was being lifted off of his back. Now all he had to do was get through this and he could feel better about himself. “When I was processed in Chicago, I was asked where I wanted to go to boot camp. I was floored, no one had ever had given me a choice of anything before that, ever. The recruiter told me all the things I needed in order to enlist; one of them was a birth certificate. I did not have one. I mentioned that to one of the local guys who were joining up and he put me in touch with a guy who knew some other guy who made me one. It cost me twenty bucks. Even my birth date is a lie. I picked something I thought was close enough to get me into the Corps and used that date.”

“When I went back to the recruiter, I asked where he had gone to boot camp. It was Parris Island. That was a great choice for me because that is where I met my new family, all of you.” Danny took another breath and let it out slowly, just like when you exit an aircraft, let it out slowly. “Some of you I met in AI or in Recon school. When the Corps sent me to Demolition School I was in my glory.”

“I could now learn how to blow up every effin home I had ever been thrown out. I could now get even with them, whoever them is.” A slight chuckle came from a couple of members who sympathized with Danny. “Happily I got over that crazy idea. Lying has been a major part of my hiding from unseen things, the ghosts of my unknown past.”

Standing just a little bit taller Danny started to feel a whole lot better. I can spill my guts out to these friends and it will not be held against me, and if it is, so what.

“I graduated from Pine Ridge High School on the reservation, what a joke that was. In spite of a lot of bad stuff that went on in the schools I attended there was one lady, who had a minimal education, and always encouraged me to learn to, “read write and cipher”. In the beginning I did that to please her. Later it became fun to read and learn new things. That lady, Mrs. Cross, saved my life.”

“No really good teacher ever stayed more than a year. Those that did stay were either drunks or could not get a teaching job some place else. If it weren't for the government school system they would be unemployed.”

“So after high school I got a job with a trucking company as a loader and unloader. That was how I got to Chicago where I eventually enlisted. Some of the drivers and helpers had spent time in the Marines and were proud of it. They told me I couldn't go wrong by joining. How right they were. I am pleased and proud to call all of you my friends and family. Thanks.”

As Danny started to step down from the bale of straw he had been standing on the rest of the Unit rose as one and gave him a rousing round of applause. All Danny Ormond could do was blush.

“Hey troops, I think we should save the next share until after evening mess. Without fear of being wrong, let me tell Danny for all of us in this Unit, we love you Dan. You are indeed one of our family.” With that said Jim started giving instructions for the next set of firing sequences. “Everybody switch weapons with someone, learn something new about another weapon. Snipers included.”

Of course the snipers were not going to hand over their most precious possession They stayed with their weapons as each of the others tried their marksmanship on the long-range targets. There were a few embarrassed Marines on the range that day. Most of the troops liked the machine gun range. The Thompson Sub Machine gun could really tear up a target.

“Shooting for real accuracy with a Thompson was not essential. Just put the slugs out there and let the bastards run into them.” Those esteemed words came from the Range Gunnery Sergeant. The unit members liked him a lot.



The grenade range was a peculiar one. The target could not be seen; only a puff of red smoke gave them something to aim at. "You don't have to come too close to your target to make good use of a grenade. Accuracy keeps you from hurting your own men." This Range Marine was a real stern sort, no nonsense and no smiles either. Most of the Unit did okay; no one made any extraordinary grenade tosses.

Next was the exercise area, they had to mount up into the trucks to get to that area. It was muddy, slippery and well used by the time Unit One got the chance to use the ropes and wall barriers.

Crawling was going to be shitty, good thing this was the last stop; at least they could shower before mess call. "My God" yelled MJ, "with all of this soup on the ground, they are still running water through the pits, are they nuts or what." Everybody just grumbled and waited for the exercise Non com to give them the route and the routines to get through the obstacle course and rope climbs.

Climbing would be first, ropes then the pole climb and after that the retaining wall climb. The wall was about eight feet high with small handholds about six feet off the ground nothing unusual here. It was just like every other obstacle course, meant to embarrass a few and completely foil others.

This course had not met up with the Recon unit, the Non com was in for a surprise.

When the first man up the rope was there in record time the Non com huffed a bit. When each of them, including Doc went to the top, touched and slid down he was left a bit bewildered. Observing the wall climb he was amazed at the teamwork. He had no idea that five of these men had never worked together before today. The training they had was that good.

Also impressed were both Jim and Ken. Ken opted to act as an observer as the group became separated. Jim wanted to do the course and did very well too Ken made a note of this. As much as these guys bitched about the muck and mire they were swimming around in mud lakes created by the large streams of muddy water coming into the holes, what a mess.

This is going to be a sloppy ride back to the compound thought Sgt. Ken Daro. Maybe I will sit up front. No way, these guys will be on my ass all the time if I do that.

Relax and enjoy it. Ken could see what he missed by not going to the full Recon school. These guys are more than a Unit it really is a family. His attention was drawn to some laughter.

“Look at Doc over there splashing like a kid, oh if I only had a camera. I hope my unit is like this one. Well we will see, hopefully soon.” Ken was all by himself and talking out loud.

### **Getting Ready To Go**

Three hours after returning from the range and exercise area the Unit had showered changed into clean utilities. They were sitting around in a fairly large circle just chatting about what they had heard from Danny today. Most of the guys wanted to say something comforting to him but this was an unusual situation for most of them. Danny tried to make it easy for them by not being in the center of things. He had taken off to the laundry to get caught up on stuff he needed to do. It was obvious that he wanted to be by himself so they gave him plenty of space.

The room smelled of gun cleaning solvent and oil, opening the windows was out of the question, the cold was getting colder. Nighttime in Korea was lousy, dark, damp and cold. What the hell was summer going to be like?

Sergeants, Jim and Ken had gone over to the Non Commissioned Officers billets with the Gunny to review the range proficiency results. Ira wanted to know if anyone failed the range quals would they be left behind or have to stay after school as punishment?

Doc grabbed his laundry bag, which was only half full and went wordlessly out the back door. If anyone could talk to Dan right now it would be the Doc. No one commented, they just kept cleaning and oiling.

Maybe the meeting of the Sergeants would produce an outline of the next mission's plan. The last mission planning session was exactly two weeks before the actual jump date. We're close to that now. No sooner had the thought passed Bruce's head and in walked the three Sergeants each with a serious look on the face.

“Okay, listen up, after tonight's mess we have a meeting in the meeting hall starting at 1930 hours.” The voice was that of Gunnery Sergeant Papushka,

unmistakable in its tone. "No one is exempted and you will be on time, planners from Japan and Pusan will be on hand. It seems we have to do more with less for about another two months." The two junior sergeants were essentially at attention as the Gunny spoke.

Newly promoted Corporal Bruce Strong suggested "Let's hustle getting these weapons cleaned and put away so we can be ready to go early to mess and be back in time to be at the meeting hall early." "Great idea Strong", said the Gunny, "I'm pleased you got the message" the sarcasm was not lost on the rest of the team. Each hustled the cleaning process and was going to put the weapons into the locking wall cabinets as quickly as possible. All the cleaning rags went into a steel can with a ventilated lid and stuck outside alongside the back door. Spontaneous combustion was something no one wanted inside the building.

After going to the head and washing the cleaning stuff off their hands the entire Unit, including Doc and Danny, assembled for the march to the mess hall. This was going to be the first meeting for the new arrivals and they each were afraid to ask what to expect. Louie made it a point he was going to ask during mess. I don't care if they laugh at me or reject my questions.

What he and the others learned at mess was that the team had very little input. They spent the time listening to what the intelligence people knew about the target area. Each meeting was different because each target was different. Since the info at the last meeting was less than good. This meeting will be filled with more details and the intel guys will tell us what the consensus was among the intel brass.

This information came to the new men in bits and pieces from each of the original Unit at the table. Oh well, go to the meeting and find out what they want us to do was the order of the day.

Unit One marched to the Meeting Hall in the usual formation, Doc as guidon and Jim trailing with Ken calling cadence. Jim thought what we need is a guidon flag that has the Recon Insignia sewn on it. Maybe I will suggest that to the Gunny, he smiled as he imagined the Gunny's response.

Once inside the hall the Unit members stood along the outer rear wall facing the front wall with a large movie screen. It had been suggested that the Unit members

remain standing pending the arrival of the officers who would conduct the briefing session. Then all members would be seated. When the Battalion CO Major Wallace came in the motioned for all of the standing Marines to be seated. He briefly looked at his watch and smiled at the rest of the assembled and said, "They are late, hope they brought a note from home."

The room lights were extinguished except for a few on the side and the slide projector began humming, the meeting had begun, on time. A voice from behind the seated Unit One members stated that the next photos were of several suspected tunnel sites currently under investigation by FEAF HQ. New high-resolution cameras' that are mounted in USAF reconnaissance aircraft give a pretty good picture of tunnel activity. This is based upon week by week traffic around and on the mountains and suspected tunnels."

"The concern the Air Forces had was the use of these tunnels as anti aircraft emplacements. They were less concerned about the use of them for storage and bomb shelters, those could be dealt with at a later date. Gun emplacements had not been a problem until recently in the west of Korea. Most fighter aircraft fly high enough to avoid it. Cargo and bomber aircraft are more vulnerable since their missions are not high altitude ones."

The voice showed several mountains some snow covered, in the central zone of the country. He then moved to a picture of the Unit's current mission target. It was a foreboding picture. The photo showed lots of snow and a limited area to drop cargo and jump into on either side of the mountain's peak. The left side of the mountain looked as if a landslide had occurred recently. A hand went up and asked if it was time for questions yet? "Fire away" was the reply from the voice in the back.

"This is Corporal Bruce Strong and that looks like an avalanche on the side of that hill, is that what it is or something else." "That is exactly what we suspect it is also. That is why we do weekly flyovers. The next picture was taken last week and I think you will notice a difference in the terrain." Sure enough the landslide had disappeared and the rock and dirt was exposed in just one weeks time. In less than ten days you will be airdropped into this area, providing the snow remains absent. The peak of this hill, as you put it, is just over three thousand feet."

The unseen voice continued. "Your air drop altitude is expected to be at the two thousand foot level. Intelligence has determined the mouth of the tunnel to be well below that. Hauling your munitions uphill is not part of the plan.

The voice continued, "I showed the first picture because it provided a better look at what we think is the tunnel entrance. It has the convex shape covered with snow and ice." He then showed a slide that had both pictures side by side. The pictures were smaller but the detail was still good. It sure looked like a mine tunnel entrance. "If the weather cooperates and more snow recedes from the western slope of the mountain, hill that is, the drop zone will be much better defined."

The lights came on again and the voice walked to the front of the room. "Welcome everyone, I am Major Hue, I am of Korean descent but am an American by birth and education. My parents are both from the north of Korea and I heard stories of these mountains all of my life. Both the good and the bad of them. The good part being about skiing and the climbing upon them. The bad were how they were used as places where slaves and prisoners were kept to build these tunnels and caves."

He added, "Both the Japanese and later the Communists, including the Russians and Chinese, have plans to use them for indistinct purposes. We, and most importantly, you and your team, want them destroyed and made unusable for any purpose."

Pointing to his chest, "As you can see by my uniform I am a US Army Major, I had to be sneaked onto the base because this compound is off limits to the Army." The remark got its intended response, laughter. "Also, I am not in the regular army. I have been inducted for 2 years as an advisor to your high command in the areas of oriental studies and history."

"At one time not too long ago, your Major Wallace was a student of mine; I am a professor of oriental and eastern studies at UCLA. Major Wallace majored in beer runs to the student union and was an honor student at that task." More laughter until Major Hue raised his hand, "But like the true leader that he is, he invited me to share with each of you the real world of the hills and valleys of northern Korea."

He reached for a carton on the table. "I have prepared a handout that discusses the topography and the type of ground you will encounter throughout the central area of North Korea. The most northern part closer to Russia is much different. That part of the

country is granite and unstable and prone to earthquakes, that makes it a poor choice for caves or tunnels.” The major shuffled through a pile of documents looking for something in particular, “Ah here it is, I could not make a slide of this but I will pass out copies so you can follow what I am saying.”

One of the OR clerks took a handful of the handouts and began passing them around. It was then that most of the Unit members noticed that all of the seats were filled.

The late arrivers had come in very quietly; once Major Wallace gets a hold of them it won't be very quiet. “I have verified the substance of the rocks and soil you will be jumping into. What I did was call my father and ask him what it really was like. His input is what you have in your hands.” Most of the Unit members looked at each other and smiled. The newest members were a bit unnerved by all of this, particularly the casualness of the meeting.

The briefing continued for another half hour and then the XO stood up and recommended a head break. “Be back in fifteen minutes, and leave all papers and notes here.” The place emptied out in record time as the enlisted men had the furthest to go to get to their heads. Gunny and the two Buck Sergeants, Ken and Jim headed to the NCO heads.

In less than ten minutes all of the Unit One members were back in their seats and pouring over the multi-page handout. Some of it made sense and some didn't. One of the newbie's, Wallie Adams, asked Jim if there would be a question and answer period afterward. Jim suggested that if he had a pertinent question to just ask it, don't wait for later.

When the meeting was reconvened, in exactly fifteen minutes time, Major Wallace stood up and asked for any questions. Wally raised his hand slowly. “Go ahead son” was the Major's acknowledgement. “Sir from the detail photo this ground on the lower slope looks like shale debris, if it is, then tunneling has to be deep inside the mountain and at a steep angle to support any walls and ceiling.”

“Very good” said Major Hue, “what is your name young man?” “Wallie Ad, sorry, PFC Walter Adams sir” he stammered at first and now was okay. “Charlie and I used to,

oh sorry again sir, PFC Charles Dreyer and I were discussing the photo and we both worked on job sites with this kind of debris, it is highly unstable.”

“Then you are both correct, there in lies the dilemma. Do we waste time blowing up something that is going to collapse of its own weight, or has someone devised a method of shoring that supports such a flimsy terrain? I don’t know.” Everyone started to pour over the photos in the handouts to get a better idea of what they could expect.

Jim was very impressed with both of these guys picking this detail up so quickly. He was equally impressed with their comfort in getting an answer. Ken and Jim smiled at each other. Both leaders were thinking about what the conversations were going to be like, not only in #15 but also the mess hall and the showers. These guys were lit up good this mission is already underway.

“One good thing about shale is that it is not too bad to land in when parachuting. Unless someone is shooting at you of course.” Major Hue had a wry sense of humor.

Major Wallace took the floor again, “This is the first of several briefings that will be conducted prior to your next mission. Take these handouts with you and study them. In two days we will meet again and cover some more details. Do not lose or misplace any pages of these handouts. They are all marked “secret, dispose of properly” okay that is all for tonight. Will the officers please remain seated? The Non coms and enlisted men are dismissed, thanks again.”

The Non coms and enlisted men looked at each other, got up and departed discretely. No call to attention, no formal “meeting dismissed” it was very informal and disconcerting to these men. What was going on with the BCO? “Look men,” Gunny sensed the unrest. “It is not for us to worry about the meeting protocol. We will just be prepared the next time for a more formal dismissal.”

He continued herding the group out the back door of the meeting room. “I think the BCO has something on his mind and just wanted to get on with it. Just get back to #15 and you can discuss the handout and put together questions for the next meeting.” Cunningham broke into the pause, “Thanks Gunny we will do exactly as you suggested. G’night Sarge.” The unit continued towards #15 straggling as opposed to being in a squad formation and marching.

A quick review of the handout showed a couple of pages in rock identification. After some small talk about it, Jim said he would look over the pages and with the other members who are familiar with rocks and rock formations. They'd put together something each can carry to understand the various terrains the unit would be working in.

The next five days were busy ones. Every other day ended with a formal briefing meeting after evening mess; each one lasted exactly ninety minutes. The enlisted personnel and Non coms entered the room first and stood behind their chair at parade rest. The lower level officers entered and one of the Non coms called the room to attention and finally the XO, CO and the BCO came in took their place and ordered "At ease, please be seated." The unit members felt more comfortable with the formality; it felt like the Marine Corps again.

The presentations by the HQ officers from Japan and Pusan were very informative. Intelligence was pouring into these two locations and the their tasks were to validate this data as accurate or what was hearsay and useless. Some of the information did not particularly affect Unit One's mission profile, which was to destroy tunnels and caves.

Some of it was more in line with the other Unit's profile for Interdiction, Interrogation and Annihilation. No one ever used the last word of the expression "Eye, Eye and A" They were referred to as "I&I."

Jim and Ken after the first meeting covering these broader intelligence briefings. Discussed the possibility of Unit One becoming an "Eye, Eye and A" Unit. Neither thought it would happen unless the newer Recon men did not arrive in a timely fashion. There was at least a two months delay in the last two Units arrival.

Jim, just before going to bed, checked the calendar, only four days to go before mission two gets underway. The guys are getting restless and if I ask them one more time to check their gear they will crucify me. Oh well, get out the nails, 'cause I intend to ask them again tomorrow and everyday after that too. With that he punched his pillow and said goodnight to Peggy.



## Chapter Thirteen

### Mission Two Underway

The roaring two engines were felt as well as heard by the members of Recon Unit One as the C-119 revved its' engines prior to taking off. The aircraft had taken over six hours to load and balance. The double-stacked containers of explosives and support gear totaling forty cases were firmly attached to the center rail of the aircraft. The eighteen men of Unit One were seated on either side of the cargo load. Each man held the parachute's static line that would attach to the steel cable overhead.

The in-flight time was estimated at two hours and twenty minutes, mostly due to evasion tactics. Most of the Unit members pretended to sleep. Mostly their eyes were closed and some prayed, some dreamed, and some were just plain apprehensive. Collectively they all just wanted to be on the ground, whatever the consequence or whatever the situation turned out to be.

The aircraft climbed to ten thousand feet and leveled off, it was cold but no oxygen was required at this altitude. The sky was gray below them, the weather guy said it was overcast at the drop zone and expected to stay that way for several days. No snow or rain was forecasted but the drop zone was still covered with about a foot of old snow.

Airplane rides to a drop zone were plain old boring, nothing to do but be with your own thoughts. At times that can be a real downer.

"Side cargo doors coming open" blasted over the overhead speakers. "Clear the openings and secure the doors." Everyone came alert to the announcement. The Air Force drop team was standing ready to push the cargo load out the side doors. "Descending to five thousand feet for our downwind leg. At each turn the aircraft will be five hundred feet lower, the drop will be at four thousand feet." The Unit members looked at each other somewhat bewildered the voice on the speakers added, "These altitudes are measured at sea level. Your mountain is three thousand and one feet high so your jump height will be between nine hundred to nine hundred and fifty feet. The cargo drop will be at one thousand and fifty feet relative to the ground."

The voice continued, "Any lower and we will lose too much airspeed to continue flying. Drop crew release the cargo latches." Holding straps were removed and kicked aside, the load shifted slightly. Each of the containers packages of two were sitting on a trolley-like pallet that lead to each side door opening. The double stacked container packages had its' static line attached to the ceiling cable. When the cargo exited the aircraft the drogue chute would deploy. The drogue pulled the main chute out of its pack so the cargo could reach the ground safely.

The cargo run was over and deemed successful. Now the aircraft was making its 180-degree turn to discharge the men of Recon Unit One. The jumpmaster stood at the end of the aircraft between the two side doors. "Stand up. Hook up" came over the speakers; each Unit member stood up, took their static line hook and attached it to the overhead cable. "Shake it once, shake it twice. Okay, now check the man in front of you. Okay, turn around check the man behind you. Okay, face the rear of the aircraft. Move to the rear of the aircraft." The red light was still on; the first man was in the door opening and ready to jump.

It was hard to distinguish one man from another, but the first ones in line on each side were the two sergeants Cunningham and Daro. Doc was somewhere in the middle of the right side facing the rear of the plane. He carried no weapons but had two large medical packs with him. The green light came on and one man on each side left the aircraft. One step behind him the next man left the aircraft. One by one they departed the aircraft. The last two jumpers had this great view of the other members with all chutes open and floating toward the ground. The last two men out of the aircraft were carrying BAR's to provide cover when retrieving the cargo drop.

This has to be the best jump ever thought Jim as he landed only a few feet from the cargo drop. He dumped the air out of his chute and looked around to see who was closest to him. My God, we are all pretty close together. He grabbed his hand-held radio and pressed the talk switch to contact the aircraft they had just departed.

"Recon One to Packet two four, do you read me, over?" "Loud and clear Recon One, looks like a good jump from up here, how do you see it?" "Looks good from here too, all chutes are dumped and we are very close to the cargo drop, thanks a lot, two four."

“Roger that One, we are going up to eight thousand feet to stay under the cloud cover and will do a racetrack pattern a few times to make sure all is okay. Your radios are working very well. When we depart you will move to channel one is that affirmative?”

“Roger that,” Jim replied and was now completely out of this harness and chute restraints. Being first out of the plane had its advantages. Being able to see where the rest of the team landed plus he could watch the chute dumping and folding by the team. Good job men, the radio interrupted his thinking, he was heading toward the cargo when it squealed.

Two voices talking at once each said the same thing. “Foot prints and drag marks on the ledge of the mountain above the entrance of the tunnel” Both the aircraft spotter and Ken had seen the same thing at the same time and jumped on the radio which were all still on “Guard” channel.

Ken got the channel all to himself and called the Unit to go to channel one and check in and to “ammo up” meaning to have all weapons loaded and safeties off. “Unit One this is Able Daro “hostiles” in he area.”

He and Jim had previously divided the Recon Unit One into two groups. Ken was group “able” Jim was group “baker”. All of the demolition men were in “able” except for Adams, he and his BAR were with Jim as was the Corpsman Doc Schmidt.

Each man’s call sign was either able or baker and his last name. Ken became “Able Daro” and Jim was “Baker Cunningham” and so it went until they all had checked in. Good show guys. These new radios are great thought Jim. If only we had headsets that could be worn under our helmets, maybe sometime later. Jim radioed to the baker team to assemble on him and for the able team to stand fast. He had set off a hand torch-like flare so they could see him and guide them to him.

Landing where he did, he was only a few hundred yards from the suspected tunnel entrance. Ken at the same time was gathering his demolition men when he noticed the disturbed snow and drag marks in the snow.

As Jim raised his head to look up at the drag marks a shot rang out and the rocks near him jumped, behind him and over his shoulder came the unmistakable multi-shot burst of a BAR. After the firing stopped, a body came tumbling down from the mountain

and off the ridge above Jim's head. Adams had put all three rounds into the Gooks chest.

Jim held his carbine at the ready and bent to see if the soldier was dead. A small hand movement from the body told him otherwise and he put a round from his carbine into the guys face. "Dead now you bastard" he stated quietly. More snow was coming from the ledge where the body had slid off and the eyes that had been looking at the dead body shifted upward. Sure enough, there was another enemy soldier in his tan puffy suit only the Chinese wore. As he tried to raise his rifle the Chicom lost his footing as a three shot volley struck his body.

Two dead and how many more were there? Jim's mind was racing, as shots rang out from the other side where Ken was assembling his men. "Baker Cunningham Able Daro here, we got one dead, looks Chinese what do you have?" "We have two, both dead look Chinese also, they came off of the ridge. I am sending two up to check it out, keep your guys away from the ridge, okay?"

"Roger that" was the quick reply from Ken. Adams and Ott were off and running, scrambling up the rockslide to look for more of the enemy. They had scampered about a hundred yards when they found two canvas bags with ropes tied to the open end. Adams poked the bags with the BAR's muzzle as Mel kept an eye out for enemy soldiers. The bags looked heavy and pretty worn, Adams knelt down to open one and was surprised to see it contained US Garand rifles wrapped in rags and ammo belts.

Mel did not look down, a sixth sense told him to stay alert, and sure enough a movement to his left about fifty feet away caught his eye. "Shit" he mumbled to himself, I am a sniper and this weapon is a single shot. I had better grab my sidearm before I move to check this out. As he moved to get his sidearm Adams spotted the same movement and ran towards it, his BAR leveled at the spot. As he got there two hands went into the air in a plea for surrender, Adams almost overran the guy.

He composed himself quickly and put the barrel into the man's chest. "Up" shouted Wallie, and the soldier stood up. "Christ" he said to himself he knows English. "How many more?" asked Adams to the soldier who responded with a side-to-side shake of his head. Mel was at his side now and looking over where the soldier had been hiding. Checking for a weapon, he motioned for the soldier to open his jacket.

When the jacket was opened it exposed an old model revolver in an even older holster. With Mel covering the soldier, Adams removed the weapon. Mel commented that the tracks seemed to stop by the boulder the soldier had been hiding behind. Wallie took a look around and agreed. With the prisoner in front, the three combatants would now find their way back down off of this ridge.

Adams took his radio and asked if taking prisoners was part of the mission plan. There was a long moment of silence until Ken answered with "Prisoners were Jim's job, mine was demolition." Wallie and Mel smiled and headed down the path they had come up.

Once off the ridge Jim searched the Chinese soldier. They removed his overcoat and inner coat, which only revealed the roll of rations these troops carried. The food ration looks like a sausage made of undershirt material and has several sausage like meals. Each meal was about five inches long and three inches in diameter. The smell alone was nauseating but Jim would not give the soldier the benefit of seeing him gag. No way in hell.

When other team members emptied the Chicom soldier's pockets; they found maps, papers and some very official looking documents. These papers were in a waterproof sleeve, something that Jim thought was waxed paper. Curiously he looked to see what language the documents were written in. Some were in what looked like Japanese; none had the boxy shape of the Koreans language. A couple of pages were in English. Jim told himself he would take a look at those later.

"Okay lets get this guy dressed and find the tunnel entrance and get our plan laid out. We need to bring in all of the cargo boxes very soon or it will be too cold to work out here." Jim called Ken and told them what he had. Ken said that he would get to the entrance and reconnoiter that side of the mountain.

"What do we do with the bodies Jim?" asked Wallie. "For now just leave them," he paused for a moment. "Better yet search them too, see if they have any papers on them, like the other guy did." None of the members of this team had ever touched a dead body before and the reluctance to start now was evident.

Ortega stepped forward and asked Ott to cover him as he opened the dead soldier's coat. The only thing they found on this one was another sausage of meals.

Nothing was found in any of the coat or jacket pockets. He then moved over to the next body with the same results, he did not bother to re-button any of the coats. When he stood up, Mel said thanks to Mario, they each understood the other and nodded.

As Ken's team started toward the tunnel entrance they smelled something familiar but out of place. Was it food, no, what the hell is it? No quick answers came to mind, Ken was standing at the poorly concealed entrance, "Whoa, wait one darned second here." This entrance could not be seen on any of the photos, how come we can find it so easily now? The snow had been trampled and only the rocks were showing, Ken was fully on alert and motioned to his team to take a few steps back.

"Jim," it was Ken on the radio. "Yeah Ken, what's up?" "Don't know for sure but I have a feeling that the tunnel or cave is occupied. There is a strange smell coming out of the entrance."

"Before anyone goes into the entrance let's put a plan together. We want to cover whoever goes inside so we can follow up if there is trouble." Ken was already putting a plan together in his head. When Jim, the prisoner and the rest of the team showed up at the tunnel entrance Ken was placing his team into a staggered line. "A submachine gunner is going in first. Then a BAR man followed by one with two grenades ready to toss, pins in, just ready."

As soon as Ken saw the prisoner he knew what they had captured. "This guy was definitely an officer, either a Lieutenant or possibly a Captain." His uniform hat gave him away, Ken had seen enough of these to last him a lifetime. "Keep this bastard close, even tied up if we have to."

Jim interrupted any further discussion with the idea of putting all three snipers out as lookouts. "If there were four, there may be more." He continued to everyone, not just the snipers "Take only the ammo you have on you. We don't have the luxury of time to go get the stuff in the containers. We have to play the next act by the seat of our pants."

At the moment he finished talking his radio went off, it was the Packet Two Four aircraft, "Sergeant Cunningham is everything okay, we monitored some of your radio calls and decided to fly back from over the Sea of Japan to double check, over?" "Packet Two Four, thanks for the concern. We ran into what may be a Chicom patrol, too soon to tell, have taken one prisoner and killed three others, over."

“A busy day so far sergeant, we can hang out up here for a few more hours, unless we see a bogey. Then we head straight for Japan air space, over.” “Packet Two Four we are going to recon the tunnel entrance, have noticed strange odors coming from the tunnel opening, a five man team is going in first, I will keep you posted, over.” “Roger that, we have passed your info along to your HQ, Packet Two-Four out.”

The image came into Jim’s head of the Gunny hanging over the radio just like when we listen to play-by-play baseball games. These radios sure are something else. “Ormond, Strong and Cook, take the lead” this was Sgt. Daro taking his team into the tunnel. “Only go in three steps and stop, there could be mines.”

Everybody froze, not from the cold, but from the thought of a land mine in the tunnel. The only lights they had with them; were the two cell ones, the others were in the cargo drop. “No lights, not yet, if there is someone in there we will be targets instead of hunters.” Good advice Ken, now how do we proceed?

“Let your eyes adjust to the dark. It may take a minute but it’s worth the wait, just be calm and try to relax.” Strong thought that Daro sounded like a high school baseball coach when he would come out to the mound to calm down a pitcher, really smart move.

In about three minutes Ken could clearly see the shapes of each of the three men with him in the tunnel entrance, they were in about twenty-five feet. None of these four could see the mouth of the tunnel anymore. Only the walls on either side, a quick measurement, I’d say twenty or so feet wide at this point. Ken’s nostrils noticed the odor getting stronger, suddenly he recognized and remembered that odor. Someone in here is wounded and bleeding badly, or has been patched up to stop the bleeding.

The next foul odor was that of urine and feces, he never called it that, it was always shit, no matter how you spelled it, it was still S H I T. Daro you have a filthy mind, talking to himself was not a new phenomenon for Ken. He used to do it a lot when he was younger.

From his left came a “pssst” Strong and Ormond had both put their fingers to their noses, they smelled it too. Strange, we can all see fairly well in here. Now a few more steps, stay to the outside wall of the tunnel Ken he said still talking to himself. The other three were watching him and also were hugging the walls.

The tunnel suddenly widened, and in front of them were large shoring timbers, big stuff, about eighteen inches on each side. Each piece was about twelve or so feet from the tunnel floor about as far as Ken could see. The ceiling beams that these timbers supported were less wide, maybe twelve inches thick. How did they get them here? The forests of North Korea are far away from here probably a hundred or so miles?

Get your mind back on the job Daro. As Ken said that, Cook had worked his way up the side of the tunnel past the second row of support timbers and put his hand in the air to “stop.” What did he see Ken wanted to know? Can I get up there to see? Cook was backing out of his position and came back to the others. “I can hear breathing and someone speaking English, sounds American. Someone is hurt bad in there,” he continued to whisper.

Ken was now taking charge the others could feel it. “These is Sgt Daro of the United States Marine Corps identify yourselves or the next sound you hear will be a grenade going off in your lap.”

“Don’t shoot we’re US Army, there are two gook soldiers in the tunnel to ambush you. For God’s sake don’t toss that grenade.” “Okay, those that can walk or crawl move our way. One at a time, no fast moves or you die, US Army or not.” Cook moved back to his position by the second shoring posts, “I can see one of them Sarge,” good keep them moving slowly. “Here comes number two,”

Ormond stopped the first man and asked how many there were in the tunnel? “Eight Americans and two ROK soldiers, both of them badly wounded, two of the Americans have broken arms, we think.” “Stay right there.” Ken had come over to the other side of the tunnel where the two ROK soldiers lay. Ormond was keeping the guy from falling down.

“Let him down easy, get the rest of the team to help these guys out of here. Then we can deal with the two gooks in the back.” Ormond took off at a trot, being careful to stay close to the walls. He had better tell the other guys that too.

In only minutes the rest of team Able was in the tunnel and helping the US soldiers out into the fresh air. Their clothes were wet and stunk to high heaven. Not one



of them had a hat or head cover of any type. No rank on their sleeves either, I'll bet they have a story to tell, Ken was still talking to himself.

Ken went looking for Jim who was putting the Chinese guy in makeshift handcuffs. I wonder where Jim learned that skill? Hmmm. "Hey Jim, trussed like a Christmas goose, good work. These Army guys say there are two gooks in the tunnel yet; they are armed and waiting for us. We can't move the two wounded Korean soldiers that are still in the tunnel."

Jim added, "The Doc wants to check out the ROK soldiers while they are still in there. When he says so, we can move them."

Ken said matter of factly. "Whaddya say we let the two Chinese guys stay in there while we gather up the cargo drop and get set to blow this place up. We can post two guards in the there to protect Doc and the Koreans. The rest can gather the gear." Jim's reply was a smile and slap on Ken's shoulder. "I am sure glad you're along on this mission."

Ken walked back to the tunnel opening to see if everyone had been evacuated. He sent Ormond and Ott back into the tunnel. "Keep it quiet:" Ken put his index finger to his lips, just like mom used to do. "In case the two gooks in there try to make a run for it; be careful of ricochets too." Immediately the two Marines went back into the tunnel.

When Ken returned to find Jim, he ran into Doc who was treating some of the Army guys, "Sarge some of these guys are in bad shape. The reason they were holed up here is because of exhaustion. They were being brought back to the Chinese HQ for interrogation. It seems as if these guys are US Army infiltrators poking into the North trying to find the DMZ tunnels. That's why they have ROK Army with them, as interpreters."

"My God" said Ken, "What the hell next, did Jim take some of my guys to get the cargo?" "Yep he left Cottie and Longo to help me and to keep an eye on the Chinaman." Ken grinned and slapped Doc on the upper arm, "Good job Doc, and keep us smiling." Doc just grinned back at the back of the departing Sergeant.

Finished with these men, he headed for the tunnel entrance with his two heavy packs. "Hey guys it's me Doc don't shoot." The answer he got was terse, "Don't walk in the middle of the tunnel, it may be mined." Doc looked at his feet and where he was

standing smack in the middle of the tunnel walls. Now what to do? Doc made a left face and walked to the wall and continued into the tunnel hugging the wall. His eyes were slowly getting used to the dark.

“Do you both have flashlights with you?” he asked, more to hear the sound of a voice than expecting a positive answer. “Sure do, we each have our two cell ones hanging on our belts we’ll turn one on so you can follow the light.”

Doc was within ten feet of them when the light came on. He never saw any of the four men until the flashlights were on. The two lying on the floor were dressed in US Army fatigues and all bloody. He took his own flashlight and held it above the two wounded Koreans. “Can either of you hold this light so I can see the damage?” “Sure Doc, I can hold both lights if I straddle this guy.”

As MJ Cook held the two flashlights, Bruce Strong turned his back so as to not lose his “night vision” ability to see in the darkened tunnel. Strong also moved further into the tunnel as the smell of the wounded was beginning to get to him.

Out in the snow of the drop zone, it was only early afternoon and the weather was turning colder, no wind. “Thank you Lord,” was one of Jim’s favorite utterances, but there was a lot of stuff to gather up. “Has anyone found the sleds yet?” Jim was speaking into the radio, a fast response was, “Yes and we are loading two of them now. A little help would be appreciated Sergeant.”

“Wait one, I will call back to the Gunny for more personnel.” Already the Unit was up to speed; no matter what comes our way we will face it. If Jim had only known what was ahead of them in the next few days, he might have asked the Gunny for more help, really.

## Chapter Fourteen

### Tunnels and More

Doc had the one ROK soldier under control with the morphine. The wounds were serious, he'd seen worse, but not in this kind of situation. Infection is always ready to pounce once the body is open to the air; air crap, this is stifling in here. As Doc tore the fatigue jacket away from the wound the man tried to scream but couldn't, he passed out. One look and Doc knew the wounds were bayonet wounds, deep enough to injure but not kill. This sucker was tortured for some reason; he ripped away the rest of the jacket and olive drab colored tee shirt.

MJ was hanging in there, not even a slight barf feeling. Doc sure is competent he thought, look at the way those hands search the wounds. In the next moment Doc was reopening the wounds to let the accumulated pus out, the pus squirted out and both Doc and MJ turned their heads, Doc looked up at MJ and smiled, "Close" was all he said.

Forty-five minutes had passed and Doc had both ROK soldiers patched up with the extra large gut patches. He had put sulfa drugs on both men plus the morphine. These two will probably sleep for three to four hours, but we have to get them out of this place. They need to be somewhere closer to the tunnel opening. Cold fresh air is better than this shit, he too was talking to himself again, must be an occupational habit; all the Recon's do it.

MJ had gone back to be with Strong as MJ got alongside of him a scream from deep inside the tunnel was heard. It was a long scream like someone falling for a long distance and then it ceased. Doc yelled, "Are you two okay?" "Fine Doc, what the hell do you think that was?" Bruce was asking in a very shaky voice.

"Sounds like somebody fell in a hole or crevice. Like someone falling down a shaft" was MJ's input to the mystery. "Doc you go out and get one of the sergeants, ask them what they want us to do? Hopefully, he wants us to wait for reinforcements. Okay?" Strong was thinking clearly thought Doc.

As he stood up Doc could see both the patients sleeping, that's good, now let's deal with the screamer. My God could one of our guys have fallen into the tunnel from

above. The last tunnel had air vents maybe that's what happened. We had better find out. Do a head count, that's how.

When he reached the mouth of the tunnel, several team members were there with pallets of cargo. "Did anybody hear that scream?" "What scream?" Doc took his radio and called for Jim, he answered quickly, Doc was not a radio guy this must be important. Doc told him about the scream and that Bruce and MJ were still holding guard in the tunnel, "Good stay where you are I'm going to do a "check in."

"Baker Cunningham, I want an everyman radio check by call sign." Members checked in and Jim was counting them on his fingers, hard to do with the double-layered gloves. After each one checked in Daro called Jim to ask what that was for, Jim told him about the scream in the tunnel. "Could be one of the gooks has fallen into something. When we finish this we can mount a posse and check it out, Able Daro out."

All forty of the cargo containers were at the opening of the tunnel. MJ, Strong and the two injured ROK soldiers were still inside. Ken and Jim were making a plan, first to get the injured away from where they were and then to recon the tunnel, carefully.

The other Army guys were huddled under some of the parachutes, trying to keep warm. They said they had not eaten since early yesterday morning. "They had been captured ten days ago. When they heard the plane they thought it was a rescue mission looking for them." The soldier was short of breath and still kept speaking. "Their assignment had been to look for new tunnels by the UN negotiated DMZ that the North Koreans were digging. The first day they found one and were discovered by this patrol." He drew another excited breath. "The officer is a senior lieutenant in the Chinese army and mean as all get out he continuously stabbed the ROK soldiers with a dirty bayonet and knife."

"He has a map of all of the tunnels that follow this route north to some kind of a supply depot." Jim was hanging on his every word. "This Army patrol started out with sixteen men, four of them ROK soldier-interpreters. The Chicoms killed two of the ROK's right away, and six of ours made a break for it and were killed. Someone must have found the bodies by now," the Army corporal said. "We only had two days of K rations and figured our folks would be looking for us after that, guess not" he continued.

Jim and Ken told these guys why this team was here, all of the soldiers eyes went wide, "What the hell for?" was a question from one of the other soldiers. "No need to know soldier" said Ken, "Its just our job, that's all." "Are you going to blow it up with those other two gooks inside?" He looked around to see if the ROK soldiers heard him say gooks? "Maybe", answered Ken, "We think one of them may have fallen into something. We heard a scream a while ago and are going in to check it out."

"You guys rest up because in a few days we have a long walk out of here", Jim was letting them know that they were not quite rescued, yet. "Ken I'm going to call the plane and let them know the situation and relay our plan for today. Any thing you want to add?" "Nah, the less you tell them the less they can hang us for later" Ken turned away laughing, getting his stuff ready for the tunnel excursion.

"Gonzales and Grasio, go relieve Cook and Strong. Careful, walk on the side of the tunnel do you have your rations with you?" Ken was in full charge of the tunnel demo team and it showed. "Ken I am going to make litters from these sleds and poles, the last time we blew the tunnel they all went up in smoke. Now they will come in handy. Jim was trying to figure out whether to make stretchers or travois for the wounded.

The way out to the sea was still undetermined. Better go with stretchers was his final decision. One of the formerly captured soldiers volunteered to help; he had made makeshift stretchers in the Boy Scouts. Jim welcomed the help, if this guy can make one and show a couple of others how to do another, that will be okay.

The stretchers this guy made were amazing, the side poles could be supported by a person's hand or the parachute straps could be put behind the carrier's neck and supported almost hands free. Jim was pouring over the maps they took off of the Chinese Lieutenant; he was trying to match them with the ones he was to use during evacuation.

No luck, oh hell just call the plane and have them ask the HQ folks if they had any ideas. Good ones accepted only, cut the crap. Gunny will have your ass if you say something like that. Jim became serious again. "Packet Two Four Baker Cunningham do you read?" "Five by five, how's it going down there?" "Well, we have the wounded patched up and are going into the tunnel to search for two Chicoms that are holed up in

there.” “We have ten former prisoners of the Chicoms with us, two ROK army and eight US Army, hungry, cold and dirty.”

“I also have some maps taken off of a Senior Lieutenant in the Chinese army that show a trail of tunnels and food stations that stretch from the DMZ to the Yalu and the river that separated Russia and Korea. None of my maps correlate to the ones the Chicom has. We have brought in all the cargo containers and sleds and jump debris. Very successful jump and landing I might add. Thanks for the great ride fellas, and if you could pass this along to our HQ it is appreciated. Over.”

“Sergeant they got all of that message real time. These new radio relay units are pretty good, just dial them in and talk away. We have to depart the scene in fifteen minutes. I understand that a flight of two Marine AU’s will be overhead in one hour; their call signs are Magpie One and Seven. I love the way the Marine Corps counts don’t you?” “Sure do Sir; have a safe trip back and thanks again, Baker Cunningham out.”

A double mike click acknowledged his comments.

“Can we help in some way?” the Army Corporal was asking again. “Sure” said Jim “If anyone feels well enough to help, we have to unload the cargo cases and get everything into the mouth of the tunnel. If you come across the C3 leave it. That we will be using last. What we want out first are the Navy lanterns and batteries and the C rations. Tonight you will eat a little bit better.”

The forty cases, each three feet by three feet by three feet held a lot of stuff. The skids they came out of the plane on were even brought in to use as firewood, if a fire could be built. Jim checked to see what the Chicom officer was doing. He just sat there expressionless in the snow; his jacket’s still unbuttoned. Tough dude, yeah we’ll see.

Ken and his crew had gone into the tunnel several hundred feet when they could no longer see very well; the air in here was stinging the eyes of each of the men. I wonder what that is? Thought Ken. It smelled funny too, acid like, maybe if I run my gloved hand across the rock face I can tell what it is once I get outside.

“Guys, this is far enough without the lights, lets single file it back to the opening. Just do an about face and go.” A short time later all of them had made it safely to the entrance. Ken showed his glove to Jim and asked him if he had any ideas. “Nope, hey Cottie, you’re a chemistry guy right? What do you think this is on the Ken’s glove?”

Cottie made a face as he sniffed the fingers of the gloves, “Smells like battery acid, sulfuric or carbolic acid possibly, you will know in about thirty minutes. If it is either of those two the glove finger tips will be gone.”

Ken was now sure he shouldn't have wiped the wall with his only pair of leather shells. If these eat away I would only have the woolen inserts, shit.

Jim told Murphy and Morgan to get the landline telephones set up in the tunnel so the rest of the tunnel could be searched. “We better get a move on. There's a lot of work to do and a lot of hands too, let's get as much done as possible. Someone move up the hill and check on the snipers. Be careful, radio them first that you are coming and the direction you are coming from, got it?”

Strong, who just came out of the tunnel, said that he would go up he needed the fresh air. As he walked passed the Chicom officer Strong snarled like a dog. The Chicom showed no emotion, “Fuck you gook,” thought Bruce. “I'll get Ortega to drop your sorry ass off in the South Bronx, in one of his taxicabs, and see if you smile then.” Bruce was smiling at the thought.

With that taken care of he radioed the three “sharpies”, as he called them, to tell them he was on his way up to check them out, “Don't shoot, please Mr. Sharpie, don't shoot me.”

Jim could only guess what was going through Pappy's mind if he was still listening in on the radio retransmit from the Packet Two Four. Hopefully when they broke off to leave, they shut down the rebroadcaster. Except for the C3 plastic explosives all of the cargo containers were empty. The soldiers were taking them off to the side and covered them with the unused parachutes, to sort of camouflage the cases. The Navy lanterns looked bigger and heavier to Jim, than he remembered, when he was on board the Olympia.

Taped to each one were two extra 6-volt lantern batteries, nice touch. Plus a stubby crosshatched screwdriver to open the waterproof case. Some of the C3 was kept aside, in case they could start a fire. It would burn nice and hot and be relatively smoke free. They did have the Sterno from the rations to heat the cans with if they had to. Maybe we could have the soldier's heat the water and the C ration cans while we

reconnoiter the tunnel. I will ask the Corporal if he considers that a good idea or not, it maybe a pretty touchy matter.

When he did ask, the Corporal instead of being insulted was happy that he and any of his men that could help would help. "Jesus man, you guys saved our lives, I would do KP for the rest of my life to be out of this fucking place."

Murphy was testing the telephones in the tunnel as Morgan played out the new twisted pair wire, "Man this stuff is easy to use and splices beautifully." Jim could hear both voices on the telephone and the radio, weird. "How soon until you catch up to Daro and his group?" Morgan answered quickly "I'm right here with them, they just told me about the possibility of mines in the center of the tunnel. That's where I have been walking the whole time, so either I missed them or these guys are bullshitting me." Morgan still had his hand phone keyed and Murphy heard Daro yell STOP.

"What the hell is going on now Morgan?"

"Don't rightly know, but I am stopped."

"Hey Murph, Daro found a vertical tunnel, his light cannot see the bottom. He wants one of the Navy lights, quick." "I'll tell Jim now and it will be on its way pronto, you sure the middle is okay?"

"Try it, what the hell can we lose," Morgan's sense of humor was dazzling thought Murphy.

Ormond grabbed two of the lanterns and shouldered his carbine and took off running into the tunnel. He had one of the Jap miner's helmets on and looked strange. The army guys could not figure out what in the world was happening here, these Marines were all crazy.

Inside the tunnel was becoming a busy place, landline wire was strung on the floor and would eventually be draped along the walls and out of the way. It was also to be used as the detonator wire when it was time to blow this tunnel up, but that was several days away.

Ormond had reached Ken with the lanterns, "Now that's better, I can see about three hundred feet at least" Ken was swinging the lantern from side to side looking for the guy who may have fallen into this pit.



When he saw the body he whistled, it was all bent and misshapen like a rag doll. All of the soldier's bones appeared to be broken. As he continued searching with the light there was a brief reflection of something that moved, "Three o'clock to my light beam, check it out, something moved."

As Ormond looked into the pit he saw what Daro was talking about, "Looks like a rifle barrel or bayonet reflection Sarge. Don't move the light, he may be getting a bead on the lantern and it blinded him."

Ken kept the lantern at the same height but crouched down to make a smaller target, "If that is another Chicom he is pretty stealthy, maybe a grenade will dislodge him?" "I don't know, Ken a grenade is liable to set off some rock movement. This tunnel is spooky, why don't I lay a three shot volley at the reflection?" "Yea go ahead and do that, can you take a clear shot?" "Yep, I can still see the line the light has made, ready?"

Bam, bam, bam, and three thirty-caliber rounds hit the object and a body fell on top of the reflected steel. The body was tethered to a strap that was attached to the pit wall. The Chicom had been waiting for someone to come down into the pit and to shoot him when he got there. No surrender for him.

"Let's be real careful, there may be a third one that we have not heard about. We'll ask the Army guys about the head count of gooks and work backwards in counting." Ken was teaching as well as making plans.

When the shots rang out everyone outside froze, "sounds like trouble Jim, want me to find out what's going on?" Strong was starting in that direction before Jim could confirm his going. "Yea, go; and see what's taking Murph and Morgan so long to get the tunnel phones going." Bruce just waved his hand in the air acknowledging that he heard Jim's comments.

As he scampered to the opening of the tunnel he saw Murphy and told him what Jim had said Murph's reply was that "Whatever happened in the tunnel has halted the installation. Wait, Morgan wants to know how many Chicom's were with the Army guys when they got here. Ormond just killed the second gook in the tunnel?"

"I'll go check with the Corporal and his guys, hang in there, be right back." "Six including the officer" was Strong's reply to Murphy when he returned to the mouth of the tunnel. Strong then went back up the hill to see Jim. He ignored the Chinese officer still

sitting in the snow with his jackets unbuttoned. Asshole thought Bruce as hurried on by. What is he trying to prove anyway? We'll see how tough he is when some of the South Korean interrogators go to work on his sorry ass.

Cunningham was reassured when Bruce got there with the headcount. "Good, now we can get on with taking care of the tunnel like we are supposed to be doing." He immediately felt guilty as if he was resenting the Army soldiers as being an intrusion into this mission. "Shape up James" he said aloud and Ortega and Ott answered him with "You do that James" and smiled at him.

My God we are all talking to ourselves, he laughed with the three snipers, Mario, Mel and Louie, he turned, waved and went down off the ridge. He was behind the unloaded cargo containers sitting at the bottom of the hill. Jim realized that Strong had stayed up on the hill with the snipers. Oh well, if we need him in the tunnel, we can use the radio.

Jim walked past Murphy at the tunnel entrance and tapped him on his helmet, "How's it going sarge?" "Great Sean, a walk in the park, gonna see what trouble Daro is creating in there." "He really fits in don't he Jim?" "Sure does, and he likes this kind of work too. Wait 'til he gets a load of a controlled explosion" Jim was remembering the first mission explosion. No not again he said to himself.

"Strong tells me the middle is okay to walk in, is that right?" "Guess so, Morgan put out all the wire in the middle before someone told him about the possibility of mines. So my guess is go for it. He's in about two fifty by my count on the spool." Jim turned, waved back at Sean and moved into the tunnel. The smell was familiar but not overpowering like before; let's see now, Daro, Grazioso, Gonzales, Murphy, Ormond and who else is in the tunnel.

Jim took his pad that he had been given by one of the C-119's pilots to keep his notes on. The pad has a clip on top, a strap on the bottom to attach to his thigh and the bottom and top cover are made of aluminum. Nice present, these Air Force guys are really more part of the team than our HQ know, I will make a note of that right now. Okay, back to my headcount. Jim looked at the list he had on the pad, and checked them off, as he knew where they were.

He stopped and wished he had worn one of the Jap hats with the light; he knelt down and opened his jacket to grab the two-cell flashlight. Let's see, Hayes, Cook, Longo, Cottie and Dreyer are loading the backpacks with the C3 explosives, who else was there, oh yea Adams too. Let me see now, six loading, four on the hill, Morgan and Murphy on the wire, Daro, Tony, Gonzales and Ormond in the tunnel, me and Doc; eighteen, bingo got 'em all.

Jim was determined to rearrange his list so he could better identify where each man in the team was at any one time. Can't let someone just fall through the cracks.

Cunningham was surprised when he reached Daro and his group. The amount of light the navy emergency lights gave off was impressive. Ken showed Jim where the two Chicoms were laying. "We have watched them for about ten minutes and no movement. I don't want to send someone down there on a rappel just to see if they are dead, too dangerous."

"It'd be better to post a watch on them and let it go at that, or we could use them for target practice and be sure. Whaddya ya think James my boy we could let the former hostages have at 'em." Jim shook his head and hoped that Ken was pulling his leg. Of course he was, Jim just couldn't tell, he responded with "Keep both eyes on them."

"That stuff you had on you glove before is not really a strong acid, it is carbonic acid, like in soft drinks. The smell is from the rotting vegetation that grows and dies due to the limestone being eaten away by the acid." Ken listened intently, he had forgotten about his glove, Jim continued to talk to the four of them.

"If this place has an air vent we can probably make this place a little more hospitable by moving some air." Gonzales wanted to ask a question, but did not want to interrupt Jim, this was his first mission and the last thing he wanted to was piss off his team leader. "We are going to be here for several days so we better get this taken care of today."

Jim noticed Julian's anxiety, "Tomorrow is survey day; all the demo guys have to be involved with finding the tunnel off shoots, if there are any." He doesn't want to tick me off, good judgment. We have only gone about three hundred feet so far and I know there is more to this place than this."

“Questions, anyone, Julian, what is it?” “I felt cold air when I was crawling on the floor on the far side of this pit or whatever it is.” Julian’s voice quivered and now Jim felt sorry for him, “Good, show us where.” Ken smiled at Jim’s patience; he turned to Grazioso and told him to “Watch the bodies, the rest of them were going with Gonzales to check on the possibility of an air vent.” It was a distinct order and not a suggestion. Tony responded with an “aye-aye Sarge” and he turned to the edge of the pit and let his eyes adjust to the light flooded area where both bodies lay.

In very short order Gonzales showed the others where he felt the cold draft. “Sure enough” said Jim, “There is outside air coming in here. It’s not only cold but also wet like melting snow is covering the opening. I wonder what’s making the snow melt, it’s below freezing outside.” Ken took his flashlight and shined it at the wall of the tunnel directly in front of them, “What kind of rocks are these anyway?”

“Looks mostly like serpentine and some quartz, there’s some shale too, that is the real scary part.” Jim was in his element here, rocks and rock structures, “Depending on what the Koreans wanted to do with this tunnel, if anything, will tell us how tough the demolition will be. They may have abandoned this place as too unsafe to use.”

“Ken before it gets dark we need to put a meal plan in place and a watch list also. Let’s leave the two G-men here to watch the gooks and the rest of us will go outside and work on a plan.” Jim then turned to his two G-men and told them he would have Morgan leave the landline phone with them since this was the furthest into the tunnel they were going today. The G-men each nodded yes.

On the way to the tunnel entrance Jim proposed a plan for the evening, “Lets get these Army guys some hot chow, I think we can light either a Sterno stove or a makeshift one out of C3.” Ken nodded waiting for more, “The wind is so strong any scent will be dispersed quickly. But we have to take care of them first, what do you think?” Ken was not prepared for the question and just shrugged his shoulders he had not given the soldiers much thought, selfish, he thought suddenly.

“You know Jim, I had not even given those guys a seconds notice, pretty lousy of me, sorry.” Jim was surprised by his humility, “Not to worry Ken, there has been a lot going on today, most of it unprepared for. Oh shit, I forgot to check the support aircraft upstairs. I’m going to do that first,” he opened his overcoat and yanked out the hand

radio and checked the channel and did a radio check. "Magpie One this is Baker Cunningham do you read, over" very quickly came a reply "Magpie One and Seven sitting at 22 high, everything okay?"

Jim was visibly relieved, "Sorry not to check in earlier, been busy with some Chicoms we found here." "Do you need air support or a strafing run, over?" "Negative, we think the skirmish is behind us. We are now getting ready to assist the former Army hostages; they're in tough shape food wise. We intend to fatten them up before we depart here, over"

"Sounds good Baker Cunningham, we will be on station for another hour plus. A flight of F3D's will be over in about 2 hours, when I get their call sign I will relay it to you. You go feed those Army cats and take care of yourselves. Winds aloft are pretty strong and may indicate a weather front coming through, Magpie out." Jim keyed the mike twice as acknowledgement.

## Chapter Fifteen

### Day one ends and two begins

“Ken, this is what I have come up with so far.” As well as speaking to Ken, Jim was planning as he spoke “Suppose you organize the exploration and tunnel demolition team while I take the outside of the tunnel stuff.” Ken was just listening, no comment yet. “I am trying to find a way to get all of this done in a day or so less than originally planned.” Ken now had an idea of what Jim was concerned about, the evacuation and extraction of such a large group.

Plus a prisoner and two seriously wounded and two less seriously injured men, now it was Ken’s turn to be concerned. “That sounds good but you are really the tunnel guy. Why don’t we see how tonight goes after getting some chow into these guys? Besides, I haven’t even checked with Doc to see how they all holding up.”

Jim sensed some concern on Ken’s part; does he feel guilty because he ignored these guys or what? “Ken, I don’t want these soldiers to think we consider them a burden, they’ve had a tough enough time.” Ken nodded and felt that Jim had read his thoughts, “Let’s get the GI’s taken care of and then work on the tunnel plan, okay?” “Got it poddner,” teased Ken. The two both stopped walking and turned to where all of the former hostages and the wounded were spread out. It looked like the pictures of a hobo camp during the depression.

Doc had been busy; he had already organized the work arrangements. The six that were not injured were to tend to the injured each one in one hour shifts. Giving them water and checking the dressings and making sure they were warm enough but not sweating. Pillows had been fashioned from the rubber-impregnated horsehair cushioning of the cargo containers. Someone was cutting the parachute panels to make a hammock to get the wounded off of the ground.

“Pretty ingenious” said Ken to Jim as they felt a little foolish thinking these guys wouldn’t find a way to scrounge stuff and make it work. After all that is what being a GI was all about, take a bunch of scraps and make something worthwhile out of it. Someone had already assembled the Army soldiers’ helmets from the bags of weapons the Chicoms were dragging through the snow. The liners were out and the inside of

each helmet had been cleaned with snow and was ready to put water in to heat the C rations.

“You guys have been busy while we were gone.” Ken wanted to show some concern for these guys, “We were going to try and come up with a plan for feeding you folks but it looks like you beat us to it. Good going.” “Jim here,” Ken wanted them to know whose idea it was by tilting his head in Jim’s direction “Wants to make sure you are all fed well before we have to hike out in a few days. So with the wind doing its’ thing maybe we can get a fire going and get you fed.”

Jim cut in with, “Any smoke should be dissipated quickly so that’s not a problem. We have a big metal container that can be used to melt the snow, that is if we can find it.” With that said, Doc raised the container over his head “Got it right here, can we use the C3 to fire it up?” “Yeah that will save the Sterno supply. Do you know how to do that Doc?”

“Hell no but I’m willing to learn. You’re sure that shit doesn’t blow up when crushed, right?” “Don’t rightly know Doc but Charlie can help with that, okay by you Ken?” Ken saw the teasing in Jim’s eyes and went along with it, “Yeah Charlie’s one of the newbie’s and most expendable, we’ll let him do it. Charlie Dreyer, front and center, now” Ken’s voice echoed over the hillside. “Guess I should use the radio, huh Jim?” “Next time Ken, next time.” Jim had finally relaxed.

Dreyer showed up in just a few moments, “What’s up Sarge, your radio not working?” Everybody laughed; it was probably the first laugh the former hostages had in several weeks. “Just break up some C3 for melting the snow under this container, Doc is afraid it will explode if it is hit with a hammer. And don’t be a smart ass with that radio crap.” Ken had his “game face” on, hard to tell if he was serious or not, Charlie didn’t care one way or the other. Ken saw that he didn’t get to Charlie, good. He liked that, and if this Marine Corps Sergeant doesn’t scare him, then the Chicoms won’t scare him either.

Charlie took his K-bar out of its sheath and started whittling away on the C3, making it into a flat circle on a big flat rock as if slicing cheese on a pizza. He grabbed some smaller stones and put them in a circle around his circle of C3. After the one block had been whittled he put the container on the rocks, shook it to make sure it was secure

and asked one of the soldiers to fill up a couple of helmets with snow and dump them into the container. That done he lighted the explosives. Almost everyone backed up a few feet. Only the sleeping wounded were unaware that an explosion could take place momentarily. Dreyer lit a piece of cotton cord and dropped it into the circle of C3, it caught slowly and then the whole thing was burning with a low glow and very little smoke. "Don't let it fool you, that shit is hot. And don't inhale the fumes, be sure to keep the snow coming we only need about three inches of hot water in the pot and don't try to put the C3 out. Just move the container when the water gets hot."

"Better yet, radio me and I will come back. We're hauling the explosive stuff into the tunnel so I am close by." Charlie looked directly at Ken when he mentioned the radio; Ken shook his fist at him, nice kid thought Ken.

Jim was very pleased to hear that the demo guys had already started to bring the explosives into the tunnel, thinking for themselves. Great. "Ken, I think we should use the C rations first and get these guys some strength back and use the K rations during the evacuation." Ken thought about that for a moment, "A lot less weight to carry too. If we can have all of the soldiers strong enough to carry the litters in shifts, we should be in good shape."

He thought for a moment, "Why don't we have the Army take care of the meal stuff. We can get more done in the tunnel if we don't have to take someone off a job to heat water and stuff." Jim concurred, and went over to the Army Corporal and told him what they had just discussed, he readily concurred and would take care of getting it all rolling.

He also asked if they could get their weapons from the dragged bag, Jim assured him he could. The bag was still up on the hill, the only thing they had taken out were the helmets and liners. He would have two of the soldiers, if they could climb okay go retrieve it. Four of them said they were able, so Jim radioed the snipers that four GI's were coming up the hill for the weapons bag, "Do you want a password?" "Nah we can see real good from up here. Louie built an igloo; it's pretty cool, actually it's pretty warm. Send the guys up." Someday thought Jim, Ortega will learn radio procedure, small flaw Jim, small flaw.



Jim had a fleeting thought; tomorrow we had better inventory the food supply. It may take going to only two meals a day so they could feed everyone. As the thoughts passed through his Jim's head, Doc came over to him and asked about the same subject. Doc had noticed that our guys were nibbling on the K-rations and saving the C-rations for the soldiers, a nice gesture, but not a good idea. Jim concurred and told Doc that he planned to inventory the rations in the morning before breakfast.

"Jim, of the forty, that's four zero containers that were dropped twenty-six are explosives, ammo and the like." Doc was in his clinical mode right now; Jim could almost see the sequence of information the Doc had gathered. "The remaining fourteen containers have cold weather gear, and a Coleman stove, three have K-rations, three have C-rations and one of them has a combination of Aircraft Meals and Emergency Sea Survival Rations." Jim looked at the Doc quizzically and Ken sort of snorted.

"That container has a big note inside, "Compliments of the Packet Rats Squadron 24", "It too contains a stove."

"Where is all that stuff Doc," Jim was looking more confused by the amount of stuff that had been dropped? "It is all being brought into the tunnel. The area where the soldiers were found is where the munitions are stacked. I figured it was better to leave the stuff on the skids and drag them in there rather than carry all of that inside."

Jim was trying to remember how many K-rations meals to a carton. "Each K-ration crate has 12 days of meals for one man" Doc declared. "And we have twenty seven crates of rations." Jim could not work the numbers in his head; he knew it was going to be a large one though. "In case you are interested, that is three hundred and twenty four meals for one man, or one hundred and eight days of food."

Doc was on a roll now; Ken could see that Doc was relishing this moment. "We have eighteen of us, eight soldiers, two wounded ROK's and the Chinese prisoner. That is a total of twenty seven men for one hundred and eight days of food or enough to feed everyone three meals a day for exactly four days."

Ken laughed out loud and put his arm around Doc Schmidt's shoulder "Doc when was the last time you had to remember all that detail?" Schmidt said he "counted and counted and was excited when he ran the numbers in his head, there was more than

enough food for the evacuation.” “You know Doc that K-rations are for a limited use, as are C-rations. Do you think the wounded will be able to eat anything solid?”

Ken was once again serious while he talked he looked at the two wounded ROK soldiers and the two American soldiers with busted arms. “Plus Ken, the Air Force gave us a gift of Navy and Air Force rations. That may be what we supplement our C-rats with,” Doc was still being Doc, serious but logical. “I have asked the Army Corporal to oversee the cooking and feeding, that okay with you two?” “Sure Doc, good work. We were so concerned with the tunnel that I had forgotten all about the wounded and the rest of it, sorry.” Ken truly was sorry too.

Ken was pondering something and Doc noticed the concern, “What’s on your mind Ken?” “Are we going to be able to feed this many men with the amount of C-rations we have?” “It sure looks like it, the mission on site time is six days plus today, right?” “We have over seven days of C-rats and we are just getting ready to heat the first meal,” was Doc’s reply. “Plus the sea and air rations, never had those before, maybe I’ll try them today.”

“Give the cold weather gear to the wounded first. Can we get the soldiers some thing clean to wear? They have got to be feeling crappy wearing that stuff for so long.” Doc told Jim that he “Would take care of that; it was way too cold to wash any clothes though.” Jim nodded his concurrence.

The way the tunnel entrance was shaped, any fire or light inside could not be seen from outside. The team members, who were wearing the Jap miner’s hats with the light on, went inside.

The unloading had gone well, the containers of explosives were on the floor of the tunnel as far in as they could go without getting too close to the pit. Doc was going to lay the two wounded on the top of the drop cases to keep them off of the wet floor of the tunnel. The soldiers had put two rows of them side by side and placed some of the horsehair cushioning on top of them to act as a mattress like platform for the two ROK soldiers.

He had told Jim and Ken that he did not remember how the first tunnel was shaped but this one seemed somehow different. Jim told them both of them “This tunnel is almost naturally hewn out by water fed erosion. The men working in here had to

shore it up almost hourly to keep the roof from falling in. We can expect to find a lot of shoring as we go deeper into the tunnel. If there are any off shoot tunnels, only teams of three men will explore them.”

Ken thought for a moment and suggested that one of each group “Carry his Thompson and the other two carry sidearms and their entrenching tool. Help is close by, but we need to make certain there are no more Chicoms in here. As soon as they smell the food, we can expect a visit from them. They will probably expect us to be unprepared, that will not happen guys.”

After eating the heated C-rations, the team went into the previously agreed upon sleep schedule, four hours of nap, four hours of work and four more of rest. By sunrise the schedule had been completed, only the soldiers kept their own sleep schedule. Two of them rotated guarding the very uncooperative Chinese officer. They dragged him through the snow into the mouth of the tunnel and used the skids from the drop containers to drag him the rest of the way. No one mistreated the officer but no one was nice to him either. No need to do either one.

Jim and Ken had separate schedules for resting; Jim crawled into his sleeping bag liner and fell right asleep. Ken went into the tunnel to check the guys watching the pit. The two G-men, Gonzales and Grazioso, ate their rations there. Neither of them wanted to leave, so one of the soldiers brought the heated cans of food to them. It was amazing what a little bit of chow can do for a tired body, the soldiers had walked over 120 miles or so with no food and little water. Now they were recovering hour by hour.

The two wounded ROK soldiers were fed the breakfast meals that came in the C ration pack, eggs and ham. Neither one could get the hard crackers down. One of the soldiers crushed them into the bouillon cube liquid so the crackers could just slide down their throats. None of the soldiers wanted to be a drag when it came time to leave. “Extraction” they heard the Marines call it, whatever its called, they wanted to be ready and able.

The next day was typical of Northern Korea, snow was blowing and the wind was whistling so much it could be heard inside the tunnel. Jim immediately went looking for air vents, natural or otherwise. During the night Ken had dropped a thermite grenade on top of the two Chicoms just make certain they were really dead. They were. He then

relieved Gonzales and Grazioso. The two had been watching the pit, to get some rest and get into their rest, work rotation. Tomorrow was tunnel survey time. Probably several days of surveying if Jim was correct about this type of tunneling.

Ken picked up the landline phone and asked who was at the other end. “No one’s home sergeant, would you like to call back later?”

“Murphy, I will personally come out there and kick your ass, but I have more important things to do in the next hour. How far can this phone stretch, I want to take it with me to check out the other side of the pit?” “This is Baker Morgan Sarge, you can go at least 300 feet from where the two G-men were watching the pit. Is that far enough or do you want us to add another spool to the line?”

“Nah Morgan, this should be fine. I know that was Murphy who answered before, tell him I’ve got my eye on him, that smart ass, Daro out.” Murphy and Morgan each laughed the good laugh; Ken was going to be the butt of a lot of their pranks from here on out.

The bitter cold outside made the gathering of snow difficult, nonetheless the soldiers had hot water and coffee always ready. One of the soldiers made a rack, for drying their clothes, out of the drag sleds and put it over the almost extinguished C3. After water had been heated and food warmed they added more snow used the water to wash their fatigues and themselves.

The snipers had come in during the worst of the storm in the early morning hours. The three snipers had built igloos of snow and ice during the afternoon. After grabbing some chow and coffee two of them returned to the mountaintop and were pretty comfortable in their sleeping bags. The third man Rossellini, stayed in the tunnel until daybreak.

The three snipers wanted to go higher up on the mountain for a better view to the North and West. Where they were now, a part of the ledge blocked their view. Jim and Ken both concurred with them.

The snipers were now in their new places higher on the mountain as the tunnel crews began their work of mapping the tunnel. Radios were working fine and there would always be someone at the entrance of the tunnel to monitor the radios and landlines phones and the over flying aircraft.

No aircraft were acknowledging the team's calls; this was day two so they were on Channel Two. Hope the pilots know that.

As the demolition crews moved into the tunnel, the illumination was very good. Each Marine had on the Jap hats with the light, plus each team of three, carried one Navy emergency lantern. The ten men, including Jim, headed past the pit and came to a point where the floor sloped downward; cautiously one by one they followed the tunnel ever so slightly downward.

The shoring had become more prevalent; the vertical supports were almost eight feet apart and some kind of rusted wire mesh was overhead to prevent loose rocks from falling.

Forty feet from the start of the slope it ended. Two offshoot tunnels could be seen clearly, the main tunnel continued straight ahead. Using the Navy lantern Jim determined that the main tunnel continued. The others shined their lanterns into both tunnels; the end of them could not be seen.

The team's broke into their prescribed number of three and moved into the side tunnels. Jim and his three men moved straight ahead. "Remember to measure, in paces, how far the tunnel goes and the dimensions of the tunnel too." Each team had a chalkboard to record such stuff. Jim also had his thigh pad for notes and his AAR remembrances. He already had three pages of notes for that.

The same shoring dimensions were continued into the main tunnel. Jim used his radio to see if he could contact the other two groups while in the tunnel. He could not. I had better get Murph and Morgan to string some wire to the center point and give phones to each of the teams. As he was putting his radio away it went off." Baker Morgan for Baker Cunningham over." "Baker Cunningham, go ahead Morgan." "Jim I can read you five by five. I am at the open area of the main tunnel, what do you need?" "I can't reach either of the other threesomes. They have gone into two branch tunnels. Can you string some wire down each of the tunnels so we can communicate?" "Jim, can do, sit tight while I unpack a couple more handsets. We will be right there."

When Morgan and Murphy caught up with Jim they gave him a handset and a spool of wire that would unroll as he walked. They took off down each of the side tunnels and did the same for each of the teams. A phone check said that everything

was working beautifully. Morgan suggested that he stay at the junction of the three tunnels and monitor the phone and the radio. Murphy would go back to the tunnel entrance to continue monitoring the radios and phones. Jim agreed and off each of the teams went further into their tunnel.

Jim went another two hundred feet and the tunnel again branched out like the previous tunnel branches. The floor again began a slight slope downward. He let the other two teams know what he had encountered. Each tunnel team noticed that the floor of the tunnel they were in was relatively dry “The sloping floor must be taking the water to some kind of a pit or cistern.” Progress, such as it was, was exasperatingly slow. They had been at this for just over four hours and no end to any tunnel, yet.

“Did everyone bring a ration box with them?” Jim was getting concerned. The teams would lose precious time if everyone had to go back and get rations. Each team of three, checked in to the affirmative. So did Morgan, who was busy setting up another set of wire connections for the next tunnel off shoots. “Hey Morgan, how many feet on this spool you gave us, this is Adams in the tunnel on the left of the main one?” “Nine hundred feet Wallie, are you out of wire?” “Yea it sure looks like it. There is no end in sight to this hole, what do you suggest?”

“Hang in there. Don’t go beyond the communications wire. Give me a yell on the handheld radio.” Morgan was hoping the tunnel was a straight one and the UHF radio would work. “Thom, Wallie on UHF do you read me, over” that answered that question. “Wallie I hear you loud and clear, that means the tunnel you’re in is pretty straight. You stay with the landline and the other two continue on. Try the handheld radio until you can’t reach me. Stop and then come back until you can, got it?”

“Charlie will stay with the landline. Cottie and I will continue to follow this tunnel, let Jim know will you Thom?” “Calling Jim now, does Charlie have his UHF with him?” An affirmative response from Charlie Dreyer said that he had it and he is on Channel Two.” “Baker Cunningham, Morgan here do you read?” “Baker Morgan, I read you, why are you using UHF and not the landline?”

“Adams just called in, they are out of landline wire. That means they are in almost a thousand feet. They did a UHF check and I can hear them. Dreyer is staying

where he is in the tunnel with the landline, Adams and Cottie are continuing to follow the tunnel until the UHF can't communicate anymore."

All kinds of bad scenarios played out in Jim's head, now what to do next.

"Hang on Jim, Wallie's calling me, go ahead Wallie, what's up?"

"Thom, there is a shitpot full of weapons, ammunition and artillery shells in this tunnel. All of it looks old." Wallie was out of breath from excitement. "We only went a couple of hundred feet past where Charlie is and found this. Ask Jim what he wants us to do."

"Wallie whatever you do, do not touch any of it. If it's old it may disintegrate if you hit it. Can you see detonators on the shells?" "Nope, these are strictly impact projectiles." "Hang on I'll get Jim." Thom picked up the landline phone and told Jim of the situation, Jim told him to tell the three in that tunnel to "stand fast. Don't move I'm on my way."

"Thom get the G-men up here. Have Grazioso take my place in the main tunnel and have Gonzales standby with you. Jim out." By the time Morgan went to make the call for the G-men they were standing by his side. Both were monitoring the landline conversations, heard what Jim had said and "came a running." "Murphy gave us these for you Thom." They handed Morgan two spools of wire and two handsets. "Thanks guys, we'll need these shortly."

As they each departed, they slung the Thompson's off their shoulders to a "ready" position, just in case. Gonzales went about twenty feet and turned around. "Oh crap," he said. "Jim wants me to wait with you, I almost forgot."

As Jim came back to where Morgan and Gonzales were crouched, he motioned Julian to follow him into the left side tunnel. They went about two steps and the landline went off. It was the other team in the right side tunnel. "Found something guys, big crates and wooden boxes. Lots of them, tell Jim, Hayes out." "Morgan here, Jim is going into the left side tunnel, they found munitions and shit in there. I'll get Daro to come to your tunnel."

Thom got on the UHF radio, "Morgan for Daro, over." "Murphy here, he was just on the ledge, I'll go get him, wait one." Sean went out of the tunnel's mouth and saw Ken coming at a trot. "Morgan needs you at the junction of the first three tunnels. Thom

has both landlines and UHF radio. Would you take these with you?" He handed Ken another spool of wire and two handsets.

"Got your rations with you Sarge?" Murphy handed him two of the K-ration boxes. Ken nodded his thanks stuffed them into his jacket side pockets and moved into the tunnel. Carefully avoiding the soldiers and wounded as he went into the darkness.

Jim hearing the intensity of the calls sent Julian to assist in the other side tunnel. Gonzales took off running.

Without fanfare Thom motioned Ken to the tunnel to his right. "Did you hear what they found Ken?" Ken said, "Yes, Murphy's radio is acting like a relay station. I heard him when I was checking the snipers." Off he went into the tunnel, Thom smiled, now there goes a guy who knows what this war shit is all about. No wasted words, no wasted motion. I need to watch him real close and learn something. Jim was the educator, trainer and planner, but Ken was the pure Marine Infantry in action.

Thom noticed that he was sweating. He looked at himself and he still had on his outdoor winter coat from when he was outside. Laying his radio and landline phone on the spools of wire Thom took his coat off. He felt the tunnel floor for wetness and lay the coat down. "Hang it up" he could hear his mother say. "I'm not your private maid service, you know." "Yea mom, I'll get it later." Shit did I just say that out loud? I'm going tunnel crazy already. He chuckled as he picked up the radio and phone. "Miss you mom" He made certain to say it only to himself.

Ken got to the three demolition men quickly. When he raised his head to shine the helmet light on the scene in front of them, he whistled. "Good Christ, those are artillery pieces and crates of ammunition. Can anyone read that writing from here?" "Nope, never saw it before. Looks Russian or something like that," that was MJ offering his input.

Ken was taking charge now. "Stay here and keep your lights shining on as much of this stuff as you can. I'm going to look for a date of some kind on the artillery pieces. I know they won't blow up if I touch them." "Better stick to the walls in case someone had mined the middle." Ken couldn't tell who said that but he heeded the advice immediately and followed the tunnel wall. He ran smack into one of the vertical shoring pieces. Shit, that hurt he said to himself.



Sure enough, like any military organization there were dates on each of the pieces of artillery. All of it was stamped 1950. It's probably part of the invasion forces reserves. Ken could also read the caliber, 122 millimeter. The tires were not on the axle heads but were stacked on top of the tongue used to drag the weapon. Ken looked down the row of crates and boxes, as far as his flashlight and headlamp lights could penetrate the darkness. All he could see were crates and more crates.

"Hey Longo, do you have a chalkboard?" "Yea Sarge, Whaddya need?" "Come on up here with me and write this stuff down. Jim is going to need this to relay to HQ. There must be fifty or sixty of these crates." Ken was craning his neck to see around the other crates. "Longo, get the whole team up here, I see something else of interest." That got the rest of this tunnel team's attention, what the hell can that be?

When the team assembled on Ken, he pointed to a small engine like contraption and a huge stack of rails for a small railroad. The wooden rail ties were stacked in a cross hatched manner, from floor to the ceiling of the tunnel. Ken took the landline and called to Jim. Jim was up to his neck in old and decaying artillery munitions. Ken's call was not really welcome at this point. "Hey poddner, you have to see this tunnel. It is loaded with artillery weapons, 76 and 122 mm field pieces. There are mortars and some smaller stuff too, it looks Russian." Ken was excited and his voice was quivering.

"There's also railroad equipment here, an engine, ties and tracks. You may want to gaze at this and let HQ know what has been found." Jim thought for just the shortest of time before responding. "Ken we have a tunnel here that's loaded with some kind of artillery projectiles and explosives. I will come over that way as soon as I get some idea of how much is stacked here."

About an hour after Ken called, Jim came into the tunnel. The five men were cautiously walking in the midst of a very large cavern. The tunnel had been hewn out side-to-side and floor to ceiling. The shoring was still being used, indicating a not too stable environment. When Jim spotted Ira Hayes, the last man in line. Jim yelled to let him know he was behind him. No sense scaring anyone in this kind of a place.

"What do you have Ira," Jim asked? "I don't really know some of this stuff is huge, the rest of the team is up ahead." "Who all is in here now Ira," Jim asked? "Ken,

MJ, Steve, Julian and me. Do you see the size of this place? How the hell are we going to blow this place up?"

Jim smiled at Hayes and said prophetically. "Where there's a will, there's a way Ira. I'm going to catch up to Daro. He sounded excited about the find. Adam's and his guys found a tunnel full of artillery ammo, maybe for this stuff in here. See you later Ira." With that Jim walked down the middle of this vast room that had to be at least 200 feet across and he had no idea how much deeper it all went. The shoring and wire mesh were all over the walls and ceiling of the space. Jim noticed that it was warm but not as wet in this tunnel.

## Chapter Sixteen

### Exploring the tunnels, more day two

While the rest of this tunnel's men counted crates and field pieces Jim assessed what Ira had asked. "How are we going to blow this up?" Jim added silently, "without killing ourselves." No one was speaking, most were writing on their chalkboards. Jim saw Ken climbing on several of the pieces; Ken could actually touch the roof. Now if we can get the C3 up that high and in a pattern that will fracture the tunnel roof; it will all come tumbling down on this stuff. We can also put some C3 on the barrels and breaches of these guns and make them permanently useless. Wiring all of this could be tricky.

Jim had forgotten his own rule; measure by paces. "Anybody measure this tunnel?" "Entrance to large room 200 paces, width of tunnel 14 paces, width of this chamber 120 paces, depth yet unknown, Longo out." "Thanks Steve, good job, in all the excitement I forgot to count, thanks again, Jim out."

"This is Murphy at the entrance, I can hear all of the groups communications very well. I can keep an inventory of what you find and which tunnel it is in, save you all that writing, over." Another good idea was Jim's first thought.

Before anyone could reply, the sound of submachine gun fire filled the silence. It definitely came from the main or center tunnel. Morgan was all over it. "Tony what's up, Morgan here?" "Found three gooks trying to get further into the tunnel. Looks like they were trying to get away and not fight." Tony's voice was very matter of fact, "One of them turned to throw a grenade. So we shot the three of them. Three verified KIA's."

Ken almost fell from the top of a stack of cases he was crawling on. In one smooth motion, he swung over the side of the stack. He hit the floor of the chamber running to the gunfire. Jim put his hand up to slow him down, "Did you hear the Morgan and Tony chatter?" "Yea, when I get there I will check back with all of you. I was too involved with all this stuff and let my guard down, bad deal Jim." With that said Ken was off at a trot, right down the middle of the tunnel, screw any landmines.

When Ken caught up to the main tunnel team he was slightly winded. As he exited the mouth of the tunnel he had been in, Morgan waved and Ken acknowledged him. The down slope of the main tunnel surprised Ken and he had difficulty slowing

himself down. By the time he did slow down the floor had leveled out. "Christ" Ken said out loud, "I'm out of shape. Nah, just the excitement and my adrenaline is sky-high. Calm down."

The three bodies were spread out and had been searched. "Nothing of value, definitely, chinks." Said Danny Ormond, "not the flat face of the Koreans." Each body had their overcoats opened and Ken could see the food ration rolls. Unlike the Chicom's outside, these soldiers' clothes were pretty clean. "There may be more of them further in the tunnel." Ken was now in charge of this group of Marines. Ken double checked the bodies and gathered the team together. "We are going to explore for more gooks. Before we go let's get a couple of spools of comm wire and have Morgan show us how to connect it so it all works."

"We are going in twenty feet apart and not in a line." "Sarge, if there were more of them in the tunnel wouldn't these guys have called them when they spotted our lights?" "Good point Bruce. Let's leave two men here, you and I Bruce will try to find the end of this tunnel." "Jim, Daro over." "Go Ken." "These guys killed three Chicom's. Strong and I are going further into the tunnel to see if there are any more in there."

"Tony and Danny are staying where they killed the gooks, no papers or anything on these bodies. We are in about 600 feet, will check back in later. No extra support needed. Daro out." Since the conversation had been on the landline, everyone heard the whole thing. Each became a little more alert.

"Bruce, you follow the left side wall and I will take the right side. Use hand signals only, these lights give us away. Let's turn them off and find out how far we can see before we go any further." "Well that's no good, I can't see a thing, how about you?" Ken was struggling just to see a few feet in front of him. "No good Bruce, we better go back to the head lights." Strong was nodding his head but Ken could not see him in the darkness. "Hey Sarge, I have a flare grenade on me. What if I toss it as far as I can and follow it? It'll blind anyone who is in there and it won't explode?"

"That is a good idea, can you see far enough with the head light to avoid hitting the side walls?" "Yea, I can see about fifty or sixty feet. I will aim for the center of the tunnel, "count of three okay?" "Go for it, nice and easy does it." Ken was not the least bit apprehensive. He liked the way Bruce thought through situations. "One, two, three." The

soup can size canister did not loft very much. Strong had thrown it in a sidearm motion. When the grenade hit the floor of the tunnel it simultaneously ignited.

Several loud screams let them know that there was someone there. "Hold on let's not rush into this. Who knows how many and how well armed?" A silhouette appeared in the light of the flare. Ken put two rounds into the shape and it fell to the tunnel floor. At the same time a weapon went off with ricochets flying all over the tunnel.

The Chicom probably dropped his loaded weapon when he fell and it went off. Ken was thinking in overdrive, we had better check that out. Bruce pointed his hand flashlight at the floor and searched until he could see the outline of a presumably dead enemy soldier.

The flare, its' bright red glow was illuminating a large area of the tunnel. However the smoke it produced would be stinging the eyes of anyone near the flare. Neither Marine wanted to get too close to the smoke, yet wanted to see if anyone was hiding there. Bruce started to move along the wall closer to the downed soldier. Ken saw Bruce moving cautiously along the left tunnel wall and he did the same on his side, both had their lights off.

Ken saw them first, four soldiers with their backs to the smoking flare each one had a rifle in one hand. What looked like the other hand was covering their nose and eyes. When Ken yelled, "Hands up drop your weapons." The four turned as one and leveled their rifles and fired blindly. The sound that the four weapons made almost sounded like one weapon, the firing was that well executed. Again the ricochets were as dangerous as the bullets themselves.

Both Strong and Ken had been hit. Neither could tell if it was a bullet or stone fragments at first. Each Marine fired an entire clip of 45 caliber rounds from their sub-machine guns into the four soldiers who went down as one body in a heap. When the blood started to ooze from Bruce's right arm he knew he had been wounded. "Got nicked in the arm Ken, can I go home now?"

In spite of the situation Ken chuckled and said, "After we clean this mess up, we'll see. Still way too smoky to get too close. Hey that looks like a wall behind those guys what do you think Bruce?"

“Better let Jim know what’s happened Ken,” Bruce was sure Jim was going to call them shortly. Better to call him first. “Can you use the landline Bruce? I want to keep an eye on that pile of gooks. I don’t like the way they all fell in a heap like that. They may be booby-trapped.”

“Baker Strong to Baker Cunningham over.” “Go Bruce.” “We killed a few Chicom’s in the main tunnel. Used a flare grenade to light up the place. It’s much too smoky to proceed right now, over.”

“Do you want or need help?”

“Nope, just wanted to let you know we are okay. Ken seems to think we may be at the end of this tunnel. From where he is he can see a wall. I will let you know when we know something, Strong out.”

“Why didn’t you tell him you were wounded Bruce?” “Not important, he has enough to be concerned about. Besides what would he do, call Doc, I’ll be fine. How about you, did you check for any hits?” “Yeah, got one in the leg, just a stinger. We can carry each other out of the tunnel, just like in the old western movies”

Ken was wisecracking trying to ignore the burning in his left leg.

“This must be the end of the tunnel, the smoke is not going anywhere. I guess that eliminates any ideas of vents in this area. Whatta you think Ken?” “Probably right, that flare is still burning.” As soon as Ken said it, the flare went out and the tunnel was in total darkness.

“Bruce, call Jim and get some of those Navy lanterns in here. Just one guy will do, but we need more light, okay?” “Got it.” “Jim, Bruce here, can you send one guy with a couple of Navy lanterns, we can’t see at all in here?”

“Hayes will be there shortly, he’s got two of them, keep me posted okay?” “Sure enough boss, Bruce out.”

Ira came around the bend in the tunnel and almost tripped on the body lying on the tunnel floor. “Shit, I wasn’t looking down and almost ran into the stiff. I am to stay with you guys, per Cunningham.” Bruce took one of the lanterns and flipped the switch. Ira gasped at the smoke and he saw the pile of Chicom’s on the floor. “Ken thinks they may be booby trapped, that’s why we are waiting and needed the lights.”

“Holy crap, booby-trapped,” Ira was almost speechless. Ken interrupted Ira by saying “I saw a lot of that on Okinawa, when a group of guys falls like that. Something bad is sure to happen, so be damned careful.” “Sure will, hey Sarge your leg is bleeding, you okay?” “Yea, we’ll look at it later, just so you know Strong was hit too. It’s in the arm, no “million dollar wound” but it may get him some time on the hospital ship.”

Ken was trying to keep the waiting less tense. They could see very clearly now the end wall of the tunnel. There was nothing else the tunnel just stopped here. Now he wondered why these guys didn’t hide in the bigger room where they could have hidden themselves better. Ken grabbed the landline phone and called Jim, “Jim, Ken over,” “go Ken, Jim here.” “This tunnel ends here, be very careful in your tunnel, some more gooks may be hiding in some of those crates.”

“Thanks Ken, my guys are pretty spread out right now and not thinking about the enemy, just inventory. I had better let them know your concern.” “When Jim turned around to face into the large room, there was Gonzales pushing a Chicom ahead of him. “Found him in a large box, there are others too. All unarmed, at least no rifles. I did not check for sidearms. Do I just shoot him or what would you like me to do with him sergeant.”

“Wow,” was Jim’s reply. “This is getting complicated. We can’t take prisoners and we sure as hell are not going to murder them either.” “Combat is one thing but this is different. You heard what Ken found in the main tunnel?” “Yes and just as he said it, is when I spotted these guys in the crates. Ormond is gathering the others and is waiting to see what you want to do Jim.”

“Let’s close this down for today and get everybody back to the entrance. This is getting too complicated. I need to think about where to go from here.”

In the main tunnel the smoke was now clearing quickly. Ken sent Ira back to bring Tony and Danny, who were waiting by the first three dead Chicom’s. Ken wanted everyone where he and Bruce were. Ken had Danny checked out the one Ira had almost tripped on. Ormond put his hand to the Chicoms throat. “No pulse, no nothing Sarge, dead as dead can be.” At that moment the landline was making noise. “Ken here who’s this?”

“Jim here Ken, you were right, more Chicom’s in here hiding in crates deeper in the room. Cook and Longo are rounding them up. It looks like five all together, and none of them are armed. I am pulling everybody back to the entrance and see what we are going to do next. When you finish in that tunnel, leave one guy at the entrance to guard it, everyone else meet at the main entrance.”

“You guys in the left tunnel, Adams, Cottie and Dreyer did you hear that? Everyone meet at the main entrance, over.” “Cottie here, we got your message, see you at the entrance. Should we leave one of us at the entrance to this tunnel?” “Not a bad idea. Adams you stay and I will send your BAR back to you when I reach the entrance.” “Aye sarge” was Wallie’s reply.

As each of the tunnels emptied out Morgan was counting heads, three went in here and Jim went in there with three and Gonzales went with Hayes in that side and so did Ken and now Ken is in the middle with let me see, Strong, Ormond, Grazioso then Hayes went in so all in all the center tunnel has five guys in it.

Then the parade from the right side tunnel and large room started. Two Chicom’s and then Gonzales. Two more chinks and behind them Longo. One more chink with Cook behind him and then came Sergeant Jim. All I need now is to see the center tunnel guys.

“MJ stay here by this tunnel’s mouth and hang on to the landline. I’ll take your prisoner. When I send someone back with Adam’s BAR I will send you more ammo for your Thompson, okay?” Cook just nodded. You can never have too much ammo.

To no one in particular Jim said, “We don’t know how long Daro will be in the center tunnel. We all can hear what’s happening on the landline, so only use it when absolutely necessary.”

“Okay, let’s move these guys to our jail.” Off they all went now there was two Marines behind each two gooks. Morgan made a note of the Chicom’s; they did not seem all that scared or worried, hmmn.

Then he began to wonder about Ken and those guys in the center tunnel. This has been some trip. This is only day two and already we have prisoners, wounded and a mystery that involves Russian artillery. No one is ever going to believe this. Hell I don’t and I am living it.



Ken had an idea, since he suspected the four he and Bruce killed had some kind of booby-trap on them. Suppose we toss this other dead chink on top of the pile and see if it blows up. Okay but how the hell do we do that and still get far enough away to keep from blowing ourselves up with them? The most common body trap was by using a grenade attached to the jacket or coat so when the jacket is pulled the pin or button activates the grenade.

Ken was trying to think of every booby-trap he had ever seen or heard of. Come on mind, work damnit. Shit, what he needed was one of those flamethrowers. No need to get too close with one of those. Well, how about one of our hand grenades? We could lob one in there and still have enough time to get a way from the explosion. But what about the shrapnel flying around in here? Nope, need something better than that.

“What’s going on Sarge?” “Just thinking Tony, I am trying to find a way to set off any booby-trap they may be wearing and not get us all killed in the process.” “Hell why bother? We are going to blow the piss out of this place in a few days. Don’t even go near the bodies, or thermite them and see what happens.”

“You are absolutely correct Mr. Gonzales, a thermite grenade may do the trick. I just don’t want them playing possum or I would just leave them. Although we loaded them down pretty good with forty rounds of forty-five caliber lead. It’s the way they fell that has me concerned, four bodies just don’t fall down like that, all at once, it’s not natural.”

“Okay, in the meantime, why don’t we get the other bodies and get them closer to the four others, no point in having corpses laying all over the place, too messy. Don’t drag them, two guys carry one and dump it close to the others. How’s your arm Bruce can you grab this one with me and toss it on the heap?”

Ken was teasing Bruce and Bruce liked it. Strange what this type of situation will do for two men thrown into an unlikely scenario. The body was lighter than Ken had expected the chink was mostly uniform, “Whatta ya think Sarge should we throw him on the pile and run like hell?” “I’m ready if you are, on three, one, two, three.”

As the two of them tossed the body at the pile of dead soldiers the each turned and ran for their lives. Hurt leg or no hurt leg Ken Daro was running in this year’s Olympics. When the body hit the pile there were three muffled explosions, harrumph,

harrumph, and harrumph. No shrapnel was heard. Ken now knew that the chinks had wired their coats to the grenade handle. When someone opened it; they would get a face or body full of grenade shrapnel.

“Ken you just saved a couple of lives just then. Any one of us would have turned their bodies over, just like we did with the others. But this time a grenade would have gotten somebody. Thanks, from each of us. A good lesson learned too.” Bruce Strong had never been more sincere in his life. Ken just said, “You’re welcome, these lessons don’t come easy, do they?”

They each smiled at the other and walked back to where the other Marines were carrying the dead Chicom’s. Bruce looked at the Marines and said, “Just stack ‘em on top of the others. Be careful they were booby-trapped.” He and Ken headed for this tunnels entrance. Ken turned and said to them. “Meet us at the main tunnel entrance when you are done.”

As they passed Morgan, Ken gave him a thumb's up when Thom asked about his leg wound. Bruce too had a big smile on his face. It looks like these two guys have some kind of “bond” going.

## Chapter Seventeen

### Day Two and beyond

Sergeant Jim Cunningham had a couple of thoughts as he sought to sift through all he had here in the entry part of this tunnel complex. One was, that he could get on the radio and hope that there was a US aircraft monitoring and ask Recon HQ for help in how to solve this dilemma. Or he could come up with a plan and then call HQ.

Better yet, come up with a plan and execute the plan and pray for the best. Okay he said to himself, you have good news and bad news here. Which do I want to know and deal with first? Go with the good news, bad news takes too long to solve.

Everyone had eaten the evening meal, finally. The Chicom officer still refused to eat, screw him. The five Chinese soldier captives ate the K-ration supper meal; seemed to like it too. The two wounded ROK soldiers were recovering very quickly. Both spoke several Chinese dialects and were anxious to speak to the newest prisoners.

Doc was very enthusiastic about the recovery of both wounded team members. Sergeant Daro was not a very good patient. He did not want his utility trousers cut away, "Just enlarge the hole, he told Doc, "and patch it up." Doc wound up cutting the leg part lengthwise so he could get the sulfa pack on the wound so it would stick. The wound was an in and out, a clean shot and easy to repair.

Bruce's arm was a more difficult wound to treat because the bullet was still in the wound. The bleeding had stopped, but that was the bad part. The wound should bleed to get the accumulated gunk out of the wound. Doc put a drain into the hole as far as it would go and patched Strong up as best he could. Surprisingly Bruce could use his arm very well; he definitely would require some kind of surgery when they got back.

The ROK soldiers told the GI's that they wanted to talk to the five Chicom's who surrendered in the tunnel. Out of sight and sound of the Chicom officer. The GI corporal told that to Doc and he passed it on to Jim.

Doc had tended to the two US soldiers who had the broken arms. The one was a simple fracture of both lower arm bones. A simple twist and a pull and Doc felt both bones snap into place. The poor soldier almost passed out from the pain of breaking and resetting, instead he threw up. The other soldier's upper left arm was broken. Doc could feel the large upper arm bone in two pieces. Getting them back together took two

people to exert enough pressure to get them back in place. The soldier having seen his buddy vomit, kept biting on the parachute strap that was clenched between his teeth. He moaned a lot but got through it okay. He would rather have passed out than to throw up.

The Army Corporal and another GI fashioned splints from the packing materials that worked rather well. The parachute harness straps held everything in place. Doc was pleased with his work. He only wished the evacuation was over; all of these guys need rest and treatment.

Jim and Ken had worked out a rotation for watching the three tunnels inside, one hour on and four off, the three men could all see each other and they had their radios. As back up to the three in the tunnel, there were three held in reserve in case of a problem. Help was quickly available. The reserve three would be in the main entrance. The snipers themselves did sniper rotation. There was to always be two on the hill. Rotation was done all through the night.

Jim and Ken talked about firepower. Now that the US soldiers had their weapons and cleaned them. Any action would have an additional five rifles as defense. Now that these GI's had some strength back they wanted to help. One of them was a sniper school candidate and he volunteered to go up on the hilltop. Jim told him okay in a day or so. Right now we may need all the weapons we've got, in these tunnels to defend ourselves. The PFC agreed to wait; he just wanted to help out.

Jim pondered some more, is that all the good news? No there's got to be more. Murphy was again outside the mouth of the tunnel, monitoring the radios. He yelled that a new fighter unit was overhead and trying to reach us. "It seems they want us to stop using local time and go to Zulu or GMT, the other is too confusing. Must be Navy pilots."

"So in ten minutes it is tomorrow, okay go to Channel Three, everybody. Their call sign is Skunk One and Two; they are both flying F3D's and are loaded. Their time overhead is two hours and thirty minutes."

Ken told Jim to give the pilots some of the details of what we have down here. "Don't tell them your plan, whatever it may be, and don't ask for one either." Jim thought this was real sound advice. Probably learned the hard way by Ken. Let them know the mission is still on schedule including the evacuation.

Jim practiced in his head what to say; jeez it is like giving a speech. He opened his lap pad and wrote some notes. Six Chicom prisoners one an officer, two wounded ROK's, two wounded US soldiers, all formerly POW's. Two wounded Recon members, six US soldiers, formerly POW's in good shape. Two tunnels full of artillery ammo and Russian field artillery pieces possibly regiment size inventory. There are nine KIA Chicom soldiers in the tunnels. The mission is still on schedule as is the evacuation.

Jim let Ken read his list. Ken nodded and patted Jim on the shoulder as Jim headed for the mouth of the cave to deliver the message. Pappy will shit a brick when he hears this. Hell he may even air drop in just to be in on the action. Get real Cunningham and send the message, he told himself.

As he went outside, Jim was pleasantly surprised. The sun was shining and the wind had died down considerably. Murphy was there with his VHF/UHF radio setup. The small hand cranked generator was close at hand in case it was needed. The new motorcycle sized batteries lasted a long time on one charge from the generator. Jim reached the aircraft overhead on the first call. Both pilots were flying in ever increasing concentric circles looking for any sign of enemy activity. Nothing to report. Jim sighed audibly he did not need anymore Chicom interference in getting this job done. One of the pilots read back the information and asked Jim if he wanted to "stand by" for a response. "I had better," he told the radio voice.

Jim could not hear the pilot's transmission of the information and waited expectantly. He wondered who would be monitoring this stuff. Surely no one is sitting around the message center at HQ waiting to hear from us. How wrong he was. The pilot came back almost immediately with a new tone in his voice.

"JOC HQ wants to know why you have US Army POW's and prisoners," the pilot was reflecting someone else's upset. "Tell them at HQ that it will all be in my AAR. It is much too complicated to explain right now."

The pilots voice was calmer on this transmission. "You may want to rethink your last remark Marine, HQ sounds pissed." "So am I Skunk One, we did not expect to run into any of this. So we are playing this hour-by-hour. We still have one tunnel that may have armed enemy soldiers hiding in it, we won't know until tomorrow when we go back

into the tunnel.” “Cunningham, Skunk Two, what’s your rank?” “Sergeant sir, why is that Important?”

“The guy at the other end of our conversation is a full Colonel and gets real demanding. He bugged us all the way from Pyongyang wanting information. Be prepared for him to pull rank and want to run the show from Japan.” “Hell, Skunk Two, let him put on a parachute and join us. He can run the show from here.”

All Jim got back was a double click of the airplanes mike as acknowledgement. Jim felt better but was not sure why. Was some colonel going to try and interfere with this mission? Screw him and the horse he didn’t come in on. I wonder if Pappy is hearing any of this? Of course he is. Now I had better be careful.

“Cunningham Skunk Two, your Recon HQ says to proceed as you feel necessary. If you need to abort the mission to get the prisoners and former POW’s out safely do it. If you want to adjust the coordination of extraction with the Navy, let your Recon HQ know that too.”

“The guy in Japan says that your orders are not to take any prisoners. Annihilate them and blow the tunnels.” “Wait one, Skunk Two” Jim had to clear his head for a moment. Recon says basically that we are on our own. What we decide is okay with them. Now some asshole in Japan, with an eagle on his collar, wants me to murder the prisoners, well eff him.

“Skunk Two Cunningham here, let Recon HQ know that we will complete the mission as planned. We will need some assistance from the Navy extraction team because of the number of men now present, over.” “Okay Cunningham, what would you like us to tell JOC HQ, Skunk Two, over?” “Tell him the same thing. The mission will be completed and all prisoners and POW’s will be extracted on the planned exit date, Cunningham over.”

“You have a big pair of balls for a Sergeant. My wingman and me love ya for it. Skunks One and Two going back up to angels twenty. Waiting for your next contact, One and Two, listening out.”

Jim thought about the pilot’s last comments. I may only be a buck sergeant in the US Marine Corps, but this is my job; to do it as best I can. And that is exactly what I am going to do.

Murphy was putting the radio stuff back into its cases when Jim spotted the Chicom officer smiling at him. Jim's initial reaction was to punch him in the face, and then the officer spoke to him. "You are a civilized man Sergeant. I fully expected to be shot when it was convenient for you to do so." It took Jim a few seconds to speak, "Your English is very good Lieutenant, and yes I think of myself as civilized, how about you?"

"Thank you sergeant, I am a product of the British Government schools in Shanghai and I speak several languages. All of which makes me a poor risk to survive being captured." Jim did not know whether to get into a conversation with this Chicom or what to do. "I have a number of things to do right now Lieutenant but I would like to speak to you later. You will not be untied, except if you wish to eat. Do you understand why I cannot release you?" "Fully."

Jim went inside to talk to the Unit and map out a plan for tomorrow. He told Ken of his brief conversation with the Chicom officer and with the JOC and Recon HQ's. Ken just shook his head remembering something from a long time ago.

Before Jim could gather the Unit members to plan tomorrow's venture into the large room tunnel. The two ROK's were sitting up and wanted to discuss something with both Ken and Jim. They had been talking with the Chicom's prisoners. "The five of them are all that is left of a platoon of Chinese conscripts who deserted over two weeks ago. They were working there way south to the DMZ and became lost. They were discovered by the soldiers who your men killed in the tunnel and the pit area."

"Those were all regulars and disliked the conscripted soldiers because they did not want to fight. The original group that caught these men was a twelve-man patrol; one Sergeant, one Corporal and the rest were privates."

One of the ROK's added, "The Chicoms you have as prisoners claim to be Chinese nationals. The others are communists; they said that the two groups fight constantly among themselves. China does not want Russia to occupy Korea. The Chinese government needs the supplies and political support from Russia. China wants to have its own form of communism."

The ROK soldiers agreed that the same problem exists in Korea. "It will most likely be there for a very long time. Self-governing is new to the Koreans and not every one likes it."

One of the ROK soldiers tilted his head towards the tunnel entrance as he spoke, "That Chinese officer is a perfect example. He is well educated and wants to be in the political party of the new Communist party. He sees only what is in it for himself. He follows orders deliberately and not thoughtfully." His voice was dripping with sarcasm as he said to Jim, "He also acts like he is the only one with an education. He would have killed me but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction. He is a brute and a low-life."

"My education is from Hong Kong even though I am Korean. I hope to be a teacher or professor when these wars are over." Jim was speechless; he had not encountered any educated Korean up to this point. He was anxious to know more. Ken on the other hand was unimpressed with the whole dialog. Ken mistrusted both the Koreans and the Chinese. Keep your friends close but your enemies closer, was Ken's motto.

"Okay, I will take that information and use it at a later time. Now we need to make our plans for tomorrow." Jim was getting back into his leadership role and felt better, for some unknown reason. "Ken, if what these Chicom deserters are saying is correct we may have gotten all of the Chicom regulars. They said there were twelve of them and we have nine in the tunnels and three on the hill." Ken thought about that for a moment and then agreed, "But we have to be ready for more when we investigate that big room again."

Ken was all business now; any political talk was behind him. "What about that JOC guy Jim?" "Screw him Ken, I would rather lose my stripes than follow that bastards instructions." "Me too; you can always tell the desk jockeys. To them it is always kill, kill, kill but they can't or won't do it themselves. Ask gunny sometimes, we had them like that in the South Pacific too."

"The plan was this. To leave one Unit member to guard the center tunnel and one to guard the left side tunnel." Ken could see Jim's adrenaline flowing as Jim addressed the assembled team. "Morgan and Murphy would continue in their respective places on the radios and the landline stuff. Everyone else will go into the right side tunnel to search for more Chicoms first." Take a breath Jim, "Then when the tunnel is secure, then and only then, we can assess the how and when to blow that tunnel."



“The center or main tunnel and the pit should be blown at the same time. Maybe by some magic we can get the roof of the pit down too. The left side tunnel was to be done at the same time as when we begin our evacuation.” That ammunition will most likely set itself off once the first explosion starts. It looked really unstable all crusty and covered with what looked like alkali or calcium deposits.

“We need to get everyone off of the hilltop before we blow anything. The noise, if someone is around, could bring the Chicom army down on our necks.”

Jim was picturing their last tunnel demolition “Blowing all three at the same time may be more dangerous than doing one or two at a time.” Destroying the artillery was a prime consideration. “Let’s look at immobilizing that stuff first with minor charges. If the roof doesn’t fall in during that we will then blow the rest of the large room. First we have to get to the end of that tunnel complex.”

The entire Recon Unit was silent, Jim knew what needed to be done, so listen to him and follow the instructions. Jim somehow did not give orders. He always made the decisions seem like it was everybody’s idea to do exactly as Jim suggested.

The US Army soldiers listened intently. Where is it we can help? Is he going to not include us in any of this work? Who wants to ask him, who wants to be the one to be told to shut up and sit down? If we need you we will ask for your assistance.

Jim looked over at the GI’s. An expectation seemed to hang over them. He asked “If any of them felt strong enough to work in the tunnel with his Recon team?” He should have known better. All the hands went up including the two guys with broken arms. Jim smiled and said to them “The wounded and injured will be excused from any of this work, but thanks.”

“The uninjured US Army personnel are welcome to participate in a US Marine Corps Recon operation. Sergeant Daro and myself will assign you to work with one of our men when we go into the tunnel tomorrow morning. This is dangerous work guys', not that you are not used to danger. These tunnels are not real stable, we all have to be careful.”

Jim was now finished with this speech and felt good about the plan. “Okay everyone get as much sleep as you can. Remember we still have prisoners to guard and take care of.” “Ken, would you like to add something?” “Nope, you’ve got it covered.

Before I turn in I will make my pilgrimage to the top of the hill and check on the snipers.” Ken stopped in mid-sentence. “Which of you Army guys is the sniper trainee?”

One of the hands went up in the air and Ken pointed to him to come along. “If you would, come up the hill with me and we can get you into the sniper rotation. You will need one of the parkas; it is cold out there. Oh yeah, bring your Garand and some ammo.” Off the two of them went, side by side with a new burst of energy. Jim looked at them as they departed; he really liked and respected Ken Daro. Not just as a Marine but also as a human being.

## Chapter Eighteen

### Day Three

Everyone, Recon Marines, the US soldiers even the two wounded ROK soldiers were up early and ready to start doing the days work. Whatever it was that Cunningham had for them to do. In reality he had concerns that he and his demolition unit would have too much help. Ken thought it was funny and kept smiling at Jim when someone would ask what he could do to help.

The Army sniper wannabee was already up on the hill. The three Marine snipers showed him how to and helped him make his own igloo so he could stay out of the cold and wind. Inside the tunnel entrance Murphy and Morgan had set up the radios again to communicate with whatever aircraft would be assigned to relay any messages. None were overhead yet, "Heck it is only seven in the morning. Pilots don't get up this early, don't you know that?"

Jim looked at his list of personnel, including the prisoners. There were five Chicom deserters and a Chicom officer. The five enlisted Chicoms were tied together at the wrist with the nylon cord from the parachutes. Where one went they all went. Walking them outside to answer natures call was almost comical. Murphy had fashioned a tether of about thirty feet long from the parachute cord and harnesses. He did not want to watch these guys "go" as he put it.

Most of the Americans both Marines and Army did their thing after dark, trickier but more private. The Chicom officer, on the other hand, had not made any request to use the facilities.

Jim went back to his list. The snipers now were four up on the mountaintop. One of the Army soldiers, a PFC named Kessler joined Rossellini, Ortega and Ott out in the wind and cold. Two of the Army guys, the ones with the busted arms, Ellerbe and Ingrahm are guarding the Chicoms, Zhang, Li, Wang, Wu and Huang. The Chicom Lt. Chen was kept separated, but he too came under the scrutiny of the two-armed GI's.

Doc was at the enlarged area of the tunnel entrance. It was now basically an aid station. Strong was there, much against his will. Doc Schmidt kept changing the drain tube and dressing to keep him there. "You don't want to lose an arm just to be in the middle of everything." Doc was lecturing and Bruce was trying to ignore the truth.

The two ROK soldiers tried to keep him company. Both Jin and Hyun spoke very good English but Bruce was not about to be pacified, by anybody. Two of the uninjured US soldiers were on snow duty and keeping an eye on the tunnel entrance. They are PFC's, Wisnewski and Lincoln. They each enjoyed helping Doc with cleanup and chores and heating the food for everyone. Each was concerned with getting out of here. Since they were captured once and starved, neither wanted to do that again.

Jim continued with his list, my God it's getting longer by the day. Okay at the junction of the three tunnels is Morgan with the radio and landline stuff. At the main tunnel is Danny Ormond and with him is a GI named Becker. On the left tunnel are Dreyer and Corporal Mankewicz of the US Army. The right tunnel will have me and Ken, Hayes and Cook, Longo and Gonzales, Cottie, Adams and Grazioso.

"Am I missing someone somewhere?" he looked at Ken and all he got from him was a shrug and a smile. As he turned around and there was his answer. Along with Morgan, in the center of the tunnels, was the Army radioman Corporal Brady. "My God" he said out loud "Does every Irishman in the military wind up with a radio?" Morgan and Brady looked at Jim and laughed. They nodded and went back to working on the landline configuration. The two of them had dragged the landline wire out of each tunnel except the large one with the artillery pieces in it. They would get that after the tunnel was secured.

As Jim was getting ready to lead the way into the right side tunnel, Murphy called. "The aircraft from K6 were overhead and needed to give you some messages. Your ears only." Jim stepped aside and had Ken lead the group of seven into the tunnel for sweeping and clearing. Jim was disappointed, he watched Ken trying to hide his wobbly leg. The man just loves this stuff bad leg and all.

Murphy was waiting for Jim at the entrance with a pair of headphones and a microphone. Jim took off his Japanese tunnel helmet and put on the earphones. "Cunningham here, over." "Blackbeard One with messages for Sergeant Cunningham over" "That's me over."

"JOC HQ wants the names, rank and serial numbers of the US Army patrol that were captured. They also want to know the date they were captured and what location they were in at the time of capture, over."

“This is Sergeant Cunningham and we are in the middle of searching for more Chicoms hiding in this tunnel complex. I have the names of these soldiers and most are currently busy soldiering, over.” “Sorry that this is inconvenient but they are very insistent, over.”

“Contact me again at 1800 hours local time and I will have the patrol leader of the US Army unit available to answer these questions, over.” “Blackbeard One to Cunningham, we are supposed to be using Zulu time, over.”

“Okay One, add nine hours to 1800 hours and call me back, Cunningham out.”

“If he calls back again, I am busy Murph.” With that said Jim ripped off the headset, handed Sean the mic, shoved the helmet on his head and stormed into the tunnel. Everyone in the sick bay area of the tunnel did not say a word as Jim moved passed.

“I was going to make the Marine Corps my career. Well if this is any indication what it is like then the hell with it. OCS and everything else can go to hell.”

As he moved into the tunnel he saw Thom and Brady at the landline area and gave them a thumbs up “Now back to work gentlemen.” Jim’s mood had gone from black to back in charge.

As he entered the right side tunnel entrance the amount of light was startling. Everyone had their helmet lights on as well as the Navy lanterns. Ken had decided to start where the deserters had been hiding. If anyone is still in there it will be either there or further back in this large complex. No one was doing inventory, everyone was looking for enemy soldiers. With eight in this place we should find something or someone pretty quickly. As that thought entered Jim’s head the UHF radio went off “Jim, Ken over.”

“Go Ken, Jim here,” “Hayes and I are at the end of this tunnel. It goes back about four hundred feet from the main chamber. Lots of small arms in crates’ here, some anti-tank weaponry as well, over.” All the while Ken was speaking Jim was picking up his walking pace heading toward the opposite end of the large room. “Ken I am on my way, be at your location shortly, Jim out.”

Jim approached what appeared to be the end of a row of the very large crates and boxes. These crates housed all of this field artillery and stuff. What he could see ahead of him were two headlamps. It is really dark back in here. He moved as fast as

he could on the unfamiliar floor surface. Lots of loose shale like stones underfoot, be careful. He could now make out the outline of Ken and Ira. Boy that was a long walk.

Ken turned on the Navy lantern to show Jim where the tunnel ended. It was as if some kind of boring machine had just quit working. The wall was almost perpendicular and smooth looking and very little moisture. The room was so much warmer than the other two tunnels. I wonder why? "Jim do you notice how warm it is in here?" Ken can now read my mind, that's frightening. "Yep, maybe an underground spring or something like that although nothing in here looks rusted it should be if the air was moist from a warm spring."

"Okay, no more Chicom's in here. Let's take a good look at what we are going to attach the C3 to." Jim was moving ahead to getting these tunnels eliminated. "Ken, if we stick a block of C3 on the bigger guns, the 76's and the 122's. And also line the ceiling in a straight line from this end to the opening. This whole place should be nothing but a big heap of rock and rubble."

"Do we have enough explosives to do that with?" Ken asked Jim. "I think so, I believe we won't need as much to do the other tunnel with the explosives in it. We can use the artillery shells as adjunct explosives and take out that tunnel using their own stuff."

"Okay Sergeant Cunningham which tunnel goes first?" Ken was trying to lighten the moment Jim was way too serious. Jim sensed the tease. Ira suggested that the first tunnel be the center one off of the main. His rationale was that the tunnel has a natural curve to it and not much debris will be expelled through the opening. "Good thinking Ira, a good choice for a very good reason."

The three of them walked slowly into the large open room. The Unit members were all over the crates and boxes looking for places to put the explosives. "Damned smart team" Jim said to no one in particular. There I go again; jabber jabber jabber, to only myself.

"Ira I tell you what," Jim was deadly serious. "Later today you take two other demo guys with you. Go into that center tunnel and get it ready to blow. We can blow the tunnel from outside the main entrance. So you need to be certain that the connections and splices are good, test them three times. Use your own judgment as to

the pattern.” Ira felt good about the added responsibility, “Who do you think I should take with me Sarge?” “You and Longo work well together and also take Cottie, he could use shot of confidence.”

Ken listened to Jim setting this whole thing up, just like a good coach. Pick the right guy, get him some competent help and also train the new kid. Nice work Jim. “Jim what is the best way to move the cases of C3 back into these tunnels?” Ken asked before anyone else did. “Ken did you notice what the GI’s did to get those cases out of the snow and into the main cave opening? They put them on skids from the drop crates, a great idea. Now we can muscle them from there to each tunnel entrance.”

“How’d you do it on the last mission?” Ken was interested. Jim remembered lugging those individual boxes of explosives and told Ken. “We had to tote the twenty-five pound boxes of C2 from outside to each of the tunnels. What a hell of a job that was, this will be much better.” Jim continued while remembering. “We used back packs to lug them from the drop zone to the cave entrance and finally to where we were going to use it. Not fun at all.”

When Jim and Ken left the right side tunnel Jim recollected the conversation with the pilot. The needed info about the former US POW’s; and went looking for Corporal Mankewicz. Jim told him about the conversation he had with the pilot. Mankewicz said he would gather that information for the HQ folks. “I’m sure they have us as MIA since we are more than two weeks overdue from our mission. I wonder when they are going to send someone to look for us. We’ve walked over a hundred miles and did not see any aircraft searching for us.” Jim added, “You were surprised when we showed up and dropped all that stuff on the first pass.”

“We sure weren’t expecting such a large force as a rescue team. The Chicom’s almost shit a brick when they saw all of those parachutes. All of you hanging under those canopies, I know we were impressed. I’ll bet no one even knows or cares that we are out here.” The disgust in Mankewicz’s voice was very evident.

“They know now, and you may have to hold your tongue Emil when Japan HQ starts asking you a lot of questions.” Jim added quickly, “No one is supposed to know about Recon’s operations here in North Korea. Don’t let him press you for any info, okay?” “Got it, ahhh, screw these headquarters types, all bluff and no stuff to back it

up.” Mankewicz was getting more pissed as he thought about being left out here to die or being captured to rot in some work camp.

Jim left Mankewicz to his thoughts. Jim’s mind was already working on his demolition plan. Move as much C3 up here as we can haul. Test some on the artillery pieces, the ones towards the back on the right side tunnel and room. Maybe we could test some tonight. It would be hard to identify where the sound came from in the dark. Maybe do one large artillery piece to see what damage is done by one C3 brick. “Whaddya think Ken, if we try this?” Ken liked the idea but he had zero knowledge of C3 explosives and how much noise it made. He would soon find out.

Jim called the team in the large room to assemble on him. “I want to immobilize one or two of the big guns in here tonight.” That got the attention of his team, “It may not be enough to just destroy the tunnel and cave system. We need to make all this stuff useless.” Adams was first to speak, “How do we do that exactly Sarge?”

“Okay, good question. Instead of placing the plastic explosive up against the walls as we normally do we are going to hand form this stuff around the muzzle and breach of as many weapons as we can get to.” Gonzales too had a question “Have you ever done this before Jim?”

“Not for real, but in school they showed us how to cut through a steel column and direct the shockwave in any direction to cut the steel in half. I figure this should be about the same as that. Hell steel is steel.”

Longo chimed in too, “This should be easier than the last job. It’s warmer in here and the plastic too is warmer so it should be the same consistency as putty.” Cook said, “You tried to mold it to one of the columns on the first mission and it all fell on the floor, some putty.” “This is different, not that old shit from WW II. This is new and improved,” even Jim laughed at that comment.

“Okay then let’s get ourselves out to the entrance area and start moving some of the cases of explosives in here.” Before Jim finished the statement the rest of the team was heading out of the large room and headed for the demolition stuff.

Moving the large containers was easily done. The skids moved along the rock floor with little difficulty. It took two men on each container to get it there; but that was a lot better than carrying each individual package. Each container had ten packages of



fifty bars of C3, a lot of explosives. As each container reached where Morgan and Brady were, the guys traded places. The one who was pulling the rope now got to push the other end of the container.

The nylon parachute cord was strong but it was tough on the hands, gloves or no gloves. They continued into the mouth of the right side tunnel and stopped before they got to the large open area where all of the artillery was stored. "This is plenty far enough," one of the G-men said to the other G-man, "Okay by me," was the reply.

Within an hour ten cases of explosives had been brought into this tunnel entrance, everyone was sweating. "Is it getting warmer in here or what?" Adams was taking off his utility jacket while he was talking. "It sure is" commented Jim, "I think there just may be a hot spring under this mountain. That could be a real plus for us, C3 likes warm, hates cold."

Ken remembered his glove and the stuff he thought was acid. Well Jim said it was acid but the kind in soda pop; hey the smell is back too. "Jim do you smell that?" Ken was sniffing with his nose in the air like a beagle scenting a rabbit. The rest of the team sniffed too. Jim thought for a moment and told Adams "Go get Charlie Dreyer and you take his place temporarily. I need to have him look at this place. He's got tunneling experience maybe he can recognize the odor and source of the warmth."

Adams took off with the message and his weapon to go guard the left side tunnel with Emil Mankewicz the Army patrol leader. Dreyer came into the room a few minutes later; it was the first time he had seen it. "Wow" and then he whistled. "What the hell is all of this stuff?" "This Charlie is a full regiment compliment of Russian made heavy and medium artillery in all of its glory. And we are going to blow it all up in a day or so. But I would like to know if you have any idea what that odor is and why this room feels so much warmer than the rest of this place?"

"Funny you should mention warm. It is warm over by the big depression; you've called it a pit. It's also warm by the entrance to the tunnel me and Emil are watching." Jim was curious now "How long ago did you notice the heat?" "About a half hour ago. I figured it was all of the body heat at first but then it continued to warm up more. It's got to be a hot spring or an artesian well or some kind."

“How about the smell or odor” Jim was unsure what to call it? “Could be ascorbic acid or some such. Mineral springs have different odors because of the various rocks and debris decomposing due to the mild acid.” Dreyer was repeating almost word for word some of the information he had been told back in Georgia when tunneling there.

“I thought that back in the main tunnel when Ken rubbed his leather glove on the wall of that tunnel.” Jim was thinking, it was only two days ago, “But it didn’t come back, the acid and smell that is.” “Mineral springs are like that, sometimes they are very therapeutic and other times they just stink,” Charlie was wondering what Jim was so concerned about some lousy smell and some warmth.

“What’s really got you worried Sarge?” Dreyer was figuring Jim had some bad experience in this kind of environment. “Do you remember something or someplace?” “No Charlie, the moisture content of the air seems low, because there is no rust on any of the artillery pieces.” Jim was explaining to Dreyer as much as he was to himself, “But the ammunition in the tunnel you and Mankewicz are guarding is all covered with alkali or calcium of some sort.”

“Oh I get it, the calcium and rotting ammo could produce a secondary explosion. Yep, that is something to be concerned about,” Charlie now was back in the tunnel demolition business, but not in Georgia. “Hang in there Jim, let me check something, can I borrow one of those big lanterns?” now Dreyer was excited. “Sure can, I’ll go with you,” said Jim as he got off of the container he was resting on.

Dreyer led Jim directly to the pit, “Just as I figured, look down below Jim. That is flowing hot water coming from way below us. That most likely is an underground river being fed by some kind of volcanic action miles away from here. Those two bodies were below that level and the water is floating them higher as the pit fills up.”

Both Charlie and Jim were getting excited, “See that Jim, there is a flow of water coming out of that fissure over to the right.” Jim thought quickly, that is how the two Chicoms got down in the pit, through some sort of tunnel or natural opening. “The bodies aren’t decomposing because they are immersed in a neutral solution of soda pop.” My God Jim thought what else are we going to encounter?

“Well the good news Sarge is that this can’t hurt us. Unless the water level gets so high as to breach the pit’s edge. But what is it doing to the ammo in the left tunnel?”

“Why don’t Mankewicz and I take a stroll into that tunnel and see for ourselves, okay?” Charlie wasn’t really asking for permission, but thought he would give Jim the opportunity to object. Jim didn’t, “You hang on to that lantern and use the UHF radio. It works well in that tunnel.”

With that said the two departed. Jim went back to the big room and Charlie went to introduce Emil to the tunnels. “Hey Sarge,” Charlie still couldn’t call him Jim, “What about Adams?” “Send him back with us, be careful. Don’t get Emil lost, he has a phone call to make later.” This made no sense to Charlie so he just waved.

Jim’s plan was to involve as many of the demo team as possible in getting the C3 attached to the ceiling the pattern was straightforward. He wanted a line of explosives the full length of the tunnel and large room beginning at the main tunnel. Lines of C3 would further be attached to the ceiling at right angles to the full-length line crossing in the middle. There would be two lines like that about a hundred feet apart, each pound and a quarter block of C3 would be stuck to the rock ceiling, behind the wire, each block of C3 about three feet apart.

The way the artillery was stored in here everyone will be able to stand on top of the crates and reach the ceiling. The toughest part would be getting the detonators into the blocks and attaching the wires. That wire carries the electrical impulse that ignites the detonator, which in turn makes the C3 explode. Jim needed to draw that out on paper so the whole team could see what the explosion pattern would be. He was going for total destruction of this large room and a collapse of the main tunnel. Jim was still unsure of how to handle the left tunnel with the shells and ammo. The info Charlie gathers will tell me how to proceed.

Charlie Dreyer came back after an hour and a half of investigating the left side tunnel. He and Corporal Mankewicz made some additional discoveries. The ammunition was not that old, between three and six years by the dates on some of the ammo cases’. All with Russian markings and packed for shipping. None of this stuff has ever been opened; some still have the factory seal undamaged.

Instead of bringing the ceiling down on top of this ammo Charlie recommended putting a brick of C3 on each case of ammo as well as doing the ceiling. Subsequent

heat will set off the loose stuff. The explosion velocity will most likely set off all of the grenades and bazooka stuff that is very unstable in a shock or impact situation.

Dreyer told Jim that Mankewicz had been in artillery school, as part of his training. He said most of this stuff is field artillery ammo, some of it looked like shrapnel type and others looked like HEAT, the anti tank stuff. He said also that there was 20 mm stuff in there too. Had we come across anything like that in the big room? The answer from Jim was no not yet.

What Jim was trying to decide was whether or not it was worth any effort to continue to identify individual pieces of artillery. Nah, just blow as much of the hardware up and bury the rest with the exploded debris. He had to make a decision soon so the team would have enough time to get all of the C3 explosives in place and the wiring connected. We have two more days to get this done and I had better work on the overall plan tonight.

Jim walked slowly into the large room. It somehow looked even larger than the first time he saw it. Now what about those steel tracks and the electric donkey that is in here? Is there a story that I am not seeing, or am I just being shortsighted about this stuff? He stopped to clear his head; he suddenly realized what was wrong. He was trying to do all of this himself.

Get this place blown up. Get the wounded to the ship for treatment. Get the prisoners into someone else's custody; and still get all of his team out safely without any further incident. Yeah, sure.

## Chapter Nineteen

### Blowing the tunnels

The plans for demolition were all completed now. Each of the demolition team members had given their input to Jim and it had been evaluated, discussed and either accepted or rejected. A funny thing about rejection in a unit like this one, everybody knew exactly why any decision was made pro or con. A very big improvement to the old sergeant knows best philosophy. Ken had watched the decision process unfold before his eyes. He was very impressed with the whole process.

Ken asked one of the demolition men PFC Steve Longo about the process they had just completed. Steve was not shy about saying that one of his ideas was too risky to be tried. "The group was right in not including it in the demo process. Besides, we have been together so long, it's over a year now, we know who is going to come up with the crappy or unworkable ideas. It's MJ and me who mostly have the lousy ideas but we still get to offer them up without a lot of criticism."

The water level in the pit area had stabilized; some of the water was exiting below the floor level of the main and left tunnels. It was not obvious where it was going. The demo team could ill afford to have the water mix with the explosives and make a mess of the tunnel demolition. Danny Ormond and Ed Becker had finished their survey of the center tunnel where the eight Chicom bodies were piled. Ed was impressed with the knowledge Danny had of how and where to place the C3 explosive charges. What and how a particular pattern would create a certain result. Ed thought they would blow this tunnel up and then do the others. Ormond showed him how that would negatively effect the other tunnels stability.

Becker had never been in a cave or tunnel before. He was unaware of the fissures and nuances of rock formations and especially how each crack is dependent on an adjacent rock for support. "When this tunnel blows this whole place will be flattened." Danny then went on to describe what blowing the tunnel on the first mission did to the top of the mountain. "The entire mountain fell in on itself. Instead of being a mountain, it now resembles a "Y" shaped valley."

To place the explosives in the center tunnel where Danny and Ed were waiting. Jim was sending Cottie and Adams to assist. Ed was asked to be a go-fer and pass the C3 and the detonators and ignition wire to the demo team for placement. He not only readily agreed but also was thrilled to participate. The plan was to finish the center tunnel and move to the left side tunnel and the pit area to seed that with the explosives.

When those three areas were completed the entire available manpower would move into the large room area and attach the C3 to the assigned spots. Jim had made the plan so that there were demolition team members working on the ceiling and others working on the hardware. He wanted the artillery pieces and the other stuff in the crates destroyed totally.

The sticky tape on the back of the C3 was better than what had been on the C2 of the last mission. It still was not perfect; it barely stuck to the ceiling. Shaped charges need to be placed so the maximum amount of exploding energy goes in the direction you want it to go. In the case of the artillery weapons, sticking it to a hard metal surface was ideal. The demolition person formed the C3 package around the part to be demolished. When the detonation happened, the charges shape took care of the rest. It was really a simple concept; execution was the difficult part. The charges had to be placed correctly for maximum damage.

To reach the ceiling of the tunnel the four men hauled the drop containers into the tunnel. They used the empty ones as step ladders to reach the ceiling. Each three cases made a pyramid six feet in height. Two cases on the bottom and one on top, not the safest way to work, but it will have to do. Ed was using a round rod to hold the spools of wire. He was standing in the center of the tunnel and two Recon men were on the containers placing the C3 in position. The detonators and wiring was added as they went along. The third Recon Marine was placing C3 on the shoring, some at the bottom and some as high as he could reach. The guys doing the ceiling would put a charge at the junction of the vertical shoring and the horizontal rafter. This would make the sidewalls collapse as well as the ceiling.

When the team had finished about a hundred feet, the circuits were checked for continuity. Danny explained to Ed, "In order for any of this to blow, the electric current has to be able to flow to these detonators, they are what set off the C3. If the electric

doesn't flow this doesn't blow, it's as simple as that." The more Ed watched this teamwork, the more impressed he was with their skills. There was very little wasted motion, and this was hard physical work.

When Becker looked at the tunnel floor he saw how much C3 had already been applied to this tunnel. There was a layer of waxed paper strips that came off of the sticky tape on each block of C3. I wonder if they are going to ask me to pick it up as some kind of practical joke, hmmm. I'll tell them I am not qualified to do that; I am only an US Army private.

The new igniter units that came with the C3 gave a more powerful electrical energy burst than the old igniter. These could set off five individually wired circuits. This would allow Jim to choreograph the explosions once all the wiring was done and the tunnels evacuated. Instead of one huge explosion, this would be a series of large ones done in series.

The only downside to this method was for one explosion to destroy the wiring to one of the other chambers. Knowing exactly which wires went to what area was critical. Labeling the wires correctly was another detail as was the continuity check that verified which circuits went to which tunnel.

Jim's plan called for the left side tunnel to be blown last. He wanted the artillery shells in that tunnel to add to the explosive C3 they had placed there. Caution dictated that the secondary explosions could damage the other wiring, so do that tunnel last.

In actuality the last tunnel area to be blown was the easiest. The area that had been used to house the injured and the prisoners would be the final area blown and would seal the cave completely.

It took two full days to place the C3, wire the circuits and check them and check them and check them. Everyone knew the old saw motto, measure twice cut once. Well here, checking circuit continuity was the equivalent of measuring.

Surprisingly the wounded including Bruce Strong was getting much stronger. The drain in his arm was producing no pus and Doc was pleased with that. The ROK soldiers were up and walking around getting their walking legs in shape. Lying on the makeshift beds had been comfortable but they both knew they had better get in shape for the long walk out of there.

The Chicom deserters were also walking around, still tethered together but active nonetheless. They too wanted out of this place, especially away from this Chinese officer. They did not know what was going to happen to them when handed over to the UN forces. It had to be better than being forced to fight in a war for a cause they did not believe in. They would take their chances with the US and UN troops.

The aircraft overhead flew wider and wider circles, not wanting to bring any attention to a specific area. They flew mostly at ten thousand feet and with the constant cloud cover, undetected from the ground. The JOC HQ colonel had been given the information about the US Army soldiers and was satisfied, at least for the moment. The hope from all the men working on the tunnel was that UN HQ had told him to back off. The pilots passing on his questions and the responses from the ground had their own opinion about commanders like him.

The latest news from Recon HQ was that the Patrol Frigate would be off shore in four days, with the extraction from shore to ship in six days. The frigate was on mine patrol. The Commies were salting the Sea of Japan with lots of anti ship mines. The mines were doing more damage to local fishing boats than to any allied vessels in the area. With the projected UDT and Recon activity it was better to patrol and clear these mines daily.

The litters were ready for the two ROK soldiers. The two were presumed by Doc to be too unstable on their feet to walk very far. It was better to be prepared to carry them then expect these two to walk all the way to the east coast of North Korea.

Depending on the route Jim could best follow, it could be as close as sixty-five miles or as far as one hundred miles.

Terrain in North Korea, especially in the wintertime, was very changeable. Ice and snow made it difficult walking and carrying. With this many people, it may also take longer. Fatigue breaks plus eating and potty breaks too, all consumed precious time. Plans may be made and scrubbed to make the best plan possible, but reality is what it is. The real world is not forgiving of mistakes and is less so of fools. Jim Cunningham was not a fool.

Jim figured if the plan as laid out could be followed, then he needed four days to reach the extraction point. That meant a constant pace of three miles per hour for



twelve to fourteen hours a day. Now figuring the litter bearers and wounded, including Ken, either the miles per day or the hours per day had to be modified.

It would be better to keep a steady pace for everyday rather than push hard the first day and injure someone in the process. The first day they needed to put at least ten miles between them and the destroyed cave and tunnel complex. The noise and explosion was sure to get someone's attention. Jim did not want to be anywhere near this place when the Commies came looking to see what had happened, and they will come a running too.

There was no C3 leftover, even though the large room took a considerable amount all by itself. Using the unexploded ordinance in the left side tunnel made more C3 available to do the large room. Jim and Ken were very pleased when it came time to inspect the job the Unit had done in the left side tunnel and the pit areas. The C3 was sticking quite well to the more smooth walls and ceiling in those two places. Old water erosion had taken its toll on the rock faces in both areas.

The shoring was smooth and easily worked on. By using slats held together with canvass straps from the parachutes, C3 had been laid on top of much of the stacked and crated artillery ordinance. Once that blows it will take the whole tunnel down with it. The problem was trying to forecast what the artillery ordinance would do once the initial explosions took place.

## Chapter Twenty

### Blowing and Going

Jim and Ken gathered at the tunnel entrance to finalize the demolition plan and the extraction scenario. The major tunnels and the large area had all been seeded with C3 and the detonators and wiring were in place. The only thing missing was to coordinate the explosion sequence that would maximize the destruction and minimize the exposure of personnel to any injury. The way to accomplish this was to deliberately set off the explosions in a logical manner so that all of the tunnels didn't go off at the same time.

On the prior mission, all explosives were setup to detonate simultaneously and while no one was injured the possibility was present. Jim was determined to avoid any kind of possibility of someone being hurt.

To Ken Daro, all of this kind of caution was a new experience; he was going to be a Recon Unit Patrol Leader upon returning to Recon HQ. The problem for Ken was he had never been to a demolition school. This tunnel complex was his classroom. Knowing that Ken wanted to know all there was to learn about demolition; Jim had taken the time and effort to include him in each part of the process.

Ken had participated in the planting of C3 on the artillery hardware as well as the walls and ceilings of the tunnels. Ken became very familiar with the idiosyncrasies of C3 and cold surfaces. It does not like a cold or wet surface to adhere to, and doesn't. Installing the detonators and hooking the wiring to them and continuity checking all was a part of the education. Ken acknowledged several times what a good instructor Jim was. When Ken went to assist some of the other demolition team, he was equally impressed with their knowledge also.

Learning how to create a sequence of explosions was the most baffling at first. When the entire team was working on the plan, terms like detonation rate and shock wave and expansion fan. Plus talk of the oblique shock totally confused Ken. When Charlie Dreyer mentioned the influence of the infinite number of Mach waves, and the relationship of them and the speed of sound. Ken just rolled his eyes. One of the

numbers mentioned quite casually was the detonation rate of C3; it was over 24,000 feet per sec.

Ken had nothing what so ever to compare that to. When Hayes commented on the Mach waves and ultimately the external noise generated by the multiple explosions, the others all knew what they were talking about. Boy, do I have a lot to learn, he was thinking, but Ken was determined to learn all about this job.

The plan was in place, all that was needed was to pick a time to blow the tunnels and get far enough away to avoid any damage to personnel. What was discovered during cleanup was another full case of C3. The supposedly empty case had been used as a worktable for Doc tending the injured. Instead of just blowing it up and creating an unforeseen problem, Jim decided that everyone who was ambulatory would carry their share of the explosives. All agreed including the US Soldiers. The case would be emptied in the tunnel and the C3 distributed outside and packed out.

“Worst case” said Jim. “We can always dump it into the Sea of Japan after extraction. There was no way the Navy was going to let us bring that on board the ship.” Leaving the explosives there would be foolish.

The evening radio call to the aircraft overhead was done without incident. Here is our plan, here are the times, and this is how many people are in the group. The route out would be discussed tomorrow after the tunnel destruction. “Roger that” was the only reply from above. Apparently Recon HQ concurred and JOC had no questions. Good because Jim and Ken were not in any mood to argue about the details.

Ken was itching to ask if he could set off one of the charges using the igniter, he didn't ask though.

Cleanup was done very efficiently; with all of these extra hands and feet the job went smoothly. The C and K ration containers and packaging were put into the pit area; the collapsing ceiling would bury all of the accumulated trash. The Chicom bodies that had been killed outside on the first day were carried in and deposited in the same place as the trash.

The snipers cleaned up their fortifications on the top of the mountain, and exited down the side of the ledge trying to leave no trace of having been there. The west side of the mountain had lots of snow while the eastern slope was almost bare. The

steepness of that side kept snow from staying very long. The path out was on that steep side and most of the pathway was loose gravel and rocks.

The first part of the departure was going to be difficult for the men carrying the litters. The two ROK soldiers were okay to walk short distances but there was no way they could make the entire trip by walking.

The Chicom officer presented a different problem. He was not going to walk. He made it very clear that he would not in any way cooperate. Fine, we have two choices. Tie him to two of the extra demolition poles that the soldiers made into stretchers and haul him out like a dead moose. The second choice was not really an option but one the Chicom would have preferred, that would be, to kill him.

Neither Jim nor Ken was going to let this guy die an honorable death while he was in their custody.

It was decided to lash the Chicom deserters' together with the nylon rope tied around their waists. They were kept ten feet apart, enough room to maneuver but not enough for them to get into or cause any trouble. The soldier who had created the stretchers was making knapsack like bags from the parachutes and harnesses. Each man could carry the explosives in these bags comfortably. What he made amazed the entire group; this guy had a real talent and imagination. These knapsacks worked very well and were comfortable to wear.

The order of march was incomplete but the leader out would be Ken, one of the BAR men would be up front with him. Jim wanted the snipers to be singled up in the formation. With this many people strung out in a line he did not want some enemy patrol to take them all out in one foray. The litter carriers and their relief would be somewhat in the middle of the line of travel. Depending on whether they traveled on the rocky paths or on the frozen river, if it were still frozen enough to walk on. The temperature outside of the tunnel was still well below freezing and had been for the entire time they had been here.

"Okay, let's all gather up the chutes and stuff and bring it into the main tunnel space, we all need to get some sleep." Each man knew his routine for rest so those that were on watch went to their places. The snipers would sleep in pairs and would be down at the mouth of the tunnel, not up on the hilltop. Sunrise would be the start of the

demolition, evacuation and extraction. Assignments would be given after the breakfast meal.

Whatever sniper team was on watch at sunrise would wake everyone at that time. Jim's final statement of the evening was "To get some rest; tomorrow is going to be a busy day."

He had no idea how profound that statement was going to prove to be.

At sunrise Rossellini and Ott woke the ones closest to the tunnel entrance and they in turn passed it on. In very short order everyone was up, cleaned up a bit and were unpacking breakfast meals. This would be the last hot meal before meeting up with the US Navy Patrol Frigate in four days.

Doc made his last ministrations to the wounded and was pleased with the overall health of everyone. He then packed his medical packs for the long trip to the planned meeting place with the Navy. Medical Corpsman never had enough supplies if you asked them and Doc was no different. Now with so many extra persons in the group would he have enough supplies if any problems arose? He tried not to think about it but that was all he could think about.

Jim and Ken had the list of personnel and what order they would depart.

The entire group of Recon Marines, US Soldiers, ROK Soldiers, Chicom deserters and the Chicom officer were to assemble at the bottom of the front slope of the mountain. Murphy, Brady and Morgan would set up the radios there.

Hayes, Cook, Longo and Daro were to recheck the firing order and continuity. "When the checks were all verified, Daro will fire igniter one." Jim knew that Ken wanted to do this. "On a two count Hayes will set off igniter two, another two count and Longo will fire number three. Finally after a two count Cook will fire circuits four and five."

The bottom of the hill was about a quarter mile from the tunnel entrance and was opposite the major explosive areas. The tunnel with the ammunition was well to the left and the very large tunnel with the field artillery was to the extreme right of the assembled group.

The first explosion was muffled at first, as it started to become louder the second explosion over-powered the exploding tunnel with its' sound. The same crescendo happened with each succeeding explosion. The first rumble of the ground under the

groups' feet moved them backward and downward. The shale like rocks offered no support as the soil and rock were moved in several directions at the same time. The explosion sequence and the quantity of the explosives caused the inside of the mountain to move in the direction that the shaped explosives dictated.

The cumulative effect was that the earth moved in many directions at the same instant. Each of the demolition men had a picture in their heads of the destruction happening inside the tunnel complex. Only their imagination could see it. The actual destruction was much more severe than any of them could ever imagine.

Jim had the demolition team pick up the igniters and wire and pack it away; it is time to move out. As he turned to the radiomen, there was an enormous movement of the ground. The mountain seemed to shake like a piece of drapery.

Charlie Dreyer yelled to Jim, "The bottom has fallen out of the mountain. The top is liable to fall in too. Lets get the hell out of here, now."

Jim did not even turn around to look back but was heading down the hill toward the three litters and the litter bearers. "Pick 'em up and move out," Jim was yelling over the noise. "Don't worry about the order, just get moving out of here." He paused long enough to shout to the litter bearers. "We'll catch up, if the Chicom officer gives any trouble, cold cock him but don't kill him, okay?"

The question went unanswered, everyone was moving off the plateau on the double. One thing about guys in the military, when it came time to perform, they did.

"Hey Sarge, the air cover wants to talk to you, should I hold him off until we get off here?" "Hell yes, we'll call him back when we get to a more stable area." Jim was very controlled, but concerned. The number of people in this group required that he take no unnecessary chances. Better to talk to the flyboys later.

As Jim scanned down the hill he saw Ken was assembling his group, their task was to lead the way out. Ken had caught up with Ortega, Hayes, Morgan and Longo. Jim had laid out the plan so there were five groups. Ken had the lead group and Jim had the rear guard group. In between were the prisoners, the wounded and their attendants, then the middle group of guards, followed them.

Jim noticed that the two ROK wounded were not on their stretchers but were moving as fast as any wounded person could. The litter bearers were having a tough

time keeping up with the two of them. Under different circumstances it would be funny, today it was a matter of life or death. The mountain and hillside was still moving in all directions.

Jim was on the UHF radio looking for Doc when the air cover pilot cut in and asked Jim what side of the mountain he was on? Jim told him he and the group were on the southeast side on the plateau heading toward the frozen river. "Good, because there is a major avalanche on the Northwest and North side of the mountain." Jim shuddered and not from the cold only, "This is Baker Cunningham what's your call sign?" "Bluegill One and Four, we are directly over you at angels twelve. We can see the mountain but cannot see any personnel, it's way too far away."

"Okay Bluegill, don't come any lower. We all appear to be okay, at least no reports of any further injuries." Jim was making that up but no one had called in with any injuries. Jim did not want some low flying aircraft to give away the Units' position just to do a flyover.

The thundering roar of the ongoing avalanche was unnerving. It sounded as if it was coming this way but the pilot's information said it was going away from them. I sure hope so; was his silent comment.

Jim heard Ken call on the radio that his group of five, had assembled and were okay. Next in line were Corporal Emil Mankewicz and his group of the eleven. Emil's group had the wounded plus their litter bearers and was behind Ken's. So far just like we planned it thought Jim. Danny Ormond then chimed in that his group of four was almost in place in behind Emil's group.

The group of prisoners was having a lot more difficulty. Partly because they were all tied together but more so because of the Chicom officer. He was definitely going to be a problem. Mel Ott had caught up to the group of six prisoners and put the Chicom officer on his back with a single punch. Out cold as a mackerel. Mel put the limp body on to the litter and tied him down. "When he comes to, he will be pissed but he can sue me" was Mel's comment.

The five Chicom enlisted men were all smiles and mimicked applause for Ott. He in turn bowed to them, even in tough situations there is room to smile and laugh.

Jim's group of eight, including Doc was the last group off the plateau. The first two groups were already out of sight. That meant they had reached the frozen river. Jim silently hoped that the river was still frozen solid. As the thought passed his mind, the radio, via Thom Morgan told everyone that the river was frozen at least twelve inches thick in the middle.

The litter men of the next group had no difficulty handling the litters with the two ROK soldiers on them. After running the whole way to the river these two were very willing to be carried for a ways. They made sure everyone knew that they intended to walk at least half the distance.

"A good sign." Doc said to Ken, "These guys are tough, I for one am glad they are on our side." Ken nodded his agreement.

As each man got his footing on the snow-covered ice of the river he looked back at the mountain now high above him. Steam was pouring out of the fissures in the side of the mountain. The east side had almost no snow on it and the cracks in the face of the mountain all were emitting continuous puffs of smoke and steam. "Boy I wonder what the tunnel with the ammo in it looks like?" Mario Ortega's mind was going a mile a minute?

"Cunningham Bluegill over." The pilots had info for Jim. "Bluegill this is Cunningham over," "We are going to make several passes above the objective and take photos. In case you are interested both sides of the mountain have no snow." Jim was puzzled and asked, "What happened, over"?

"Between the avalanche and the continuing explosions the snow has turned to steam. There are railroad tracks at the base of the mountain and some narrow gauge tracks leading off of them. That's what we want to get some shots of, over." "Okay, Cunningham listening out." The double click of the pilots mike acknowledged Jim's remark.

Strangely the exodus had been uneventful since getting off of the hillside and the plateau. The frozen river was eerily quiet, even with all this weight on the ice there was no sound. Jim checked his maps and did not see his next landmark yet, too soon fella, don't get anxious, keep it calm. Jim could barely see Ken and his lead men from where he was. The entire party was stretched out for almost a half mile.



As the noise that the mountain was making faded away Jim felt a soothing feeling come over him too. He really did enjoy the quiet. Coming from a fairly large city with all the hustle and bustle that goes with it, the quiet was nice.

An hour had passed since the explosions and the evacuation was going pretty well. The litter bearers had switched off, the exchange was very fluid like. No one stopped; they just moved in and took one side and then the other. The Chicoms' were all huddled together since the rope tied to their waists did not allow much side movement. Jim made a mental note to try and change that. No one was closer than ten yards to each other, just in case some Chicom marksman was watching. He was not going to get any multiple hits.

At the two hour mark Jim spotted his first checkpoint, the mountain range splits into three canyons. A beautiful sight, maybe in a different moment in time, but not right now. Ken had halted the forward progress to prepare for a meal break and a "head call." He had seen a spot that was sheltered but small, only half of the group could be sheltered. This way some could take a break and the others could stand guard. "Half an hour break," announced Ken on the radio. He had already announced it without the radio, and he then realized no one had heard him. Tough to break old habits he said to himself. I'm too used to shouting orders, not using a radio.

The break and stretch were now behind them. For the next hour they could still see the mountain steaming and smoking. Jim wondered what the locals thought had happened, what locals he countered his own thoughts? With a suddenness that caught them all napping the earth shook violently. The river ice rose up about a foot or so, depending on whom you asked later. The shaking had taken about ten seconds or so. It seemed a whole lot longer, and then it all went back to being quiet. Luckily the river ice did not break although a lot of the snow was scattered and the walking surface was now just ice. The river ice felt sturdy and was not making any cracking sounds.

"Jim what the hell was that?" Ken was not really expecting Jim to know but he had to ask something of someone. "That may have been an earthquake Ken, can't say for sure."

"It was mother nature having sex." That contribution came from Ortega. "What the hell do you know about sex Mario?" Ott was now in the picture.

Jim could feel the tension lessening as the radios' chattered back and forth with each other. Neither Jim nor Ken made any effort to stop the banter, let them play. It was strange how these two Marine sergeants thought so much alike.

During the fourth hour of the exodus, Jim liked that word. The quiet was broken by the sound of aircraft flying overhead. "Daro and Cunningham Bluegill One over," "go Bluegill Daro here." A couple of things, we got some great shots of the destruction the steam and stuff obscured some of the first ones but we went back and got more." "That is good news Bluegill, what is the bad news?"

"Well there is a locomotive and three boxcars about two miles ahead of you on your left. We can't see any activity even when we went down to nine thousand feet, over." "Bluegill is it moving?" "Negative, no movement." "Roger that." Jim was now getting into his planning mode, "How far off of our path are they?" Quickly the pilot relayed that they were about a half mile before the bridge that crossed the river. "Where the eff is that bridge on any of the maps?" Ken was getting concerned now, not about the train but the accuracy of the maps. "Okay Bluegill, we will be back to you shortly, give us ten minutes to make a plan, okay?" "Roger, be back in ten, Bluegill out."

As the groups continued in an easterly direction Ken was moving them to either side of the river bank for more shelter and to be less of a target. Jim noticed a definite change in the demeanor of the Chicom deserters. They had gone from relaxed to tense in a very short period of time. He made a mental note to check with Hyun and Jin the two ROK Korean's to see if they could find out anything. Both of them had gotten off of the litters and were walking. Ken in the meantime was in his infantry mode, hand signals and arm waves, no radios unless absolutely necessary.

No one could see anything yet, and then they saw the railroad bridge. Half of it was in the water and the other side looked functional. The column in the middle of the river did not look damaged. "We have got to be close to that train." Ken gave the signal to stop, everyone did. The group was now more bunched up than anytime since the start of this journey.

Ken took Hayes, his BAR, and Longo with him to reconnoiter the banks of the river. The sides of the river were only a few feet above the ice they were walking on. When they reached a place to get off the ice safely they did. The train was dead ahead

of them on the tracks; the boxcars were buried in snow on one side. No steam was coming from the engine and there was no noise from the boxcars. Ken and his team were still a good half-mile from the front of the train.

Ken motioned Jim to come up to where he and the other two Marines were. "We can't just walk past this, if someone is hiding in that train we could be dead ducks. What do you think Jim?" "I agree. Let's put together two small teams of four. Ken you take the left side and I will take the other side, we can meet at the ass end of the last boxcar. Okay?"

"Yep, let's do it Jim, get your team and let's make a move together." Jim motioned for Emil, Ott, Murphy and Cottie to join him. He sent Rossellini to join up with Ken. Both teams were in place and moved swiftly the short distance to the engine. Each team divided and checked the engine's cab area. Nothing, just snow and ice. The tender was in the same condition. There was no coal, only logs covered with snow and ice.

Now came the tricky part, checking the boxcars, "One guy grab the handle and pull sideways, the second man poke your Thompson in there and be ready to fire." Jim's team did the first boxcar while Ken's team did the second. Nothing in either car, not even a crate or pallet of some kind. The last boxcar had a slight motion to it as if someone or something was moving inside. Ken motioned to Jim that the door handle would be opened on three.

Ott grabbed the handle and when Ken said "three" both doors slid open, and the gunfire began. Two grenades came out of each side door but only one rifle was firing. Ken yelled "grenade" every body hit the snow. When the grenades exploded, Jim yelled and then went silent. He had been hit in the throat. Emil yelled the eff word he was hit in the belly. Cottie was hit in the shin and he never said a word. The two grenades on Ken's side never went off. Ken and Rossellini were up and pumping rounds into the boxcar from different ends of the door opening.

When Jim looked up he saw his radioman Murphy in his best John Wayne stance firing his Thompson into the open door. There was no more gunfire from the boxcar. Cottie got a boost up from Murphy and kept his weapon firing. It was too dark inside the

car to be certain how many were in there. With both doors now wide-open Willie counted six bodies.

These definitely were North Koreans'; it looked like only three had weapons. All six were dead, tough shit said Cottie. Ken got on the radio to Doc about the wounded. When Doc got there he assessed the situation and decided that Emil had the worst wounds. Doc tore open his overcoat to check Emil's gut wounds. He handed Jim a large gauze pad to apply to his neck wound. Ken was cutting Cottie's pant leg to get at his wounds.

The other members of the team were dragging the bodies out of the boxcar. They each had poked the bodies for any kind of booby traps, unlikely but better safe than sorry. Two of the Koreans were trainmen and not soldiers, "Too bad men, you shouldn't hang around with guys with guns." Mel was waxing philosophical, "You too may get hurt."

Doc made a quick but thorough examination of Corporal Mankewicz wounds. They were not life threatening but serious, clean them put on the sulfa pad and keep it dry. His wounds had more cloth in them than shrapnel. That could be even more dangerous. It was harder to get fabric out of a wound than a piece of metal. Jim on the other hand was very lucky. The two pieces hit him under his chin, "One hit the chinstrap and nicked your neck and the other hit your jawbone but the bone did not fracture."

"Sergeant Cunningham you are going to have a swordsman's scar for the rest of your life, but you will survive." Doc still had his gallows humor going, but Jim was glad for the good news.

Ken had begun treating Willie's wounded leg; a chunk about an inch square was missing from the shin. He said it didn't hurt but it was bleeding quite a lot. By the time Doc got there some clotting had started so Doc cleaned the wound. He applied the sulfa pack to the shin and bound it with a wide tape. "This is guaranteed to take the hair off of your leg Will and I will enjoy every moment of it."

Cottie hit Doc right on the large Red Cross on Doc's helmet as a way of thanks.

"Ken I think we should blow this piece of shit sky high," Jim said as he pointed to the train. "I'm with ya poddner, let's do it, we certainly have enough juice to do a really good job too." Jim got on the radio and had Morgan bring up the wire, detonators and

the igniter. As the seven men began to relax a bit, the pilots wanted to know what they had found and should they tell HQ or JOC? "Hell no, don't tell them a thing until we figure it all out." Ken was very emphatic, "We are going to destroy this equipment and then skedaddle out, we will tell them later what we found."

"Roger that, Bluefish listening out."

Ken had forgotten to thank the two pilots for the heads up, damn. "Hey Bluefish Daro here over" "Go Daro Bluefish Two here" "Forgot to thank you both for the heads up. This could have been a bad situation, sorry I forgot to say thanks before."

"You're welcome son, it is the very least we can do for you guys. We will be on station for another twenty minutes or so. These things eat av gas like a Cadillac, Bluefish One and Two listening out."

Doc made a medical decision and sent Jim and Emil back to the main group. He went with them to get someone to keep an eye on these two. Willie Cottie could not have been dragged away from the train; he was going to be a part of demolishing this thing. Doc did not argue but gave him a new sulfa pack in the event that one came loose during the demo party. Ken opted not to put the bodies back on the train; instead he and Rossellini dragged them under the boxcars.

Murphy showed up with the igniters and wire, each man had enough C3 in his pack to more than do the job at hand. They split up, one on each boxcar and two on the engine and tender. It was very cold yet the plastic explosives were adhering to the metal undercarriage of the boxcars. The demolition experience was sure paying off. In less than fifteen minutes they had the entire train wired and ready to blow up. Murphy tested the circuits and all was well. Good continuity and the entire train should be ready for the scrap heap in just a few minutes.

Ken had an idea. "Jim can you talk?" he asked on the radio. "Yeah go ahead Ken." "I think we should blow the other half of that bridge when we do the train. What do you think?" "I considered that on the way back here, it means we should move everyone to the East side of the abutment and bridge. We don't want to be trapped by our own demo debris." Daro had not thought about that part of it, "You're right Jim, how can we do both at the same time?"

Hayes had an idea too “Sarge suppose I stay on the path alongside the river and blow the train while the rest of the group moves below the railroad trestle?” Both Ken and Jim agreed that was a good idea. “Ira, we will use the radio to coordinate the detonations” Jim was hurt but still in charge.

Emil was now on one of the stretchers and protesting like all get out. The ROK soldiers wouldn't take no for an answer either. The two of them were arguing in Korean as to which one would give up his litter. They both got off their stretcher and started walking. It did not matter to the litter carrier who was on the stretcher. “We have to move out and now.”

The trestle was only about a half mile from where the group was congregated so moving out and beyond the obstruction was done rather quickly. The train had taken two knapsacks of C3 and the trestle would take about the same. No attempt was going to be made to take out the center abutment, it was way to massive. “We can make a mess of it by demolishing the top five or so feet if we put charges all around it like a girdle.” Charlie Dreyer said. “It will probably take six guys to do this, three on the trestle end, at the land side, and three on the abutment.” Charlie was in high gear now and was taking charge of the demolition.

Ken nodded his head and Jim just shrugged his shoulder, wow that hurt. “Don't do it again,” he muttered out loud. He was proud that Dreyer had stepped up to lead the job; Jim just did not have the energy. Suddenly he was tired, sleepy rather than exhausted, but still tired and he had the insane need to yawn.

Don't do it, that hurts he told himself. Ken watched as the main group walked past the center abutment of the trestle. They intended to go about a mile down the river. The discussion that had taken place by the main group was that the explosion may destroy the ice and they would all be stuck with no place to walk and get around the rubble.

In less than forty-five minutes the six Recon Marines had placed the C3 and the detonators, wired the whole thing and tested the circuits. Experience was paying off. All but Hayes was now on the east side of the railroad trestle. Murphy had the igniter in his bare hand and his gloved hand held the radio. He called Ken and asked if he would like to blow this one?” Ken almost ran the whole way there; he was at least three quarters of

a mile away when the call came through. He reached the spot where Thom was and was out of breath and his leg was hurting, but he was happy.

Murphy was about a quarter of a mile from the bridge and he had a clear view of Ira Hayes, "On three guys, ready?" Daro and Hayes each answered affirmative, "One, two, three." It was difficult for everyone to see both explosions from where they were, but the results were beautiful. The trestle came down first, then the top of the center abutment.

The railroad train lifted up a few feet and settled in a heap and burned more brightly than either Jim or Ken would have liked. The explosives generated so much heat that the water in the engine boiler and tender was steaming like a mushroom cloud. "Nice work gentlemen" Ken was as excited as he had ever been and wanted to thank everyone for a great job.

When Murphy and Ken caught up with the main group. Hayes was already there and smiling at Ken who was grinning from ear to ear. Hayes wanted to know if everyone had seen how far those logs flew into the air, man what a sight.

"Okay, lets get this show back on the road. Same positions as before, "Jim you okay to take the rear again?" "Sure am poddner" Jim said, mimicking Ken's favorite nickname for everyone. Okay lets move out, the next stop will be in two hours for a food break. It will be getting dark soon and we want to be moving when that happens."

When Jim returned to his original place in the group, he passed the Chicom officer who was passed out again. Jim wondered who kept hitting this guy and then put it out of his head. I've got real work to do and not worry about some Chicom with a shitty attitude.

The aircraft overhead were a new pair of Marine AU's, updated Corsairs flown by Sergeants who had been officers in WW II and were returned to enlisted rank when the war ended. Most had stayed on inactive reserve and when the Korean War started they were reactivated at their "permanent rank" of mostly Master Sergeant.

"Recon leader this is Bugaboo three and four at nine thousand feet, quite a fire you have there, over." Ken acknowledged the call "Can you see anyone on the ground in the area of the fire?" "Nah, unless we get down to five thousand feet we can't really tell and we were told specifically to stay between nine and twelve grand" was the pilots

reply. "If you need us, just yell, we will be on station until one hour after sunset our pattern takes us out over the Japan Sea and downtown Nampo-do about a hundred miles inland from here. The Bugaboo's are listening out."

Jim felt much better after hearing these two planes and the pilot's information. Now if we can get through tomorrow without incident we should be okay.



## Chapter Twenty-one

### One Day At A Time

Jim and Ken figured they had lost four hours by having to deal with the train and trestle demolition. The good news was those not involved with the actual action at least had the chance to rest and recuperate some. Now it was time to lay out the remainder of the schedule. They had to meet up with the Navy at the isolated cove that had been chosen as the pick up point. By staying on the frozen river they would not join up at that point. The frozen river was a gift, that is, if it remained this frozen to its delta.

As a whole, this entourage was making excellent time, except for the four hour interlude with the train the pace was very good. By map and time estimates the group was a more than half way to the destination. Ken asked Jim via radio, "What happens if we get to the pickup point early, will they come and get us anyway?"

"I don't think so. On the last mission our hike out was shorter and more direct. The mission planners stressed that the meeting of the two parties was to be at night. That was mostly for the safety of the ship and landing craft crews, not us."

Jim realized that his jaw did not hurt as much when he talked on the radio. The pain was numbed and his speech was slurred, he could hear it. "Hey Ken, is my voice slurred on the radio?" "Yeah, why?" "Can you understand me?" "As much as I ever can, why?" "Well my tongue feels thick and my jaw doesn't hurt, but half of my face feels funny." "Well poddner, now your face looks funny on both sides." Ken was enjoying Jim's dilemma and Jim could feel the partnership that was developing and maturing. He liked it.

"Ask Doc why your face feels numb, he's our medical staff." Doc was listening to this banter, it could not be called a conversation and broke in. "Jim I gave you two shots, one of Novocain along with the changed bandage and a tetanus shot. I needed you to be ambulatory and alert and was not concerned with your speech. I knew you could overcome that part." "Thanks Doc, you are indeed the best, Jim out."

Occasionally the moonlight, through what the weather guys called "broken clouds" provided enough light so the maps could be read without using a flashlight. While everyone appreciated the light they looked much more carefully along the river's banks and the occasional flat areas, for soldiers. What was very strange was the

absence of civilians. No one was on the river's edge where most Koreans hung out. It was mostly the women and children but sometimes men too. Tonight nobody was present.

At the last meal break of the day, Ken and Jim compared notes on the maps. Jim had laid out the route using the land and topographical maps. Ken had commented the day before about the quality of the maps. "Hell Texaco does a better job than JOC does with these things."

JOC almost entirely relied on old Japanese maps for road and trail information. Grossly wrong, could it be by an oversight or was it a deliberate move by the Japanese command structure. They deeply and truly hated the Koreans. Regardless, the trails we were to take are way off the path of the river. In a late spring or summer mission the trails would be treacherous. The maps showed lots of hill climbing and small streams to cross in the lower areas of this eastern side of North Korea.

Winter suited Jim just fine for the moment let the river stay frozen. It seemed that at night the groups pace picked up. No one was running or anything like that, it just seemed that with the absence of daylight the group moved faster. Ken, Jim and Emil who was still required to be on a stretcher, checked their watches at daybreak "Made good time last night." was Emil's comment. "Maybe today Doc will let me walk some. I am getting tired of laying here, and these guys could use a rest too."

To Jim and Ken that sounded like a plea for them to intercede on Emil's behalf with Doc. "When we break for our morning meal", Jim chimed in. "I will check with Doc about you walking some, I have to see him about my face anyway." Jim was in complete empathy with Mankewicz. We are these units' leaders not someone to be carried on a stretcher.

After the K-ration breakfast meal, Doc held office hours. The two ROK soldiers were in great shape as was Ken and Bruce Strong. Cottie required more cleaning and a new sulfa pack. Off came more leg hair and Willie refused to make a sound. Doc looked at him, "Don't even think about slapping my helmet again, or I will amputate your leg right here." Neither man smiled, but was doing so inside. Willie was really feeling a part of this Unit.

The landmark check went okay, we are here and this is where we want to meet the US Navy. Even the Chicom officer was interested. He now was getting concerned about himself being a prisoner. Being captured is one thing but being a prisoner is really a whole different affair.

This patrol had been very patient with him and he knew it. How would the US Navy treat him, or what if the South Koreans got their hands on him? He was not about to show any deference to these Americans, let them think what they want. They will all soon go home and forget what damage they had inflicted upon a race and a culture that was older than any of their religions.

We Orientals are patient and timeless; we run the long race not the sprint. Chen was getting angry inside; he dared not let anyone detect what he was thinking. One thing did occur to him, as he lay tied up on the stretcher. When would I ever see my family again? They were used to long separations, that were the nature of being in the Army, but he did miss them all. Maybe a prisoner exchange would be worked out?

On my honor I will not tell anybody anything, no matter what they do to me. He was resolute, but realistic too, and somewhat scared.

“One more night guys,” Ken Daro was passing the good news. “The maps show us real close to the coast and the terrain is pretty flat where we think the river ends.” Everyone was listening intently. “No guarantees, just going by the maps and some wishful thinking.”

“Oh yeah, the medical report is that Emil can get off the litter after the mid day break and Hyun and Jin are almost as good as new. Willie is okay, just losing some blood and if anyone is interested Jim’s speech is getting better. Just what we all needed Cunningham without a slur.” “How are you Sarge?” asked Hayes.” “Fine, thanks for asking, the leg has mended real well, thanks to our Doc here.” Ken was sincere and everyone could tell.

Jim again spoke still with a slight slur to his voice. “Okay lets hit the road, or rather the river and get out of here. Be sure to police the area, leave nothing behind.” Even the Chicom soldiers made certain their area was all cleaned up. They wanted out of Korea and they were not about to be careless. Hyun and Jin were beginning to like these guys, under different circumstances, who knows?

Taking up the same positions as when the exodus began the group moved out. Emil was the only exception; he was being carried on the litter, at least for now. Doc was not able to get as much material out of his belly wounds, as he would have liked. At the lunch break he would try again, Emil was not a happy soldier.

The day was completely overcast and cold. Good to keep the ice frozen but it was a living hell on the troops. One good thing about lousy weather, it makes military personnel more alert. They are always searching, always on their guard. An hour before the planned lunch meal, Longo and Ortega spotted a wisp of smoke beyond a bend in the river. Ken agreed that they should both advance while the group stopped. Jim in the back of this human convoy could not see any smoke but agreed it needed to be checked.

What the two Marines found would change the entire evacuation for the next day plus. Sitting on the edge of the river, a Korean man and woman in their middle years were sobbing and rocking back and forth. The presence of the two US Marines startled them so badly that the woman screamed. "Whoa quiet," Steve yelled at them. All the while trying to wave his hands palms down and support his Thompson.

"Mahn-na-Bwep-Ge Dwe-o-Seo Bahn-Gamp-Soude ne De" Ortega had used one of a few Korean phrases he knew (I am very pleased to meet you). The man looked up and in spite of the situation, smiled. "US Marines, US Marines" Steve was staring at the woman, and pointing to his coat that had USMC with the Eagle Globe and Anchor on the top pocket. Her face was swollen and some of her clothing was torn and not from being old and worn out.

The woman stopped rocking as her husband stood up to address the Marines. She could not see too well, her left eye was bloody and completely closed. Mario wasted no time getting on the radio to Daro and Cunningham. "Ken and Jim you have got to see this. We ran into a couple of civilians, middle age man and woman, all beat up. Can you get Jin and Hyun up here to interpret? Something bad is going on, Ortega here." "What the hell now?" Ken was upset he didn't go with them so he could assess the situation first hand.

"Wait one Ortega. Brady did you get that?" "Yeah Sarge," Brady, the Army radioman turned to Jin and Hyun and told them to get going, "I will send Jin and Hyun

up as fast as they can travel.” He briefed the two of them from what he heard on the UHF radio and off they went. Patrick was amazed, watching these two run down the frozen river. A few days ago both of these guys were near death and today they are once again right in the thick of things. That Navy Corpsman really knows his stuff.

When Jin and Hyun ran past the front group, Ken went with them. That left Ira with his BAR and Thom Morgan with the radios as the “point men” of the group. The rest of the group kept moving forward to see what was going on. They still were a half-mile from the turn in the river. Ken, Jin and Hyun slowed the pace when they spotted Longo waving at them to slow down.

“Good God,” said Ken as he looked at the couple. “Who did this?” he asked of anyone who would listen. “We will find out Sergeant Daro,” said Jin who was addressing the woman. Meanwhile Hyun went to speak to the man. After some animated talking, crying and agitated wailing the two ROK soldiers were nodding their heads and grimacing. Ken offered the man his canteen of water; the man turned to the woman and gave it to her. They could all see the condition of her lips and mouth, swollen and badly bruised. The water stung but she swallowed nonetheless. She gave the canteen to the man and he took a drink also, it was almost a ceremonial sip. Not the drink and swallow of a thirsty person.

Jin reached for the woman’s hand and she took his in hers. He noticed it too was badly bruised but he gently and almost lovingly caressed her fingers. “Hyun you tell the Sergeant what these people have been through. I will try to calm momma san down a little bit, okay?” “Yes, Jin I will do that.” Hyun turned to Ken, Steve and Mario like he was giving a report.

“This man and this woman are husband and wife, they have two sons and a daughter. The sons’ are in South Korea, they think Taegu. The daughter, who’s fifteen, is now dead. Four Chicom soldiers and two DPRK soldiers attacked the couple and their daughter. They beat the father, raped the mother and daughter many times and killed the daughter because she would not go with them.” Hyun paused for a deep breath, he was angry and getting more so. Ken put out his arm and touched Hyun in an almost parental way; Hyun nodded his thanks and continued.

“The soldiers burned their house to the ground with the girl in it,” Hyun speech was getting more emotional. “These folks were left here by the river when the wife could not walk any further. That was early this morning, it seems the army is on the alert after some tunnels were destroyed a few days ago. Neighbors had told the soldiers that this couples sons’ were in the ROK army and that is how this all happened.” Hyun turned to the man and hugged him. Ken could see that both of these ROK soldiers shared the pain of this couple.

In less than fifteen minutes the entire group was surrounding this man and woman. The couple was startled to see, Chinese soldiers tied to each other and a Chinese officer tied on a stretcher. The woman wanted to but could not spit on them, her mouth hurt too much.

Doc went to the woman first and moved her away from the gaping crowd. He pointed to his helmet with the Red Cross. The woman nodded and said through broken lips and teeth, “Ah Wed Qwass, Wed Qwass.” Doc also smiled at her and handed her a large gauze pad soaked in water so she could wash her face. He turned to her husband and did the same. They each washed slowly and gingerly the cuts and bruises were still fresh and some reopened and bled.

“Good” said Doc “we will treat the obvious wounds and then check for other ones later.” “Jin, when was the last time they ate anything?” Doc had no idea how these people were going to chew anything as hard as K-rations. “Yesterday morning breakfast, the Chicoms got here about mid-morning” was the reply.

Hyun said to Ken, “The man wants to know where we are headed, should we tell him?” “Sure, maybe he knows something that can help us,” Ken, replied. When Hyun told the man he started waving his arms, “No, no, no go” everyone understood what he said. “What’s he mean Hyun?” Ken was now very interested. “He says that the delta area is filled with DPRK and Chicoms arresting Koreans trying to get below the DMZ.” Ken’s shoulders visibly sank in frustration. “There are small fishing boats that take people from the river’s end to towns below the zone.”

“Well that sure as hell is going to change our plans, anybody seen Jim?” Ken was now getting into his Recon mode. “What’s up Ken?” Jim had been standing away from all the others in the group. “This couple was attacked by Chicoms. He says that the

delta we are headed for is full of soldiers arresting Koreans headed out of the North Country to get below the DMZ.” Ken now was slightly out of his element, reading a map was one thing but having to reorient a group as large as this one with maps as old as the Ming Dynasty was troubling.

Jim asked Jin if the man knew of any way other than the river to get to Iwon-up the pick up point? The man recognized the name Iwon-up even though Jim had really messed up the pronunciation and made a lot of head bobbing while saying the Korean equivalent of “Yes.”

Jim showed the man his map and the man nodded and pointed to a series of blank spaces on the official Japanese map Jim was using as his guide. Jim called Ken aside and said. “Let’s get everyone calmed down. Then have the husband, Jin and Hyun, you and me and go over some map changes and create a new plan.”

The MAG 12 Corsairs were overhead again and checked in. “Baker Cunningham Bluefish Two and Three do you read over?” “Loud and clear Bluefish do you have anything for us today?” Jim was trying to be nonchalant but his heart was racing terribly. “Not from our side, how are you holding out?” this was almost like a telephone call from a neighbor it was so casual Jim thought.

“Well we have some new information that the delta of this frozen river is crawling with Chicom soldiers. We were going there as a middle step to our final destination to meet the Navy.” Jim was now going to put them on the spot. “Can you make a safe enough pass to verify that info, over?” Cunningham literally held his breath until he got the answer.

“Sure, we will make a couple of low passes, shoot some ammo and get back to you in about twenty minutes, we are still over Hungnam.” The pilot sounded like he had done this kind of thing before. “Great” said Jim, “look forward to your getting back to us, be careful, Cunningham listening out.”

Doc had taken the woman well off to the side. He had given her some gauze pads to treat her vaginal area. He made a mild solution of peroxide and water for her to use. When he turned his back to her she whimpered and cried some and then was silent. Doc took that to mean she had come to grips with the whole situation and was somehow resolved to do what she had to do to survive.

What went through his mind was “How in the hell do you know that”?

When she had finished, the wife tapped Doc on his shoulder and was shaking her head from side to side. She was bleeding and sore and he was in over his head medically. Doc was wondering if his Corpsman’s manual had anything about the female apparatus. He did not want to say the words, even in his own head.

Mom I need some advice, help me, wherever you are, he was pleading with his mother who happened to be over nine thousand miles away. Sure enough, in the nurses section of the manual was a series of treatments for venereal disease, menstrual pain and bleeding, rape case treatment and childbirth instructions.

“Thanks Mom,” he said out loud. No one noticed.

Doc sat on the riverbank next to the woman and was reading the words and the woman was looking at the pictures. She pointed to the lips of the vulva and Doc was so embarrassed he dropped the manual on the ice. The woman smiled, hid her mouth because it hurt so much. Her blackened eyes and her nodding head told Doc that it was all right to be the way he was.

He was so relieved that he reached behind her back and hugged her shoulder-to-shoulder and she hugged him right back. At that exact moment, Otto Schmidt, US Navy Petty Officer Second Class was certain that he was going back to medical school. This was his calling. Just as soon as we get our collective butts out of this bind that we are in. All of a sudden Doc had new resolve, what a relief.

Thom Morgan was treating the husband while Doc was with the wife. He looked like a second at the Saturday night fights, cotton balls and Q-tips peroxide and iodine. The man was not going to look too pretty with all that stuff on his wounds but he was not going to get an infection. “Thanks Thom, nice work, did you let him look in a mirror?” The two smiled at each other and the husband smiled at them too.

The aircraft returned right on schedule, “Yep the info was correct. Lots of activity and no return gunfire must be only infantry at the beach site. We made a high pass over your expected rendezvous spot and no activity that could change however. Bluefish Two and Three over.” “Bluefish this is Cunningham, thanks for the update, we are making plans to head north on some back route. We have a man and wife with us who know the area and will help us.”



Ken was looking at the blank places on the map where the man had pointed at before. "These maps still are next to useless, over." "Cunningham, yeah we have similar problems, they give us a target and it is not where they say it is, disappointing but hell that's war. You say you have a man and woman with you to help guide you out. Is that affirmative?" "That is affirmative," replied Cunningham. "We will be overhead at angels ten for the next two hours, a large square pattern, but we hear you loud and clear, the Bluefishes are listening out."

Jim was rifling through his backpack for the maps and stuff the Chicom officer had on him, "Here they are, hey Jin and Hyun see if the husband can make any sense out of these." The husband recognized the maps immediately, as a petroleum and fuels distributor he was used to reading Japanese maps and reading their instructions. "These are distribution points for fuel, water and food for the workers that the Japanese had working in Korea."

Hyun continued, "All these marks like stars are places where the railroad would deliver to and these circles are where trucks would have to deliver to. These black squares are where local draymen, carts and such, would deliver from. Each of these marks is a point where a tax or fee would be assessed to the people who pick up whatever is being sold there. These are very detailed maps; they cover many villages that most maps don't show."

Hyun and Jin were speaking in Korean to the husband and wife, Jin turned to Jim and said "These peoples family name is Park, the husband is Bong-Hwa, the wife is Chan-Sook, the daughters name is Kun-Sun and the sons names are Chin-Hwa and Chin-Mae." Jim was going to write the names in his book but was at a loss to know how to write down what he had just heard. Hyun stepped around the husband and wife, took Jim's marker pen, and wrote the names on the blank page. "Thanks Hyun, what are your and Jin's family names?" "I am Pak and Jin is Choi, my name is very similar to the man and woman. We could somehow be related, who knows in this crazy world."

"Amen to that Hyun, thanks again," Jim put the marker back into the sleeve on the thigh-writing pad.

Charlie Dreyer and Willie Cottie had opened their K-ration packs and started heating water in their canteen cups to make some bouillon for the couple. The tablets

that heat the water last long enough to do just that; others were opening their packages to add their tablets to the slow burning smokeless fire. Most servicemen did not use the bouillon cubes except to use as a dipping sauce for the hard and almost indigestible crackers. Jim and Ken were very proud of these guys for doing this of their own initiative.

When the cubes had sufficiently dissolved the two men offered the hot cups to the husband and wife. The offer was gratefully received. Willie showed the woman to dunk the cracker first in the liquid and then eat it. The smile she gave him made him gasp, lips were ripped and teeth newly broken. Willie wanted to kill the guy's who did this, let's go get 'em. Instead he smiled back at her, bowed and stepped back to let her eat in private.

In the midst of all this commotion, the group took it upon itself to post watches and snipers out on the perimeter of the fairly large gathering. Jim had made his decision, and wanted Ken to know what it was. Not for concurrence, although that would be good, but more to inform him. Jim was taking the husband and wife with them back to South Korea regardless of the consequences.

Ken was not the least surprised by Jim's declaration. Jim had now seen the victim's side of a war and it was not pretty. "Unfortunately when we let our feelings interfere with what are normally rational decisions something shitty happens."

Somebody's law or some crap like that, Ken could not remember where he heard that before, oh yeah his old platoon leader at the "Frozen Chosin" said that to him several times.

"Jim, I agree with you on an emotional level but how are we going to travel with two middle age, injured civilians?" Ken was deadly serious. "The husband, Bong-Wha knows the way around the Chicoms', or so he says, and we don't. I don't see any alternative right now. The mama san, Chan Sook," Jim liked saying both of their names, "Can't walk and we have a couple of free stretchers. If he can convince her to travel that way we can all make it out safely and quickly."

"Jim," Ken was not trying to be contrary he just wanted to make sure Jim knew the consequences of this decision, "Why not tell the father about your plan and see what he thinks before you make any more decisions for him?"

“That’s fair, I will get Jin or Hyun to help me explain what I want to happen for them.” The conversation took place and both the husband and wife were excited about going south, if it did not get this bunch of young men in any trouble. The two ROK soldiers explained to the Park’s that Jim and Ken were usually in trouble. \The four of them had their personal chuckle at Jim and Ken’s expense. Jim and Ken had no idea what had been said.

Mr. Park suggested that they get started soon. The cold was sure to get worse as the day went on and walking on icy and snow covered back roads was dangerous. He also told them it was only a one-day slow walk to the destination. The travel lineup was now changed. Ken would continue with Mario and Ira up front with the Park’s. Hyun and two of the Army litter bearers for Mrs. Park.

Thom Morgan and Steve Longo would drop back to be with the middle guard. Mr. Park said, “Some of the trails are used by the locals who travel mostly in the daytime, there is no kind of military or police use of them.”

Jim and Ken picked a spot where the group could make an exit from the river’s ice to the snowy ground without leaving any signs for someone to follow. In its’ usual orderly form the group moved out towards the extraction point, via a series of unknown trails and paths. There was sort of a contest between the litter bearers as to who would carry Mrs. Park; it was finally agreed by a secret lottery.

In actuality they all won, since the switch off was now scheduled for every thirty minutes. When they had gone about an hour and a half, Mr. Park showed Jim and Ken a line of trails that would get them to Iwon-up early in the morning. Very casually he mentioned to Hyun that one of the other trails leads to a series of tunnels where the government was storing fuel oil, gasoline and diesel fuel. The locals had been warned about talking about what is stored there.

Jim and Ken broke out their maps and the Chicom’s map. Their maps did not show any cave or tunnel. The Chicom’s map had a series of marks that Mr. Park said were all tunnels and large storage caves. He wanted to know if the Marines had the time he would show them where it is located. What a temptation to get off this trail and recon this new information.

“How far is it Hyun?” “About an hour Sergeant.” “Ken what if we take a five man patrol and reconnoiter the location to verify what Mr. Park is telling us?” “And then what?” was Ken’s response. “Just to verify what he is saying is fact,” was Jim’s reply.

Ken was less interested in verification than in getting this large group out of North Korea. He did not want to challenge Jim’s authority in this situation. Jim sensed Ken’s uneasiness at making the trek to the tunnel and said so, both men relaxed. “Let’s think about this for a little while.” Jim was thinking of another way to use Mr. Park’s information.

“If we can pinpoint the exact coordinates of the storage tunnels maybe we can get an air strike in there to do some damage.” Jim was in his planning zone and becoming more excited as he considered the possibilities. “That makes a lot of sense Jim, it would be a reward for the air cover guys too.” Ken was thinking that the guys upstairs had to be bored with flying over the top of a Recon unit walking across the countryside.

“Cunningham to air cover on channel ten over.” “Boxcar One on ten, go ahead.” “Boxcar we have a possible target of opportunity just north and west of our location are you interested, over?” “Always interested. What where and when Cunningham?” Came the instant reply. “We have a local merchant with us who knows that one of the tunnel complexes has lot of petroleum products stored in it.” Jim was now aware of how bizarre this must all sound. We are working now to develop the actual coordinates and site conditions, over.”

“We are a flight of three AD4’s and have a full complement of hardware on board. If you can give us a distance from your location to a known landmark we can make a couple of passes.” Jim, Ken and Mr. Park poured over the maps to find a landmark Mr. Park recognized. It took a few minutes for them to find a reservoir and a dam between them and the potential target. “Now to figure out the distance and coordinates.” Jim was shaking from both the cold, which had become bitter, and from the excitement of doing more damage.

“Okay Boxcar, as best we can determine the coordinates on map series A070A4 are as follows, 40 degrees, 17 minutes, 21 seconds North and 128 degrees, 38 minutes, 19 seconds East;” Jim paused for a breath, “over.” “Hey young fella, where the

hell did you get your map at a Shell station?" came the quick reply from on high. "These are the latest we have from JOC Japan. What series are you working from?" Jim was going from excited to agitated quickly.

"Cunningham our maps are US Navy issue dated 1952 and have seven digit serial numbers with no alpha in the chain, over." "Boxcar, Cunningham here, can you contact Recon HQ direct and tell them about the maps. We need some kind of help in matching yours to ours. This is a hot target zone and we don't want to miss it, over." "Boxcar contacting Recon HQ, be back soon, Boxcar out."

Mr. Park had a suggestion, "If he gave us the name of the town and a landmark could we find it that way?" Hyun and now Jin were almost interrogating the poor old man. Ken stepped in to remind the two ROK's that it was okay if he can't remember something. The opposite was true; he did know and did remember. There was a very tall monument, 37 meters high. It is for an early Japanese governor of Korea at the junction of three roads leading to the storage area. Mr. Park remembered just fine. The late winter afternoon setting sun creates a shadow which points directly at the mountains central peak and is above the storage facility.

"Cunningham, Boxcar over, those coordinates jibe with Recon HQ for a town called Faggu dash tu, can you verify that for us over?" The pilot actually sounded excited too. Jim asked Mr. Park through Jin and got an affirmative series of nods. "Boxcar, Cunningham, that is affirmative Faggu dash tu, over." "Cunningham, Recon suggested we give you guys at least an hour head start to get you out of the area. Confirm, over." "We confirm and are cutting a chogii for Iwon-up right now. Cunningham out."

"Everybody up." Jim was using the UHF radio. "We have to make tracks for the extraction point right now. If we can move faster we should. If anyone can't reasonably keep up the pace, shout. It is important to get out of this area but not at the cost of any additional injuries, Jim out."

The group was listening to the air to ground communications and were ready to go the moment Jim stopped talking to the pilots. With the exception of the Chicom Lieutenant everyone wanted to be on the Patrol Frigate and out of here. The US Soldiers were fascinated with the VHF/UHF handheld radios. The Marines acted as if

they had used them forever. Some were remembering the last mission and how crappy communications had been. This is much better.

While the group waited, the GI who concocted the stretchers remodeled one of the litters into a seating chair. Just like in the movies with the royal princess being carried in her chair by the eunuchs. Mrs. Park was not too sure of the contraption, but she got on anyway. It was very comfortable, her smile made him feel just great. He bowed to her as she stepped in and sat down. Carrying her this way was a lot easier than carrying the litter. There was less strain on the arms and shoulders.

Mr. Park was an excellent guide; there is no language barrier among people who travel on the trails. Hand motions were all the talking that was necessary. Some of the trails looked like they hadn't been used since the Japanese occupation. What was surprising, there was not one single soul to be seen. Where the hell are the civilians?

When Jim and Ken conferred about the pace and the distance traveled after an hour's time, they had actually covered over six miles. The pace was faster than expected but not close enough to lwon-up to communicate with the Navy via radio. There was still more than an hour of daylight and hopefully they could continue after dark. Much slower of course, but at least moving.

To the west of the traveling entourage, the sound of aircraft and explosions could be heard. This was the first time since this mission began that the sounds of the air-war had been heard. The only explosions this group had heard were the ones they created, they didn't count. The explosions continued for quite some time. Occasionally the sound of an aircraft engine could be heard but not often. The attacks were taking a north/south route.

The next hour was rougher. The terrain was less snow covered but slippery. The air was much warmer in the wooded area. A pee break was taken and Mrs. Park and Mr. Park went off together, holding each other's hand. The Chicom soldiers deserters invited the Chicom Lieutenant to go with them, he refused. The litter bearers did not untie him when he refused to get off the stretcher.

When Mr. and Mrs. Park returned they each faced the other and bowed. She went to her chair and he went to Ken, Jim and Jin. He estimated about ten more hours

until they reached the coast. That was far too early to meet the LCVP; the Navy only made the pickups in the dark.

Do we slow down here where it is somewhat safe? Or move on and get to Iwon-up and be exposed to enemy coastal patrols? Two tough questions but all agreed the pace would be slowed. The meal breaks would be longer the rest would help everyone.

There was still rumbling noises coming from the west. No aircraft noises anymore, but the soft rumble of low powered explosions. Two hours later it was again a break time. The group would be staying here for the next four hours. Guards were posted at each end of the group fore and aft, according to Doc. The middle guards would go out fifty yards from the main line of travel and protect the perimeter.

Doc was making his rounds and as he was checking Mr. Park, Mrs. Park showed up. Talking to Hyun, Doc determined that she was feeling better but would like another large gauze pad. Doc gave her a two pack of large wound pads. She dropped her eyes and bowed her head as she backed away; they each bowed to her in return. Doc got all choked up thinking about what this lovely woman had been through. What the future would be for she and her husband?

Mrs. Park looked lost in the US Army overcoat she had on. Corporal Ellerbe had given her his overcoat. Ellerbe was wearing two army field jackets. One was his own and one thanks to Emil Mankewicz who did not need it. He was wrapped in a sleeping bag while on the stretcher. Even in that huge coat, Mrs. Park still looked and acted like a lady. Amazing.

## Chapter Twenty-two

### Iwon-up and out

The rest period was over; the moon had risen to a point where its' light was bright enough to see by while walking in these lightly wooded forests. There was no rush on Jim and Ken's part. They each wanted out of the area but did not want to wait in Iwon-up for darkness and the extraction. Mr. Park let them know that this type of wooded area extended to within three or so kilometers of the eastern coast. Now that was good news.

Mrs. Park was embarrassed by all of the attention that the litter carrying crew was showing her. One of the members had whittled the rock hard chocolate bar into slivers for her to suck on. He did the same with the cereal bar from the Breakfast K-ration. The peanut butter was a mystery to her. She wound up using the wooden spoon to scrape the new delicacy from its little tin can.

The jelly was much easier to deal with. There was no way she could put it on those hard round crackers and eat it that way. Both the jelly and peanut butter were left over from the C-rations the group had eaten while in the tunnels. Dunking the crackers into the Supper ration bouillon drink was still the only way she could eat them.

After the brief meal the group moved out again. The air was damp and less cold than previous days; weapons kept collecting moisture on them. Seeing in the moonlight was not a big problem. Jin and Hyun were enjoying their conversations with Mr. Park, he was not only easy to talk with, he seemed to be a smart businessman as well.

Both wondered to themselves what would happen to this couple when they all reached Iwon-up in a few hours. Jin wanted to ask Jim or Ken but was unsure how to bring the subject up. Hyun had similar thoughts and trepidations. Neither knew anything about the Marine Sergeants' leading this mission.

Their answer came before they could ask.

Just before daybreak the air cover was overhead. Or somewhere up there, no one ever saw these airplanes. "Bravo Cunningham this is Brown Bear One over," the radio announced a new day. "Brown Bear this is Cunningham over." Jim yawned even though he had been awake for the last hour.



“For your information the interdiction you called in yesterday was a complete success. The target destroyed and all aircraft returned to base naked and undamaged, over.”

“Brown Bear, that is good news, we could only hear some of the explosions we could not see anything, over.”

“Sarge, we have several updates for you, are you ready to copy over?”

“Ready Bear, go.” said Jim.

“JOC is against your bringing the Chicom deserters on board a US Navy ship. The same goes for the Chicom officer. Over.”

“What do they suggest I do with them sir, over?”

“No suggestions from them or Recon HQ Cunningham, over.”

“Bear, since there are no suggestions, we will take them with us back to Recon HQ over.”

“Okay. The next has to do with the Army unit. JOC wants you to divert them to the Songch’no-gang River to meet a US Army patrol that will be there in three days, over.”

“Wait one Bear,” Jim was incredulous. He knew that the entire unit heard what JOC was telling him to do. He was not about to comply with the demand.

“Brown Bear, this is Cunningham back with you. I respectfully decline to do follow that last suggestion. This group of soldiers has sustained wounds, injuries and starvation. They are coming with us on board that ship, over.”

“Roger that, Cunningham, now for the last item. It is for you to leave the Korean couple at your current location and forbid them to follow your Unit. The use of deadly force is authorized, if necessary.”

“Brown Bear, who the hell is issuing these orders, some Neanderthal over?”

“Brown Bear One here, we were as surprised as you are by them. What would you like me to relay to JOC?”

“Cunningham here, tell JOC and their like minded fools to go screw themselves. Everyone, and I mean everyone that is traveling in this group currently, is getting on that US Navy vessel tonight. They will disembark at Inchon together when we arrive. Is that clear enough sir?”

“Roger that Cunningham, I will relay that information to JOC and I have Recon HQ on the net as well. Back to you in a few, Bear One out.”

Jim was furious, Ken wanted to say something but decided to wait. It was Doc who called Jim on the radio, “Doc here Jim over.” “Go Doc, Jim here.” “Be prepared for a big battle when we return. That JOC Colonel has been gunning for you since the last mission, be careful, over.” “Gottcha Doc, this kind of shit really pisses me off. Who do these people think they are? Worse than that, what kind of people do they think we are, Jim out?”

Mr. Park could tell that there was a problem and it may concern he and his wife. He asked Jin about it, Jin searched for a Korean word that would mean bureaucracy. He could not think of one. All he could do is shrug his shoulders. A half hour later while the group continued walking in total silence, the aircraft were back. “Cunningham, Brown Bear One here, over.” Jim was had prepared a long dissertation on the rules of warfare etc. He answered the radio call, “Cunningham here over.”

“Roger Cunningham, your USMC Recon HQ advises you to do what ever you deem best for the persons under your command and supervision.” Jim audibly sighed and waited for the other shoe to drop. “The US Navy is on schedule to meet you at the rendezvous point at 1830 hours this day. You will arrive at that point with a complement of 36 persons, one a female. Is this affirmative?”

“Cunningham here, that is indeed affirmative, thanks for the good news, over.” “Recon HQ is anxious to speak with the civilians under your supervision. It seems intelligence had no idea about the POL cache that we attacked and hopefully destroyed yesterday, over.”

“Brown Bear, I’m sure there is a lot of stuff like that around here that no one in Japan or Korean HQ’s know much about. Over.”

“Well Sergeant, keep you powder dry and get the hell out of there on schedule. We will be in the area until 1130 hours, Bear One out.”

You could almost here the air go out of everyone’s lungs. This was really good news for the entire detail. Jin asked Jim if he and Hyun could tell the Korean couple what was going to happen later. Jim agreed that they each should know, and make certain they agree with the plan.

Jim explained to Ken about the LCVP, the Patrol Frigate, and the process that was used on the first mission. Ken said that it would be a first for him, climbing out of a landing craft was not something they taught in Amphib School. "There is a first time for everything." Said Jim back to Ken.

The two Sergeant co-leaders discussed where all these people were going to fit on such a small ship. He was sure the skipper of whatever Frigate picked them up would make everyone fit in somehow.

Miles had passed since the first conversations with the aircraft overhead. Jim was surprised when the Bear flight leader said adios. Gosh it was 1130 already. Time was flying by, how much longer to the coastline? At that moment Mr. Park and Jin walked up to Jim's side. Mr. Park estimated about a three-hour long walk and they would be at the Sea of Japan. He did not know how far Jim had to travel to the meeting place. Jim didn't either, but he intended to find out.

The new route they had taken was north of the proposed pick up point. That was an advantage since most of the Chinese activity was to the south. The beaches south of Iwon-up were where the small craft could pick up people leaving North Korea for South Korea. Ironically according to Mr. Park the Chinese did not stay there long after darkness set in. It was too dangerous.

The Chicom's instead took over local peoples homes until the next daylight. Many people disliked this arrangement and had killed some of the Chicom soldiers. The civilian population was wreaking havoc on the ever-fearful Chicom soldiers sent to police or kill escaping civilians at these the beach areas.

North Korea being North Korea had another weather change and not for the better. First the wind speed picked up coming from the east. Then came some stinging rain mixed with hail. That was followed by snow, hard driven little flakes that were impossible to see through. The snowflakes were like a white sheet hung up in front of everyone's face. "Damn," said Jim. "Great" said Ken happily. "Whatta ya mean Ken?" asked Jim. "Hell Jim, if we can't see and we know where we are going, then the NK's and the Chicoms can't see us either." The logic was inescapable.

This could work to the Recon units advantage, maybe.

Another hour had past and the weather was the same, not very good. Ken and Jim agreed, the pick up point was relatively close. They would take advantage of the forest and stay hidden until a short while before extraction. No one knew what the terrain was like at the extraction point, or leading to it, for that matter.

These concerns lead to a change of tactics. Ken would lead a five-man group to map out a path to the exit point. Two men would return to the main group with the details. When Ken and his small group heard from the Navy, the main body of the group would move to the exit point.

Ken took the G-men (Grazioso and Gonzales), MJ Cook, Longo and Thom Morgan. When the path had been established and marked, MJ and Longo would return to the main group. Morgan with his long-range radio and telegraphy skills would be needed to communicate with the LCVP crew. Mr. Park said to Hyun “The men needed to follow the large tree line. It leads away from the ice covered trail that was bordered by the smaller trees.”

His advice was readily accepted, “He knew this place and they sure didn’t,” commented Ken. When Ken and his crew started out they kept the large deciduous trees Mr. Park had mentioned on their left. Sure enough the footing was sound and not icy at all. “That man is a gem to behold,” said Ken to Ken.

In less than an hour the five-man team was in place, and in hiding. It was still daylight and Ken figured it would be at least another hour to dusk plus another thirty minutes until dark. MJ and Longo scoured the area to find someplace large enough to hide thirty-six people. They may have to wait over an hour before the Navy showed up. The two men came upon a small sheltered ravine like area about a hundred yards from where Ken and Thom were setting up. Not too far and not too close. Most importantly, it was defensible from all directions. The place was so sheltered there was no snow or ice visible.

Jim waited impatiently to hear from Ken and his group. When he did hear their call it was all good news. “They had put down no trail markers. Just follow the trees without leaves and you will fall right into our laps.” Ken was still not at ease with these radios. “Steve and MJ had found a ravine a short distance from us, that will shelter everybody, and it’s secure, Ken over.” Jim waited a moment and said, “The Navy is not

going to meet us until 1800 hours. We still have at least two hours until dark and an hour past that for pickup, Jim over.”

Ken thought long and hard for a moment. He knew Jim had a plan and Ken wanted Jim to say what it was. “Jim, Ken over.” “Go Ken, Jim here.” “Jim what’s your plan, over?” “If that ravine they found can hold everyone and is sheltered, that would be better than all of us being exposed to this driving wind and snow. What’s your assessment of the ravine?” “I’ll go check it out and get back to you ASAP, Ken out.”

“Hey Jim, Ken over.” Jim was surprised at such a quick response. “Jim here, go Ken.” “Hey fella, MJ and Steve have found a hell of hiding place here. It’s about a hundred yards long and twenty to twenty-five feet deep and about the same wide. Plenty of room for everybody over.” “Sounds good, how about protection?” “Jim they have that covered too. It is a natural for sniper posts on top. At least three places with good sight distances, over to you Jim.”

“Ken that sounds great. I will call you when I get some kind of arrangement going as to who goes in where and stuff like that. Jim out.” Jim knew that he had a tough job on his hands figuring out who should be on the LCVP first. Where to put the prisoners and Mr. And Mrs. Park? He needed some time to think this through. While he was thinking the radio alerted him to a message.

“Cunningham here go,” he said to whoever was calling. “Cunningham this is Lucky Strike leader with some information. Are you ready to copy over?” “Wait one leader,” Jim reached for his thigh-mounted pad and got out his marker. “Okay leader, Cunningham is ready to copy over.” Jim settled against a large tree to shelter himself and his pad from the snow and stuff.

“First, there will be two boats to meet your group, one is an LCVP and the other is a Navy launch, over.” “Copy that, one LCVP and one launch over.”

“Affirmative, number two, all prisoners will go on the launch. The Korean couple will accompany your men on the LCVP. Copy that?” “Aye sir copy, all Chicoms on the launch, the Park’s go with us on the landing craft, over.”

“Good Cunningham, number three. All ambulatory personnel except the Korean couple will exit via shipboard ladder. All injured personnel and the husband and wife, will be hoisted aboard via the hook. Whatever that is,” he added, “over.” “Leader, that is

good news, anything else?” “No, that is all I have it is getting dark up here so we will be heading for home, over.” “Thanks Lucky Strikes, have a safe trip home, over.” “We hope so too, oh yeah, a couple of F3D’s are going to be overhead shortly to cover your extraction. I understand they can see in the dark, now that’s weird. Semper Fi Sergeant, leader out.” Jim clicked his mike lever twice as acknowledgement.

“Hey Ken did you copy that?” “I sure did poddner. We are ready to ship out of this place, over.” Ken and Jim both thought the same thing. What a lucky break, two boats to get all thirty-six people out and the acceptance of Mr. and Mrs. Park. Great going.

When Jim returned to the assembled group, he now knew what the expression “huddled masses” meant. Everyone was bunched together against the wind and driving snow. Jim could not even see the Park’s but he knew they were in there somewhere. “Listen up everyone, we are moving out in a few minutes. There is a ravine of some sort by our departure point.” The mass of humanity started to break apart.

“We will wait there for the Navy to pick us up at 1800 hours.” Jim became very serious at this point. “It is now very important that we not let our guard down.”

As he continued, Mr. And Mrs. Park moved to the front of the group. “The snipers will be up on the top of the ravine as cover.” Jim was looking around for Ott and Ortega. “The Chinese including the officer will be deepest in the ravine. They will be departing on a separate vessel, some sort of launch.”

Jim looked directly at Mrs. Park. “This fine lady and her husband will be joining the rest of us on the LCVP.” The smile on Jim’s face gave away what Jin or Hyun had not yet interpreted. The Park’s were going with us. Under different circumstances there would have been a cheer. Mrs. Park could only hold her hand over her mouth, nod her head and cried good tears.

Almost silently the group formed up into its former order. They had all heard about following the leafless trees and were ready to head on out. “Ira take the lead, I will join you shortly. Mario you are up front and Mel you have our rear. Ready, let’s move out.”

The spring in everyone’s step was noticeable. Only the Chicom Lieutenant was his usual dour self. “Screw him; I hope they throw his ass over the side, when he gets on the launch.” That comment, was made out loud by Brian Ellerbe, one of the former

US Army prisoners. It got a lot of assenting votes from the other GI's. "We are going home, thank God and the US Marines for finding us." That came from Jeff Ingrahm who was carrying the stretcher with the Chicom Lieutenant tied to it. "Amen to that Jeff." Echoed Joe Kessler at the other end of the same stretcher.

"Quiet everybody, pass it back." Jim did not want any more noise than the footfalls on the path. He thought about the Lieutenant making some sound but the others in the back will take care of that. They had already taped his mouth shut with some of Doc's extra sticky, extra wide, adhesive tape.

Mrs. Park was back on her litter chair with Willie Cottie and Ed Becker on the handles. Mr. Park insisted on walking and made good time too, he was no slacker. Mr. Park was very aware of "out of place" noises in the darkening forest; he heard none but stayed alert. Jin was in front of him and Hyun was behind him, they too were listening.

In just over an hour the group met Ken and his crew. The three snipers gathered together to climb to the top of the ravine. Ammo check. Weapons check. Grenades check. Radio okay. Good. Let's get up there and check the place out. Jim could not allow the Army "sniper to be" to join them. Jim had to make sure all these soldiers got out safely.

The Chicom soldiers were first in and then the litter with the officer was put on the ground. All of the Chicoms moved away from where he was placed down. Next were the members of the rear guard. Then came the wounded. Next were the middle guard and finally the four that made up the lead group on the way out.

Ken did a headcount while Jim was checking on the snipers. "Everyone present or accounted for sir." Most of the soldiers and Marines laughed at Ken's standing at attention and saluting an imaginary officer. This daily routine in the military was nice to hear and see again.

Just like clockwork, at 1800 hours the light blinked on the radio. There was a caller. That caller was overhead in the form of an USMC F3D SkyKnight telling Jim to go to channel two-two for the Navy recovery team.

Jim did exactly that. The extraction, at the completion of Mission Number Two for USMC Reconnaissance Unit One, was almost over.

Jim and Ken decided the best way to get everyone to where they were supposed to go was to turn all the Chicom's over to the Army. The wounded soldiers would not participate and would stay with the Marines. In the ravine a lot of shuffling about was taking place. The US Army proudly took the six Chicom's to the staging area above the narrow beach landing area. The Lieutenant was no longer on the stretcher and his hands were tied together in front of him with nylon rope. If he needed assistance getting into the boat he would get it.

When the two craft arrived on scene it was well orchestrated. The launch came in first and beached itself upright. A short gangway was put over the side so the "guests" could climb aboard. Well-armed Navy Shore Patrol guided the Chinese prisoners to their seats. The prisoners were then handcuffed to the seat. Jim wondered about what would happen if the launch capsized, then put the idea out of his head. Surprisingly the officer offered no resistance and placidly took the seat he was assigned to. When the Chicom's were all on board, the launch backed off the sandy beach. Then the LCVP came ashore.

The wounded were loaded first. Emil was complaining that he could walk but no one let him get off the litter. The Navy had provided a Corpsman to assist Doc if he needed it. The Park's were escorted to the rear of the LCVP where several folding deckchairs had been placed. Jim, Ken and Doc were the last aboard and as the landing craft backed away from the beach. Their radios were looking for attention. Ken answered his first, "Daro here, go."

"This is "Knight Fight One and Two, it looks like you have made your extraction satisfactorily so we are going to see if we can find a place to unload a few thousand pounds of bombs somewhere. Happy sailing Marines and Semper FI."

"Semper Fi to both of you and thanks for the escort we all appreciate it. Daro and Cunningham out." They nodded to each other and took a place along the sidewall of this almost full LCVP.

The coxswain swung the bow around from the waters edge and applied power to get going back to the Patrol Frigate. No one could hear the launch over the landing crafts engines. Lt was right alongside of them. Both vessels were making the same speed across this dark and stormy Sea of Japan.



Jim reflected on the previous days.

Thank God that no one was injured more seriously than they had been. He touched his still tender chin and neck.

He closed his eyes and said a prayer of “thanks”.

## Chapter Twenty-three

### Post Extraction

The LCVP ride was bumpy and slow. The coxswain announced that due to heavy seas and unusually high winds the fifteen-mile trip was going to almost two hours. Relax enjoy the coffee and rolls. It may be a consolation for some of you; the launch is having a tougher time of it than we are. Almost everyone thought of the Chicom officer and hoped he got seasick.

The Park's were huddled under blankets on top of the GI overcoats. The Navy had provided tea for the two of them. Ken and Jim had given up holding on to the side handrail and sat on the floor with their coffee and jelly filled rolls.

The reminder about ammunition and explosives was stated by one of the LCVP crew. All had been told about the restriction so there was no bitching this time. Emil was sitting in one of the folding deck chairs alongside the Park's. Jin and Hyun, the injured ROK soldiers were never too far away from the Korean couple. Doc asked Jim, if Hyun and Jin, were going to adopt the Korean couple or the other way around. Jim was glad to have the two ROK's on board. He would love to have them permanently attached to this Unit. These two ROK soldiers sure held up their end of the workload. We'll see, can't hurt to ask, but who to ask?

Jim was aware the LCVP had a larger crew this time. There were six Navy members on board. Curious, he called to one of the sailors passing out the coffee and rolls. "Oh we are the "lift out crew. When the landing craft pulls alongside the Patrol Frigate you will disembark." He continued while pouring. "Then we go astern of the Olympia and grab the seaplane tender hook, the davit lines and lifting cables. Everyone still aboard will be lifted onto the afterdeck." The look on his face told Jim that this sailor was very proud of his part of this operation. Jim was even more surprised to find out that they would be going to the Patrol Frigate Olympia. It will be great to see some of the crew again.

Jim's thoughts went to Lt. Howton; I wonder how he's doing at Yokosuka? That's where he said he was headed before Naval War College. I need to sit down and write him a letter about what has just happened to this Unit. I'm sure he would be interested.

Jim was not far off about Lt. Howton's interest in this now completed second mission. Jim's thoughts were interrupted by the engine speed change on the LCVP. The coxswain got on the megaphone to announce that the Frigate was just a half-mile away. The launch would be secured first and the prisoners taken to the brig. "When that is done, we get to pull alongside. The ambulatory will use the ladder to exit the landing craft."

Most of the Recon Unit had stored their ammo and grenades in the secure containers. The Army soldiers had followed the Marines example and secured their weapons and ammo. Neither Jim nor Ken had to call for "sling arms" as the entire collection of troops had already done that.

There is something about infantrymen be they Marine or Army. When it comes time to follow orders, follow them they did, without question. The two ROK soldiers had done so also, when they finished storing their ammunition and grenades. They both returned to the side of the Park's.

Jim could see the stern of the Patrol Frigate now. The afterdeck looked much higher than he remembered. Shortly after spotting the hoist and cradle the landing craft pulled alongside the frigate. The ladder was dropped into the landing craft. A Navy seaman slid down the ladder into the bowels of the LCVP and secured the ladder. He specifically called for Sergeant Cunningham. "You are to go first followed by Sergeant Daro". Jim did not protest, he preferred being last. Follow directions when you are not in charge James, he said to himself. As he reached the deck, just like the last time, two deckhands grabbed him and moved him alongside the side of the deckhouse. Lt. Sparrow was there to greet him and Ken. The two Sergeants saluted and got a return salute.

Mr. Sparrow introduced himself to Ken and warmly shook both Marines' hands for a long time. "My God it is good to see you again Jim, er Sergeant Cunningham." "Good to see you too Mr. Sparrow, I did not expect to see you so soon," Jim had reflected on just how short a period of time had elapsed since they had last seen each other. Yet it seemed like a year.

The rest of the Recon team was streaming on to the deck space so Jim, Ken and Mr. Sparrow backed up to make room. "Large group this time. Must have been a real

party you had out there.” Lt. Sparrow was not aware of what had taken place in the past two weeks. “We had a very exciting time on this mission. When we get some time alone Ken and I can give you some details, if you want to?” “Hell yes, what you guys do is dangerous and clandestine. Everything a guy could ever want,” he was smiling broadly. Jim and Ken smiled with him.

“Oh incidentally I have been assigned to assist you with your AAR. That is if you need any help.” Mr. Sparrow was setting up the time when Ken and Jim could share the details of this last mission. “Sir, when it comes time for AAR’s I always need help. You should have seen the last one, it went on forever.” Jim said. And Ken added, “And forever and forever and forever.” Ken nudged Jim’s shoulder and asked Mr. Sparrow if he noticed Jim’s wounds? Sheepishly Mr. Sparrow said he had not noticed the injury in the night darkness and blowing snow. “Sorry Jim, does it hurt?” “Not anymore, Doc did a great job of patching me up.”

“Lieutenant, I need to find some way to reward Doc Schmidt for all he did for everyone on this mission.” Jim had thought about this for a few days now. Jim continued with his thought. “Doc went well above and beyond the call of duty. He administered to all of us Marines and the Army soldiers and ROK soldiers too. The work he did with Mr. and Mrs. Park was extraordinary.” Jim was searching for more words when Mr. Sparrow interrupted him. “The skipper will know best how you can reward Doc for his services. The Skipper is a master at recognition of personnel that he serves with. I’ll ask him, okay?”

“Thanks, that would be great. I suppose that he’s busy on the bridge right now, hope I can see him again.” “Oh you will, he was looking forward to this extraction, you and your Unit are family by golly.” Lieutenant Sparrow was trying to interject some humor into the nights work. He succeeded.

The LCVP moved to the rear of the Patrol Frigate so it could be lifted onto the cradle Mr. Sparrow had designed. Jim had only seen part of this maneuver on the last trip and was anxious to see it from beginning to end. Since the Park’s were still onboard the landing craft, he wondered how they were doing.

He and Ken followed Mr. Sparrow to the fantail to observe the operation, as it was called. By the time they got there the deck hands had attached the old seaplane

hook to the crossed cable that attached at four points on the landing craft. "As the frigate dipped its bow into the water, the aft or back end lifted up. It's during that time that the surface tension on the landing craft is at its minimum and the crane lifts and breaks that tension." "Ingenious." "No," said Lt. Sparrow, "Just plain old high school physics."

As the LCVP swung onto the waiting cradle, the crane operator gently lowered this massive hunk of wood and metal onto the rails. The ramp came down with a noise the Marines had not noticed on either trip. Mr. Sparrow told them that the noise was because there was no water flowing under the ramp. Water acted as a lubricant so now it was metal on metal, an ugly sound. When the ramp fully extended, it mated with a wood and steel platform. The people remaining in the LCVP were assisted off and onto the deck.

It seems Mr. Park become sick after the ride to the frigate; waiting in the choppy water had done him in. Mrs. Park was quick to tell Jin and Hyun that she was just fine; it was him who was the baby. Jin helped her off the platform. The Chief of the Boat was there to escort her to the sick bay for additional treatment. Hyun took Mr. Park by his arm and followed Jin.

When Emil stepped off of the platform he was soaked he too had become ill. "One look at Mr. Park and I couldn't hold it anymore. Going to sea was never in my plans." Jim was surprised to find out that there is a Navy Doctor on board. When the frigate pulled into Pusan for additional supplies. Commander Correy assuming that the husband and wife may need medical attention and clothes, secured both.

They also picked up sixty pair of US Air Force one-piece fatigues. Along with underwear and socks, in small medium and large for the Marines and Soldiers. They could change into these while their utilities and fatigues were cleaned in the laundry. Mr. Sparrow had suggested this instead of the sailors giving their dungarees and skivvies to the recently extracted forces.

The sleeping arrangements would be similar to the last time. They would use the crew racks when the crew wasn't in them. Also the mess hall would now be the general meeting area. The officer's wardroom could not hold all of these people. When the Park's returned from sickbay, they would be occupying Mr. Sparrow's quarters.

The PA system announced, "All ambulatory USMC Recon and US Army personnel would report to the mess hall for chow and a briefing. Escorts would be at the gangway gate in five minutes." Since most of the team and soldiers were already there, Jim, Ken and Mr. Sparrow went to join them.

Chief Bednarik told Jim and Ken when they arrived at the gangway that they should report to sick bay immediately, both of them. Dr. Mahoney was waiting to evaluate their wounds. The Doctor, PO 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Otto Schmidt and PO 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Martin Allenby US Navy Corpsmen would give them medical updates on the injured personnel. Jim and Ken followed the Chief, they really had no desire not to, and there is no joking with this Chief of the Boat.

"Where are the prisoners Chief?" Ken was first to ask. "They were stripped, searched and given White Navy Jump Suits with a big "P" on the back and put into separate cells. All of the Chicom deserters are in one cell and the officer is across the passageway from them. Those enlisted Chicom's don't like that officer much do they?" the Chief had stated the obvious.

The sick bay was crowded. The Parks were with the Doctor and both Jin and Hyun were being given antibiotics and told to sit with the other wounded men. Both of the Corpsmen were busy. The Navy doctor wanted the makeshift casts removed as soon as possible. X-rays were being taken of everyone who was injured. It did not matter if the person was shot in the leg such as Ken or knife cuts such as the ROK soldiers. The Doctor wanted x-rays so x-rays he would have.

Chief Matthews figured that this was the doctor's first Navy medical assignment outside of a hospital environment. The doctor wanted medical records and histories and most of what he asked for was nonexistent. He was stumped as what to do next. Then the Recon Unit showed up with real wounds and even less information and needed to be attended to. Within a few hours he had seen everyone and his diagnosis pretty well matched Doc Schmidt's. Even the condition of Mr. and Mrs. Park was agreed to.

Doctor Mahoney was going to defer Bruce Strong's surgery. Doc Schmidt was concerned that waiting two to three more days could create more of a problem than removing the bullet now. Bruce was then scheduled for surgery in one hour. Emil Mankewicz's grenade fragment cuts had pieces of uniform buried in them would be

operated on after Strong. Both Navy Medics would assist, one as the anesthetist and the other as the surgical nurse.

Neither had ever performed these tasks before this. Each was more than willing to participate. Doc Schmidt also met someone today he had not met on the first visit to the FP166 Olympia. The Navy Pharmacist Mate 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Marcus Kravitz. He too had been added to the crew. He was to assist with the medical needs of the military and civilian casualties. During surgery, Kravitz would keep the details of each operation in the sick bay log.

Schmidt would learn during surgical preparations that both Dr. Mahoney and PM3rd Kravitz had been at Pusan. They were awaiting transportation to the Hospital Ship Mercy on station in the Yellow Sea. The orders they carried with them were changed on the spot and both joined the PF 166 crew on its' second extraction in as many months of Recon Unit One. Both men viewed the reassignment as a temporary glitch in their current tour of duty.

Ken and Jim had differing views on the effectiveness of going to sickbay. Jim was grateful to know that no infection was present and the chin and neck would heal with minor scarring. Ken on the other hand had to have a drain put into his leg to probe for any foreign material that may have come with the bullet that went through his leg. Not only was it painful, the topical Novocain did not deaden the inside of his leg.

Ken now limped. Something he hadn't done since he was wounded so many days ago. So much for medical progress. Doctor Mahoney did give him a clean bill of health when he said to Ken. "I have treated a lot of bullet wounds as an intern at UCLA Medical. Some are not as clean and well cared for as this after six days without proper medical care."

Ken could not let the comment go uncontested. "Sir, myself and the rest of this group of Marines, soldiers, civilians and prisoners have all received the very best of medical care imaginable. This care was rendered under some pretty shitty conditions. I think you owe Doc Schmidt an apology, don't you?"

The doctor was not used to being addressed this way and stepped back at Ken's tirade. He quickly replied. "I meant no disparagement in any way Sergeant. I was merely stating a medical fact and as an officer I resent your tone."

“I don’t give a hoot about your resentment Lieutenant, but you do owe our “Doc” an apology.” “Consider it done Marine, and I will remember this moment as a learning experience. Chief Bednarik told me I would probably have a couple of them by the time this cruise was completed.”

The Navy Lieutenant and the Marine buck Sergeant shook hands and smiled. They both learned something, about each other and themselves.

The group in sickbay was late getting to the mess hall but the cooks were ready nonetheless. Eating steak and eggs with orange juice, toast, hash browns and real coffee was a fitting reward for the past eleven days of C and K-rations. Jim checked his watch and doubled checked with Ken. “It’s tomorrow already, what happened to today?” Ken’s reply surprised Jim. “It wasn’t that exciting so just forget about it.”

Jim wanted to be sure that Ken was kidding; he looked around the mess hall to see who had heard Ken’s remark. A few had and just passed it off as a comment, no big deal. So Jim did the same, although he felt yesterday was one of his best days as a leader.

The bunk assignments were given out and no one objected to anything the Chief said. “We don’t have reveille on the ship so you will be awakened at 0900 hours. Heads and facilities are right next to the bunk areas. We have mixed Army, ROK and Marines in no specific order. You all got here together you can all shower, shit and shine together.”

The Chief looked around to see if everyone knew what he was talking about and said. “The list is posted on the bulkhead beside the hatch you entered through,” no one questioned him. He just continued on, “This vessel is running in rough seas with a cross wind from the portside. There is no danger from enemy attack in this weather. But some drunken fisherman may get his ass run over if he doesn’t heed the siren and our horn.”

With his next breath he continued on. “The skipper of this fine vessel is Commander Edwin Correy, US Navy. He will visit you here in the mess hall at 1030 hours. Please all be present or accounted for, Sergeants those will be your jobs.” “Aye-Aye Chief,” said Ken and Jim in unison. “1030 hours, assembled here in the mess hall,” added Ken. Chief Bednarik nodded to Ken “Your clean utilities, fatigues or whatever you



ground-pounders call 'em; are on your assigned bunks. No special delivery this time around gentlemen.”

“Weapons cleaning will be after you meet with the skipper and after the ships crew has had its mid-day meal. Solvent and rags will be supplied, complements of the US Navy.” Ken was amazed at this Chief; he had this list in his head, no notes on cards for him. He was just ticking off the assignments as he went along. “I suggest that you wrap up your meal so the cooks and mess men can cleanup and also get some sleep.”

“Welcome aboard the USS Olympia, Patrol Frigate 166. See you all in a few hours, sleep well and don't let the bed bugs bite.” The son of a bitch has a sense of humor thought Ken. I never would have suspected it; Ken smiled at his own appraisal of a career senior non-commissioned naval officer.

Later that morning a little before 1030 hours, seamen arrived at the bunkrooms to escort the men to the mess hall. Just as before, no non-ships company personnel were to be permitted to roam the ship unescorted. Breakfast was a quiet and seemingly reflective time. Emil was still in sickbay. Strong was also there. Doc had not come to breakfast with the unit. After the surgical events he bunked in with the medical guys. They were now attending the recovering two surgical patients. Lt. Mahoney visited the Park's in Mr. Sparrow's quarters all was going well.

The Park's also had their breakfast served there. Mr. Park was feeling a lot better now. Mrs. Park looked years younger in her new kimono type robe courtesy of Mr. Correy the skipper. The Chief Master at Arms Calvin Matthews delivered all this news when the soldiers and Marines had arrived in the mess hall. He introduced himself and nodded to the original Recon Unit One members. “Some of your faces look familiar, now where can that be from? I haven't been in a hoochy house for a couple of years.”

What he got back in response was a chorus of booing. He then went from man to man shaking hands and welcoming each one and thanking them for a job well done. It is amazing that this Chief and our Gunny are such good friends. The Chief has a sense of humor. Belay that thought Jim. If Gunny ever found out you had a thought like that he would slice and dice you like tuna fish.

At 1100 hours the skipper arrived. The mess hall came to attention without anyone calling it and he waved everyone to be seated and be at ease. “I am

Commander Edwin Correy, Captain of the Patrol Frigate Olympia and I am pleased to welcome each and everyone of you aboard my ship.”

The Captain looked serious yet had a smile on his face. “Something’s up,” said Jim to Ken quietly. “Something you wish to share Sergeant Cunningham?” the skipper had seen the two heads bobbing as one.

“Yes sir,” Jim stood up at attention and addressed the Captain. “What is it then young man?” the Captain was going to banter with him. “Something is wrong. I can feel it and you can’t hide the fact that it is. Yet you want to, correct?” “Very perceptive Marine, yes I do have some good news. However, the bad news is devastating to each and every one of you.” The Captain had turned deadly serious. He opened a waterproof folder that had lots of pages loose inside of it.

“According to the papers I was handed a few hours ago, all of you are facing UCMJ charges. Ranging from disobedience to obey a direct order down to each of you receiving an Article 15, a non judicial punishment.” The Captain was physically relieved and asked for a cup of coffee. “I need to steady my nerves before I read anymore.” He swallowed noisily and put down the mug.

“Charges are being preferred by the Joint Operations Commission, Japan. An Article three is open and the jurisdiction is JOC HQ Japan.” He tried to continue, but instead took another sip of coffee, “US Army JAG has entered into an investigation of the past twelve days of your mission, that is Article 32. Article 31, Charges and Specifications are what I will read next.” He looked around the mess hall, “Gentlemen, please relax you are making me nervous, these are charges, as yet undefined and certainly not substantiated.”

Jim wanted to raise his hand like a school kid but let the skipper continue. “Article 81, Conspiracy, Article 88, Contempt towards an officer, Article 89, Disrespect to an officer.” A brief pause for more coffee, one of the mess men had refilled the mug. “Article 90, Willful disobedience to a lawful order. Article 92, Failure to obey an order. Article 97, Unlawful detention. Article 99, Misbehavior before an enemy.” No coffee this time, he just pushed the mug a little ways away from the table edge and cleared his throat. “Article 104, Aiding and abetting the enemy, and last Article 107, false statements to an officer and false official statements.”

When the Captain finished reading these charges, he sat down and sighed deeply. "If I did not know some of you personally, I would still be stunned by these charges. But I do know some of you and know that you are incapable of any of these ridiculous accusations. Now what can we do about them? Navy JAG is aware and is working on the source of these charges, as is Recon HQ in Pyongtaek."

From the far side of the mess hall came a statement from Sean Murphy one of the unit's radiomen. "It is that shit head Colonel from JOC, I will bet my life on it." "That could very well be it Marine but that doesn't change the charges at all." "I know that sir but you should have heard the things he was telling Jim and Ken to have us do." Sean was not going to keep quiet. The skipper sensed this and suggested that they first of all calm down and let's get to the bottom of the problem.

"Jim, I mean Sergeant Cunningham, do you and Sergeant. Daro, is it?" "Sir yes sir Daro." Ken said strongly. The skipper continued, "Do you both have your daily records of events for the AAR?" He was hoping against hope that they did. "Yes sir, said Jim, they are in my bunk area in a waterproof thigh case. I even made notes of the Colonel's suggestions on several occasions. "Good, Chief would you escort Sergeant Cunningham to his bunk and retrieve the pad and time stamp every page. Please don't obliterate any writing Chief." "Aye, Aye Captain; C'mon Sarge we'll get the stuff and go to the radio room and time stamp it. Anything else skipper?" "No that will do it. Thanks Chief."

He waited until they two men had left the room. "I know you all like Jim very much. It is now extremely important to not over state any thing by trying to help him or yourselves. Since you are all charged in this Article 3, I have found out that time after time the truth wins out. Naval Investigators are not the fastest in the world but they do eventually get to the truth, be patient."

He turned looking for the Army soldier who was in charge of those men. He did not see anyone, so he asked. "Who is in charge of the US Army unit?"

"Corporal Emil Mankewicz sir came the answer. But he is still in the hospital." "Okay, then we will wait to cover that part of the charges when he is able to function." He rose from his place at the long steel topped table. The room rose as one, someone

yelled. "Attention on deck" and the skipper departed the room. Ken called the room to "At ease, sit."

"Guys, I have been through one of the UCMJ charges before. They are not something to laugh about. These investigations stay with you your entire career. In some cases they are with you for the rest of your life." Ken was speaking while sitting. All the while remembering his experience of a year and a half ago. "The last thing you want to do is lie or exaggerate what you either know or don't know first hand."

The serious nature of the charges were sinking in. "Jim has not made a secret of not liking what this Colonel has said on both missions on which he was the patrol leader. That is Jim's prerogative as a leader of a Recon Patrol Unit."

Knowing full well that he only had one side of he story, Commander Correy's intention was to contact the Marine Recon Units HQ. How to do this and not violate the spirit of the UCMJ presumptions of guilty as charged, and become part of these charges?

When the skipper arrived on the bridge he was greeted by a lot of gloom. News spreads quickly on a small ship and these Marines had become family. By default now the Army soldiers of the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry also. As the helmsman started to ask the Captain about the charges the PA system announced, "The Captain had an urgent and private message in the radio room." The skipper looked over at the helmsman and said, "Hold that question sailor. I will be right back." "Aye, aye Captain Correy."

Captain Correy arrived in the radio shack in a less than pleasant mood. The lead radioman knowing the nature of the call sent the other two comm sailors to go "get a smoke; and don't come back in until the skipper leaves." Unfortunately for them the seas were running high and the wind was creating havoc with the snow and ice that had formed on all the steel surfaces. The Olympia was at maximum turns of its two propeller shafts but was barely making 7 knots of forward progress. At this rate the radio/radar operators were calculating at least a 72-hour trip to Inchon, twice the normal time for the trip.

The radio/telephone call was from Recon Battalion Commander Roger Wallace and Recon CO Captain Llewellyn Sinclair. "I don't need to tell you how pissed off I am at this situation Ed." Roger Wallace was calm but firm in his message. "Somehow we need

to get this Article 32 stopped before anymore damage is done to the Recon effort.” The skipper and Wallace had known each other for a little over a year and a half, both were direct and straight talkers.

“Roger, who is the initiator of these charges and what do they say are the problems?” “He is a US Army Colonel at JOC. He intervened, actually interfered with other mission attempts by our Marine Recon effort.” Mr. Correy was suspicious of this Courts Martial information. He asked directly what the Colonel’s role in the Marines missions was. “He has none.” Was the response, “And that has bugged him and his office since last year.”

The Major added, “All of the Army’s attempts at clandestine intervention have been either unsuccessful or over managed by headquarters types.” Correy replied, “And this guy resents that, and is going to make your unit look bad anyway he can. What a shitty way to fight a war Roger.”

“Captain Correy, this is Lew Sinclair the Recon CO. What are the medical evaluations of the men and the civilians?” “I’m sorry Lew, I got all caught up in the Article 32 crap. Most are doing okay. We have a MD on board who performed minor surgery on the Army corporal who had belly wounds from a grenade. He is doing very well today. Your Marine Bruce Strong had a slug removed from his arm, he is up and taking nourishment as they say.” The skipper checked his medical report and read off the results of each man. “Thanks, that is good news, all around.” was Sinclair’s response.

“My assessment of Cunningham’s leadership is very positive. I have him collecting his daily info log so we can review it and get fresh input rather than wait to do this when we arrive at Inchon.” Correy paused, “I hope you both agree with this approach.” “Oh, yes. Yes thanks for doing that. Maybe we can get this crazy situation resolved faster this way.” Wallace’s response was formal. Correy suspected that he had something on his mind.

“Ed, if I can get the Office of Naval Intelligence, ONI, on this today. They may be able to investigate this Colonel and add to what you gather from Cunningham and Daro.”

“Hell yes, do it. It beats waiting until these men get back to your base.”

By God I hope they have good records. “Okay Ed, where is a good place to meet, and with who, or is it whom.” “Don’t know the answer to either question Roger.”

“Petty officer, have the bridge pipe Sergeants Cunningham and Daro to the Officers Wardroom.” Mr. Correy said while he was thinking ahead. “Make sure the officers clean up the place first, okay?”

“Aye skipper,” was the automatic reply. “I am going to be off the bridge for at least an hour. Let Mr. Sparrow know where I will be. Thanks Sparky.” The two men looked at each other and smiled. Both knew this was going to be a long hour for the skipper.

In the wardroom a couple of officers were clearing the table and wiping it down. When Jim knocked they both knew it wasn’t anyone from the crew. They would just walk in. “Wait one please.” Came the answer from behind the watertight door.” As they waited Commander Correy arrived. “Gentlemen it seems as if the two new ensigns have not finished cleaning the wardroom. Do they know you are here?” The question struck Jim as very parental. Not authoritative and not “wishy-washy” either.

“Yes sir, they asked us to wait one, so we are.” Jim’s relaxed tone told the skipper that he had his notes and reviewed them with positive results. “I will bet they drank all the coffee and are trying to make more in a hurry, let me knock. Captain Correy wishes to use the officers wardroom today Ensigns, open up.”

The hatch door flew open and two junior officers Jim had not met before were standing there with cloths in their hands and at attention. The skipper walked past the two of them without introducing anyone. When they left Commander Correy said. “I deliberately did not introduce you to them. It will give them something to worry about until evening meal. They will assume I am mad at them. Ya gotta love recruits.” The three men laughed.

“In the interest of time, we need to go into your notes to the first day’s contact with this Colonel. Also, I would like to know, just for my own self, where he fits into the whole Recon picture.” In just two sentences the skipper had laid out the format of this gathering. Surprisingly Ken was the first to speak. “This Colonel is from JOC Japan. They have an advisory role of any mission that involves multi-country forces working around or above the DMZ. I know this from before I was allowed to join forces with Jim

here and become his assistant patrol leader on this mission.” That told the skipper something he didn’t know. He had wondered why there were two Sergeants leading a mission. He figured there was a good reason.

“Sergeant Daro” the skipper said and Ken interrupted him. “Sir if you would, please call me Ken and I am sure Jim would feel more comfortable than being called Sergeant. Jim smiled, relaxed and nodded his head. “Okay and you can call me Sir.” Now the three of them smiled. Ken continued to tell what he knew about the JOC Colonel.

“The Colonel had been cut out of any information about USMC Recon missions. Whether they were on the East or the West coast of North Korea. Since these raids did not include any multi-national personnel, the Marine Corps was not obligated to inform JOC.”

“Post the last mission Jim lead. There was a debriefing from the corps of spooks. It was conducted on a bus tour around K6 with all of Recon Unit One attending. Some of the information that was gathered on that bus leads us to the last mountain we blew up. The information I think that Mr. Park has is even more vital than anything JOC or its’ spooks even know about.”

Ken was talking faster than Jim had ever heard him speak. “My formal training is not in Recon. I am being refitted into one of these units.” Ken was informing Jim as much as the skipper with his statements. “Jim’s job was to get me up to speed on how to get this job done with little or no loss of life. And how to evaluate the targets of opportunity.”

Ken realized that he had gone far a field with some of his last statements. He tried to get back on track. “The decisions made and the new equipment that our Unit’s carry are all top secret. The ultimate test is in the field and the JOC folks don’t like not knowing what we have and how we are using it.” Jim was a bit confused by some of what Ken was referring to.

“The fact that this Colonel was able to link to the air cover indicates a dangerous leak in the intelligence side of our house.” A dangerous leak, what the hell is that? Jim was even more confused. Ken continued, “As a matter of fact and for your information Sir. With our new intelligence equipment we were able to track the LCVP from your ship

to shore using our new equipment. Even though you were over the horizon, in excess of fifteen miles off shore, we could hear the commands given by your Chief to the landing craft crew.”

“I screwed up in not realizing there were two boats out there.” Ken was informing Jim of this for the first time. “The chatter I chalked up as intra boat talk and it wasn’t. It was one seaman on one craft talking to another seaman on the other.” Ken took a deep inhale and noisy exhale. “Using the “night vision apparatus” I saw two hot signatures and ignored its’ significance. The two boats were coming ashore in tandem.” Next time I will know better he told himself.

Ken said directly to Jim. “For security purposes the only persons who knew about this equipment were Murphy, Morgan and I.” Jim looked betrayed when Ken looked at him. “Sorry poddner but those two were briefed at the control tower meeting and were sworn, as was I, to complete secrecy.” Jim had the urge to deck him but he looked at the pain on Ken’s face. Jim saw the look of dismay on the face of the skipper and thought better of it. Instead he asked Ken “what else don’t I know about you and the rest of my Unit?” “Lots,” teased Ken seeing that Jim had understood what he did and why.

“Dammit now I am confused. You two Marines went on the same mission with differing objectives. How can that be?” The Captain was about to bang their two heads together like school kids.

“Oh I get it. Jim teaches you about demolition and blowing stuff up; and you find the source of an intelligence leak. One mission with two goals. The only way to find the truth was for only a select number of players to know the game.” Sneaky but clever added the skipper to himself. “You know something, you two make an excellent team. Your commanders are going to be very proud of you both. Of course that will be after you each get out of Portsmouth Naval Prison.”

“Sorry bad joke” the skipper added quickly.

The skipper stood up and stretched. “Can I get you Marines a cup of US Navy coffee?” “Yes sir” they both answered simultaneously. Again the three of them laughed together.

“Now let’s look at your day-by-day remarks on your notepad Jim.” The Captain was back in his role of information gatherer. Jim had noted the time and call sign of the



aircraft team covering the Marines and a brief comment about JOC. The Skipper heard Jim's comments about leaving the soldiers, some of them wounded, to meet some Army patrol a hundred miles away. He became angry, but held his comments. The part about ditching the Chicom prisoners who were deserters and the Chicom officer was bad enough. The Captain could see the pain in Jim's face when he finally told the Captain about being told to leave the Park's there or "eliminate" them. Commander Correy knew he would resolve this problem, if it took all year.

Jim had also noted the comment of the pilot about an armchair commander in Japan. "I'm sure if we can locate the pilots they would remember saying exactly that." Ken then said, "We know all the aircraft were out of K6 and they were all Marines and Navy flying F3D's, Corsairs and AD's. None were off of a carrier. Their call signs were all MAG 12 ones, I'll stake my life on it."

"Yep, that is good detail. Now I am going to start with this and get on the horn to Yokosuka to see who convened this Courts Martial?" Now the Captain was in a lecture mode. "In the Navy and Marine Corps someone just can't file charges and then walk away. Our system is such that a charge is made and a hearing takes place, and they decide what is called for, if anything.

No one puts together this many charges without some kind of complicity. It is up to your command structure to find out how and why this has happened and get it stopped."

The Captain then went into his friendlier mode. "We are going to be at sea for at least four days, this wind and heavy seas are expected to last for two more days." He went into a fatherly mood for a moment. "I suggest that the two of you find a spot to work on your AAR and let the Article 32 take its course. There is absolutely nothing either of you can do about this." He knew these two tough Marines needed some time to heal a wound, and they would too."

"This is management stuff and we will handle it, successfully too I may add."

"Skipper, excuse me I have deferred something very important." Jim had risen when the Captain did. "I want to find and give an award for Doc, I mean Petty Officer Schmidt sir. He saved lives out there and he deserves something special." Commander

Correy looked Jim right in the eyes and said. "How about a nice bouquet of yellow roses Sergeant Cunningham, is that special enough?"

Ken was almost standing when the skipper said that and he bumped his wounded leg on the table. "Damn it" he yelled as the old pain came back. The skipper turned directly at Ken and said. "Please be careful Sergeant Daro. Next you too will be wanting roses." That said, he turned and left the two Marines in the wardroom, looking at each other quizzically.

## Chapter Twenty-four

### Sorting it all out, someone's lying

Jim and Ken left the Officers Wardroom after washing and putting away the mugs they had used in the meeting with the skipper. Both were quiet on their short and cold walk back to the mess hall. No one was there with the exception of the mess men and cooks.

Both Marine Sergeants went to the bunk area that had been assigned to him; there is where they found the rest of the unit. Jim tried to explain as simply as possible the discussion he and Ken had with Commander Correy. Both Jim and Ken felt more positive about the situation after meeting with the skipper than they did before.

Most of the team members understood that Jim and Ken could not share too much about the meeting with the skipper, but were curious about how all of this affected them as individuals. Jim shared with the group that the charges in the Article 32 covered everyone. The Army soldiers who had been prisoners of the Chicoms; the two ROK soldiers were named also. "What for?" is the question Wallie Adams wanted answered. "We don't really know the details, the skipper is contacting The Office of Naval Intelligence, and Navy JAG for advice."

"When Ken and I left the commander he was in a very good mood He also said that it was a management task and he would handle it and in the end he would be successful." Jim let that comment sink in, not just to the men gathered in this bunkroom but in his own head also. "That comment leads me to believe that something was not proper in the bringing of these charges on our Unit." Jim paused, "I hope it is not some technicality, but an improper use of UCMJ."

"The good news is that we will be on this ship for the next four days. The weather is terrible and the ships speed is hampered by high winds and high seas." Jim was smiling as he looked at these familiar faces. "With chow like this plus all the rest and sleep we can ever hope for, let's enjoy the next few days and relax."

The knock on the compartment door interrupted any thought or talk; it was one of the military police with gun cleaning solvent, oil and rags. "If anyone needs training in the use of these materials please let us know. The Chief will come to your compartment

and gladly demonstrate their use.” The response from the assembled soldiers and Marines was far from polite, which was exactly the response the MP expected.

“The weather outside is lousy so there will be a movie in the mess hall after supper at 1830 hours.” The petty officer looked around the room to see any reaction, it was all positive. “Anyone going will be escorted to and from there, one of us will be here at 1800 hours.” As emphasis he added, “There will also be about fifty members of Ships Company, so it will be crowded.” As he turned to leave, the MP said, “Oh the movie is the African Queen with Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn. Mr. Sparrow traded the movie Scrooge for it when we were in Pusan.”

The afternoon had been spent cleaning weapons and some light chatter; there was almost no talk about any of the charges. The guys who smoked had to go to a designated smoking area on the ship. It was plenty cold and wet outside so very few went out more than once. Some of the sailors were hanging out in the smoking area when four of the Army soldiers came to smoke.

The conversation got around to what it was like being captured by the commies. The four soldiers talked about how they each thought their lives were over. Each had a different version of how their life would end, but the end was surely close. “Having those Marines find us in that cave and tunnel complex was eerie, almost spiritual.” One of the soldiers said he hadn’t been to any kind of religious service since he was a child. He was sure going to set that straight.

When the talk got around to the Chicom Lieutenant, all four of them were physically drained. That SOB deserves the worst punishment anyone can think of. He was laughing when he kept cutting those Korean soldiers. To their credit they never told him anything. That really pissed him off. They would both be dead if the Recon guys hadn’t showed up with that Navy Corpsman. He did miracles with the stuff he carries in that bag of his. The rest of those Marines are great too. They shared everything with us, food, water, and clothes. Hell, they even and let some of the non-wounded help in the demolition and stuff. What a blast that was.

Word had spread through the whole ship about what the Recon’s last mission had been like. When Chief Matthew’s heard the scuttlebutt he went to the skipper and let him know. Nothing kills morale faster than scuttlebutt that is not verified. The sailors

had taken this Recon Unit on as family and when someone hurts family, look out. Some sailors wanted to find a way to hurt the Chicom's, it didn't matter that they too were victims. Others were plotting to hurt the Chicom officer, what a prick he is; he did such and such to so and so. On and on it went and Commander Correy had to put a stop to the plotting and planning.

When time came to go to the movie, everyone was lined up at the bulkhead door waiting for the escorts. It was like a date, but with no gals, oh well so what. The escorts arrived and apologized for being late. The reason would come shortly. When they got to the mess hall to watch the movie, the Park's were there, and of course Jin and Hyun and most of the ships company. The skipper wanted to speak to as many as possible face to face and have Jim and Ken address them also.

"Sailors, Marines and Soldiers and of course Mr. and Mrs. Park," the Captain was going to address them man to man. "Some of this crew are making plans to injure or worse, the people who are in our custody as prisoners of war. This must not go any further. The Marines and soldiers had every opportunity to do just that and didn't, for a good reason." He looked around for guilty faces and actions; there were a couple he could identify. "We must not, we can not stoop to the level of the enemy, ever."

"These Marines and Soldiers appreciate your anger but would most likely appreciate more your restraint. I would like Sergeants' Cunningham and Daro to come here and add to my statement. Gentlemen." Ken was less surprised than Jim was so he spoke first, "What your skipper just said is absolutely right. If anyone hurts any of the prisoners all of you will suffer the consequences." Ken felt like going on so he did, "We are under investigation on many counts for violation of the UCMJ. These charges are all false and we will wait for the Navy judicial system to sort it out"

"The Captain has complete confidence in the system as do I. We have both seen it work and work well. The last thing anyone aboard this vessel needs is for the prisoners to be hurt in any way. Initially I wanted to kill them, well at least the Lieutenant." Ken could not tell if that was a chuckle or a snort, no matter. "That impulse was wrong; he has information that could be valuable to our efforts in North Korea. You and your shipmates share in our effort by what you do as part of our team. We can't afford to lose you." Ken sat down without any fanfare. It was Jim's turn.

“Hi everyone, I am Jim Cunningham and Ken has said the real important things that you need to hear. Yes we are facing some kind of courts martial. I am not really sure about any of it.” Jim paused and made a hand gesture towards the skipper. “Commander Correy has our situation under his control and I trust in him and the system.” The Captain nodded and smiled. “Is it perfect? Probably not, but I know that my entire team is innocent of any charges made by anyone about anything.” He looked directly at a group of sailors that were huddled in the corner of the mess hall. “Let me echo Sergeant Daro’s statements. It does us no good and you and your shipmates no good either, if any of the Chicom’s are hurt while in your custody.”

Jim smiled at the same group. “It won’t be the JAG that gets you it will be Chief Matthews and Chief Bednarik. May God help you, you will need it.” After just the briefest of moments the place erupted with laughter followed by applause. The kind only military folks can appreciate. The troops recognize the truth when they hear it.

The Park’s had been listening to the tone of the meeting. When Jin and Hyun interpreted for them they were nodding their heads in unison. They knew what little effect retribution could have. Mrs. Park had joined in the clapping. Her little hands hardly made a sound but Jim could hear it. Thank you ma’am.

“Lady and gentlemen please relax and enjoy the movie. Those seamen that were pulled off duty please return to your duty station.” A chorus of “aye aye skipper” was heard and fully half of the crowd departed to their duty station.

In very short order the tables were rotated to act as seating for the movie and the cooks and mess men were making punch and popcorn. Jim and Ken looked at each other and some of their Recon team and nodded, “Good meeting.” Ken ended with, “How true. Now let’s see what this movie is all about.” Jim wondered if the Park’s had ever seen a movie and would they be able to understand. Hey, with Jin and Hyun glued to their side, of course they would.

The movie was a success; little did many realize that this movie would be voted as “movie of the year.” After the viewing many sailors lingered to talk with the Marines and Soldiers. Many just wanted to meet and shake hands with Mr. and Mrs. Park who were gracious and overwhelmed by all of the attention.

Mrs. Park had asked Jin and Hyun who the cook was. She would like to help him make one of the ships' meals a Korean style one. They asked and found him and introduced the chef and Mrs. Park. The two of them were head to head planning tomorrow's dinner meal. The chef reminded Mrs. Park that there were 195 people to feed in three shifts.

When she reached up and touched his cheek with her hand, Jin translated what she said to him. "I have cooked for hundreds every month at our temple." The chef reached across to her and gave her a big hug. Mr. Park sat there smiling, and pleased with the decision to leave their home in North Korea. He hated the names North and South their country was Korea. North and South was an abomination created by the United Nations.

In the morning Ken and Jim were learning to play cribbage, the ship had several sets on board. The sailors showing them how to play were having fun. Contrary to the last visit to the Olympia, Mr. Correy was allowing more interaction of the crew and the ships visitors. The bad weather continued and it was best that both crew and visitors be busy instead of laying around bitching about it. Just when Jim was getting the hang of the game the PA system paged him and Ken to the officers' wardroom, "And bring your notes, maps and comm records."

As always they were escorted to the main deck and the wardroom. Ken knocked and Mr. Sparrows voice said, "Come on in." The two Marines were surprised to see Mr. Park here also. "Sergeants, please have a seat, coffee and pastry is on the sideboard." Lt. Jg Sparrow added that the skipper would be joining them shortly; he had the Chicom officer's maps and stuff.

The skipper has been asked by Naval Intelligence to have Mr. Park identify other tunnel locations and as best he could and note some identifying landmarks." Since the previous cruise, a Korean Navy Ensign was assigned to PF-166 to learn about the frigates. He and the skipper would be joining them shortly.

Jim was spreading his maps and papers on the table when the Captain and a Korean Naval Officer with the rank of an Ensign entered. He was introduced, as Ensign Chi his first name was Jin. Just like our ROK soldier thought Jim. It must be like John and James in America, a pretty common first name. The skipper grabbed two coffees,

and gave one to the Ensign. The Ensign bowed and the Captain smiled. Mr. Correy knew that somehow this act would be imitated all over the ship by nightfall.

All of the maps were spread on the wardroom table, Mr. Park was asked to identify his town on the map. He demonstrated his map skills by identifying his town with little effort. Something most people can't do easily. The Ensign explained that in Mr. Park's business, the only way to find where the customer wanted his products delivered was to use maps similar to this one. The Ensign added, "These old time Koreans and Chinese know where they want to go and if there is no existing road to the destination, they create one."

As Jim, Ken and Lt. Sparrow looked over the maps Jim had, they each noticed significant discrepancies. That is what Mr. Park had been trying to tell them when Jim decided to take the Park's with the team to the extraction point.

Jim knew where the objective was, but the roads and trails marked as leading to it had been all incorrectly identified.

The Navy Ensign Chi was having a spirited discussion with Mr. Park about the line of mountains that had tunnels constructed out of the natural cave openings. Natural caving made it possible to excavate and hide the material that is removed. It was used either to build roads or paths that cannot easily be discerned or discovered from the air. They are meant to blend in.

One of the places Mr. Park pointed to was close to where the first tunnels were destroyed. Ken could see the wheels turning in Jim's head. "Here is target of opportunity number three. We know the terrain and the exit route, this would be a natural for our next mission."

Jim asked the Ensign to ask Mr. Park if he had any idea what is stored in that tunnel complex. Mr. Park replied, "It contained mostly home heating and cooking oils. Not the kind you can eat but the kind that burns in cooking stoves. He believes that the tunnel you first destroyed was built to house troops and the supplies for them are in this other tunnel system." The Ensigns English was pretty good; he translated quickly, even while Mr. Park was still talking. He slipped from Korean to English and some Japanese snuck in there also.



The Captain was making notes of longitude and latitude when Mr. Park would identify a spot. "We could have a reconnaissance plane do multiple flyovers of a large area taking photos of the terrain and then analyze them." A call from the bridge said there was a forecasted break in the weather, should they increase speed? The Captain went to the call box and informed the helm to maintain speed at one-half. "We are not in any hurry helmsman." "Aye aye skipper ahead one half and holding on heading one-seven-zero degrees."

"With the coming good weather we will be performing routine at sea maintenance. Suppose we meet again tomorrow at 1000 hours and do some more of this." The skipper then stood up, stretched like he just had gotten out of bed, he and the Ensign left. That was fine with everyone. Mr. Park was trying to tell the three non Korean-speaking Americans about other stuff on the map. Lt. Sparrow was shaking his head when Ken suggested he get the ROK guys in here to help interpret. "Good idea, I will call down for an escort for them."

It took a half hour for Jin and Hyun to get there. They were not in the bunk area but with Mrs. Park in the mess kitchen and the cooking crew. After the two of them listened to Mr. Park they turned to Mr. Sparrow and said. "There were many other tunnels on the west side beginning about 50km North Pyongyang."

"Between Kanggye and Pyong-song there are hundreds of locations where his company delivers gasoline, fuel oil and cooking oils and lubrication oils and solvents." The two ROK soldiers were happy to help but it was obvious they wanted to be back with Mrs. Park. "Many locations are either underground or in caves and tunnels. Can we leave now?" Jin was almost out the door when Lt. Sparrow said, "Yeah okay go and thanks." Mr. Park was smiling and said in real bad English "Nice boys."

Lt. Jg Sparrow said to both Ken and Jim. "The Korean Navy will be taking some of the refitted Patrol Frigates from the US Navy to patrol both coasts. Yokosuka is turning out about one every three months that will be serviceable for use in these waters." He saw the look on both Jim and Ken's faces. "We, the US Navy, will continue to use them on this coast because the Japanese are touchy about the Koreans having a Navy."

Sparrow added quickly, "Plus the fact that we would not turn sensitive operations over to them or any other nation. Some restrictions will have to be placed upon the South Koreans as to what waters they can sail in without being seen as aggressors." Ken asked about the twelve-mile limit that we have in the US. "Well the international treaties that govern that are now under review."

Mr. Sparrow was now lecture mode, "The US wants the distance increased to fifty miles, and the Japanese would like that too. They really fear the Koreans." "Wow fifty miles, that's a long way offshore," said Ken. "The war between Japan and Korea may never end," added Mr. Sparrow. "Some of the current Korean political appointees are Japanese and were part of the military forces that occupied Korea for such a long time."

Sparrow sighed and said, "When the US was setting up the provincial governments in the two Korea's. Our politicians and political military officers returned Japanese government officials. The mayors and staff, who had run Korea during WW II to the same political offices they held previously, many of the South Koreans rebelled against this and were summarily punished for it." With that said he stood up, as did the Marines and Mr. Park, "Can you two find your way back to the bunk area alone?" "Yes sir," they both said and all four departed.

Jim said to Ken on his way back to the bunk area "You can tell the Mr. Sparrow was enlisted at one time. He shares stuff that most officers would consider "officers to know only" stuff." Ken was surprised at the comment, "I thought you weren't too hot on this guy Jim?" "I wasn't when I first met him because some of his body language made him seem superior. Turns out he was seeing his own reflection in some of the things I said and did."

Ken probed a little "Do you hope when you become an officer Jim that you will be aloof from how the enlisted ranks think and feel?" "Yeah, I do sometimes think about that. Now I have to worry about that Article 32 crap that is happening to everyone. Hell Ken, we may both wind up in a brig somewhere on some remote South Pacific Island."

It was the first time Jim had expressed any fear about the charges. Ken thought that it was a good thing for Jim to get this out and off his mind.

The Unit members wanted to know about the meeting. Somehow they had figured it was about the courts martial. “No, Mr. Parks was showing us more locations similar to the ones we did on missions one and two.” Jim and Ken owed these guys an explanation; even though neither one of them had any real info to deliver. “Guys, I know you are concerned about the charges, and that’s okay. If either of us has any new info we will let you all in on it, no secrets okay?”

“We do know that the weather is going to improve and that the skipper is not going to increase the ships speed.” Ken was trying his best to think of stuff he and Jim may know that they could share with the team. “The skipper is keeping the speed down so the crew can perform deferred maintenance. I think he is stalling until he hears something from ONI or Recon HQ. I believe and Jim does too, that we are in good hands with the Commander.”

Turning to Jim he asked, “Anything you want to add poddner?” “Nope poddner.” Jim looked at the assembled team and said to them, “When we get back to the states I am going to buy this ugly bastard a horse, so he can go “poddner” with it all day long.” A few laughed, some snorted and some of the city guys didn’t get it at all.

Ahhh the melting pot that is the US military, you’ve got to love it.

When the Recon and Army units went to the mess hall, they found that the meal was the same one that was on the regular menu. “What happened to the meal Mrs. Park had been planning?” “Oh that won’t be until tomorrow’s evening meal.” A seaman at the mess hall hatch who took names and Unit ID from each and every attendee at each meal told them. “It takes a lot of preparation, the cutting and the soaking of vegetables and marinating meat to create a real Korean dinner. Wait until you get inside and smell all the spices and stuff.”

The men were disappointed at first. However the meal scheduled was delicious, spaghetti with meatballs and Italian sausage, real old country style hot bread sticks too. The seaman at the hatch had been correct. The distinct odor of marinating meat and vegetables was unmistakable, pungent and hunger making.

Mrs. Park was still in the kitchen. Jin and Hyun and the chef, all seemed to be talking at once, but amicably. Mrs. Park was definitely in charge, no matter what the chef’s sleeve said about his rank being that of a Chief Petty Officer. In another time and

place she was probably the life of any party, we could only hope and pray she gets that all back.

Considering how few days it had been since the incident that landed she and her husband into the world of the US Army, Navy and Marine Corps, her recovery would be quick and complete.

There was no movie tonight so Jim, Ken and the G-men were back at the cribbage board. "Hey sarge" yelled Danny Ormond. "How about we finish the introductions we started back at Recon One?" "Okay," replied Jim, "Who hasn't shared their life's story with the rest of the Unit?" The soldiers were looking confused, so Jim told them how the unit had been formed initially and then those who were added for this current mission.

"We did it in order for each person to better know the other members of the team. Some of it was fun and some not so much so. We'll show you how it works and if you want to some or all of you can join in. No pressure and no points lost, okay?"

"Now it is time for volunteers. If there aren't any, then I will go to my trusty notes and read off those who did share." Jim opened his thigh pad notebook to look for the names of who had shared and those yet to share. "Okay, here we are, these men have not shared their stories, Cook, Longo, Murphy, Morgan and Grazioso. One of you can go first it doesn't matter to us."

The noise of the springs from the bunk could be heard as one of the unit got up to share. Most heads turned to look to see who made the bunk noises.

### **More sharing begins**

"Okay Sergeant Cunningham I will lead off the show. I am Thomas Morgan the 3<sup>rd</sup>. I have always spelled it with an "h" because grandpa and dad don't. I am from the City of Niagara Falls in New York State, where the world famous falls are. Up until I joined the Marines my life was pretty quiet and normal, my schooling is basically the same as millions of others. I liked science since eighth grade when our teacher had each of us build a crystal radio set and it had to work. I was hooked.

In High School I played some sports mostly baseball and tennis, for us tennis is an indoor sport. Best of all we had a radio club after school and we could go in there during lunch period. We built and learned how to communicate using short wave, and

CW, that's continuous wave for Morse code. We even had our own call sign 2TW6N. Radio for me was a natural when I joined up."

"After high school I had no desire to go to college and I took a lineman's job with Niagara Electric and Power Company. If you have never climbed a high-tension structure in the dead of winter, you are missing high adventure." Thom paused thoughtfully and continued, "My hope was to get into the union, work my way up to some supervisory level and coast into retirement. It did not happen that way. It was one dirty job after another kept coming my way and I was being treated like crap."

"One night I was with some buddies in a local bar and a couple of Marines were in there on the way to Great Lakes for radio training. Well my ears lit up like a Christmas tree. I asked every question I could think of and they answered me honestly about the new jobs in the Corps. They stressed the fact that all Marines are first and foremost infantry and trained to fight, but technology was also adding opportunity."

"I went home, discussed it with my folks and they each agreed it would do me good to get out of Niagara Falls and learn new skills to use after my enlistment." Thom was feeling more comfortable now. Continuing he said, "Dad went with me to the recruiters. He had been in the Navy during the War, and after boot camp he stayed at the Great Lakes Training Center as an instructor."

Thom turned serious for a moment; "He had seen some recruiters who promised stuff to new recruits only to screw them later. Once you were in, suddenly all the classes promised were full, and had been for months before the you enlisted."

That statement finished, Thom's demeanor took on a more positive note and he continued his story.

"From the day I first hit boot camp and got off the base bus, and until now I have been a lucky guy. Everything I have put in for, school wise, I have gotten. Radio school, Wireman school, advanced infantry plus Recon and demolition schools. I love it." He was now on a positive roll, "My family is my Mom and Dad, two brothers both younger at 16 and 14 and one sister who turns 12 on July 4<sup>th</sup>. Dad calls her his little "cracker." The rest of us call her spoiled." He chuckled at that comment, as did some others.

“I was raised in the Lutheran Church, but stopped attending when I was in high school. After what we have just been through maybe I believe I should start going again.”

“Well, thanks for listening.” Thom gestured toward where he had been sitting earlier. “Serafino are you next?”

“Yeah smart ass. I thought you would call on your buddy Murphy. I guessed wrong.” Longo stood up and stretched his whole body. “My name is Steve Longo, yes as Thom with an “h” says, my real name is Serafino. I come from a long line of Sicilian gangsters.”

“The Marine Corps is my refuge, I could either join or go to Juvenile Jail. Unlike some of you my education was on the streets of Brooklyn NY. Yes I went to school and yes I graduated. That was because my grandfather and the high school principal had a long talk.” It was easy to tell that this young Marine was embarrassed by his early life.

“I was forever in some kind of trouble. Not serious but always pushing the system to see how far I could get. At 9 I was caught stealing stuff from Kresge’s Department store. At 12 I was hustling policy numbers for the local bar, no charges, just a kick in the ass from the local cops. When I was fifteen we were caught in a street rumble with the colored guys from Bed Stuy, man that was bloody. We all were sent to a police camp for a week. That was cool but I didn’t learn anything, except how not to get caught the next time.” A sense of smugness started to creep into Steve’s manner, he quickly change gears and continued.

“Well that next time is what lead me to the Marine Corps. The juvie judge was a Marine and he promised me that if I were able to successfully complete boot camp he would throw away the charges. In my mind I thought that would be a piece of cake, bullshit.”

“My DI must have known about the charges ‘cause he ripped me a new one every day.” Steve started to smile and looked around the room at his teammates. Others had the same notion that “boot” was going to be a snap. Like hell it was.

“It was during the swamp survival and orienteering course that I wised up and told him so. I promised him that I was going to become the best-damned Marine ever.

He laughed in my face, but helped me by challenging me. Instead of busting my ass he taught me how to properly do the individual courses.”

“When I went home between advanced infantry and Recon school, I challenged my old friends to join up and become a man. They laughed at me and I was determined to show them what a man really looks like. Most told me about the dough each of them had in their pockets and what did I have? A lot more than money guys, a lot more.” Steve took the opportunity to again look around at his peers and had eye contact with some of the Army soldiers.

“Demolition school was like a new world to me. I was learning to blow things up on purpose and it was okay to do that.”

“You and you, each and every one of you on the Recon team are my new family. I will not let you down.” He felt taller and more at ease having shared. “Oh yeah, for what its’ worth, I have a sister, she’s 25 and married to a small time street hustler. They both have a lot to learn about what it takes to stand up and be counted on.”

“Thanks everyone.” He was getting cute now. “Who is next? Oh yes I see him hiding in the corner. Gentlemen please welcome from the slums of Darien Connecticut. The one and the only Mr. communications himself, PFC Sean Murphy. C’mon Murph, get off that bunk and tell us how hard life is in the Nutmeg State.”

“Efff you ginzo, hello to everyone. Jeez, if I knew I was sleeping in the same bunk room with a hoodlum I would have requested different accommodations.” Both Sean and Steve made a vulgar gesture to the other, all the while smiling.

“Steve hit it right, I am from Darien, Connecticut and their idea of a slum is for your family to own only one home and two cars.”

“My family is in the custom home construction business. During the war they were in the building of barracks at Portsmouth and Springfield, Mass. Currently dad and mom run the business out of an office building in downtown Darien. Mom is the Chief Financial Officer of the company.”

“It is expected to be a family business. There’s my oldest sister, who is an architect. Plus her husband who is a general manager of the construction sites.” He reflected briefly as to how much he missed all of that. “I am expected to join the firm when this career in the Marine Corps is over.”

“I will most likely go back to college when I get back. I too dropped out when the draft got too close.” Sean reminded himself that this was his choice. “My mom would have preferred that I go into the Army, but independent thinker that I am. I became a US Marine. I would rather take my lumps, both the successes and failures, my way.”

“My family and I are all churchgoers, St. Paul’s Episcopal, the church is right next to the new High School. When mom and dad were to be married, he was RC and she was a Presby and they decided to meet in the middle at St. Paul’s. Dad calls it catholic light. They have been active in that church community ever since.”

He had to stretch his back a little, what is that all about? Sean continued his story.

“I grew up in a very privileged environment, money, clothes and a life style I thought everyone enjoyed. That is until I went to Hartford to do some church missionary outreach work. What an eye opener. People were living on the streets, veterans that could not get or keep a job. Broken families due to alcohol abuse. It left an indelible mark on me.” Again he felt the need to stand taller. “That is one of the reasons I became a Marine. I knew it would open my eyes to what the real world is like. It has, and in spades.”

Sean looked directly at Jim and then to Ken and said, “I have experienced more human compassion on this current mission than I have ever seen in my life. War is terrible, and we did not ask to come here. Those that put us into this quandary and almost impossible position, need to know that we will finish the job they started or die trying.” Sean cleared his throat and continued.

“I too played sports in both high school and College. Not overly well, but well enough to know that I could hold my own with anyone. The Marine Corps has taught me about teamwork and that leadership counts.”

“On our first mission I was so damned scared of making a mistake; on this mission I was just plain scared.” Smiling he added, “Remember when Thom and I were introduced to this new radio and communications stuff? I felt that someone was trusted me enough to use and be responsible for evaluating these radios performance in battle. I could never have had that challenge except here.”



“The charges in that Article 32 are not only bogus but bullshit. The person who crafted those charges will somehow be dealt with. I know Jim and Ken are good people and those charges are crap.” Lighten up he kept telling himself. “I also know that if Gunnery Sergeant Papushka finds out who they are, there will be hell to pay. Well enough of my preaching I just wanted to get that off my chest and out in the open. Regardless of the outcome of anything; we stand as one, US Marines, Semper Fi.”

This was the longest speech he had ever given and it was from the heart. “Thanks to whoever thought up this idea of sharing. Okay folks, who is going to be next?”

“Let’s take a break.” Ken stood up and said it, and everyone agreed. When the hatch was open the setting sun was shining on a much calmer sea. The view was beautiful and yet strangely so the orange reflection on the calmer but very cold Sea of Japan. It was picture perfect, beautiful.

“Hey Sarge, how do we know if the smoking lamp is lit?” Without even looking to see who said that, “Light up and find out asshole,” was Ken’s quick reply.

As yet he had not lighted his own cigarette. He was looking for the place where the sailors had taken them this morning and smoked.

## Chapter Twenty-five

### Last days on the Frigate Olympia

Jim and Ken suggested the rest of the Recon Unit take the opportunity and write a letter home. Both thought so much of the idea, they would also write some letters. "After lunch we can get back to sharing of the team's stories. Maybe some of the Army guys would like to join in?" "I'll ask them," Jim told Ken.

Mr. Sparrow had not been seen since early yesterday morning. I hope that is a good sign thought Jim. Ken suggested that with the better weather and Mr. Sparrow being the Operations and Maintenance Officer, he could be busy with Navy stuff.

While some of the men were writing letters, some took naps. Meanwhile in the radio room, Mr. Sparrow and the skipper were very busy. Commander Correy was acting as a go between with Naval Intelligence in Yokosuka and Recon HQ in Pyongyang.

Both groups were in full support of the Recon Unit One's decisions and were insisting that the perpetrators of these charges come forward and be identified. So far no one had done so. The Army JAG was not interested in divulging the names and the Navy JAG were not going to let the charges go forward. Not without all of the accusers being interviewed.

Lt. Jg Sparrow being the Operations and Maintenance Officer also had responsibility for the ships Radio Communications. Since this was a war zone, most of the transmissions were encoded and as a result had to be decoded, mostly a labor-intensive chore. On a ship as small as these Patrol Frigates the radiomen that received these messages had to decode them. It took hours of effort to get some of these messages interpreted correctly. Only four qualified seamen covered the 24-hour a day 7 days a week schedule that staffed the radio room. Four would normally be enough for a regular radio traffic day; these days were neither regular nor close to being normal.

The lead radioman, a petty officer first class, had requested the Marine radiomen be allowed to assist with processing the increased radio traffic. The request was not ignored but neither was it implemented. "Do the best you can," was the usual response.

The last messages decoded indicated that the Navy JAG would charge the Chicom Officer, presently in US custody, with torture and conduct unbecoming while

supervising prisoners of war. His trial will be held at the UN HQ Court located in Pusan following processing at Recon HQ in Pyongtaek. The preliminary hearing before trial would take place no later than June 1, 1952. A summary court consisting of like ranked officers of various UN forces would assess his crimes.

One of the messages that took a long time to decode concerned the Chinese prisoners. The five would remain in US Marine Corps custody at the Recon HQ detention center located at K6, in Pyongtaek, South Korea. The UN Command would provide Chinese speaking legal representation. The objective would be to deport them from Korea to Nationalist China residing on Formosa, now being referred to as Taiwan. Prisoners would normally be sent to Dong ho, an island prison, south of Pusan. However, their status as deserters would mark them for certain death at the hands of some of other Chicom prisoners.

One radio message that did not need decoding said that Lt. Aaron Howton, USN was interfacing with Navy JAG, Far East, as a character witness for the Marine Recon Unit. One of the JAG officers working on the case will be attending Naval War College in the same class as Mr. Howton. He made Howton aware of the pending charges. Mr. Howton immediately volunteered his assistance and Marine HQ at K6 accepted that offer.

A coded message for "Captains eyes only" came through and only Mr. Sparrow was permitted to decode the message. It did not take him very long, the message was short and to the point. "The Captain of Patrol Frigate 166, Olympia had requested permission to award US Navy Medical Corpsman Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Otto Schmidt the US Navy Commendation Medal for Meritorious Achievement." The message stated, "Based upon facts entered to US Naval Headquarters Yokosuka Japan the request is granted in the affirmative."

Mr. Sparrow smiled and shouted, "That's great." He did not show the note to the two radiomen but immediately headed for the bridge to see the skipper. When the note was delivered both men were smiling and shaking hands.

"When do we want to do this captain?" Sparrow was ready to start cutting the orders to make it happen now. "Let's wait until we dock at Inchon, we can involve the entire crew in the recognition." That was the Captain's reply and the ever-listening ears

of the seamen on duty on the bridge would spread the word that some big event would happen when they reached port. "It will give them a couple of days to wonder what it is all about." The Captain whispered to Sparrow as he pointed toward the bridge crewmen. Sparrow nodded, smiled and left for the radio room and more messages.

When Mr. Sparrow re-entered the communication room the seamen expected him to give them the scoop. "It was nothing important for you to know, only the skipper" was his response. Mr. Sparrow correctly surmised. When these radiomen get off duty, these two guys will huddle with the three on the bridge, and the rest of the crew will know something is in the works by evening meal.

Oh the evening meal, that is the one Mrs. Park is making. I had better get there early. Mr. Sparrow was knowingly being selfish. Some of the other officers were aggressive when it came to good chow and he did not wish to get there late. The officer's mess was little different from regular mess. He who comes late eats what's left, and Sparrow was not going to be late.

Lunch in the mess hall was tough to sit through. The smell of cooking that was going on in the kitchen permeated the entire mess hall. The scent was intoxicating. Sailors, Marines and soldiers sat there inhaling the exotic smells. Mrs. Park could not be seen above the kettles, but everyone knew she was there.

A quick burst of Korean and an even quicker interpretation from both Jin and Hyun and the mess men working with her did her bidding. "Hey that is just like the Marine Corps" was one of the smart-ass remarks.

"These cooks will never forget this experience," so said Mel Ott to Ken. They both laughed, but were glad she was not bossing them around. "Ya know Sarge, it was really a lucky break for us, meeting up with the Park's." "How do you mean that, Mel?" "Well Mr. Park is giving us good info for the next missions and he lead us out of what could have been a trap." Mel was reflecting on the exodus from the woods to the extraction point. "Plus, look what Mrs. Park is doing right now. She's doing this to please us. What a great couple."

Ken reached over, mussed Ott's crew cut head, and said. "Do you want to adopt them too? They come as a package you know. Mr. and Mrs. plus the two ROK's Jin and

Hyun.” Mel pushed Ken’s hand away and muttered a minor obscenity. They smiled at each other and left the mess hall heading for the smoking area.

The frigate was moving along at a leisurely pace and the noticeable rocking, pitching and all the other directions a ship could be tossed were gone. The Captain had allowed complete interaction between the Sailors, Marines and Soldiers. It was strange how well behaved the groups were in these circumstances. Normally they would be finding a way to get one up man ship, in any way possible.

One group of Sailors, Marines and Soldiers were discovered in the LCVP shooting craps. Chief Bednarik heard the noises and interrupted the festivities, no punishment, yet. The Chief was not known for looking the other way when it came to infractions. Right now he had bigger fish to fry rather than to be bothered by some minor gambling in board.

After a walk around the ship the Marines and Soldiers went back to the bunk area and most hoped that the sharing would continue. Jim had arrived before them. He was reviewing his notes, dates and times. When stuff happened is just as important as what happened. “Emil, would you mind going over some of the time lines of when we met up with you folks,” Jim was puzzled by this entries he had made.

Emil said, “I’m not sure of what day it was, but we had been prisoners for over ten days.” Jim’s shorthand, learned in high school, was not the normal kind of shorthand. His was the type that news reporters used. Very few vowels and fewer suffixes were the gist of this method.

“I can remember being very excited when we found you guys in the tunnel.” Jim was explaining why he needed the clarification. “I wrote a lot of this stuff when the others were attempting to clear the tunnel. I just don’t want to be fumbling around when they start the interrogation.” “Interrogation, is that what you expect Jim?” Emil was shocked to think of such a thing. “They should be pinning medals all over this Unit. Not trying to punish you guys.” The pitch of Emil’s voice had started to rise.

“Emil the last time I heard your voice that high was in the tunnels and you were looking at all that artillery stuff.” Emil realized that Jim was teasing him. “Yeah I guess I got kind of excited.” Jim was smiling at Emil’s comments; the last thing this Unit was worried about was any kind of awards or medals.

As Jim was sorting out some of the info Emil had provided, the PA speaker announced. "Sergeant Cunningham please report to the bridge to meet with the Captain." As Jim stood up, Ken commented that he was being called to the principal's office for not turning in his homework. "Funny, real funny Daro. The skipper probably wants me to steer the ship for a while." Jim did not feel in a fun type mood but the skipper had always been square with him and there was no reason to be worried. "See you guys later," he spoke as he left the bunk area.

Finding the bridge was not very difficult; it is the highest structure on the ship. Except for the two masts that hold the "crows nest" and the antennae. Jim went up the ladder. Two years ago this was a stairway. He knocked on the door and the skipper himself opened it. "Wow that was quick, thanks for getting here so fast." the skipper's manner was casual and sincere. Jim had been tempted to salute but didn't. "My radiomen need a hand and I would like to borrow a couple of your communications men." He paused to gauge Jim's reaction to this request. "They need them to assist in copying the huge amount of code and voice traffic we are experiencing."

Jim knew the increased traffic was because of the Recon Unit's problems. "Absolutely sir, both Murphy and Morgan copy and transmit Morse code and type faster than I can think." The skipper smiled picturing Jim at a typewriter. He put his hand on Jim's shoulder and told him "All communications are privileged between the radio room and the Captain of the ship."

Jim got the captains message nodded and asked him. "Should I send the two of them to the radio room when I get back or how should I handle it?" "Good suggestion, Sergeant" the Captain nodded and gave Jim a "thumbs up."

"Just ask them to come to the radio room and introduce themselves to the RM 1<sup>st</sup> Class who is on duty. He will give them all the directions they will need." "The bridge will let the Comm Center know that you approved of their participation." Jim noticed that the skipper made the whole thing sound very formal. He was certain Murphy and Morgan would be excited about helping out.

"One more thing Sergeant Cunningham, these two men will be working the same shift's as the crew." The captain was telling him something else beside the Comm Center work schedule. "As such they will be bunking with my communications persons.

Are you okay with that?" Jim was surprised but answered "Certainly sir." Jim had no idea that the communications personnel all slept within the Comm Center's area. The skipper was also eliminating any leaks that might occur with personnel coming and going.

When Jim returned to the Recon units bunk area, the two Recon radio guys were happy to assist. They were less enthusiastic about sleeping in the comm room but so be it. Each brought his new toilet kit and a towel with them.

"Don't forget an underwear change," was Ken Daro's contribution. They each laughed but reached into the bunk locker and grabbed two pair of shorts and tee shirts. "Hey Jim, will we miss Mrs. Park's dinner?" Sean sounded concerned, "Don't worry, the Comm Center sailors will be going to mess and you will be working the same shifts and keeping the same schedule."

There were several loud blasts of a three-inch deck gun, no one moved. Their presence was not requested and this was not the time to be a sightseer. Then the definite sound of twin fifty caliber machine guns were heard and a couple more of the deck gun. Then the PA system came to life. "Battle stations on the double. Mines in the water on the port side." "Deck marksmen stand fast amidships."

"Hey if the skipper needs expert riflemen we are here." Ortega and Ott were on their feet and ready to defend the PF 166 against all enemies. "If the skipper or the crew need any of us, they will request our services." Ken was putting up a good front. "In the meantime relax; it is only a minefield we are traveling through." Jim and Ken both looked at the soldiers, who for the most part looked dazed.

"You guys know that you have been a jinx on this Recon Unit since we met you." Ken was teasing the soldiers who almost immediately laughed with him. Ellerbe said, "What the hell else can happen to us? Incidentally Sergeant, until we met you guys our lives were perfect." That set the tone for the next half hour. The two groups sat around the bunk area talking about what could possibly happen next. The more each group tried the more ridiculous were the suggestions, but a lot of tension was relieved. Thank goodness.

Outside the ships quarters riflemen and machine gunners were pouring rounds into the water into which an old style contact mine had surfaced. Normally these mines

do not come to the surface. They are anchored with a chain and weighted box and set on the ocean floor. Since this one was on the surface the chain either rusted through or broke in the previous days storms. A precise shot from the twin fifties blew the bugger up. It may have been old but the explosion indicated there was nothing wrong with the explosives.

There was the usual cheer that went up for a hit like this. The PA system acknowledged the hit and for everyone on deck to remain and keep a sharp eye out for any others. "The deck gun crew could stand down to a ready status. Unload the breech and secure the ammunition."

It was close to dinnertime and the Recon Unit and the Soldiers did not want to venture out on deck with a condition of "battle stations" in progress. Ken suggested they just sit tight and wait for instructions. They did not have to wait long; one of the seamen came to their area and would be the escort to mess. "Oh don't worry, this happens all the time. This is our regular job sweeping for mines, finding mines and destroying them."

His nonchalance about the job told Ken that this sailor wasn't just "blowing smoke." "We do this almost every day." The sailor said directly to Ken, "Picking you guys is up at the completion of your mission's is a bonus for us."

The attendance in the mess hall was not a surprise. Everyone on board wanted to have a taste of real Korean cooking. All of the scuttlebutt surrounding the cooks and bakers and Mrs. Park and the two ROK guys who are always with her. What are they anyway, her bodyguards?

The tables had been set with flowers. Now where the hell did they come from? When the first men to be seated touched the flowers they discovered they were made of paper. Meticulously made and very beautiful, who gets to keep them? My god, don't tell me these paper flowers are going to be raffled off. The rack of trays was also gussied up with paper flowers.

Even if the meal is not very good, the way the place looks, it was worth the wait. As soon as the first served sat and sampled the food, the accolades started. "This is delicious, spicy but not hot like Mexican or some Chinese stuff I've had." "Maybe the lady would like to stay aboard and cook all the time like this." The compliments



continued on and on. Most of the Sailors' and Marines' comments were just like these, enthusiastic and positive.

Mrs. Park was behind the kettles and staying out of view. She wanted the men to enjoy her cooking and know she appreciates them. Sook did not want recognition. She did this to thank everyone for her chance to leave the oppressive regime of her country. The people running her homeland were thugs and do not represent the wants or needs of the people they claim to serve.

When the Marines and Soldiers turn came to eat. Mrs. Park came out to greet them. Sure enough, at her side were Jin and Hyun. If the moment had not been such a serious one, it would have been comical. However, Mrs. Park was deadly serious. Both ROK soldiers said at the same time, "This is for you and all you have done for our family." Their speech in unison, made everyone who heard it laugh, so did Mrs. Park.

As Doc and the other medics came through the line, she reached out and hugged him hard. The mess hall was a thunder of applause, much to the embarrassment of Petty Officer Schmidt. The only thing Otto Schmidt could think of to do was kiss the top of Mrs. Park's head as he continued to hug her in return.

"War may be hell but this experience I will never forget." Doc's pronouncement brought tears to the eyes of many in the mess hall.

Many of the tough guys would later deny that, but it happened.

The chief cook informed the ROK soldiers that it was time to feed the officers in the wardroom. "Please escort Mrs. Park to the wardroom along with the mess men who will be serving." She did not know that Mr. Park would be there as well. They would all dine together and in style.

The daylight was almost gone and a US warship in hostile waters does not run with its' light on. Consequently the walk to the wardroom was a tricky one. The Mess men were pushing the food carts. The deck was wet and slippery the air was cold. With Jin and Hyun by her side the petite Mrs. Park shivered a little but did not want any kind of sympathy or concern. She was strong and she would prove it.

When the food was inside the wardroom, the mess men and the ROK escorts went back to the mess hall. Last in was Mrs. Park. She bowed to this room full of American officers and rocked back a bit, suddenly aware of the focused attention.

Once she was inside the wardroom, all the officers stood up. They bowed as graciously as a westerner can to this tiny Korean lady. Her husband was seated next to the Captain and showed her an empty chair next to himself. They embraced ever so slightly and bowed to each other after which he held the chair for her. Those lessons of courtesy between a husband and wife were not lost on many in that small wardroom.

After the meal and before dessert, the skipper had an announcement to make. He rose to his feet and with his cup of tea; he toasted this couple. "Together they have shown a unique side of humanity to a group of US Servicemen that no one would ever forget." With the smile of a Cheshire cat he said. "I would also like Mr. and Mrs. Park to know that when we dock at Inchon tomorrow their two sons will be on the pier to greet them."

Ensign Chi quickly translated the message but the Parks' somehow knew what the skipper had said. Tears of elation and disbelief all flowed at once. Not all of them from the Parks. Some of the ships officers were deeply touched by the announcement. None of the officers, except Chi, were remotely aware of this surprise; even Mr. Sparrow had not been informed.

"Jake I can't tell you everything. I like to offer a few surprises too." Mr. Sparrow just shook his head. Another lesson learned from a skipper who genuinely likes people. "Got it skipper, thanks."

"One more thing while I am standing. By tomorrow morning all of the charges against the Marines and Soldiers will not only be dropped, but will disappear as if they never existed." The Captain really did like surprises. "Mr. Sparrow, Ensign Chi and myself will make the trip to their bunk room." he paused slightly. "After they have finished eating. Then we will then make the announcement."

Smiling he said, "Chief Bednarik is making certain they will all be in the bunk room by 1900 hours." Everyone knew that no one was going to say no to the Chief. Most of the officers in this wardroom knew better than to say no to him.

"We cannot discuss any details with them at this time." His pause was short and noisy, like a snort. "Mainly because we don't know any details, which is probably just as well." The skipper did add, "I can tell you our Naval Intelligence is on the loose."

“It seems the Intel guys, both Army and Navy, know this Recon team. Both groups had a briefing with the Marines’ after their last mission. Now the ONI folks are out hunting heads.” That said, he bowed to Mrs. Park and took his seat. Ensign Chi asked permission to tell the Parks’ the news about the Recon team. “Of course, please do.” When he did tell the Parks’ a cry of pure glee erupted from Mrs. Park. The wardroom matched and enjoyed her happiness. What a night this has been.

Dinner in the wardroom was completed; the mess men had been called to clear the foodservice carts. While the mess men were clearing the room, the officers were unusually quiet. Sometimes the mess men were the source of some of the juiciest information. Not tonight guys.

A few of the officers had to leave early to relieve other officers who were on duty. Those who came in later congratulated the Parks’ too. Because a ship has to be kept running regardless of circumstances the word is passed from reliever to the relieved. In this way no information or important data is lost. In the case of the Olympia, as on all naval warships the shifts changed every four hours. Those coming on watch would know anything that happening in that particular section from the persons or persons who is being relieved.

It was no different tonight with the news about the Marines’ and Soldiers’. The good news for the Park’s was met with resounding approval and a commitment to silence.

The Recon Unit and the US and ROK Army soldiers were assembled in the bunk area. The chatter was all about the terrific meal Mrs. Park had the chef and his cooks prepare. “That dessert was really good.” Ortega had the floor at the moment. “Just think, she made all that out of ingredients and stuff they already had on board. Too bad she’s married or I would propose to her.”

The catcalls and disparaging remarks that came back at him did not surprise Mario. He enjoyed making outlandish statements just to get others stirred up. Interrupting the banter was a rather solid knock on the hatch. “Ken shouted; “c’mon in it’s open.” That said the skipper and his entourage entered and stepped over the watertight lower bulkhead.

“Attenhut, Captain on deck,” shouted Ortega who was closest to the hatch. “At ease.” Mr. Sparrow replied and then asked Jim and Ken directly “Is everyone here Sergeants?” “Sir, yes sir” replied Jim and Ken who were still standing at attention. Jim realized that Mr. Sparrow had given an “at ease” so he relaxed into that position and Ken did the same. “Commander Correy wishes to convey a few messages. Sir you have the deck.”

“Thank you Lieutenant Sparrow.” Uh oh these two officers are being formal, what is that all about? “How about the meal Mrs. Park made for us?” He emphasized the statement by patting his belly. “I don’t know about you gentlemen but I am full. That was an outstanding meal.” A chorus of “yes sir” echoed back to the captain. “Okay, now everyone relax. Forget at ease and stand down. I have only good news.” The skipper knew not to drag this out too long.

“All charges coming out of the Article Three brought by JOC Japan are being dropped and expunged. That Article Three never happened.” He took a look around the bunkroom as a collective sigh was happening. “The matter however is far from closed. Naval Intelligence, ONI, is tracking down the perpetrators of these charges.” He looked directly at Jim and said, “There is absolutely no reason for anyone here to be concerned about what happens next.” Commander Correy let that sink in. “That part of this whole mess is for command officers to resolve.” The Captain, Mr. Sparrow and Mr. Chi were nodding their heads. The skipper continued. “Men, I know your boss and Major Wallace is not going to let this issue slide. He may or may not share the outcome with you. That is just the way it is.”

After the briefest of pauses he continued to say. “Tomorrow when we dock in Inchon, there will be a brief but important ceremony. Mr. and Mrs. Park’s two sons will be meeting us at dockside and will be reunited with their parents. I would like all of you to be assembled dockside as well.” Again looking directly at Jim he asked if anyone would not be present. Jim answered, “No sir, all Recon and the US Army soldiers will be present at dockside.”

“What time sir?” “Oh, it will be after we dock at our berth and tie up. No telling how long that will take.” The skipper was pulling Jim’s leg and enjoying the moment.

While the looks on the faces of the others told him all of them got the tease and Cunningham doesn't.

The captain let the noise level diminish of its own accord. "I have some further information to share with all of you. "The five Chicom soldiers will be given POW status and held at the K6 Recon compound. Under detention by international law." He paused because he knew the statement sounded somewhat legalistic, it was. "Most likely they will be turned over, at their own request, to the Chinese Nationalist Government now residing on the island of Formosa." As the skipper looked around he saw confusion. "The essence of that means they are not being returned to the communists." Now there were smiles on the faces of the assembled Marines and soldiers.

"In case you are interested, the Chinese officer is to be held at the same K6 compound and under arrest." Some smiles appeared, mostly on the face of the soldiers. "He is to stand trial after a military review by peer officers of various UN countries for violations of the Geneva Conventions."

The skipper again paused to let this sink in. "To ease anyone's mind, there is no way in the world based on the testimonies given, that he will escape a trial." He looked around and felt sure they understood this guy was not going to walk away without punishment.

"You are all aware that under the Geneva Convention, guilt is assumed and the charges have to be disproved."

There were several exclamations of elation at the news. The Captain wanted to let these guys vent in the privacy of the bunkroom. With each other as a sounding board they may all get over this bump in the road quickly.

"Now I must get back to work. You see the Captain of a US Navy warship is on duty twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week." Mr. Sparrow rolled his eyes and the Korean Navy Ensign just smiled. He too had just learned something from this US Navy Commander.

It is important how you enter a room to pass on news. It is also important how you leave a room when you exit.

Just as soon as the hatch door closed the three officers could hear the cheers and elation of the voices inside that bunkroom. "I'm glad you didn't wait until tomorrow to pass on that good news sir. Those men deserve a good nights sleep."

"Mr. Sparrow, thank you for the support. Yes they will sleep well tonight. Thankfully. Now let's get back to work and arrive at Inchon in one piece."

"Aye sir," the junior officers said simultaneously.

## Chapter Twenty-six

### Final day aboard and ...

Inside the Recon bunkroom the elation was initially subdued, suspicious of any kind of change, Jim and Ken had to be reassuring to these young Marines. "This may not be on our service record but what happens if someone does do something stupid later on?" PFC Ormond was asking a question that others only thought about. "Well" answered Ken, "You had better not screw up. Then there will be nothing to worry about now will there?" Such a simple answer thought Danny, but he knew in his heart of hearts that he could easily screw up something later on.

"What happens when there is no one who believes any of us in the future?" Jim noticed that the questions were coming at an increasing rate. He responded to the questions. "Look, the skipper told us tonight so we could get a good nights sleep. Why don't we stop with the idea that any of us will screw up? We didn't this time and the next time we won't screw up either. Got it?" Danny shrugged and realized that no one had screwed up, except some high-ranking guy in Japan.

Now that guy screwed up, the skipper said a lot of intelligence guys were after his ass. Go get him.

Sleep came hard that night, why?

It had been a very good day, good rest, great food, and good news. What the heck more do I want? Even Jim was tossing in his head. He looked over to see if Ken was awake. Nope, sound asleep, or at least pretending to sleep. Jim kept going over in his head about what the Gunny was going to say. He was reliving the greeting at the pier when the Gunny and the Chief got together. What would be the conversation this time?

"Boy do you have a bunch of screw ups in your outfit Pappy." Stop trying to predict the outcome that you cannot possible know.

Turn over and go to sleep. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

At breakfast it was announced that docking time would be about 1400 hours local time. The ship was so far off shore that it was hard to gauge how close they really were to Inchon. The sun was off to their right as they exited the mess hall. "That's a good sign right?" The G-men were playing at navigator. "Yeah I guess so."

Jim asked the men if they had read the pages handed out at breakfast. "Some of what is on there we already know," he said. "Just like the last time, we will receive our ammo and other munitions after we disembark."

Emil was talking to his men and the ROK soldiers, "They will be leaving the jump fatigues on." Jim looked around at his guys; some still were wearing the jump fatigues. "All Marines will be wearing the appropriate utilities, Doc you too," Jim was getting into his regular mode of leader.

"One more thing, this is mostly for the G-men; you will refrain from doing the manual of arms with your Thompson's." Jim looked directly at the two men. He was aware others too had done the same thing, but he knew where the start of that resided. "Any questions about that? Good."

"According to the directive we received, the Army will assemble as a unit. Okay Emil?" "Got it Sarge." Jim continued, "The Navy Unit was to leave the ship first and form up. Next will be the Marines, in two ranks" Jim looked at Ken and got a nod. He and Jim would both be in front of the assembled Marine Recon Unit. "The Army Unit will be next to the Marines with Emil out front." Emil nodded waiting for more info. Jim obliged him. "Emil you will form up your men in two rows even with us and you will stand in front relative to Ken and me."

"Emil, the two ROK Soldiers will be with you," Jim was smiling at the two of them. "That is if you can pry them away from The Parks' for awhile." The ice was broken and the two Korean soldiers gave an American "get lost" wave to Jim. "Before we leave this room and since we are all together I want to be very serious for a moment." Jim shifted around so he could see everyone.

"Our mission was a success and we owe some measure of that success to the involvement of everyone in this room." Some became embarrassed and started to look around and some looked down at the deck. "No one prepared any of you soldiers for your journey and we were hardly prepared to be part of that journey."

Now even Ken was getting uncomfortable, where is he going with this?

"In spite of weather, wounds and situations, we all came through this satisfactorily. Congratulations and I sincerely hope and pray that some time in the future, we can all get together and enjoy ourselves." All the heads were up and looking



at Jim. "Since we are all going back to Recon HQ for billeting, I suggest that we spend some time there swapping addresses."

Ah ha, Jim is planning a reunion and we still have 16 months on our tour of duty. Those thoughts came into the head of Doc Schmidt. That is a great idea, always looking to the future. Nice going Cunningham.

A hand went up in the back part of the compartment. "Yeah, what's your question MJ?" "Since we are staying at the same place for at least a couple of days; could we do the sharing thing some more? I'd like to hear the Army guys stories." A chorus of affirmative comments echoed MJ's request. "Okay, but let's do that very soon after we arrive. There is no way of knowing how long the Army will be allowed to occupy a US Marine Corps dormitory." That produced the desired effect, laughter.

"Before lunch, have your weapons on your bunk." Jim was making certain that no last minute, "I forgot", occurred prior to exiting the ship. "We want to look sharp. All helmets clean and chin straps up." He thought he sounded like a Boy Scout leader and not a Marine Non-com. "I am sure the CMA will have all of our hardware waiting for us like he did on our last cruise." A little bit of laughter, not much but then again Jim was not a stand-up comic.

"When you get to the gangway area, the Officer of the Deck and the Yeoman will be recording or checking off your name, so sound off." The Recon men knew the routine but for the Army this was brand new. Continuing on, he said. "You will carry your weapon in your left hand at Patrol Carry position." Some bewildered soldiers were trying to remember that position. "Keep your weapons low and left, sling loose. When we form up you can dress your sling then." He looked around the room. "Questions anyone?"

A soldier bravely raised his hand, "Ellerbe right?" said Jim, "Sarge what do we say as we leave the ship?" Jim smiled and replied. "Great question, who will answer that?" Doc raised his hand. Of course a Navy guy would know the answer. "Okay Doc what should he say?" Quickly Doc answered and looked directly at Ellerbe.

"Sir, Private First Class Brian Ellerbe request permission to go ashore." Ellerbe was surprise Doc knew his first name. "The OOD, Officer of the Deck, will reply, "Permission granted. He may also add a nicety and if he does, just thank him and salute the flag that is flying on the fantail. The back of the boat."

“Hey Ortega, let’s show the newbie’s how it is done.” Doc was calling Mario, who hated all this Navy hoopla as he called it.” “Okay Doc, but just once.” The two men went and stood alongside of Jim and Ken to demonstrate. “I am the OOD,” said Doc, “Mario is approaching the gangway, he stops, turns to face me and salutes me and holds the salute. He gives his name and rank then requests permission to go ashore. I say permission granted ugly Mario and have a lousy day.”

Mario made a series of funny faces at Doc but still played the role. Mario said “Thank you sir, I am going to have a date with your wife.” Mario continued with “I step toward the gangway, turn to the American flag and salute her. Then I walk down the gangway that is nothing but a ramp with cleats on it. For God’s sake be careful and don’t trip on them.”

Doc and Mario bowed to each other and Mario added a curtsy, which got him a couple of whistles from the crowd. “Well done gentlemen, I can visualize sea duty in both of your futures.” “Screw you Sergeant Cunningham,” replied Ortega quickly. The Doc just walked slowly back to his former place. He really liked these guys, really.

Ken conducted weapons inspection of both the Marines and Army hardware. Most of the soldiers had not field stripped a 1911 Colt forty-five caliber handgun. So he showed them how. Ken was an amazing instructor, patient, considerate and knowledgeable. Even the Marines had gathered around to watch him demonstrate the proper process for clearing, cleaning, inspecting and finally its’ reassembly.

There was little to do until docking so the last of the Marines was going to give the highlights of their life. Checking his list, Jim saw that Cook was the only one who had not shared, up until now. Funny he thought, MJ was not shy I wonder why he waited to go last. We’ll probably find out shortly if not sooner. “According to my list there is only one Marine who has not shared his life story with us. That one Marine is none other than M.J. Cook. Mr. Cook you have the floor, or to be correct the deck.” Jim found himself trying to inject some humor into the group, no luck.

### **MJ Shares**

“Thank you Sergeant Cunningham, yes I am the last to share, and with what I thought was a good reason.” M.J. was standing and most of the others were either sitting on the bunks or standing around the inner bulkheads.

“My real name is Macarius Jared Cook, so I go by M.J.” He looked to see if anyone was amused, none were. “All through every school I went to I had to explain my name. When I was entering High School my sister suggested using just my first initials. It worked. If some one asked me, I would tell them that was all there was just M.J.” Smiling at him and thinking about how simple it was to say, here among men who cared less about your name, then what you were as a Marine.

“I was born into the US Marine Corps, at the Naval Hospital in San Diego. Dad and Mom are both Marines. Still are on active duty. Mom in Camp Lejeune, and Dad at Parris Island.” Thinking about them made him miss them both. “The are both officers, Mom outranks my Dad. She is a Lt. Colonel and Dad is a Major.” He let that sink in to the minds of the assembled. “My sister, bless her heart is married to a Marine. A Second Lieutenant and a Naval Academy grad.” He felt that he was skipping around and tried to get his mind organized. “Sorry fellas, I took a mental left turn thinking about my family.” No one reacted one way or the other.

“As some of you can imagine, Marines, like most military families, move often. Well I attended no less than eleven different schools on my way to getting a High School Diploma.” He was going to name them all, but thought better of it. “I attended Polk Junior College in South Carolina for a year studying pre-engineering and decided to get into the fray over in Korea. I am nineteen years; my twentieth will be in April, and I love being in the Corps, especially in Recon.”

He remembered how his folks tried to avoid any pressure to enlist. “I was thinking about how hard my parents tried not to insist I join. It was funny to watch and even funnier when they both were excited when I did enlist.” MJ took a moment to look around. “Like a lot of you, academics was fun for me too. I did not realize how much fun until I got to use some of it in Recon and Demo schools.”

He was still trying to get himself on track, still no luck. “I must sound like a blithering idiot, in my own mind I cannot put my life story into some kind of order.”

Stopping to take a deep breath, he continued. “Moving around a lot meant not having any kind of church or religious focus. We always attended the Protestant services at whatever base we were on.” Another pause and his mind jumped ahead in time.

“I got my first name from a Marine my dad served with in the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines in China. That’s when the Marines were patrolling the rivers way back in the thirties. He was killed in China while saving my dad and others lives during a river patrol. Marcarius J. Theopolis was a tough old bird according to those who knew him. He was always in some kind of disciplinary problem. According to my dad when it came time to fight and defend. Nobody did it better.” M.J. tried to bring into focus Marcarius’ photo his dad kept on his desk. “When I was born, dad and mom decided to name me after him. Try explaining that when you change schools a lot.”

“My sister is four years older than me. When Mom went off to OCS for Women, sis was eleven years old. My dad had a real problem with the two of us in school and mom away for ninety days. Back then there were very few female officers and mom wanted to be one.” A smile crept across MJ’s lips, “If mom burns something when she’s cooking or makes any kind of mistake, dad always shakes his head and calls her his ninety day wonder.”

He was smiling broadly now thinking about something he said. “I was just thinking about us as kids. We used to salute mom and dad all the time. The return salutes were sometimes funny because mom would salute and then drop her thumb to her nose at the two of us kids.”

“When I shipped out for boot camp, that’s where dad works. He is the Adjutant for Training at PI. He told me to expect no favors there. My DI reminded me daily of that too.” MJ stood taller thinking about those days of boot camp. “I cannot imagine what I would have done if I had blown it in boot. My folks would somehow understand, but I sure wouldn’t.”

Looking around the room, he said. “I met a couple of you there. And I still owe you back for treating me like I was poison because of dad’s position on the base.” He looked directly at Ortega. “Yeah you Mario. I heard all those stories and all those remarks. I don’t get mad I get even, so be careful.” The two Marines were smiling at each other thinking of a time less complicated than right now.

‘Well I don’t have much more to share. I can’t believe it took me this long to tell my closest friends about myself. What a wimp.” Breathing easier but wanting to say more he added, “I am going to sit down now. Thanks to all of you for everything you do

with me, day in and day out. Dad has always said that the glue that binds Marines' together is their differences, I believe it." He started to sit down and stopped, he looked directly at Jim Cunningham.

"When you were nominated for OCS, that is when I knew I too had an opportunity to learn from you and emulate what you do." Cook's eyes were boring right into Jim's and Jim returned the eye contact. "Now I realize that you do this stuff instinctively. If I am going to get to OCS, I have to do it my way and not imitate someone else. I will always be beholding to you for your leadership Jim. Thank you."

He said no more, M.J. just walked back to his bunk amid the silence and sat down.

"I don't always know how to respond when a person finishes sharing." Jim was trying to remember back weeks ago when he shared. "We started this only a few weeks ago and now I just rechecked my list of sharing Marines and one name is missing." Tony G. was about to hide under the covers on his bunk.

### **Tony's turn to share**

He knew Jim had found him out. "I thought you just said M.J. was last. Jesus Jim, I don't have anything to say." He looked almost pleadingly at Sergeant Cunningham. "Just skip over me." "No way Tony, we all share that is the rule." "What rule is that Sarge?" "My rule PFC Grazioso." The smile on Jim's face was evidence that he was enjoying this moment. "So get your butt up here or I will have Gonzales do it for you."

"Hell he can't have a bowel movement so how is he going to move me?" As he was saying that Julian was getting out of his bunk as if to hustle Tony to the front of the bunkroom. When Tony reached the speaking area, Julian sat back down.

"I've heard a lot of stories over the past few weeks. And I want to say to each of you who exposed yourself to likes of us in this room. That took guts, real guts." Tony stood up taller, thrust out his chest and breathed deeply. "Every time one of you talked about your family or lack of family. I related, sadly." He considered sitting down and let them tease him about not sharing. He knew he had to confront what he had hidden away for several years.

"My name is Anthony John Grazioso and I have been an orphan twice." Okay hotshot, go through with it, and face your reality. "My birth mother and father were killed

in a fire in Middletown NY when I was ten. My sister who was two years younger than me died with them in the fire.” This is painful dammit.

“I was staying with my cousin and his family in Chester, just a few miles from Middletown when it happened.” Bad thoughts keep coming back. “After the funerals and stuff I went to live with my cousin and his family in Chester. It was okay. They tried but it was never the same.” Pain again.

“I put all of my energy into school and sports, anything I could, to keep busy. Just like now, my mind is racing like crazy trying to put all this behind me.” Tony felt some kind of warm feeling coming from the room.

“When I was seventeen just after high school graduation. My aunt, uncle, cousin and me were heading for a vacation in the Pocono Mountains. Probably close to where Bruce lives.” He remembered who lived there, good. “I was on one of those rafts that are anchored in the middle of this large lake named Wallenpaupack. The rest of the family was rowing out to get me. It was too far to swim to where the food and tables had been set up.” The pain was not getting better, go away.

“Some kids in a boat with a motor on it ran into them broadside and cut the row boat in half. They all died, my uncle, aunt and cousin. Two from drowning and my cousin from a fractured skull.”

Easy now Tony, get a grip on yourself. “In less than seven years I had lost two entire families. Not only was I alone, but also I was feeling so sorry for myself. I thought about killing myself.” Okay now, stop with the hearts and flowers. “One of my high school coaches looked me up. He wanted to offer me a job for the summer to help ease the pain and loss.” Think about the good things Tony.

“I accepted and spent the summer cleaning the locker rooms and gym for ten hours a day. He never left my side. His wife would bring us lunch and sit and talk. Not pitying me but keeping me from thinking about myself.”

I’ve got to sit down; this is not going very well. “They had no kids of their own. She was an elementary school librarian and he was a high school counselor and coach. Kids were their lives.” I can remember and feel their hugs right now.

“I did not know much about either of them until that summer. He had served in the Marines during the war and completed his education with the GI Bill. Her dad told

her that the Corps had made a man of him just like it did for himself.” Just a little while longer Tone don’t blow it now.

“I listened to the stories both the coach and his father-in-law told me about the Marines’. It was inevitable for me to join.” Tony had a slight smile on his face, finally. “They pretended to argue about who was going to sign my enlistment papers. I was only seventeen.”

Tony was getting a grip on himself now. “At graduation from boot camp they all came down to Parris Island to see me. I introduced them to my new family of US Marines. The three of them attended my graduation from each of the phases, Advanced Infantry and Recon.” He thought about his first night with Recon Unit One. “When I was first introduced to all of you back in Recon School. I knew I had a family for life. Jim was a bit too young to be a dad. But his counseling, leadership and encouragement means a lot to me. From what I have heard over this last year a lot of you feel the same way.”

He looked around the room and not only was his Marine family happy for him; a couple of the soldiers gave him “thumbs up” too. He felt better, not good just better.

“Thank you all for letting me share, or should I say, “spill my guts’. I will be quiet now and go sit down.” Julian was on his feet and when Tony came close Gonzales grabbed him and put a large Italian style hug on him. “Love ya brother, I really do Tony.”

Ken stood up and declared the end of sharing for a while. “Remember the rule, what you have heard in these shares are private and personal. Let’s keep it that way.” Ken wanted to get the two groups back on track, that is, ready to depart the ship.

“Okay now, all weapons, sidearms included should be on your bunk.” This was going to be a verification check. “Ammo belts, helmets, canteens and backpacks too.” Everyone was going to be ready to leave when the time came to go. “No excuses, we all need to be ready when the bell sounds.” Nice boxing metaphor Daro he told himself.

A knock on the hatch told him the Navy was here for some purpose. “Lunch in thirty” the seaman said as he stuck his head into the bunk area. He then closed the hatch and left.

Just like clockwork the seaman returned in thirty minutes to escort them to the mess hall. Ken asked the sailor “Why the blues sailor?” “Captains orders Sergeant, the

entire crew will be in blues with our white hats.” In the mess hall things were different, everything was stowed and no steam coming from the kettles.

Lunch was a sandwich, coffee and some cookies. Very good it was just not what they had gotten used to. Ken noticed that the mess hall staff was all in what he called “undress blues.” “Maybe the skipper is going to have an inspection after we leave and before the ship departs for wherever” was Jim’s comment to Ken.

It was now just past 1300 hours, while on deck no one could see land. “Still don’t know where we are,” commented Bruce Strong. Jim replied to him “As long as the skipper and Mr. Sparrow know where we are it’s okay. Hell Bruce, we just went through fifteen days of barely knowing where we were and we got to where we were going.” “Barely” retorted Bruce.

Meanwhile Ken was checking the weapons and gear that was laid out on the bunks. The soldiers eagerly complied; they enjoyed Ken’s being involved with them this way. Emil was watching Ken as he inspected each weapon and piece of gear. Ken reminded Emil of an appraiser looking at jewelry from an estate sale or some such.

Mankewicz began daydreaming; someday in the future I might be reminiscing in a coffee shop with some young folks. “One time in Korea when I was in the Army. Chinese soldiers had captured us for ten days. Along came these Marines, who were air dropped into the area to blow up these tunnels. Well by God, they rescued us. Killed all the Chicoms and let some of us, who weren’t injured, help them setup the explosives and blow the hell out of this here mountain. Then they helped us escape to the Korean coast where the US Navy met us and took us back to their Marine Base.”

Emil did not hear what Ken had been saying to him. When it registered that someone was talking to him, he actually blushed and said he was sorry for not listening. “All I was saying was when you get back to your base of operations. You need to turn these M-1’s in for some servicing.”

Ken had been moving the barrels around so some light was shining down the barrel. “Most of these barrels have pitted bores. Using them could be dangerous to you and your men. Emil made a mental note to get these replaced. If and when they ever returned to their unit. The blast from the PA interrupted his thoughts.



“All US Marines plus the US and ROK Army personnel prepare to disembark in five minutes.” In only a couple of minutes the outside PA blared. “Now here this, all section one and three personnel man the starboard rail, now.”

The bunkroom became noisy; the sailors were running to their duty stations. “The PA in the bunkroom announced. “All Marines and Soldiers grab your gear and report to the OOD at the gangway. The gangway is to your port side as you exit the hatch. That is to your left men. Go left young men go left. Please.” Oh the skipper will chew some ass when he gets a hold of the guy on the PA. Ken was trying to picture that scene.

Doc was leading the way out of the hatch he veered to his left. When he got to the OOD it was Mr. Sparrow. “Sir Petty Officer Schmidt request permission to go ashore.” Sparrow returned his salute and as he dropped his salute Mr. Sparrow reached to shake Doc’s hand. Doc quickly dropped his salute and shook the Lieutenant’s hand. The two Navy men looked into the others eyes as they shook hands, “See you again soon Doc,” “I hope so Sir, right now I need to get back on solid ground.” The both laughed. Doc stepped to the side and saluted the flag and went down the gangway.

As each Marine saluted Mr. Sparrow he shook their hand, wished them well. It started with Ott, and continued until Jim and Ken were ready to depart. Each Marine gave Mr. Sparrow a “Semper Fi Lieutenant” When Jim and Ken arrived at the OOD’s station, they saluted and Mr. Sparrow was visibly emotional facing these two men. “I never get enough time to spend with you when you are on board. I will miss you both. Take care and God’s speed.”

The two Marine Sergeants simultaneously said, “Semper Fi Lieutenant Sparrow.” Ken added, “And God’s speed to you too sir.” The two turned, saluted the flag and went down the gangway.

As the each got to the top of the gangway they were able to see the dock. It looked like half of the ships company was on the dock, in their blues, at a parade rest. “There has to be some kind of a ceremony or something Jim.” “Don’t know Ken, maybe it is an inspection.”

As the two arrived at their Unit with Doc in the guide-on position each turned toward the ship and could see the ships railing lined with blue uniformed sailors. Emil and the Soldiers descended the gangway right behind the Marines. They lined up just

like it was planned. It doesn't matter what branch of the US military you are in. When it comes to "fall in and dress down", it all looks sharp.

Shortly thereafter Commander Correy and Major Wallace arrived. One of the Navy Chiefs' called the detail to attention. Four seamen carried a large platform and another one carried a lectern and placed them in front of the assembled groups.

Commander Correy stepped up onto the platform, as did Major Wallace. Mr. Correy introduced himself, like he needed an introduction. Then acknowledged Major Wallace. Mr. Correy then gave everyone an "at ease". He pointed to his left where he and the Major had come from. "For those of you who haven't met them I have the distinct honor to introduce Mr. and Mrs. Park, most recently from North Korea."

The Park's waved and started walking toward the Major and Commander. "I also would like to introduce to you their sons ROK Army Corporal's Chin-Hwa and Chin-Mae Park.

Almost no one had heard the sons' names. The cheering from the sailors at the railing of the ship; along with the clapping and whistling of the three assembled groups on the dock, made hearing impossible when the Park's name was announced.

The two sons walked several yards behind their parents, they both looked stunned. Most likely they had no idea why the ships crew and this assembled mass of Marines; Sailors and Soldiers were so enthusiastic about their modest and quiet parents.

Two chairs came out for the two civilian guests. Now Mr. Park seemed to be the most uncomfortable. Mrs. Park was an integral part of the ship's crew and she knew it. The two sons were standing at "attention" when Commander Correy reached over and told them to stand at ease, they did. When the noise ceased, the skipper took a bullhorn and keyed the mike "Can you all hear me?" "Yes sir" came the reply,

"I am here to present to a deserving young man a significant honor for significant achievement in a combat situation. Petty Officer Second Class Otto Schmidt, front and center please." Another cheer went up as Doc left the formation and walked, really he marched, to the podium. Major Wallace motioned for Doc to come up onto the platform. Doc had never seen the Major in such a happy mood; before today, Doc's contact with him had been all business.

“Petty Officer Schmidt, may I call you Doc?” “Sir yes sir” The skipper turned to the assemble troops and said, “My God he even sounds like a Marine.” The response was more yelling and “Aarogah” from the Recon Marines.

He continued, “Doc, according to documentation provided to the Department of the Navy you went beyond the scope of a Medical Corpsman. Under combat conditions you not only treated the men assigned to you but also treated the wounded US Army and ROK Army personnel as well.”

“For those actions I am proud to present you with the US Navy Medal of Commendation with a V for valor attachment. Congratulations.” The noise now was ear shattering.

From out of seemingly nowhere Gunnery Sergeant Papushka and Master Sergeant Kennedy appeared alongside the podium. “Everything must be okay,” said Ortega, “They are both smiling at the same time.” Commander Correy put his hands up for quiet, and got it.

“Petty Officer Schmidt, I am not able to give you an award for this next item. But I and your boss, Major Wallace, are proud to know such a nice young man as you.” Two seamen walked up to Mr. and Mrs. Park and urged them to join the group on the platform.

“For your assistance and aid in the face of constant danger you took the time and your talents to care for and medically treat two severely injured Korean civilians. The President of the Republic of South Korea has awarded you the Syngman Rhee Citation.” Mrs. Park did not understand the words but she knew how she felt about Doc. Gathering all of her strength and with Mr. Park’s help she moved over to Doc’s side and hugged him hard.

For the first time since his sisters death Doc was crying. All of the pent up emotion that comes with saving a life poured out of him as he put his two arms around both of the Parks. Their sons, Mae and Hwa did not know what to make of the scene. They had no idea that their parents had been injured.

Only a few moments before ceremony, the four Park’s had been reunited with no time to talk, just hug and kiss each other.

The whistling and cheering went on for a full five minutes. Some of the Sailors started a cheer "Sook, Sook, Sook." When she heard her name Sook raised her head and waved to the Sailors who had enjoyed her cooking. Doc did not have the only teary eyes in the crowd. Doc at six two and one hundred and ninety pounds towered over the husband and wife. When he opened his arms it was as if these two Korean parents had been reborn.

Hwa and Mae came into Doc's circle to hug him as well, Doc reciprocated willingly.

"Hey Jim look at Pappy, he's all smiles, maybe the ride back won't be as bad as the last time." "Don't bet on it Mario" replied Jim. Jim continued to yell and clap. "Doc deserves whatever awards they can give; he earned his keep this trip."

Commander Correy asked for and got some quiet. Two sailors helped Mr. and Mrs. Park off the platform. The sons left the platform unassisted. Doc with his new ribbons pinned on his utilities was getting down also.

"Again, Petty Officer Schmidt, this party was for you, congratulations, well done." Mr. Correy introduced Major Wallace who accepted the offer of the bullhorn.

"I would like Second Lieutenants' Jin Choi and Hyun Pak to come forward. "What the hell." Emil's comment could be heard above the pier noise of cranes and hammering. The two ROK soldiers in USAF one-piece fatigues walked slowly to the platform. The Major ushered them up to the podium.

"These two ROK Army officers for the past year have posed as enlisted men in the ROK army. Their mission was to locate tunnels near the DMZ and have the engineers destroy them. Their efforts exposed several spies and infiltrators within the ranks of the ROK Army. When they were captured and tortured by a Chicom officer, in spite of their pain and suffering, they never divulged any information."

"To each of you, Lt. Jin Choi and Lt. Hyun Pak, I am proud to award the Syngman Rhee Citation medal and your countries Medal of Valor for wounds sustained in a combat situation. Well-done gentlemen you are a tribute to the Country of Korea and to the United Nations Forces. Congratulations."

Commander Correy took the proffered bullhorn and said. "As General Mac Arthur once said, and I quote. These proceedings are closed."

Acker/The Hills Went Boom

“Non commissioned officers take charge of your units and details.”

## Chapter Twenty-seven

### Return to Recon Base

The ceremony was over and the sailors returned to their ship. The soldiers mingled with the Recon Unit, they were unsure what was happening next. The two ROK Lieutenants' joined the soldiers as if nothing had happened. So far as each of the officers were concerned nothing had changed. Now everyone knew what Jin and Hyun had known all along. Nothing needs to be different in how we are together. Little did they know how much things were about to change? The two Korean officers went right over to Doc Schmidt to congratulate him on his awards. Doc's reply was priceless, "If I had known you two were officers' I would have charged you my higher rates." That comment broke the ice for the two ROK officers of feeling isolated.

Major Wallace, Sergeants' Papushka and Kennedy arrived, all smiling and hands extended to shake the hands of the returning troops. Ken called the unit to attention and before the last syllable left his lips the Major cancelled it with a lusty "at ease." As a result some were at a "brace" and others were still lounging. "Gentlemen, welcome home. I mean that for you soldiers as well. Your officers are on their way. I think they got lost on the way here. I am certain it's the heavy traffic on Korea's marvelous road system." The Marines laughed and the soldiers were non-committal. Major Wallace smiled at them and said. "If you Army guys are going to spend some time with us at our Recon Headquarters. You have to learn to laugh at the Commanding Offices humor. The group of soldiers laughed heartily. "Now that is better."

"Let me introduce my "Top Sergeant", Master Sergeant Kennedy, he will be in charge of getting you setup at our luxury resort. Sergeant, they are all yours. I will be on board the Olympia for a few hours and will see all of you in the morning, sometime." Kennedy and the Gunny both stepped aside and let the Major pass; both saluted crisply and got a crisp return. Ken had started to call the detail to attention, but was not quick enough. Gunny spoke first, "We will be taking a bus back to base your gear is already loaded on a six by that is in the parking area." As Pappy looked around he saw the soldiers staying in the background. "As soon as we get back to base you all will be fed

and given your hut assignments.” “The two lieutenant’s will be housed in the officers hut.”

“Sergeant Pappy may we stay with our unit as well?” asked Jin. “That can probably be arranged. Are you sure you want to do that sir?” “Yes sergeant, we have lived for almost a year as privates with these men. We have not changed, only the knowledge of our rank has.” “Good point private Jin, what I don’t know for certain can’t hurt me.” The gunny was still smiling, what is going on with him today. Jim was suspicious, pleased, but suspicious.

“Sergeant Kennedy and I will be riding the bus back to base with you. Relax this is not going to be a question and answer ride back like the last mission. Gunny really had not hoped for a lot of cheering so he added, “My butt can’t take the ride in a “six by six anymore.” He was still smiling. “Me and the sarge are going aboard to meet with CMA Matthews. We will just be about an hour. Chief Matthews has turned the prisoners over to the SP’s and the interpreters.” He thought for a second and said. “The Chicom officer is being transported separately in a weapons carrier. The others are in a deuce and a half, well guarded but separated.”

The two Marine sergeants turned around waved and walked toward the ship. The Chief was waiting at the foot of the gangway. He raised an arm and gave an acknowledgement to the standing Marines and soldiers. Most of the assembled group waved back at him.

An unfamiliar noise got their attention; a very large bus was coming their way as well as a small pickup truck. The truck was fitted out with a slide in kitchen unit, which housed a coffee dispenser and a small refrigerator with fruit and cold non-booze types of beverages. Another container had sweet rolls, hard rolls and pastries. The Army guys were very impressed and the Marines tried to be nonchalant. It didn’t work. “If you Marines are trying to get us to transfer to the Marine Corps with this kind of stuff, it won’t work. We love the Army. The laughter that occurred surprised the Marines driving the two vehicles.

Both groups’ bellied up to the truck got what they wanted and sat down on the pierced steel planking of the pier. Just like in the bunkroom aboard ship, they were all mingled, Army and Marines all mixed together. “The gunny told us no shop talk, but how

was this mission guys?" "Tough and yet it was rewarding too. We can't really say too much until after we submit our After Action Report, but we appreciate your concern." Jim ended his remarks with this. "We went out with eighteen and came back with thirty-four and mostly in one piece." He touched his still tender jaw and neck. The asking Marine nodded and went back to his truck more confused than before he asked.

A little over an hour passed and the gunny and the top were seen meandering across the decking of the pier. "What the hell is this a picnic?" Gunny still had the damned grin on his face. "The Park family is on their way back to the Recon base and will be staying in one of the empty huts." He looked around for some reaction and got none. "A small field kitchen has been installed so they can cook and eat whatever food they prefer, or they can eat in the officers mess." Most of the soldiers and Marines had stood up by this time. Ken had a question, "What about the head facilities sarge?" "Good question sergeant, the Park's will have exclusive access to the new heads that were assembled while you all were vacationing in the north." If gunny doesn't lose that grin soon I am going to say something. No I'm not. Jim was again talking to himself.

"Okay, as soon as the Major shows up we can be on our way." "He's riding with us?" asked Ken. "Sergeant Daro, do want to tell him he can't?" "No gunny, I just figured he would ride in his own jeep or something." "Well young man, you figured wrong, again." Ken was confused but decided to shut up. "The major gave his vehicle to the Park's family so they could be together in a little privacy and comfort." Sergeant Kennedy looked over at some of the soldiers and commented, "You guys thought the Marines lived a tough life. Well, this is how we live, all the time." My God, now he too is grinning like the gunny. Jim was going crazy with all this grinning and smiling.

"Okay lets load up we can wait in a warm bus instead of out here in the cold." Kennedy and the gunny took the front seat and left the seat behind the driver for the Major. The soldiers and Marines climbed in, again in mixed mode, these were now brothers in arms. Ironically the two ROK officers wound up not sitting together but across the center aisle from each other. The Major climbed aboard and pretended to count heads like a tour director would. He looked for Cunningham and found him. Sergeant Cunningham, I just presented the skipper of the Olympia with a bottle of twenty-five year old scotch whiskey. The cost of that present is coming out of your next



payday. With that said he spun on the vertical bar and landed in his seat. The bus door closed and the vehicle slowly moved off of the pier. The little truck was long gone.

Within a few minutes the bus cleared the pier and dock facility, which was getting bigger as each month passed. When the bus was on the newly paved road, Jin got out of this seat and spoke to Jim. He wanted permission to speak to the group and explain just who he and Hyun were. They two ROK soldiers felt they owed that to them. Jim stood in the aisle and addressed the men. "Hyun and Jin would like to continue our sharing. They would like to tell us their stories."

"Cunningham what the hell are you talking about, sharing what stories?" The grin had left the gunny's face, good; at least he is back to normal. "We have been sharing our personal histories and Jin and Hyun want to add theirs. I said they could." Now the Major was smiling from ear to ear, the gunny just got told to sit down and be quiet. Major Wallace wondered what the gunny was going to say to Cunningham tomorrow. I think I already know. With that, the Major turned to listen to the two ROK lieutenants.

"Hello to everyone let me formally introduce my colleague and myself. I am Jin Pak and he is Hyun Choi as you found out earlier we are both officers in the Republic of Korea Army. Specifically we are intelligence officers. Under more normal circumstances I would apologize for our keeping secrets from the persons with whom we are working. That is not for us to decide. We Korean's are by nature suspicious and private. Our mission was so secret our direct command does not know our status. Until now that is."

A voice from the front of the bus interrupted Jin's story. The driver handed a microphone to the Major and told him to have Jin plug it into the socket next to the Major. It was the same arrangement used on the base tour bus. The Major and Jin exchange pleasantries and Jin carried on. Now no one had to strain to hear him speak. "Oh yes, Hyun and I were both born in Korea. We don't know who our parents are. It seems some of you have similar situations." He looked at Danny Ormond. "Each of us was adopted by parents who work in the diplomatic field of government." Now he took a breath and continued "Hyun and I met as children in Hong Kong while attending primary school. His adopted parents and mine, adopted children from many countries, mostly Asian and dominated by Japan.

Some of the audience visibly relaxed, this was going to be a long share, but very interesting. “My adopted parents were operating from Hong Kong due to its’ neutrality. My dad was a diplomatic courier in the Syngman Rhee government and my mother a teacher in a primary school.” Jin took a glance at Hyun who nodded an agreement. “Hyun’s parents, mother and father are both diplomatic representatives from the Rhee government to Burma and India respectively. They find Hong Kong safer to be working from.” Jin smiled and said, “Hyun and I each have seven brothers and sisters. Sometimes we get the families mixed up as who belongs to what father and mother.” Still smiling he added, “Life was sad and bleak before adoption but afterward life was beautiful.”

Continuing on, “After secondary school Hyun and I went off to university. I was to study languages and he to study government.” He looked directly at Hyun “Hyun got me involved with politics and I changed my course of study.” As if a light bulb went off in his head Jin put his finger in the air “Oh, I forgot to mention, both of our fathers are Europeans and our mothers are Asian, in want of another word.” Getting back on course “I was studying languages, French and Flemish, my father is originally from Belgium, and I was also learning English, Chinese and Korean.” His breathing took on a heavy sound.

“That is how the Chinese officer discovered we were not enlisted soldiers. We both understood his commands to kill some of the American soldiers and keep us alive.” Not many Koreans know or care to speak Chinese. And our Korean is not the language locally used. It is a more classical or formal version. It is not generally spoken where most of the enlisted or conscripted ROK soldiers come from. A very bad mistake for us to make.”

“Before World War II ended, Hyun and I knew the Japanese would eventually lose, and we wanted to be part of the rebuilding of our country of birth. His parents and mine supported our desire to do this.” Clearly reflecting on their decision he added. “We were outraged and disappointed when the UN with the US and Great Britain gave in to the Soviet demands that Korea be divided.” He let the audience digest that comment. “To we Koreans, there is only one country not some of us North and some of us South.”

He looked directly at the soldiers. "You all heard Mrs. Park say the same thing. All Koreans are family, and not some compass direction."

"Some good things did come out of our failed mission. We discovered who was using the tunnels we were looking for on the DMZ line." His pause was brief but a thoughtful one. "Several spies and turncoats were flushed out because after our capture they celebrated and were discovered." Another pause, "When you Marines came upon us in the cave, the Chinese were not just surprised, but desperate. The lack of food and only snow for water was wearing them down, physically as well as their spirits. That roll of meals you saw on the Senior Lieutenant. He took that from another Chinese soldier after he killed him."

Jin was smiling just a bit, "I was just thinking about the look on the Lieutenant's face when you uncovered the deserters hiding in that tunnel. He had been afraid to go back into the tunnels because of the darkness and the strange smells. He is a coward." Now Jin was being contemplative, "I think I will save part of my story for after we get to your base. It is a long tale and a happy one but it serves no purpose to tell it here."

"When your unit came upon Mr. and Mrs. Park, Hyun and I were overjoyed. It gave us both a reason to help someone and not have to feel so guilty about our squad being captured." Hyun was nodding in agreement and took the mike from Jin. "We know how you teased us about being attached to this Korean couple. Helping them, gave us a chance to avoid our guilt for the squads capture." Now a smile came on his face. "That couple is so much in love with all you Marines it is happiness at its best." Hyun became reflective. "The way you stood up to that officer on the radio who told you to leave or eliminate the Park's, has endeared you to them forever."

"This will certainly be another Korean tale to be passed on from generation to generation."

Hyun handed the microphone back to Jin. This was the longest conversation anyone, in either the Army patrol or the Marine Recon Unit, had with these two ROK soldiers. To most on the bus it looked like it felt good to the two of them as well. Keeping all that inside can be dangerous.

Jin started speaking again "When the war is over and we can start our families, both of us are still unmarried, most likely we will name at least one of our sons Jim and

one Ken.” That drew a lot of laughter, Gunny and Kennedy did not fully understand the comment, but Jim and Ken did.” “Ya gotta love these guys,” Ken said across the aisle to Jim.” Jim nodded his head and gazed once again at Jin standing in the aisle of the bus wondering what Jin was thinking at that moment.

“That Chinese Lieutenant called Hyun and me his “prizes” he was going to be highly rewarded for capturing us.” Smiling like someone who has just won a prize, he added. “Let’s see what his reward is now that he is being charged with crimes against prisoners.” Hyun stood up at this point and told the busload of soldiers and Marines. “I expect that when we have to testify against the Chinese officer and the spies, our cover will be blown, to use an American expression. When that happens Jin and I will be looking for jobs. So if you have any influence with some high paying company owners back in the USA, please keep us in your minds.”

“Just a touch of humor, I hope I did not offend anyone here.” Hyun looked and saw no one was offended. “You all know how much time we spent with Mrs. Park over the past weeks.” He was smiling again. “When she discovered that we were both single and never married, her mind went full speed ahead. She was naming names of girls and women she knows who would love to have us in their families.” He added reflectively. “She was not even the least bit kidding, she is deadly serious.” Hyun was getting ready to sit down and said and again that smile. “Maybe she can get some of you Marines a bride or two?” He was booed loudly and catcalled.

Jin took the microphone back and added. “We will all be together for at least one more day, I would like to have some time to sit around and listen to some more of your stories. That is if you want to and have the time.”

“Sure enough Jin,” Emil said, “I mean Lieutenant Pak, I would be happy to share my family and my story with you and Hyun and of course the rest of our team and the Marine Recon Unit.”

“Sounds good to me Emil, I am looking forward to the time and place,” Ken was speaking for the entire Recon Unit members.

Major Wallace stood up in the front of the bus. “All you men, enlisted and officers have at least the next four days off. The time is yours and how you spend that time is up

to you.” “Due to inclement weather while you were all on vacation in the North Country, the exercise facility has not been completed.”

The Major looked like the gunny, he had a silly grin on his face too. “However, we do have a brand new pool table and shuffleboard setup in hut number 8 for your use. There’s also dartboards, chess, bridge no poker and other stuff I cannot remember. The AAR review and debriefing will be in one week, seven days from today. I’m sure everyone will be ready. Oh yes one thing I forgot in the game room, there is also, if you will pardon the expression Chinese checkers.” That said he turned to the front and sat down.

The busload of soldiers and Marines burst into laughter.

Emil asked Mario Ortega about the AAR review and debriefing. Mario told Emil “I will have Jim get in touch with you tomorrow.” Mario smiled and said. “Hey, it’s a piece of cake. Well at least the way Jim does it,” he added quickly.

“Hey Jin, what the hell is Chinese checkers?” Willie Cottie had never heard of such a thing. “It’s not really Chinese, back in Germany in the 1800’s a man invented a game called Halma, that is Greek for jump. Two people play it with 19 marbles each.” Jin turned in his seat to face Willie, who was sitting directly behind him. “Like so many things the idea was stolen, or maybe improved upon is a better way to say that. A Doctor in America made it a board game for six using a six pointed star and using ten marbles for each player.” Willie was as interested in this as much as anyone had ever seen him interested in anything except his job. “So how do they play it with six players Jin?” “Someone goes first and moves one of his marbles one space. The object is to get all of your marbles across the board to the opposite triangle of marbles.” Willie was looking skeptical and Hyun leaned across the aisle and told Willie that he would show him how to play and especially how to beat Jin. “That would be great, not beating Jin, I mean learning to play something new, thanks Hyun.”

That was the last exchange of conversation as the K6 Main Gate appeared in front of the bus. The driver opened the door and a Marine wearing an MP armband stepped onto the bus. He took one look at the Major and asked, “Everybody onboard that you expected sir?” “Yes Sergeant, Recon One plus a few guests are back home, thanks for asking. Did my staff car arrive okay?” “Yes sir, about an hour ago, their

papers were slightly out of order but your signature helped fix that.” The two men smiled knowingly at each other and the Staff Sergeant swung back off of the bus.

“Hell of a Marine that Sergeant Spiers, Major.” “I know Gunny, he wants to join Recon in the worst way but he is afraid of airplanes and heights. I’ve known him since the occupation of Japan, he hates sea duty too.” “Sounds like a career limitation sir,” that was Sergeant Kennedy. “Maybe Top but he is a whale of a fighter on the ground. Someday ask Sergeant Daro about Spiers.”

The bus pulled away from the gate and headed for the Recon HQ area.

Twenty minutes later everyone was off the bus in front of the Orderly Room. It was dark but the lights were on and so were the lights in the Mess Hall. The Army soldiers were looking at the two high barbed wire fence gates the bus had to pass through to get inside. There was a wide area between the two gates and very high fences. Even though it was dark the outline of an elevated guard tower was visible in the corner of the barbed wire fencing.

The Major and the two Sergeants, Gunny and the Top, had left the area. Sergeant Holloway came out of the Orderly Room and spoke with Jim and Ken. All of their stuff was in #15; the Army guys’ stuff was in #11. The Park family is in #7, and the ROK officers are to go to BOQ in #17.” “Sergeant Holloway, the two ROK officers wish to stay with their patrol members. Top said it was okay for now.” Ken had jumped right in on their behalf. “Okay, whatever anyone wants is fine with me. The mess Hall is open for the next hour or so. They have already served the staff that’s on site. You have the place to yourselves.”

Jim and Ken split up, Ken would escort the Marines to #15 and Jim would show the soldiers where #11 was and where the heads are located. “Let’s meet in front of #11 in twenty minutes for chow, okay Ken?” “Sure Jim, I have to hit the head too. So I guess that will be where everyone is going to meet first.” The US and ROK Army soldiers were silent, most were looking around at the high barbed wire fencing and the lighted area where the guard dogs were walking. Lots of questions, maybe some answers at mess, maybe, maybe not.

Everyone was refreshed and ready for chow. None of the soldiers took the time to change into their regular fatigues. That would happen in the morning. The two ROK

Lieutenants were not going to put their rank on the collars of their one-piece loaner jump suit fatigues. That would wait until, as Jin put it, "The future." After mess was completed the Marines agreed to take the Army on a tour of the Recon HQ facility. Especially, the soldiers wanted to see the brig where the Chicom prisoners were locked up. Scuttlebutt had it that Navy and Army intelligence personnel were already interviewing the Chicom officer and the other prisoners.

Dinner was another spectacle, Southern Fried Chicken, Biscuits, Gravy and Corn. The mess men here at Recon were no less happy to be serving the returning forces than the mess men on the Frigate. There was no one here to tell them to not ask questions. As a result the questions were flying all over the place. Jim took the high road and told the cooks and mess men as much as he dared without going too far. The mess hall gang understood that and appreciated whatever Jim was able and willing to share with them. A number of questions centered on the Korean couple and the two guards with them. Jim and Ken both assured them all that the "guards" are really their sons who are in the ROK army.

"That mama san, Mrs. Park, she cooked us a meal that fed the entire ship we were on. Just to thank us for saving their lives." You could have heard a pin drop in the mess hall. "Sorry sarge, I couldn't help myself." Ortega had struck again. "Mario, the old man is going to make you a permanent E1 if you're not careful." Jim was admonishing but not angry or upset. He told himself that Mrs. Park preparing a meal was not some breach of USMC security. "Yes, Jim told the mess hall contingent, she did fix a wonderful and authentic Korean meal for us."

As a follow on to that remark he added. "I am going to recommend to the CO that we put together some kind of information sheet to include stuff like that about the last mission." He was thoughtful for a moment, "Not everything that happens on one of our jaunts out of here is super secret. Most is but not all of it." That seemed to put both groups at ease, at least for now.

Emil was anxious to get on with the tour of the Recon Units Base HQ. "Is everybody finished eating?" This was the third time he had asked the same or similar question. No one answered any of his inquiries; it was a lot of fun to tease Emil. He never got mad or tried to hold the teasing against anybody. Emil never, ever pulled the

rank card; he was tough, but fair. Jim finally spoke up, "Those that are ready can follow me. The rest of you can go directly to your hut or hang out here and help the mess men clean up." That last statement got everyone moving. Emil made a mental note of that.

The walking tour took longer than the first time the unit took one. They did run into several officers, some Marines, some Navy, two Army Majors and Lieutenants. Salutes were rendered and returned, some of the looks on the officers faces indicated they knew who these men were. Most significantly were the US Army soldiers in Air Force jump suits with two Koreans dressed similarly in tow. Jin and Hyun were funny; they both reacted as enlisted men when the officers were passing. Even though a couple of the officers were of equal real rank and required no salute from them.

Everyone wanted to see the game room in #8. The large room was really well appointed in equipment and games, a pool table, two ping-pong tables, table shuffleboard and card tables and plenty of chairs. A pretty up to date record player with lots of records was set up at the far end away from the tables. Emil commented on the stem wall that all of the Quonset Huts were built on. That is a real improvement, lots of more useful space.

It was now 2100 hours and Jim decided it was not the proper time to be playing games and he said so. Surprising to the soldiers, no one griped, not one peep. Sergeants have power in the Marine Corps went through Emil's mind I have to remember that too. "God I have a lot to remember." "What's that Emil?" said Ken. "Nothing, just thinking out loud, this place is amazing in more ways than one." Ken agreed, and he and Emil both laughed at their own little joke.

At 0700 hours Marine Recon Unit One were marching to the mess hall. As they passed the hut where the soldiers were staying Emil appeared in the doorway. Jim called his detail to a halt and the soldiers including the two ROK officers fell in behind the Marines. In such a short period of time these two diverse groups had almost become one. Jim had a paper in his hand with today's schedule; it included the Army detail as well as Marines. During breakfast, several tables had been pushed together to accommodate this large group; Jim covered the events and where they would take place. "0900 both soldiers and Marines would assemble in the Meeting Hall #6, utilities and fatigues okay." Jim looked at Emil and Ken and suggested that the two groups



assemble in back of #15 and the combined groups would march the long way around to the Meeting Room. This way we can show off a little bit, Jim seemed to be having a good time today.

When assembly time came the two groups with Doc, in his usual guidon position up front, marched up and down each of the four roadways inside the Recon HQ Compound. They marched past the Master at Arms facility, the arsenal and brig, continued passed the parking area for trucks, jeeps and weapons carriers. Next was the Motor Pool area, which now had many vehicles, compared to their last visit. They proceeded onward up Avenue C, to the Officers Quarters, the Officers Mess Hall and the Non-Com Quarters and heads. At the Enlisted Men's' Head a group of Marines Jim had not seen before today, watched the parade. Evidently replacements, Ken determined that because no one of them made an obscene gesture.

They were now marching down Avenue B toward the Meeting Room. As they came closer to the building Jim spotted the Gunny, the Top and all three Officers of Recon Headquarters. Ken was wondering how Jim was going to handle this and sure enough Jim bellowed, "eyes right." As the men marched passed the assembled officers and Non Com's, Doc saluted, Jim saluted then came Ken he did the same. As Emil, who was calling cadence approached, he too saluted. The marchers all had their heads facing to their right side. "Good morning gentlemen", Major Wallace said with a wry smile on his face. In contrast Gunny had a huge scowl, Kennedy was smiling at Gunny's reaction. "Good morning Sir" said Jim as the two groups marched on past. "Eyes front" Jim called as the last row of soldiers passed the HQ staff.

When the group's reached the end of Avenue B at Broadway Jim called for a "column right"; it was executed flawlessly and they ended directly in front of the Meeting Hall. "Detail halt, right face," now everyone was facing the steps to the front door. "Doc, you will lead them in by rows," it would be up to Doc to figure out where they were going to sit. "Detail fallout by rows, follow Petty Officer Schmidt," as always they did as they were told. The soldiers followed suit and soon everyone was standing at attention behind a double row of chairs.

Currently they were the only ones in this very large room. It was a double Quonset hut making it forty feet wide and eighty feet in length. The officers and NCO's

that had been outside now came into the room. No call to “attention” was needed because everyone was already at a brace. “Very impressive men, I couldn’t be prouder of our troops in uniform, regardless of branch or country of service; well done.” That was Captain Llewellyn Sinclair letting us know he appreciated the marching. “Stand at ease the BCO has something to say to all of you.” Remaining standing while Major Wallace strode to he microphone stand.

“Today you made all of the Recon Staff extremely proud by what you have just done. All eyes in the compound were looking at you and are equally proud. You are to be commended for maintaining a sharp military discipline in a place where sharp and military are sometimes missing.” He waved everyone to a seat. “We will be joined shortly by some US Army and ROK Army and Naval officers as well as Mr. Park and his two sons. Mrs. Park is well; she just is not joining us this morning. “Oh yes, before I forget, Sergeants Cunningham and Daro, this is not the AAR debriefing so you can put your notes away.” The Marines laughed, at least some did, the soldiers had no idea what the Major was talking about.

“I should explain my last comment for those of you who were not at the last AAR this unit had. Jim Cunningham showed up here with the most complete AAR ever written. He also had twelve pages of backup notes for reference.” Now the audience got it, some turned to look at Jim who was slightly taken back by the attention.

While the laughter was still going, a US Army Major, Captain and a ROK Navy Captain arrived, with their entourage. Sergeant Kennedy called the room to attention. Major Wallace, after the officers had taken their places called the room to an “As you were.” Lieutenant Northcutt came in the rear door so no one saw or heard him. He was carrying a large hard sided brief case with his two hands. He headed for the front of the Meeting Room and the microphone.

“By order of the President of the United States of America, Harry S. Truman, the Order of the Purple Heart is hereby awarded to:” Lt. Northcutt had put the briefcase on a table and was reading the orders contained in the case. He then called each name on the list; the formerly wounded Marines and soldiers came to the front of the room and stood at attention. He reached the end of the list and neither Korean officer was named. “Please accept these orders as your medal. You will receive the actual medal and

ribbons when you return stateside.” He turned to the assembled group and said, “In case you are wondering about Lt. Choi and Lt. Pak. The Purple Heart is only awarded to US military wounded.” Well that answered that now didn’t it?

The recipients all went back to their seats. The Korean Army Major took the floor and called Lieutenants’ Jin Pak and Hyun Choi to the front. In very choppy English he presented the two officers with the Korean Army Soldiers Medal for wounds suffered in wartime action in defense of their country. He also told them in Korean the same thing. He obviously did not know much about these two very well educated officers; their language skills were extraordinary. They returned to their seats with fancy enameled boxes containing their medals. The US Army Major returned to the mike. “I would like US Army PFC Jeffrey Ingrahm to please come forward.” Jeff was looking around as if someone was playing a joke, he hadn’t been wounded nor had he done anything heroic. What did they want with me?

## Chapter Twenty-eight

### The Meeting Room

“Private First Class Ingrahm on behalf of the General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Secretary of Defense Robert A. Lovett, I hereby present you with the US Army Commendation Medal.” Poor Jeff was beside himself. “Your ingenuity in the face of a disastrous situation after having been taken prisoner and rescued. You created several devices to aid in the transport of your severely wounded comrades that could not walk. Your efforts saved their lives.” My God Jeff thought he is talking about the litters I made. “I understand that Mrs. Park’s chair was very comfortable too.” He smiled at Jeff’s confusion and shook Jeff’s hand for a long time. He too handed paper orders to the recipient, no medals today.

As Jeff started to walk back to his seat the Major was still holding Jeff’s hand. The tug stopped him in his tracks. “Let me introduce you to Major Chon of the Army of the Republic of Korea.” Jeff went back to his position of attention and the ROK Major stood in front of him. “Private First Class Jeffrey Ingrahm, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Korea this citation reads as follows.” The Major stood as straight and tall as he could. “In recognition of your extraordinary efforts on behalf of two ROK Army soldiers and two civilian citizens, you displayed skills and effort above and beyond any call of duty. In appreciation of these lives saved you are today awarded the Syngman Rhee Presidential Citation.” The Major looked up from his notes and looked Jeff directly in his eyes. “Young man, this world needs more men like you. On behalf of the General Staff of the ROK Armed Forces, we salute you. The Park family will live on because of you and your efforts.”

The Major stepped back and saluted Jeff, stunned Jeff returned his salute crisply. They both shook hands and the Major turned to take his seat. Jeff was on very unsteady legs and took a moment to return to his. The black enameled box in his hand was still open as he sat down, looking at the white ribbon with the emblem of Korea in its' center. Luckily for him Emil was holding Jeff's chair. The entire room was applauding this young man PFC Jeff Ingrahm was still in shock.

Captain Sinclair took the microphone as he was applauding. With almost everyone just getting seated he announced. "I am now going to call the entire Recon Unit One up front and center." They all stood up shuffled chairs and stood at attention in front of the remaining seated group. "It gives me great pleasure to award this unit its second US Marine Corps Meritorious Unit Citation. This is the first time this citation has ever been awarded for a second time. Congratulations." "Thank you sir" said Jim for the entire unit. As Jim and the group started to walk away, Major Wallace said, "where do you think you are going gentlemen?"

Those that had moved stood fast, and then returned to their original places. The Major made much of taking a sheaf of papers out of the briefcase and shuffling them in his hands. Clearing his throat he sounded almost like a preacher "By direct order of the President of the United States of America, I hereby present the following individuals, US Marine..." the Major took his time reading each name and rank slowly and distinctly, the Presidential Unit Citation." He stood taller than ever and said, "The actions you undertook to not only do your duty as assigned, but as a unit you exceeded all the expectations of your command and your nation." The Major was deeply touched as he continued to read the citations words. "The heroism and dedication, the aforementioned individual United States Marines, toward executing your missions' objectives was accomplished above and beyond the call of duty. The rescue and assistance this unit gave to another US military organization, namely the United States Army and Republic of Korea Army personnel, exemplifies the time-honored tradition of the US Marine Corps. A grateful nation salutes you and thanks you. Signed Harry S. Truman, President."

Everyone in the room was surprised when the US Army patrol, including the two ROK officers, stood as one and applauded heartily.

“It seems I am not the only one emotionally touched by this units exploits.” Major Wallace paused to collect his thoughts. While looking into the faces of this group of war tested and proven group of young men, he was touched by how young they all were. “You will each be receiving an individual certificate of this Unit Citation when you return to the States. It is part of your DD214 and your military history file.”

The men of Unit One stood uncomfortably at attention. When the Major turned to sit down, Sergeant Kennedy ordered the Unit members to “Stand at rest and return to your seats.” The Major, slightly embarrassed thanked the sergeant.

“Gentlemen,” said Captain Sinclair “In keeping with the jubilant mood, I would like the following US Marines to come forward. PFC’s Ormond, Morgan, Gonzales, Adams, Cottie and Dreyer. Front and center please.” While the six Marines moved back to the front of the room, the Gunny and Sergeant Kennedy were walking to the same area. “I am extremely pleased to announce, effective 28 February 1952 each of you is promoted to the rank of Corporal in the US Marine Corps.” Sinclair was facing each man and shaking their hand as Kennedy and Papushka followed him handing each one the stripes of a USMC Corporal.

“These are well deserved promotions. We have struggled in Recon to establish criteria for promotions. You men have exceeded that expectation and performance standard.” The Captain chuckled a bit. “Other Marines may find it hard to emulate your successes, but you have shown it can be done.” He became very serious at this point. “Many thought we, you specifically, could not accomplish these missions. You have proven them wrong.” Some emotion was bubbling to the surface. “Beyond any doubt, with the training you’ve had. And the character of the individuals selected, you can and did, prove them wrong, several times over”

“Congratulations to each of you. Wear those stripes proudly.” Captain Sinclair looked approvingly at each of the new Corporals and said they can stand at ease and please be seated. “One more point gentlemen, all newly minted Corporals are considered Non Commissioned Officers. As such you will be scheduled for NCO classes with Sergeant Kennedy in a day of two. Classes last about one week. Is that correct Top?” “Usually so Captain, some of the slower ones take two weeks, we’ll see.” The broad smile on Kennedy’s face gave his words the desired humorous reaction.

“If I teach the class Captain, they’ll get it in two days or I get their stripes.” Gunny was now getting into the act. “I am sure they would get it that quickly Gunny but let’s go easy on them this time.” “Aye sir” he answered. “Enough of me up here” Sinclair said, “I am going to turn the next part of the program over to our Adjutant Lt. James Northcutt.”

“Northcutt stood up, thanked the CO and moved to the microphone. “I would like Sergeants Cunningham and Daro to come forward, please.” He reached into the briefcase and pulled out two manila envelopes. “The Battalion Commanding Officer and the Reconnaissance Headquarters Commanding Officer are pleased to announce; a drum roll please.” There were a couple of snickers to that remark. “The promotion to Staff Sergeant in the United States Marine Corp for Sergeant James Cunningham and Sergeant Kenneth Daro.” The shouts of the assembled enlisted men, both Army and Marine, spoke of how the men, these two lead, felt about them as leaders.

“As most of you are aware, promotion to NCO rank in the Marine Corp is not based on time in grade.” His explanation was as much for the newest Corporals as it was for the soldiers present. “Once you achieve the rank of Corporal, our first level of NCO, the rest is base upon merit and performance points accrued. Each of you has exceeded the goals established for this promotion. Congratulations, to both of you.” He looked directly at the sitting audience of officers and enlisted men. “It was only last month that I introduced these two Marines to each other.” He took the time to look each man in the eyes. “Their performance as team players, to all accounts, was exemplary.” Now he faced the audience. “I pray to God that my next selections are equally as successful as you two have been.” Northcutt then handed each of them their orders declaring them USMC Staff Sergeants.

“Now for the good part gentlemen, your instructor in Senior NCO class will be, another drum roll please.” Someone drummed on the tabletop. “Gunnery Sergeant Paul Papushka. Pappy they are all yours. Semper Fi.” Lt. Northcutt handed each of them two pair of Staff Sergeants stripes. The three men stood there smiling and shaking hands for a full minute. A very popular pair of promotions, some of the original Unit One members were thinking ahead. “I wonder what this all means to us as a unit?” They would all find out the answer shortly.

Captain Sinclair, while the applause was still going took over the position at the microphone. He announced but it was not a command “The presentation portion of this meeting is hereby concluded.” Sergeant Kennedy called the room to attention. Chairs scraped the plywood floor and doors were opened as the visiting officers and staff exited as one. Kennedy left everyone standing at attention for a few moments after the doors were closed. “Major Wallace and Captain Sinclair have a few more announcements and comments to add, please stand at ease and be seated.”

“Lieutenant Northcutt do you have some of the handouts?” “Sir, yes sir” was the quick reply. “In the brown envelope with the string tie sir, at the podium.” Wallace looked down below the microphone and picked up an envelope, “Just as my wife always says to me if it had teeth it would bite you. Thanks Lieutenant, I knew you would be prepared.” He opened the envelope and the pile of sheets came out paper clipped together. “These papers are the new profiles for Marine Recon Units operating under this command.”

The Captain walked around the room passing out the papers, both the Gunny and the Top got up to assist and he waved them back to their seats. “I am not allowed by my staff to do anything.” He smiled at this group of enlisted, now all Non commissioned officers in the Corps. “I want to do this because I need to look into the eyes of every man here and be certain that you understand the reason for these changes.” He arrived back at the podium and shut off the microphone. Sinclair was getting personal.

“As you can see, we are returning to Units of 12 men each. The Units will have one Medic and one Korean enlisted man as an interpreter rifleman.” He looked at his list and continued. “The names you don’t recognize are the replacements. They will be here at Recon HQ tomorrow.” He looked to see if he could discern any concern on the faces of the members. He could not, good; they are ready to hear the rest. “Mr. Park and his two sons have kindly provided us with additional intelligence information.” Sinclair looked over the heads of the Marines to acknowledge the Park family.

The entire Recon Unit turned as one to see them sitting there. Most figured they had left with the others. The Captain motioned for the three Koreans to come forward



and Jin and Hyun were asked to come forward too. They would interpret for the non-Korean speaking personnel, which was practically everyone.

A large map of North Korea was uncovered. The only part of South Korea shown was from Seoul City north to the DMZ. "Using our new maps and Mr. Park's memory and his sons' knowledge of where their father traveled. We can piece together a series of tunnels that are being used as POL and munitions storage." Captain Sinclair motioned for Mr. Park to show the locations. "Here, here, here." Mr. Park had learned a new word and used it. He was smiling at the recognition his new word had on the men listening to him.

Before he could speak another word the front door of the meeting room opened. A US Navy nurse and Mrs. Park came through the door. Everybody stood up including the officers. Again Mrs. Park was embarrassed by the attention. The difference this time was because Navy dentists and doctors had fixed her broken teeth and taken care of the facial cuts. The nurse was obviously a precaution. While everyone still stood she went over to Mr. Park and her sons with a gleaming smile still feeling the aftermath of the painkillers. She bowed to them, the nurse's eyebrows almost left her head, and all four embraced. Mrs. Park took a chair that was offered by Lieutenant Northcutt. She too had knowledge of these storage tunnels as everyone would soon find out.

"Before we go any further, as you can see Mrs. Park has experienced US Navy Medical Services. They fixed her smile and the cuts inside her mouth." He looked in the nurse's direction. "She also brought along a very attractive Navy nurse, thank you Mrs. Park." Jin and Hyun were translating as fast as they could for her husband and sons. The sons both went over to hug her again. The Recon and Army units gave her a rousing round of applause. The Navy nurse did a curtsy to an increase in the amount of applause. "Thank you nurse, for helping me lose control of my own meeting." "You are indeed welcome Captain Sinclair. I will now go sit in the back of the room and be silent." Both she and the Captain smiled at that and she did take a seat in the back of the room.

"Excuse me Lieutenant, I am sorry I missed your name tag." "It is Lieutenant Joanne Barrows Captain," she answered crisply. In a very formal tone he asked if she had at least a secret clearance. "I do, but I have never heard anything that was worth repeating, but I do have one." Snickering started slowly and grew and then abruptly

stopped when they saw the Captains face. All he said in reply was, "Thank you Lt. Barrows." He took a deep breath and exhaled noisily.

"Where were we, oh yes, Mr. Park and his sons provided us data we did not have before"? He turned to the map. "Prior to your last mission the plan has always been to use units of twelve, including of course a combat medic." Picking up a pointer he marked with a coloring pencil a path of sorts.

"This is where the tunnels are located, along this line of mountains. Our feeling is now that using units of twelve and sealing off these tunnels will be more beneficial than trying to completely destroy them." He turned back to the unit members. "Except for the unusual circumstances you ran into on your last mission, does anyone see a flaw in this new approach?" There was some mumbling and side talk but no hands were raised to ask a question or offer a comment. Jim decided to start it off. "I think we would have to study the topography of each tunnel by itself." Jim turned to Mr. Park, "Jin does Mr. Park know what these tunnels are like inside?" "Yes to these first three he has shown. He says they are the same as your first tunnel and the one the planes destroyed."

"Oh crap, that one was really unstable Jim, I mean Staff Sergeant Cunningham." "Don't be a wise ass Danny" retorted Jim. "Sorry sir, back to your first question, a team of twelve is more than enough. It really depends on how much damage the mission is required to accomplish." The Captain looked at Jim and replied, "You tell me Jim, I mean Staff Sergeant Cunningham." The room was getting the inference that Ormond had just made; the laughter was strictly at Jim's expense. "How much destruction is enough in your mind?" Jim was trying to ignore the sarcasm. "Sir, I prefer total destruction, but not if it is going to take more than three days." Ignoring was not working. "They know we are coming after their tunnels, they don't know where. In addition the longer we stay the more difficult and lengthy the extraction."

"All excellent points. I told the staff that you and your men would be the best judge of how to manage subsequent missions." The Captain turned to Northcutt, "James did you put any info about the I & I teams in this package?" "No sir, I was waiting until tomorrow to introduce that part of the new plans." "Thank you." Turning back to the troops he said, "Okay then that's it. Tomorrow at 1000 hours in this room."

You will meet your replacements and new team members. In addition we will also introduce you to the I & I teams that will be arriving tomorrow.”

“Sergeant Papushka, it is all yours.” Gunny was already standing, “Meeting room attenhut, this meeting is over. You are all dismissed.” With everyone standing the three officers left the room. “At ease, you are free to leave. Hut assignments will not be changed until tomorrow. So everyone stay where you are, for now, got it?” A chorus of “Got it” echoed in the room. “Whatever happened to “Yes Gunnery Sergeant” or don’t any of you remember Marine Corps courtesy?” The Gunny was smiling again; Jim made another mental note of that. What can it mean, if anything?

It was now 1300 hours and the group was headed for the mess hall. Mr. and Mrs. Park were heading for their hut with their two sons. Jin and Hyun went to invite the family to have lunch with the group. They each had to refuse. The Park family was having lunch with Lt. Northcutt, Capt. Sinclair and some intelligence officers. Jim and Ken had the same idea at the same time, “Now what?”

Lunch talk was mostly about all the ribbons and medals collected. The soldiers were saying they were just happy to be alive, screw the medals. It was decided during lunch, that all would meet in hut #15 and continue the sharing. Emil would be first and Jeff Ingrahm would be next, after that it would be “draw straws.”

Before heading back to #15 everyone detoured to hut #8 to grab a soft drink while listening to the sharing. It was almost 1500 by the time they all arrived in #15 and got settled down.

“Hi everyone, my name is Emil Mankewicz from Rocky Mount, North Carolina. I am 27 years old, married and divorced, no kids thank God. I graduated from Rocky Mount High School and attended Nash County Community College studying pre law. In High School I wanted to be a High School teacher, when I went to apply, the teachers college was full up, so I switched to law. You know state police and all that stuff. After college and my failed marriage, I joined the army with intelligence as my goal. The army got me two things. My alimony dropped to next to nothing and Intel school was open. Until we were captured I was thinking of making the Army a career. Now I am thinking much differently. The lack of support for us when captured pissed me off. Then when that asshole Colonel in Japan wanted you to leave us there. That did it for me. Screw

the US Army in all of its forms.” Emil realized he had not taken a breath, all this was pent up inside of himself.

“I have to take a breath guys. That was one of the longest speeches I have ever made.” The assembled Marines and soldiers were empathetic to Emil. A number of them felt the same way. “This is the first time I have spoken about that incident but it will not be the last.” He felt better, but what good does it do to bitch about it? “This may seem strange to some of you. I intend to see about transferring to the Marine Corps, if I can.” Everyone was now hanging on his every word. Jim was thinking of asking Pappy, Ken was thinking of asking Kennedy. The two ROK officers were thinking they would be shot if they asked to transfer from the Army to the ROK Marines.

“Gosh, I don’t want to make this a depressing session. My dad and mom were dirt poor until WW II. Dad got a good paying job at the wood mill making plywood parts for landing craft. Heck, he might have supplied the wood for the one we rode in.” That got a chuckle. “Mom worked for the Southern Railroad in administration. The railroad is how all the plywood parts got to Mississippi to build the landing craft.” Emil took a moment to think about them, I miss you two. “They are still employed at both places. The housing boom gave dad the opportunity to get into supervisory work and mom too. She heads up the statistical department for the entire Southern RR.”

Getting back on track he added. “Along with mom and dad I have two sisters, both married to great guys, each family has two girls. My brothers-in-law are both in the service. One is in the Army at Ft. Bragg and the other in the Air Force on Okinawa. Both are in electronics, I don’t know what exactly but radios of some kind.” Now I need to share some painful stuff. “My marriage lasted only three years, as I said no kids. Everyone was mad at me, my folks, my priests, her family, her and even her damned dog was mad at me.” Emil’s release of this caused some amusing banter in the room. Seemed like someone else had a similar experience. “As a result I was no longer a Catholic and had to find another church. In North Carolina that is not a problem, we have them on every corner of any county.”

An “Amen” came from the group sitting close to where Emil was standing on a footlocker. “Now I just attend whatever non-denominational church is on post. That works all right for me.” He looked at the men who had made the “Amen” and winked.

“When I was in high school and college my grades were okay, not in the top quarter, but high middle. As a kid I delivered newspapers and played all the major sports mainly I liked baseball. I was a catcher and was able to play for the local American Legion team. That is where I met my wife to be, she is one of the veterans daughters. Those guys, the war veterans were a real inspiration to me. Regardless of what branch they had been in all they talked about were their wartime buddies.”

Emil was thinking back aboard ship when someone said he would be sitting around telling young people about being captured, rescued by Marines and treated like royalty aboard a US Naval vessel. “You know guys I was just thinking about the comment about me reminiscing in the future. I think you are probably right on that score. Just like the Legion vets, sitting around remembering.” Emil became very serious, “If anyone has an idea how I can transfer to the Marines I would be in your debt.” Serious became contemplative. “The more I think about how the Navy officers and the Marine officers had your back and supported all of you. Unlike us who were just left to die out there.” He went from contemplative to stern. “I don’t know any of the details and probably shouldn’t but I hope, hope hell, I pray that Colonel Son-of-a bitch gets what is coming to him. The Army being the Army, he will most likely get off free as a bird.”

“Well, as I said before, I usually am a listener not a speaker but I thank you all for listening and not thinking I am a loon or some crazy person. Or maybe you do, that’s okay too. Emil out.” He was laughing at his own little joke as he stepped off of the footlocker.

“Okay,” Jim was on his feet and Ken was getting off his footlocker too. How about a stretch and then we can come back and listen to “Mr. Fix a whole bunch of stuff” PFC Jeff Ingrahm.” A lot of yes’s and noise but most were headed for the enlisted men head. The soft drinks and lunch were taking their toll.

When Jim returned from the head, there were two notices on the front door clipboard. One stated that Jim and Ken were to meet in the Orderly Room at 1630 hours with Major Wallace, Captain Sinclair, Lieutenant Northcutt and other unnamed officers. Full Dress Blue Uniforms are Mandatory; the last statement had been underlined. Both Marines knew the last remark was not really true; their dress uniforms were in storage in Japan.

“Hey guys, could we postpone Jeff’s share until after evening mess? Ken and I have to report to the Orderly Room with the brass. We don’t want to miss his story.” The groans were just like kids made when told to go to bed. Jim and Ken both laughed. Most agreed they would spend the time in #8 playing some games. A few of the Recon men had a concerned expression on their faces. “As soon as we can, we will tell you all about our visit. If it was serious, they would not just have left a note now would they?” Agreement, yes a positive step.

Jin and Hyun were going to show Danny Ormond how to play “Chicom Chess”. The three of them were laughing as they walked out the back door of #15 on their way to the game room.

When Ken and Jim arrived at the Orderly Room a little early, none of the officers were there. Of course Pappy and Kennedy were waiting in what was being called the lobby. The lobby was nothing more than a plywood wall with an opening going back to the meeting area and the various non-com and commissioned officers offices. “Uniform of the Day for you two is “Dress Blues” what happened?” Sergeant Holloway was in his usual good mood. “We decided that swimming the Sea of Japan to get them was too much to ask so we came as we were.” Jim thought for a second. “Hey Holloway, I can bad mouth you all I want, we are the same rank now.” Holloway replied, “Rank wise that is true but I can still change that any time I want. I write the BCO’s signature a couple of times a day.” The three Staff Sergeants laughed until the Gunny broke up the banter. “Okay ladies, this way to the slaughter.” Always a way with words, Pappy was not going to change.

The meeting ended after a ninety-minute presentation. Jim had five pages of notes on his thigh notepad along with the three pages of typed handouts. The Non-coms all ate together in the mess hall no one discussing the meeting. Holloway was telling everyone about his newest child, a boy, the kid already has a tattoo. It really was a birthmark but no one pressed the issue. Pappy seemed homesick when looking at the photos of Holloway’s newest. Jim and Ken said their goodbyes and headed back to #15. Only Doc and Wallie Adams were there, the rest were still in the game room. Wallie volunteered to go get them and the soldiers.

Everyone wanted to hear what Jim and Ken heard at the meeting. The two of them reminded the troops about the earlier agreement. Business would have to wait until after the sharing.

Jeff stood on the same footlocker that Emil had used. This kept everyone in the room in front of whoever was speaking. "Hello friends and fellow servicemen of the US and ROK armed forces. My name is Jeffrey Howard Ingrahm; I am named for my two deceased grandfathers. My folks thought it would be a good tribute to them." A good start Jeff he told himself. "I am 24 years old, born and raised in Gillette Wyoming up in the northern corner of the state. My dad is a cattle rancher and grows feed as well. Mom is the bookie and the brains of the outfit and is the family gardener." Okay, now sit down; no they will just pound the hell out of me if I do that. "In high school I majored in the sciences, I had hoped to study agriculture in college. Well the post war downturn in the beef market hit the family hard, so no college. I did attend a local Junior College at night, they only offered Liberal Arts so I took it anyway." Seeing some empathy in some of the faces, he knew he wasn't alone on that score. "Dad and I were the main repairmen on the ranch. We would spend hours at the various junk and scrap yards picking up stuff to make work a little easier on the ranch." He smiled remembering the event. "One time dad and me made a "cow pie recovery machine". It had wheels and was pulled behind the tractor and we picked up the dried cattle poop. We took the poop and made a pile of it and dirt, added some lime and made fertilizer for the feed lots."

"I have an older brother, he is now 31. He was in the Army in WW II and was wounded on Okinawa. When he got back he attended and finished college on the GI Bill. He majored in Aggie studies and now runs his part of the ranch." Jeff reflected on what was going to be his part of the ranch when he got back to Wyoming. "When I was 21 I joined the Army, with a 3 year enlistment you got GI Bill benefits. I selected Military Police with intelligence. I passed all the tests and was to focus on the Intelligence Division of the Army. Intel school was mostly theory but it killed a year of my enlistment." My God do I sound like a hypocrite or what?

"Was I ever scared when we were captured, I thought we were all going to die. That would have been a hell of a price to pay just to get the GI Bill of Rights and go to college." Everything has its' price was one of his dad's famous sayings. "So far as

church goes, yes I go every Sunday. After the service we go to somebody's farm or ranch and hang out doing church related stuff. My girl friend, we have been going together since ninth grade also attends with us. She is enrolled in U of WY at Laramie and is studying natural resources. You know water, soil, air and stuff like that. When I get back I most likely will attend U of WY at Casper, they have the COOP Extensions programs. That's where the University helps farmers and ranchers use new technologies and techniques. I like that kind of stuff."

Jeff took a deep breath; he had no idea how the next part would sound. "I was really scared when they handed out the awards, I could hardly stand up. I thought I was going to piss in my pants, what a awful feeling." Several of the Marine Recon Unit laughed knowingly, Jeff had no idea why they laughed. "I have no words to express how I feel about the you Marines' and Doc who rescued us. Someone aboard ship mentioned about naming kids after Jim and Ken. I think we will name ours as Recon One, two, three etcetera." Most folks laughed at that.

"I know there is a chapel here on this Marine airbase. I would sure appreciated it if someone could show me how to get there." Several hands went into the air, volunteers. "One more thing. Could someone explain why the high barbed wire and the guard dogs? Is this a top secret place like Los Alamos in New Mexico?" Smiling broadly Jeff stepped down and surprisingly got a round of applause. More surprising was the visit of Sergeants Kennedy and Papushka. When the group in the room realized who it was that just entered the room it became deadly silent.

"What the hell are you guys always so happy about? May I remind you that war is a serious business and Sergeant Kennedy and I are here to keep it that way."

The "word" in the US Marine Corps was always, "No good news ever comes from anyone with more than three stripes."

"Gentlemen, may we have your undivided attention for just a few minutes. What we have to say is in preparation for tomorrows introduction of replacements; and the restructuring of the Recon Units themselves." Some of the US Army started to get up and Sgt. Kennedy waved his hand at them. "There is nothing being said here that you soldiers can not hear. You are all in the intelligence game so you already know the rules about security." Most of them nodded, and returned to where they had been sitting. "It



was mentioned and papers distributed about the new assignments.” Heads bobbed indicating acknowledgment. “Now with three Recon Assault Units ready to go, a new plan is being formed.” No response, these guys are very aware that some thing bigger is about to happen.

“In about a week an exercise that will include the three Demolition Recon Units and one Recon I & I unit plus the Air Force, MAG 12. The ROK and US Army, Navy and Marine Corp intelligence units.” Everyone was listening intently, Kennedy continued. “An Air Force C-119 will make a first pass at a location called “A.” Another C-119 will make a first pass at a location called “B” and another C-119 will be making its first pass at a location called “C.”” No obvious questions yet. “When the first pass is completed each Recon Unit will jump at its respective target on the second pass. An exercise profile will be at each drop zone. The team will complete that mission and one of the missions will require additional firepower. No I will not tell you which team, because I don’t know that yet.”

Kennedy could see the questions starting to build in the minds of his Recon team. “The team that requires assistance will have the I & I team airdropped to assist in the completion of the mission.” He held up his hand to quell any questions at this point. “All missions will then use their extraction instructions to exit the area of their target.” He realized he still had his hand in the air stifling questions; good I will keep on going. “Every team will extract to the Sea of Japan and a Navy vessel will be there to meet the team.”

“Questions anyone?” Jim had his hand raised and Sgt. Kennedy acknowledged him. “What is the purpose of this training? It seems rather complex for a training exercise?” Kennedy nodded, “Good question Jim, the Chicoms and the North Koreans will be waiting for us to attack more of the caves. The Park family has given us some really valuable information about the next series of tunnels.” Some of the unit listened more intently. “Incidentally, we are putting the Park family, including the sons, on our team as special consultants. They will be permanently housed where they are in hut #7. The sons have to return temporarily, to Taegu to retrieve their clothing. They have been laundering the clothes on their backs for several days now. MAG will fly them down and back tomorrow morning.”

There was another hand raised. "Corporal Adams, you have a question?" "Yes Sergeant, when the units split into smaller sized ones, do we have to relocate or can we all stay in the same hut?" "Hmnm"; the Top was not prepared for that question. "I don't know Corporal. I guess that would depend on a lot of things, mostly how your Unit Leader's feel about having such a large number of men in one building."

Gunny jumped into the fray, "When we first set these buildings up, it was for twelve man teams with plenty of room to spare." There was some acknowledgement, not much, but some. "The object was to develop team camaraderie and a team spirit." Kennedy jumped back into the conversation. "Suppose we do this for now; each unit has its own facility. When the new men arrive tomorrow it is all established." There was a plan in place and the Top wanted it be working before tomorrow.

"There will be one unit for each hut with one non-com unit leader on site. If the future dictates something different then we can reassess the setup at that time." He could see from the expressions that he had his point across. "For now however, lets break up into the units as described on the papers you received today."

"What about the army contingent Sarge?" Ken was asking that question. "Let the men decide who but I would like to see half go with you and half with Cunningham." He looked directly at Emil and asked. "Can you do that Corporal Mankewicz?" The quickness of the reply startled some of the Marines. "Sir yes sir Master Sergeant Kennedy, I will do that post haste." Kennedy was grinning from ear to ear, so was Pappy. "Oh Corporal if I could only get that same response from my Marines. I would be a happy man." Snorts and catcalls greeted that last comment. Emil was showing his desire to be a Marine sooner than expected.

"Please have the move accomplished by lights out gentlemen." They all knew that a move of this size could be done in thirty minutes or less. Emil went to Jin and Hyun and asked if they would split up? One stay here and one go with Staff Sergeant Daro. Both agreed, it was only temporary, the ROK Army and US Army would be looking for them to get back to their own post shortly. Tomorrow another South Korean would be in each hut anyway. Jin and Hyun would help make the transition smoother for all concerned.

Ken got out his list and called out to the G-men to "Get your gear and follow me."

He then completed the list, “Adams, Longo, Rossellini, Cook, Hayes, and Jin or Hyun. Which one is coming with me?” Jin raised his hand. “Good choice” said Ken; “You are now a member in good standing with Recon Unit Three.” Jin knew enough about these two sergeants that either one was great to work with or for.

“Hey Louie, do you have withdrawal signs yet?” Bruce was getting his jabs in early; this could be fun to watch. Most of these men had been together since Advanced Infantry School and all of them since Recon and demolition training.

## **Chapter Twenty-nine**

### **New Members, New Missions**

There was not much talk about the new missions that Sergeants Kennedy and Papushka discussed earlier. After late chow in the mess hall most of the men went to hut #8 and played some games rather than talk about the changes. We’ll have plenty of time to ask questions at the briefing tomorrow, that is if there is a briefing. Hell there is always a briefing in this man’s Marine Corps. Tomorrow’s meeting should prove interesting though, some new replacements and a new medic plus two ROK Marines.

Where do the ROK Marines get their training and just how are they trained?

Ken and Jim had decided to keep the units' marching to the mess hall as part of the daily order of the day. The guys liked it and so apparently did those who watched this now enlarging Recon Unit. Marching its' way to and from meetings, mess hall and sometimes the game room.

Assembling the groups for the march to the mess hall was not really complicated; the rear door of hut #15 was directly in line with the front door of #16. That's where Ken and the newly formed Recon Unit Three were billeted. The info they received yesterday stated that all Recon Demolition teams are to be "odd" numbered and the Recon "I & I" units are to be "even" numbered. None of the Units was very large. The demo teams were now set at twelve men and the Interdiction and Interrogation Units had two teams of six men with both teams in one hut.

When the two groups met on Avenue B, Doc took up his usual spot in the guidon position.

The USMC Recon HQ and its subordinate Units did not have an authorized guidon flag, so Doc took the position with no flag and no flagstaff. The Doc enjoyed the position and so did the rest of the men like having him there. In the Navy marching anywhere after boot camp was an exception, with the Marines it was an everyday occurrence. After reveille and before breakfast the two units met in the enlisted men's head. A few new faces were there that they did not recognize. No one asked anyone anything because there was a lot more going on at Recon HQ than just Recon teams.

Recon HQ was now a full headquarters facility with all of the necessary support personnel staffing. This was an operation that was on wartime alert everyday for twenty-four hours, seven days a week. Heck, the motor pool itself must have fifty or so men in their unit alone. The MP's and guards were in a self-contained facility. They had their own heads with showers and a bunkroom in the Master at Arms buildings where the brig and the K-9 dogs were. The only time anyone saw one of them was either at chow or if the MP's were patrolling the fenced perimeter area with the K-9's.

Breakfast was a quiet affair, compared to most of the recent meals they had shared. Quiet contemplation it was called. Yes they all knew the changes that were being made but not many people liked changes. Especially when something is working

as well as the Recon Unit One was working. Both Jim and Ken were quiet, not that either of them was the chatty kind. Now it seemed more noticeable because no one else was talking either.

The one thing that had been decided was the sharing. The soldiers were the next ones to share and would continue until they had all been heard. There was no telling when the soldiers would be sent back to their respective army units and the chances of ever meeting one of them was nil. Sharing would take place in #15 after lunch today. By then the 1000 hours meeting would have been completed. Plus they would have helped the replacements get their stuff stowed away in their assigned units hut.

The time between breakfast and the meeting was used for letter writing or lounging. Jim owed Lt. Howton one and at least one to Peggy also; he wondered how much she was really waiting for him to get back to Newark. Her letters were warm and friendly but were vague about their relationship. What relationship Cunningham, you are more vague about it than she is? Either tell her how you feel or not. Don't string her or yourself along just because you are over here in Korea and lonely. Lonely, gee I never actually thought about that, there is always plenty to keep us busy and alert, but lonely, hmmn.

The knock on the front door of hut #15 drew Jim's attention away from his daydream.

"The meeting will start at 1000 hours sharp, please arrive ten minutes early. Dress code is combat detail utilities. No sidearms or weapons are permitted, the BCO's deathly afraid of guns." The messenger was smiling at his own humor. "Yeah sure Garcia, remember they always shoot the messenger" was Jim's reply. The messenger then went off to deliver the same message to Ken and his unit. There was no comment or grumbling from Jim's unit, they were used to being early. Jim was always early for everything.

At 0940 Ken, Jim and Emil's men were standing on Avenue B ready to go. Out of the back door of hut #13 came Joe Werner and his two "I & I" teams. "May we join you guys on the way to the meeting?" Corporal Werner had his hand extended and shook each of the three leaders hand. "Sure, have your men fall in behind the army unit." Joe then realized that there was three distinct groups of men lined up here. "Okay, my

teams fall in behind the Army and no screwin' around." Everyone laughed, including the soldiers. They knew the Marines would prefer to be marching with other Marines and not following the US Army soldiers. Cunningham is a classy guy Werner told himself including these soldiers as part of their unit's routines.

When fully assembled they marched up Avenue B to Chesty Puller Way where they made a column left toward Avenue D and made a column left at the corner and continued past the brig and passing in front of the motor pool parking areas and on to Broadway and finally to the meeting hall. Arrival was at exactly 0950 as suggested. Gunny and Kennedy were on the front steps of the hall all smiles again. "Well I see you have all met each other already, good." For some unusual reason the Gunny was still wearing his uncharacteristic smile when giving orders. "We will do the formal introductions later. Lots going on so dismiss your men and come on inside, the brass will be here shortly."

As usual no one sat down but stood behind the chair that was in front of each man. Once the officers arrived the enlisted personnel would have to stand up anyway so why bother sitting down. Just like clockwork at 1000 hours in trooped the officers, not just the Recon officers but there were also several others. A couple of familiar faces and some not so familiar. Now where do we know them from?

Some of the original Unit One members recognized two of the officers as having been on the bus "tour" way back when. After the order to be seated was given, Major Wallace took to the podium with a large stack of papers. "Good to see you all here. I will introduce the speakers as they come to the microphone rather than beforehand." He looked at this group of Marines and Army personnel anxiously waiting to see what was going to be announced next.

"You are all expecting to meet your replacements and the supplemental men this morning. Hopefully you will. Immediately after this portion of the meeting is concluded." No one commented in anyway, so he continued. "I want to cover once again the exercise you will be participating in next week."

"Our third demolition unit should arrive either tomorrow or no later than Friday." Aha there was some response. "It is not the weather. God knows that is bad enough but it seems to be some red tape in Japan HQ, or is that a redundant statement?" There, I

heard a chuckle, he added quickly. "JOC HQ you remember them I am sure. Well they are certain that an armistice between the Koreans will be signed in three weeks, late March." Now I have everyone's attention good. "Our forecasts are based on a different picture. Naval intelligence feels that the Chicoms want to stalemate the peace process by signing a truce or cease fire and not a surrender."

Some stares of vagueness he observed in the audience. "In the meantime we need to blow the hell out of every mountain and tunnel we can find and as quickly as we can. The Park family has given our Intel folks details unknown to us before." I am talking too fast, slow down Roger. "So we are going to have you conduct a multi unit assault on several tunnel complexes that the Parks have indicated have supplies and war materiel stored inside."

"The Navy and Air Force like the idea but want to do a practice run before committing to the plan completely." He paused to take a sip of water and held the glass for a long time, thinking. "Lieutenant Northcutt has produced a flip chart of the assault as it is currently conceived. I told him that Cunningham's group would pick apart the plans defects within two minutes." The Recon Adjutant flipped the top page to uncover the overhead view of the proposed assault. "He does draw nice pictures doesn't he?" Everyone laughed including Northcutt, the BCO was trying to get the teams on his side.

"The real target tunnels and mountains are thirty-five and forty miles apart. Since we don't have access to a secure area that big we settled on one that is ten miles wide running from east to west and the north south run is sixty miles." No one even blinked the size of the exercise is not relevant to them. "This is how the exercise will work."

"The three demolition teams will be flown on three separate C-119 aircraft leaving from here. Our plan calls for a simultaneously coordinated jump or as near to it as we can humanly have one over each target on the ground." Now I have their undivided attention. "The first pass will drop the containers, most will be empty. One container will have the mission objectives. Another contains the meal packages." Was that a dirty look I got from S/Sgt Daro? Yes it was. "The airdrop exercise will have the same number of containers as the real mission, to get the timing correct. The second pass will be a jump pass; we can't afford a three-pass approach. The enemy has some idea that we are after their storage facilities and we need to keep the time overhead to a

minimum.”

No response from Cunningham’s group, maybe this plan is okay. “One of the unit’s will be confronted on the ground by a simulated enemy force. That unit will be given assistance, as required, from the “I&I” teams flying in a separate aircraft.” Cunningham has his hand in the air. What did I miss or say that was not correct. “Sergeant, you have a question?” “Yes, Major Wallace, why the practice run, why don’t we just go ahead and do the mission as conceived?” Jim had stood up to address the Major and now sat down. “Is there a specific reason you don’t want to do a practice run?” “Yes sir, first is the opportunity for injury, second is Chicom intelligence being made aware of the planned exercise.” The BCO thought about that for a few moments. “To what do you base that suspicion on Sgt. Cunningham?” Jim pointed to the US Army soldiers. “These soldiers ran into a trap because someone told someone who told someone about their mission.” Jim turned back to address the Major. “I believe surprise is the best approach, fly in, jump out, blow the targets successfully and everybody gets out okay. Except for the tunnels that is.” Jim had a smile on his face, so did the Gunny and Kennedy. The old man told them that Jim would have a different plan, how right Major Wallace had been.

Concurrence from both Jim and Ken’s teams was immediate. The “I & I” guys were silent they just sat and listened. They did not want to get into the middle of a fight that was not theirs. Some of them had already experienced being sold out by bad intelligence on their prior mission. This new breed of Recon Marines was not the kind to ponder a long time about something. Give us the job and get out of the way and let us make it happen. “What do you propose Sergeant Cunningham, we do not have the time or everyone prepared for drastic changes to these procedures?” Jim started to stand up and Major Wallace motioned for him to stay seated. “Please gentlemen, if you wish to be heard raise your hand and I will acknowledge you but you do not have to stand each time you speak, okay?”

Jim still had his hand up and put his butt back into the chair. “Sir, going back to our first mission, we had no prior idea how it was going to unfold. Every step was a learning experience. The Chicoms didn’t even know we were there. On mission two it was an accidental meeting of Chicoms not associated with the tunnel complex. My



feeling is for us to just do the job; with little or no information getting outside of this room.” Jim had shown his suspicious side. This was a side of Jim Cunningham few of the officers knew he possessed.

“Okay, let’s see what our intelligence community thinks of your plan versus Lt. Northcutt’s.” Everyone knew it was not the Adjutants plan; the Major wanted some humor injected into this meeting. Before turning the podium over to Captain Sinclair, Major Wallace turned to the assembled teams and asked. “Corporal Mankewicz, you and your patrol were ambushed when you came upon the tunnel at the DMZ? What is your idea of a practice exercise versus just doing the real thing?” Emil stood up and stood at attention, the Major noted this act. “Sir, if Staff Sergeant Cunningham wants to go in without a dress rehearsal, I say go. My patrol and I would follow this guy from here to hell and back. He makes good, belay that, he makes great decisions.” Emil had more to say about preparations. “And Sir, practice does not always make things perfect.” Emil stood at ease and then took his seat.

The back of Jim’s neck had reddened and his face was blushing having received this praise from Emil.

Captain Sinclair broke the spell that Corporal Mankewicz had just woven by introducing Major Werner and Captain Farrell from the Intelligence community. “We have had similar discussions also. Not so well enunciated as what Sgt. Cunningham just said when planning these assaults.” He spoke directly at the faces he recognized from the bus tour. “These are not multi day missions such as you have recently accomplished. These mission’s are one and two day assaults and departures.”

He paused to let that sink in, continuing, the Captain added quickly. “We are planning to use the Sikorsky HRS1 helicopters as extraction vehicles in place of the US Navy LCVP’s and Frigates. One helicopter can accommodate the twelve man size units. Unfortunately the food is not nearly as good as when you were aboard the frigates.” Aha, levity, I made them all smile with that one. A voice from the front group asked, “Can we choose which method of extraction we can use Sir?” Ortega has struck again. He is a pisser thought Jim Cunningham, but you have to love the guy.

“No son, I don’t think so,” was the reply.

Suddenly the mood was less tense. It became clear that overall the units wanted

to go now and not rehearse. How to weigh the value of each approach? “Captain Farrell, what is your perspective on the suggestion just presented?” Major Wallace was trying to see where the intelligence officer and his staff stood on the subject. “I have always favored the hit and run tactic for these types of missions.” He too studied the audience for some sign or response; there was none he could read. “Team safety is an issue. But not much more so than if they jumped into hostile territory on an interdiction mission.”

“Thank you Captain.” Major Werner had hoped to get a response to the Captain’s statements; he too could not read the mood of these teams. “Let me add something to this plan as it now stands. Each demolition team goes in and we will have interdiction teams on a stand by if assistance is needed.” Tread softly John he told himself. “How many “I & I” teams is considered the right number?” The major was thinking out loud. Jim and Ken each had their hands in the air at this point. The Major had to chose so he went with Ken. “Jim and I were just talking about having the “I & I” guys use the helicopters to lend an assist instead of using the more dangerous airdrop.”

“Corporal Werner, your thoughts on that suggestion if you please?”

The question was posed to Joe by his brother Major John Werner and sounded like an FBI interrogation question. Joe’s answer was pure family-to-family style. “Fine Major, we don’t care what kind of transport is used. Only make sure that it gets us there and back in one piece.” Major Wallace was pleased with the tone and results of this meeting and said so. “Let’s all be back here tomorrow at 1000 hours for a follow up briefing. We should have everyone on board by then. That will give us three complete Demolition Units and three “I & I” units.” That said he and the other officers departed.

“Be back here at 1400 hours to meet and greet the new arrivals that are currently on site.” Sgt. Kennedy had called the room to attention and when the officers departed he turned to the assembled enlisted men and gave a one-person applause. “Very well done, all of you. The Major won’t tell you today but the executive staff of Recon HQ is proud of the way you all handled yourselves in this meeting.” Kennedy gave one of his now famous, “chin bobs” that passed as an affirmative response. “Now you are dismissed, see you at 1400 hours.” He looked directly at Emil and said, “And for you army and navy types, that means the big hand is on the twelve and the little hand is on

the two.” That stated, he turned and walked out the side door with the Gunny at his side.

The soldiers, including the two ROK officers, who were still dressed as enlisted men, were all laughing at that time worn humor of the senior NCO’s. The “I & I” teams were confounded by what had just taken place but accepted it and laughed with them.

Ken, Jim and Emil decided to go to chow instead of going back to the huts and turn around and come back. Joe felt the same way and so did his two teams. “If we eat now maybe we can get a share or two in before the meeting with the replacements.” The “I & I” guys were not sure what that meant, but going to mess early was a great move. “Good idea,” as Emil turned to tell his group he needn’t have bothered. The four groups had been standing behind the four leaders and heard the decision. So off they all went across Broadway to the mess hall. “By golly all we seem to do lately is eat and go to meetings, what a tough life boss.” One more time Ortega spoke the thoughts of others of the unit. His perception of other people’s thoughts was uncanny.

Lunch was deli style; at least that is what the Marine Corps knew it as. Sandwiches of indescribable cold deli cuts, cheese that did not melt or bend. It broke if you tried to bend it; the bread topped them all. Absolutely no nutritional value, it could have been used as shingling, either on a roof or as siding, but as a food source, uh uh. They all bitched about the food, but no one skipped the meal. After all tonight’s meal may be the vilest of all food groups, grilled liver, yuck. When lunch was over, it was stretch time out on the planked sidewalk of Broadway.

The four units formed up outside the mess hall facing the gated area and marched past the Orderly Room. The sun had warmed the previously frozen ground and was turning it to the gooey and slippery slime that is Korean mud. Ignoring the mud, they made a column left at Avenue A and marched adjacent to the barbed wire secure zone. One guard was seen in the corner tower but no one seemed to be patrolling inside the perimeter. When the detail reached the end of Avenue A at “Chesty Puller Way” which had been recently named for the toughest Marine in modern times and the former Marine Commander in Korea. The units turned left, and left again, at Avenue B in front of hut #16 and by the back door of huts #15 and 13. Jim invited everyone to join him in #15 in fifteen minutes. Time enough for a head call and a smoke.

It was still the Army’s turn to speak and speak they did. Alex Wisnewski went first

and was a pretty fair country speaker. Educated in New England, Vermont mostly he and his family were carnival folks. His education was mostly done on the road, until the state of Massachusetts, when the carnie was performing there, insisted on some kind of end of year tests that he had to pass. Dad and mom then left him with an aunt in Essex Junction, Vermont and that was where he learned to read and write. He never joined the carnival, too noisy and too many freaks, not all of them with the carnie either. He enlisted in the Army right out of high school. He could not wait to get away from all of the snow and ice. That got a laugh considering the weather here in Korea. He has no desire to be anything special, just to make some money and find some direction for his life. He has two more years on his enlistment.

Next up was Patrick Brady, the radio operator of the Army patrol. He was recently made a Corporal because of his electronics knowledge and willingness to take an extra course while in basic communications school. He too grew up in New England, Newport, Rhode Island, and the "smallest of the forty-eight" as the song goes. He went from the elementary grades through high school in Newport; including one year at the State sponsored Junior College. His interest in radio and now television sent him to the RCA Institute for Electronics. One of his instructors told him about how the Army was looking for electronics technicians and the schooling in the military was just like taking college courses. The cost was a three-year enlistment for a no cost education to use after the three years. His parents were not too happy to hear of his joining up, but this was his life and not theirs. Newport, Rhode Island is the most beautiful city in the country. People from all over the world come there to take photos and paint in oils and watercolors. Rhode Island waterways are a great place to sail too, if you are into that kind of stuff. Brady has one sister, a real "pain in the you know what." She constantly called me stupid for being in the Army. When the patrol had been captured, he finally agreed with her.

Dad works for the Newport school district as the head administrator and mom stays at home and goes to the garden club. Both are very proper and stuck in the nineteenth century. The whole family is very Episcopalian dull and kind of boring.

Ken checked the time; they had twenty minutes to get back to the meeting hall. The hut emptied out fast as the race to the head was on. The heads was empty at this

hour so they were done in only a few minutes. Back on Avenue B and falling into formation for the parade back for the afternoon meeting. It was now a very familiar and special routine. The hut #13 guys fell in right behind the Army that drew some smiles and salutes from the soldiers. To a man, all the soldiers enjoyed being so included in the day-to-day activities of this Marine unit of which they had become a part.

The Senior Non Coms of the Recon HQ conducted the afternoon meeting. By way of introductions Sergeant Kennedy introduced Corporal Joseph Werner, Recon Unit Two, team one leader. Joe would introduce the men in his Unit and also his team two leader. "I am Joe Werner a corporal in the Reconnaissance Unit of the USMC. Our unit consists of two teams of six members. Corporal John Sandusky is the team two leader, he will introduce his men in a moment." Joe was being very formal, probably has a good reason. Joe then continued "My radioman is Corporal Clayton, on BAR is PFC Claxton, our sniper is PFC Clausen, the two riflemen are PFC's Bowden and Maxwell."

Each had stood up and at attention when their name was called. Joe then introduced Sandusky. In the booming voice of a drill instructor, Sandusky said, "I am Corporal John Sandusky the leader of Recon Unit Two, team two. My radioman is PFC Martin, the teams BAR man is PFC Newsome, my team sniper is PFC Adamly and our two riflemen are PFC's Nevins and Giles." A totally rehearsed performance, true to Marine Corps standards, no fluff, no smart-ass remarks and no wasted words.

Now both teams of Unit Two were standing at attention waiting for someone to give them an "at ease." Finally the Gunny did just that and the twelve men took their seats. The soldiers were sitting with startled looks on their faces. They had never seen any enlisted men introduced to another group of enlisted personnel ever. This is something for us to bring back to our platoon when we return. Emil had been thinking about what it will be like to return to an Army unit that didn't even send out someone to look for us. He was getting pissed off again; he could feel it and did not like the feeling.

Just as the newly announced Marines were getting settled in their chairs the side door opened and in trooped the demolition units' additional team members. Lt. Northcutt was with them as was the entire Park family, papa, mama and the two sons. Mrs. Park was smiling more now that she had her teeth and mouth fixed. Her smile and attitude was infectious too. It even had a positive effect on the Gunny and Kennedy who were

smiling at her presence. The room had been called to attention and quickly given an “at ease” by the Recon Adjutant as he entered. The two “I & I” teams had no clue about anything that had just happened. Who are these Korean civilians and what are they doing here?

“Sorry for the interruption, we were delayed at the main gate.” Northcutt was not really apologizing but merely stating a fact. “It seems security was expecting ROK Marines as replacement for the demo team members.” He is actually laughing at what happened. “What showed up at the gate are really two US Marines of Korean ancestry. As well as four other Marines of suspect heritage and more questionable ancestry.” All were smiling as Lt. Northcutt finished his explanation.

“Let me first introduce our newest Recon Unit One members.” The Adjutant looked quickly at his notes. “Direct from demolition school via Silverton, NJ is PFC Ernest Luring and from Los Angeles, CA is PFC Ro Chou who is has demolition and radio skills and the team’s interpreter.” He looked at Jim and started the applause himself. The rest of the units’ responded with their applause.

“Now for Recon Unit Three, we have with us four members to build your unit to the required strength of twelve.” He looked at his notes again and said. “From the potato state of Idaho we have PFC Arthur Bozeman, electronics, from San Diego CA is Chin Lee, wireman, demolition and unit three’s interpreter.” The Lt. Paused again “And from Philadelphia PA is the teams new sniper PFC Martin Mancuso, and finally but surely not last is our newest US Navy Corpsman Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Andrew Hughes of the beautiful city of Topeka, KS. How about a warm welcome for these long awaited new team members.” The applause they all received was good but not overwhelming. Some were waiting for the “other shoe to drop”, nothing happened.

The Lieutenant sat down and Sergeant Kennedy decided to take over. “Please everyone take their seats, make room for the new men. That’s good now play nice.” The Top NCO was standing by the podium but not using a mike, he did not need one. He motioned for the Park family to come forward, the four of them moved toward Kennedy in a very tentative way. Mr. Park was carrying a flat package that was wrapped in the paper the Korean villagers used to wrap their laundry with. The sons Mae and Hue motioned to Jin and Hyun to come help them interpret for the family. The Parks wanted

to make a gift to the Marines.

Like always the two ROK Army Lieutenants were beside the Parks, Jin spoke what one of the sons said to him. “Staff Sergeant Cunningham would you please come forward?” Startled at first, Jim stood up, moved some chairs out of his way and made for the podium. “On behalf of the Park family and in memory of their beloved daughter and sister,” Jin paused and Hyun continued, “We are pleased to present to you and your men this US Marine Corps Recon guidon flag.”

Jim almost burst into tears. He had so long ago put the Parks daughter out of his thinking. Now he would have a daily reminder of her and the Park family. Mr. Park unwrapped the flag. It was the brilliant red of the USMC with the Corps golden block letters USMC above the gold “Eagle, Globe and Anchor” emblem in the flags center. Beneath the emblem were the words, Recon Unit One – Korea. The flag had been meticulously hand crafted with both sides identical and stitched together to form the flag.

A stunned Jim Cunningham was again speechless in the presence of the Park family. What a generous and thoughtful family. What wonderful people. Jim retrieved his wits and bowed to the family. He reached out to Mrs. Park and hugged her tight. While hugging her he shook hands with Mr. Park. He was grinning the grin of a father whose son has just graduated Magna Cum Laude. Proud he was for sure. Jim finally let go of Mrs. Park and shook hands with her two sons. They too insisted on a group hug. Lt. Northcutt broke the silence with “I have something to present to you also. That is if you promise not to hug me like you just did with Mother Park.”

It was obvious; she had gotten to the Lieutenant too. Northcutt turned and picked up two stout pieces of dowel like wood. It was the flagstaff for the guidon; it was in two pieces like a pool cue and the two pieces screwed together. The wooden staff was heavy and about an inch and a quarter in diameter. This was not something that had just been lying around. This was another handcrafted piece of work.

“Will the Recon Unit family physician please come forward and receive this gift?” No one moved, some looked around but no one got up. “US Navy Petty Officer Schmidt, I mean you.” Northcutt was enjoying himself. “For those of you unfamiliar with this young man. He is the “Doc” to all who know him and a fine sailor and good medic. Most

important to us, he is a wonderful family doctor as well.” When Doc arrived at the podium it was more hugs and tears. He really was crying.

Jim had to force himself to not give in to the urge to cry. My God we are Marines and we have control of our emotions. Keep telling yourself that Jim and you may get through the next few minutes.

A good number of men in this meeting room had no idea who these people were or what this ceremony was all about. There's a Navy Petty Officer, a Marine Lieutenant and a Marine Staff Sergeant all blubbering about some guidon flag. How dumb is all that? Almost as one the Marines of Units' One and Three and the US soldiers stood up clapped hard and long and whistled. Those still seated had no idea of what they were witnessing, have these guys all gone nuts? Not exactly, but yeah maybe just a little bit.

Not wanting to be seen as outsiders the rest stood up and added to the applause. It was better to join in and be thought of as dumb then to sit there and prove it to everyone.

As a casual viewer might observe, not one person was seated. Kennedy and Papushka were also standing and clapping. What a wonderful day this has been. They both had news to share with these assembled men but that was going to have to wait. This was too good of a mood to spoil. Good thinking Senior NCO's. The business they had to share could wait at least one more day.

Pappy reflected on what the “sharing” was going to be like tonight in the huts. Maybe I will just “drop in” to see, can't hurt anything, can it?

Evening chow was not the anticipated “Grilled liver with god awful onions” but the Marine Corps version of Swiss steak. It was a pleasant meal considering what they all had been led to believe was on the menu. The meal being one where the tray was cleaned completely meant some pretty full bellies. Jim suggested to the other leaders that the Units take a long way back to hut #15 where the rest of the soldiers were to share their story.

Agreed to by all and off they marched along Avenue A alongside the security fence. The K-9's were out and only gave the slightest glance at this marching contingent. The handlers knew how to keep their dogs focused. They marched up and down each of the Avenues and on Chesty Puller Way and onto Broadway and back to



the back door of #15. This was now a sizeable group but these huts could actually house over eighty persons plus their gear. Having only twelve in each was a luxury. Emil was going to select the next speaker but Abe Lincoln beat him to the punch.

“I am Abraham Lincoln, from the great state of Illinois, you know the land of the real Abe Lincoln. My hometown is Springfield the same as his. Until I joined the US Army I had never been out of my home county, no real need to. Everything anyone could ever want is right there in Springfield or a town or two away.” Abe was tall like the late president but a lot better looking, almost handsome in fact. “Our family name is over two hundred years old, originally from England. Being tall, gangly and slightly stoop shouldered means I play the president in all the plays about the president.” He was very comfortable talking about himself.

“When I was in junior high school I got the acting bug, bad too. Everything else slipped except singing, dancing and acting. My folks had to set a grade level for me to achieve in order to stay involved with the theater activities. It worked too.” No wonder this guy can speak so well, he’s trained. “After graduation from high school, Lincoln of course,” everyone chuckled, is he making this all up or is he for real? “I was headed for a theater group that performs as well as teaches acting. Well I became involved with some people who had different ideas about life and love than I do. After one particular show we went to a “cast party” and the guys all went one way and the girls went the other way. And I mean the other way.” The interest level in the room soared. “Man oh man I had never seen a guy kiss another guy before, at least not on the lips.” The sounds from his audience were a mixture of grunts, kisses and the noise of popping a finger in the cheek of a person’s mouth.

“Well, needless to say I got the hell out of there and went home. It took me two days to tell this story to my mom and dad. Strangely, they both laughed, not at me but because of my being so naive. Stupid was more like it. After several lousy attempts at finding a job that I liked, I decided to join the Army with some friends who were also looking for work. The Army seemed like a place I could grow up some and then come home and live my life. My two younger brothers, 16 and 14 think having a brother in the service is great.

They have no idea that I had been captured, injured and rescued. I haven’t even

told my parents. I am a notoriously lousy letter writer. The fact that they have not heard from me in a month is not surprising.” He was thinking ahead to what he would say to them when he did write. “Oh well, that about does it for me, sorry for talking so long. Thanks for listening.” Abe stepped down off of the footlocker and was headed for a bunk to sit on when a voice from the front door of the hut sounded off.

“Lincoln, write that letter tonight, that is an order. The Red Cross has already advised your parents that you had been captured. Three weeks later the same Red Cross also informed them that you had been rescued. They received no details only that you are safe and healthy. So as your temporary command NCO you are so ordered, got it. “Yes sir Gunnery Sergeant Papushka, I got it.”

That was the first time anyone was aware that Pappy and The Top had come into the hut to listen to the sharing. Sneaky old bastards those two, said Jim to himself.

Joe Kessler had stood up when Pappy was addressing Abe. When the heads of the assembled group turned toward the footlocker being used as a speaker’s platform they saw Joe standing there. “Hello everyone and honored guests.” It was hard to tell if Joe was talking about the new replacements or the two USMC HQ Senior NCO’s.

It did not matter at all.

## Chapter Thirty

### Missions Improbable

Joe Kessler unlike Abe hated talking in public or even in private. His silence when he did not have anything to say had cost him in school and church and even when on a date. If he did not have anything pertinent to say, he said nothing. Infuriating, you bet, socially unacceptable. So began his dialog about himself. “In fact I have talked more since being rescued than I have ever spoken in my entire life. When I was asked in the tunnel about being a decent marksman. I jumped at the chance. I really want to be a sniper. Maybe it is because they are not supposed to speak or make any noise, I don’t know.” Joe was picturing the scene in the tunnel and when he was accepted and was up on the top of the mountain with Ortega, Ott and Rossellini he was in his glory. “When those three Marine snipers showed me how to build an igloo and accepted me as one of their own, I was in hog heaven.”

“I know Emil is interested in leaving the Army and becoming a Marine; I am too. Since being with all of you sharing your lives and histories I know where my future lies, right here along side of my real buddies.” There the cat is out of the bag, I only told this to myself and no one else. “I am so happy to get that off of my chest. I have role played how I was going to tell my First Sergeant about this feeling. Shit he probably wouldn’t care one way or the other.”

“Oh crap, I didn’t tell you about my family, real middle America from Iowa City Iowa. Nice place sometimes, more often than not all anyone ever talks about is farming.” He scrunched up his face and a few faces in the audience did the same,

mutual feelings. “Mom and Dad are third generation farmers. They lived through the dust bowl times and the flood times. The more my brothers and sisters and I heard these stories the more we all wanted to get the hell out of there and not look back. My brothers are older. One was in WW II in Europe. He says he hated every minute of his service time. The next older to me should have gone but was deferred because I was not old enough to work on the farm and he was. He is a really great guy, solid as a rock.”

He smiled at the thought of Kenny; everyone liked him, especially the girls. “My younger sisters are 12 and 14 and most likely will not stay in Iowa. They have been talking about leaving since the two of them were in elementary school and learned about places like New York and San Francisco. They are both dreamers. I had better write to them and tell them about the places I have seen. That’ll make them real jealous.”

“My family and I go to church, it is one of the fun things to do in town. We go to the Assembly of God church. Lots of talk about fire and brimstone and talk about the rapture and the like. I have no idea about any of that. The Bible I read doesn’t sound anything like what these folks preach on Sunday’s.”

He started to get down from the footlocker and remembered he hadn’t thanked them for listening. “Thanks everyone, for everything. I have never felt as if I belonged to anything or any group before, but I sure feel like I belong here. God bless all of you, and if I didn’t say so at the time. Thanks for rescuing my patrol and me. You know we will never forget any on you.”

Of course the “I & I” and the replacements had no idea what Joe Kessler was talking about, maybe someone will clue us in.

When Brian Ellerbe took to the footlocker he had everyone stand up and stretch. “Hands together, over your head, up on your toes, now stretch, higher, higher. That’s good, now please be seated, you are in for a treat. Gentlemen and Senior NCO’s; I present to you. For you’re listening and moral pleasure, my partner in the US Army’s worst ever tunnel patrol. Former POW and all around good guy PFC Ed Becker.”

After all of that Brian stepped off the footlocker and sat down leaving Ed totally bewildered. Ed stood up, reached over and tousled Brian’s crew cut head. “Thank you

my closest friend in the US Army.” Ed adjusted his stance on the footlocker and began his remarks. “Brian and I go back to grade school in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Daily we terrorized the other kids, mostly the girls.” He kept looking at Brian self-consciously. “Both of us were bigger than our peers all through school. He and I played all the sports that were allowed, and some that weren’t. Our grades in school were mostly okay. That was a curse for our parents who would have loved to have something to yell at us about.” It is hard to think about those days and also think about what to say here. “Fooling around was a way of life for us, until we had to find a job after graduation from high school. We had no skills and even less personality. The A and W Root Beer Stand owners wouldn’t even hire us.”

After a moment of reflection Ed continued his tale of the two lives. “Brian and I decided to hire on to one of the fishing boats that Gloucester is so famous for. Here are these two former football players, each weighing over 190 pounds and tough. Well after one day of working on the boat and we wanted off. However we were about twenty miles out at sea. It was cold, wet smelly and crap for food.” Remembering the food made Ed’s face become a sneer. “We had signed on for a one-week trial. That means only minimum daily pay no matter how much fish the crew of the boat caught. Bad move for us. Obviously we survived this experience only to move on to another disaster.” Ed was enjoying telling their story. They had never shared any of this with anyone so this felt rather good.

“Our former football and baseball coach landed us a job as counselors at a kid’s vacation camp. This made that stinky fishing boat seem like paradise. We had to sleep with a bunch of spoiled boys from the larger cities of Massachusetts. They had everything anyone could ever hope for and still wanted more. They wouldn’t do anything as a team; it was all about them as individuals. We couldn’t scold them or punish them in any way, so we were screwed. The crafts that the camp had for these kids were stupid, almost as bad as the games the kids were supposed to play. No baseball or softball certainly no football, all girly shit, no fooling.” The smile on his face told part of the story too.

“Like most things distasteful, it too eventually ended.” The sigh he made was it one of relief or of a remembrance? No one could tell which. “Our next job was my idea.

We joined the Army to see the world and meet new people. Well wouldn't you know it, after basic training and with three options on the table, Germany, England or Japan? They sent us both to Korea." Ed thought this was funny, well to him it was and maybe to Brian too.

"Here are two guys with next to no skills put into an intelligence platoon with others of equal skills in all things intelligent." He was thinking about his parents and what they thought he and Brian were doing in the Army. "Our parents are great. Both pair are very special people. They just don't have any idea of what we are really like. Hell, we don't know ourselves."

"We were taught in our Korea orientation that we were to observe what our leaders did and imitate that and we would be fine." He became reflective suddenly; it was like a major wind shift. "Brian and my first patrol, was the one where we were captured. He kept reminding me that this was all my idea. And just like all the other screw-ups we had made together, we figured it would all work out. By Christ it did. You Marines came along and took over. The way you killed those Chicoms was amazing. I thought we were watching one of those Saturday afternoon westerns."

Ed took a wide stance with his legs apart and used his fingers as a pair of "six guns." You know where the guys' with the white hats kill all the guys with the black hats." His mood did not change he was very serious. "I wanted so bad to kill that Chicom officer. That SOB was cutting Jin and Hyun just for fun, but for the life of me I was powerless, so was Brian. The way that bastard broke Alex's and Abe's arms was just sadistic." Ed was apologetic but was just as angry with himself for his failure to act. "We have each talked about the feelings we had then. The urge was not strong enough to do the deed and kill him."

"We both felt weak. When the time came for us to assist you in setting the explosives, we both jumped at the chance, anything to be of help. Up until that time we felt useless. Jim and Ken made us feel like men again. I don't know if anyone else has ever felt useless at some crucial time in your lives, but we sure have. To each of you demolition team members, a great big Massachusetts thank you." He got some of his composure back and continued. "During the, what the hell do you call it when you leave some place?" "Evacuation" was the response. "Yea that's it, during the evacuation. If

Ingrahm hadn't made those litters and stuff, Brian and I would have carried the wounded out on our backs. We were and are that grateful and eternally in your debt."

Ed tried to change his emotional state at this point, don't get so negative he repeated to himself. "The events on the way out, like finding that train and blowing up that railroad trestle and then coming across the Parks. It was amazing to see how calm you all were. I was pissing in my pants most of the way out. When you trusted Mr. Park, a North Korean, to show the way out. I was crazy with fear of being recaptured, so was my buddy Brian."

"The absolute best though was back at the tunnel's when you told that pilot to tell the JOC guy to go eff himself. I already knew that my career was over and I was watching yours go away too." He was now looking directly at Jim Cunningham. He spotted the Gunny way in the back and Sgt Kennedy back there too. "You Senior NCO's acknowledged Jim and his team with those awards and medals. But someone who owes his life and my partner's life too, there are not enough awards for them. We cannot ever forget what you all have done for us. I only pray that my children will be half the men that you all are."

"Hell I had better sit my ass down now. Brian you finish up here." Ed almost stumbled off of the footlocker but Brian caught him and helped him get his feet firmly on the floor. "Hi again, Ed has said what is really in both of our hearts."

"Our families as we have said are very much alike. We each have an older sister, and they are in college studying to be lawyers. Our families both go to the Congregational Church, which is very upper middle class white protestant. Very proper people they are, with their hats, gloves, stockings and everything by the book. You can just imagine how we two don't fit in there."

"We do talk about what we are going to do when we get back home. It must be to get a college education and become something better than what we came over here as. It may sound corny or like some bull crap but we really owe it to all of you to make something of our lives. Now before I start bawling and blubbering. I thank you all for listening and may God be with you all, collectively and individually."

Kennedy and Papushka were totally caught off guard while listening to these men share their most personal thoughts. Neither Pappy nor Kennedy had ever shared any of their thoughts with anyone else not even their spouses.

A lesson was just learned here fella.

Jim stood up from where he was seated and told everyone that Ed and Brian were the final two who had not shared up to this point. He checked his watch; “We have about 45 minutes left before lights out, how about we use it for one more person to share. Ken how about we hear from one of your new members?” Ken looked quickly to his left and there was Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Andrew Hughes sitting there trying to look invisible. No luck and he knew it even before Ken singled him out. “Okay Mr. Medic of Recon Unit number three, it is your turn. Up and at ‘em.”

Quickly Andy Hughes turned to Ken and Jim and muttered some thing about “Is this how democracy works in the Marine Corps?” No one answered him as he strode to the now empty footlocker.

“Hello everyone, I was not prepared to be speaking tonight and I apologize for the snotty comment I just made about democracy and the Corps. I say that because for the rest of my natural life Ken Daro, excuse me Staff Sergeant Daro is going to be on my ass about something.” That got a few chuckles; Pappy liked the comment the best of anyone.

“I am 22 years old from Topeka, Kansas. My dad works for the AT&SF Railroad as a brakeman. To supplement his income he also works part time as a railroad cop chasing vagrants and hoboes off of railroad property. My mom is a stay at home housewife raising five kids tends a vegetable garden and helps at church too.”

“Age wise I am right in the middle of my siblings. My older brother is in the Navy as an aviation tech on the carrier Princeton.” Andy appeared very proud of his brother, a good thing for a family to be proud of their service members. “My older sister is getting married next month to a pastor in the local Baptist church. Our younger brother and sister are still in high school. She is a senior and he is a junior who already has a college offer to play football at Kansas U.”



Gunny was impressed with the pride this kid showed when speaking about his family. I hope my kids feel that way about me. Stop thinking and just listen to the Hughes lad.

“Sis is undecided about college but she is going to be a wonderful mother she’s just a natural. I attended Topeka Junior College in pre-nursing courses and did very well scholastically. When I applied to Kansas U the school of nursing was not accepting any further enrollments, I was angry and very disappointed.” The brief glimmer of a smile came to his mouth as he continued. “My older brother suggested looking into joining the Navy so I spoke to the recruiter and he got me a slot in the Hospital Corpsman School. I loved it and was top in my class of eighty.”

Yes you are entitled to be proud young Mr. Hughes Pappy was enjoying this share.

“I figured I would be assigned to a hospital ship or some base hospital to gain experience. Well, the Marine Corps came along and made me an offer I could not pass up.” A lot of them knew about USMC offers and empathized with Andy. “Become a Recon Corpsman and you can jump out of airplanes and be in the thick of a combat zone, unarmed. Now who can refuse an opportunity like that, so I said yes?” He looked down from the footlocker to see a bunch of smiling faces that shared a similar offer.

“My dad is very proud of my decision and mom is terrified but accepting. I have no steady girl friend; I have been way too busy and focused on other things to make any commitments.” This Navy hitch is my commitment, and one commitment at a time is enough. “My family is Baptist, Southern style as we like to say. We do full immersion baptisms and all that kind of stuff. I understand that a lot of Navy Chaplains are Baptists so I should be right at home here on this Marine Base. I used to go door to door handing out tracts, those little cards with the bible sayings on them. If anyone wants to learn more about Jesus and being “saved” I am your man.”

Andy thought for a minute and added, “I really don’t intend to do that but if anyone is interested I am available.” Changing directions he mentioned to the group in front of him. “No one could tell me much about what you Recon teams do and that was strange but I guess that what ever I need to know to do my job you all will tell me. Am I correct in that assumption? Can I get an Amen?” He got several right back at himself

and that put a smile on his face. "Thank you all for letting me speak, I am the humble and obedient servant of Recon Unit Three." Andy stepped down off of the footlocker to a subdued but appreciative applause.

The bunks were put back to their original positions and footlockers too. Each man "policed" the area where he was sitting. Get every scrap of candy wrapper and coke bottle and bring it back with you to your own hut and dispose of it there. Those were the rules and they were obeyed, always.

Gunny wished everyone a "good night" and Sgt. Kennedy just waved, both went out the front door and were welcomed by a blast of icy cold Korean winter air. "Another snow storm Pappy" was all that the Top said as the two NCO's walked back to their hut to get ready for tomorrow's meeting. "Yep" was the reply from the Gunny.

"Well today is the day we find out what our missions are or are not." Jim was setting the stage for the 1000 hours meeting scheduled and confirmed for today. "Let's just go to the meeting and listen. Our officers have all been straight with us so let's give them the benefit of any doubts we may have." All Sgt. Holloway, had told him was that everyone was now on site or at least reachable in an hour or so.

"Rather than bitch about something at the meeting, does anyone have any real concerns about what we know so far?" No response, not a good sign. "Okay, when we get back to our huts, if you think of something, let Ken or me know and we can try to sort it all out, among ourselves."

A hand went up but Jim could not see the face at the end of the arm. "Yeah, what is it?" It was Mario, but he looked very serious. "Are we all going to share the guidon that Mrs. Park made?" "I guess so Mario, I think that Captain Sinclair will most likely have another one made for each of the Recon Units." Ken interjected at this point. "The problem is not the number of them guys. USMC HQ has authorized no guidon. We are for all intents and purposes a non-existent component of the Marine Corp." The sound heard after that sobering comment indicated that most had forgotten, their overall Recon mission statement.

"We are to remain clandestine and unpublished." The group as a whole was just reminded why they are behind all this barbed wire and don't intermingle with the rest of the K-6, MAG 12 Air Base personnel. Life had taken on such a normalcy over the past

two weeks. It was easy to forget why the Recons were formed. "When the Army is returned to their base or bases, you can be sure there will not be any fanfare or a large welcoming event. You will just be another patrol who returned from your mission later than expected." Ken was giving them the reality of what they have been involved with for the last four weeks.

Emil asked no one in particular. "Could that be the reason we are still here at your HQ?" Jim and Ken looked at each other and nodded. Jim answered, "Ken and I were talking about this yesterday. Your commanders probably think you are less likely to say or do anything prejudicial to our missions if you are housed here." Ken nodded in agreement while searching the faces of the Army detail.

"It is not likely that your commanders have forgotten about you, they sent a delegation here to recognize your efforts and success." Some seem to brighten up with that comment. Ken continued to address the soldiers. "Unless you are in a hurry to leave, I suggest you all just go with the flow. Remember in a week or so, we are all going to be on this new mission assignment. You'll have the place to yourselves."

A sobering thought for all the soldiers. "I think we should table this conversation until we are back in our huts." Emil was getting very concerned with this talk happening in the mess hall. "Sounds good, lets all meet in #15 after the march back. Okay Mr. Guidon man?" Jim was teasing Doc who not only had the new guidon flag and flagstaff, he even brought it inside the mess hall. Doc claimed it was because there was no place to secure the flag outside.

So the order was for all of the men to assemble outside in five and we will continue the discussion until we go to the meeting at 1000 hours. There were no dissenters.

The discussion in #15 only lasted thirty minutes with little resolution. Life for the ten Army soldiers would remain the same. Jin and Hyun would still be acting as enlisted personnel and keeping a low profile. Emil would be leading their detail to chow and whatever meetings there would be and also to the game room. Talk about fish out of water.

At 1000 hours, in the meeting room, everyone was seated because Sgt. Kennedy said so. There were a lot of extra chairs lined up behind and to the side of where the

meeting area usually was. Someone is expecting company murmured Ortega to his partner Mel Ott. The men of Recon Unit Two were for the most part silent as were the five replacement Marines. Everyone was sizing up the daily events as they unfolded. This was not the time or place to be asking stupid questions, save those for later in the huts.

When the time became 1015 hours the assembled group was getting restless but were trying not to show it, so it showed even more. The front double doors opened and Major Wallace, Captain Sinclair, Lieutenant Northcutt came into the room followed by Major Werner and his two Naval Intelligence officers. The room came to attention before the call and stood at attention until told to be at ease and please sit. Doc had the guidon in a flag stand he borrowed from the Orderly Room staff. The flag and staff were alongside the front row of chairs and could not be missed. "Nice flag you have there doctor Schmidt." "Thank you sir, we think so too." Both Doc and the Major enjoyed their little banter and smiled at each other.

"I am Major Wallace, BCO of this Recon HQ, the big cheese and lord of all you can see, within these barbed wire surroundings." Uh oh, the BCO is making jokes, at himself. Be careful everyone. "First, let me say for the record, while you all were telling each other your life stories." Now how in the hell does he know that? "I and my staff and those of Naval Intelligence have concluded the following." He looked down at the notes he had on the rostrum and shuffled a couple of pages. "The mission is on as planned without any prior training exercise, you are to go with the new plan. No I am not going to hand out any pages right now."

Everyone, including the soldiers was on the edges of their chairs. "It looks as if I have your attention, great. I am stalling for a few more minutes because the third Recon demolition unit is currently at the Main gate and I want them to hear this mission plan directly from me." What third unit, where are they coming from and more important, where the hell have they been? "I am sure you have questions and concerns, they will be taken care of shortly." He picked up one of the Recon Units VHF/UHF hand held radios and spoke to Sergeant Holloway. "Good, thank you sergeant, show them right into the meeting building." The unmistakable sound of the diesel bus and the squealing brakes stopping outside filled the room.

“Lt. Northcutt would you kindly usher in the new arrivals?” Northcutt had already been on his feet and headed to the doors. Sgt. Kennedy asked, as only he can, for everyone to “Rise and stand at parade rest.” The sound of a coordinated marching unit added to the sound of the bus idling and into the meeting room marched thirty-two ROK Marines in dark green utilities. One by one they removed their cap crisply as they entered the room and followed Lt. Northcutt and Staff Sergeant Tyler Williams to each ones’ assigned chair. Each man stood at his chair in the most erect parade rest most had ever seen. There was no rank on the sleeves of their utilities or on their collars.

Sergeant Kennedy then boomed his usual, “Atten hut”, “rest”, “and be seated.” The Major went back to the microphone and thanked everyone for being here. “Before I go any further with the mission discussion, I want to introduce everyone in this room to a newest addition to the Recon HQ. Sitting along side of you Marines, Sailors and Soldiers are the Republic of Korea Marine Corps.” Looking at his notes again he said. “I want to read to you something about them.” He cleared his throat and began.

“On April 15, 1949 the Republic of Korea Marine Corps was founded in Deoksan airfield in Jinhae with an initial strength of 380 men. The ROKMC troops were issued the leftover weapons from the Imperial Japanese Army that had been used during WW II including the type ninety-nine light machine gun. The first action seen by these ROK Marines was when the North violated the agreed upon demarcation zone of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. During these battles the ROK Marines were noted by foreign correspondents as the “Invincible Marines” after an incident in which a squad of ROK Marines wiped out an entire battalion of Communist forces.” The BCO had read the entire posting without taking a breath. After reading that message for this his third time he was still impressed with the accomplishments of this new unit.

“These ROK Marines will be part of our next mission planning and development. Their leaders will select 12 of this group to accompany our Recon Units One and Three on this next mission.” He let that sink in for a moment, now he was ready to explain the details. “Each unit, One, Three and the ROK Marines will have a separate target.” Okay, that answered the question of integrating the units. “Since no foreign troops may serve in any US Military unit under US command, the ROK Marines will have their own

leaders. Staff Sergeant Tyler Williams is assigned to them as an advisor of all things pertaining to the USMC. He is not a ROK Marine leader.”

Sinclair noted a unanimous sigh in the room; he intended to pay closer attention to the faces of his Recon men. “Each of these ROK Marines speaks and knows no less than 200 English words and phrases. Tomorrow all USMC Recon teams will be learning to speak and understand no less than 200 Korean words and phrases.” He looked directly at Jin and Hyun and asked. “May I request your assistance in tutoring some of my men?” Both answered simultaneously “Sir, yes sir.” “Good, and incidentally, your commanders would like you all to be wearing your US Army uniforms with the proper insignia. Jin and Hyun, if you wish you may move to the BOQ or stay with Corporal Mankewicz and his men.”

“We prefer to stay with them, we are all one team Major Wallace.” “Thank you both, our Korean language trainers are looking forward to meeting with you after this meeting. Is that okay?” Again, the two said in unison, “Sir, yes sir.” The Major echoed the smiles on each of the faces of these two Korean Army Officers.

Lieutenant Northcutt put his charts up on the stand for all to see. They had been modified to show the unit that would be attacking each targeted tunnel complex. The Koreans would attack the center-most mountain while Unit One would hit the most northern mountain and tunnels. Unit Three would take the southern mountain target. English would be the primary language of the mission. Korean would be the backup language for emergencies. Among the Korean Marines themselves whatever language they chose to use was okay. The exit routes had been massaged by Mr. Park and his two sons along with Naval Intelligence. This would be the first time helicopters would be used for extraction and Mr. Park had been asked to provide information about possible pick up sites further inland than shore extraction points. He identified several that could be used by all three groups after successfully demolishing the assigned targets.

Major Wallace noticed that the Korean Marines sat at attention even when seated. He thought about asking them to relax but when he noticed the officers and non-coms sitting the same way. He did not pursue the matter any further. They run their Marines the way they want and we run ours another, to each his own.

“Sergeant Kennedy do you have anything to add to this meeting?” “I do sir thank you.” Kennedy stood in place; he did not need or want to use the microphone. “Language classes will be held in your individual billets, there is plenty of room and from what I understand the learning is better in this size groups.” His pause was because Pappy handed him a note. “Gunnery Sergeant Papushka reminds me that there are three practice jumps scheduled over the next six days. The jumps will be made, using full assault gear including radios and weapons. The drop zone will be between Suwon and Pyongtaek to conserve time and the recovery of equipment. This practice jump will also include the newly arrived ROK Marines.” He turned to Pappy, handed him his note back and said that he and Pappy would be jumping also. Pappy only smiled at the sarcastic tone of the Tops comment.

A lot to digest and the meeting is not over yet.

Oh yes it was, the two Senior NCO’s both stood up and Kennedy called the room to attention and dismissed them with no additional information or instructions. Now that is strange, no explanation of why the practice jumps, except to keep up proficiency or was there another motive. Ken wondered why he would think there would be another motive on the part of the HQ NCO’s. Who is this Staff Sergeant Tyler Williams anyway? I remember his name from a long time ago, but who is he and why is he the liaison to the ROK Marines?

It was decided to go to late lunch at the mess hall. No one was in a hurry for another lunch of sandwiches and a liquid someone called “cool aid” a very sweet, highly strawberry flavored water drink. It somewhat masked the flavor of the chlorine treated water they were drinking, but not completely.

As the groups left the meeting room hut and assembled to march back to their respective billets, there was a noticeable activity happening by the Motor Pool building and the large vehicle parking area. The Army engineers and Navy Seabees were putting up large pilings, like telephone poles. Also there, somewhat smaller posts were being sunk into the partly frozen ground. Curiosity was more than either Jim or Ken could handle and so the march back to the huts went via the Motor Pool.

The activity was about a new exercise and obstacle course being built so the Recon Units could maintain their conditioning. Since moving to this new location the

troops had not been able to get in their required physical exercise and conditioning. With this newly installed equipment they would have no excuses for being idle. The course covered the entire parking areas for the heavy trucks, buses and the smaller vehicles. Those had been moved to a new area at the opposite side of the Motor Pool Maintenance Building.

Jim halted the detail to inquire as to what was going on. "The whole thing will be finished in three days. We have already set it up in another location to get your CO's approval and now we have taken it apart and rebuilding it here." The construction officer seemed very proud of what the two engineering groups had accomplished. "You guys are going to have a lot of fun with this stuff." He checked to see how old, or how young these Marines were. "The difficulty level is high but that is what your bosses wanted." He did not talk like a Naval Officer but sounded to everyone like a guy who normally would be constructing bridges and stuff like that on some civilian project.

At one end of the exercise area were four pilings and Ken wanted to know what that was for? "It is a jump exercise tower, just like you had in jump school. We modified it so it can be used for the water crossing rope course too." This officer was enjoying the look on the group's faces, just like kids they can't wait to try all this stuff out. "The last thing will be a double "S" curved track that will go around the perimeter and then snake through the course, overall it will be more than a mile long." He was smiling back at the young smiling faces looking at his construction site. "We have to wait until the ground thaws some more to do that part of this though."

Their curiosity satisfied, the units' reassembled to complete the march to their huts. When Ken called them to attention, all work stopped on the project. The men were watching this group of Marines as though watching a parade. Jim, Emil and Ken saluted the construction officer who returned probably the worst salute ever seen. Some of the Seabees yelled out a "Semper Fi" to the marchers. "Back atcha, Semper Fi" came the response from Ken. The group moved out and back to their huts.

Waiting inside each hut were books and binders for the language training. In the process of counting "heads" while issuing a set to each member, the Army unit had also been included. Even Jin and Hyun had a package of material. Everyone was going to learn to speak and understand Korean, everybody. Each man spent a few moments



looking at the package, some more studiously than others. This was just one more part of being in Recon, here it is, learn it, don't bitch, do it. Some remembered fondly the manuals that came with demolition school. You did not read, heed or initial them, at your own peril. After a few errors and some slow starts and minor accidents with the explosives, they all read everything.

Jim let everyone know that late chow ended in 15 minutes and to assemble on Avenue B. The manuals were placed in the footlockers and each of the units mustered up. Unexpectedly the ROK Marines were already lined up and ready to go. They may not speak English, or do they? But they have already figured out the USMC routine for leaving the billets. Jim went over to the leader and introduced himself; he was met with a grin a bow and "Hi." Ken came over also and shook the ROK Marines hand; he also got the grin, the bow and a "Hi." The only response either Marine could make was "Hi" also. Both Ken and Jim looked at each other and decided to hit the books as soon as they got back from lunch.

The new marching order had Unit One in the lead, Unit Two next, then Unit Three; the ROK Marines followed the US Army.

Ken had an idea, "Jim I am sending a runner to the mess hall to hold lunch for us all. Let's take this entire assembly on a long march around the area. Show off all of our new Marines." Agreement all around and off they went up Avenue B to Chesty Puller Way a right turn down Avenue A to Broadway and the Orderly Room. They made a right on Broadway to the end at the Motor Pool and new "Fitness Facility" as it was now being called. Past the MP's and kennels, made a right back on to CPW another right on Avenue C passed the meeting hall and then a final left on Broadway to the entrance of the mess hall. Looking sharp, being sharp and showing off, you can't beat that.

Jim asked Jin and Hyun to interface with the ROK Marines in maneuvering the mess hall routine. Both happily agreed. Both were wearing their real rank on their collars and salutes were exchanged. That felt real good to finally acknowledge these two as officers. Jim, Ken and Emil all agreed on that score.

There was not much to say about lunch, more sandwiches but today they had canned fruit cocktail as the dessert, that made it okay. Everyone ate and an effort was made to include the ROK Marines, some of them spoke passable English. Jin and Hyun

acted as go betweens. The two new USMC Marines of Korean heritage were just observing this was not their show. Watch, observe and if asked help out, if not, stay silent.

Needless to say the ROK Marines were just as curious about Jin, Hyun and the other two Koreans in the US Marines ranks. Mostly they were interested in what the Army was doing with these Recon teams. Curiosity was one thing, but asking dumb questions was pure hell no matter what service branch you were in or what country you represented. Universally, if the brass wants you to know something, they will tell you.

## **Chapter Thirty-one**

### **Integrating Forces**

“Annyong Haseyo”, the speaker in hut #15 was a US Army Captain not of Korean heritage. He received the same greeting from Jin and Ro Chou the only ones in the room who knew what the Captain had just said. “And to the remaining members what I said was “Good morning.” A chorus of good morning came back at the Army officer. “Well done”, his southern accent was now very detectable. “By this time next week, you will all have Korean language skills that will amaze and amuse your friends and families back home. Wherever that may be.” He let that comment sink in for a moment. “These skills may also save your ass in a tough situation here in the sunny warm climate of the two Koreas.”

It was an interesting beginning to learn the language that might possibly save their lives. Okay, now who is the instructor and when does it officially begin? “I assume that you realize that I will not be your everyday instructor.” The Captain looked at a received a bunch of nods. He added quickly. “We are still working that out. Sgt. Kennedy told me that there are several Korean speaking Marines in your units and two Koreans’ who are with the US Army who can assist in this effort.” These guys are smiling at me, what is that all about? “Briefly that means we can get started tomorrow morning, after I give those men the instructions and what we want covered.” The Captain was going to ask a question, oh go ask it he told himself.

“Why are all you smiling at me?” “Jin is right here and so is Ro; you can give them the information right now.” Jim answered for the entire unit. “Lt. Choi and Corporal

Chou will you both please go with the Captain?" "Yazza boss," said Ro Chou imitating the radio funny men "Amos and Andy" For that he got a dirty look from Jim, a partly smiling Jim Cunningham.

Ro and Jin got off their footlockers and went to where the Captain was standing. "The other two reside in Hut #16 with Staff Sergeant Daro," Jim added. The Captain nodded his understanding and as the three men started to leave, Jim called the unit to "Attention." The Captain waved and said, "It's okay, please stay seated." Obviously, the Captain has a reserve commission. Or is a civilian given the rank for a certain time period. The Captain was definitely not regular Army.

The rest of the afternoon was spent getting gear together for the first of three practice jumps. Weapons were cleared and cleaned. Backpacks were checked for contents and spare socks and shirts. The radio/communications guys were busy with their equipment and issuing the VHF/UHF handheld transceivers. The updated ones had a new feature. It had telephone operator's headset with an earphone and microphone. A wire that goes over the head and under the helmet was part of the headset. These were to be tested on the practice drops. First impression to some was why?

The four tutors, Ro, Chin, Jin and Hyun received the training materials for coaches. The way it was to work was pretty simple. Two of the four, would train and coach one unit in the morning and the two coaching teams would then change audiences in the afternoon. All sessions would be one hour long. Unit two's men would split into their two teams with one team attending Jim's and the other team Ken's. Simplicity works well.

Two days of language training and using the new exercise facility was making the days go pretty fast. The tower was not yet complete; the landing area was still a mass of mud and rocks. Hanging below the tower, that is over thirty feet high; a landing net from a troop ship had been installed. Troops climbed up the ladder and swung across its' twenty foot width and then climbed down the opposite end to the ground.

A variation was, to climb up one edge of the landing net and slide down the guy ropes that were providing support for the whole structure. One of the favorites turned out to be the utility poles. Using one of the two ropes that were attached to the top of the

pole each man climbed the rope and slid down the second rope. Pappy thought they were having too much fun to be calling this physical training.

Today is practice jump number one and take off is at 0800 from Base Ops of K6. They all heard the troop carriers arrive earlier. Since this was a full jump rehearsal chutes and packs would be put on at the ramp and not aboard the aircraft. Actual flight time was less than an hour to the drop zone. Along with weapons and a full load of ammo was a one-day K-ration supply of three meals. Also carried were two canteens of water and the VHF/UHF handheld radio.

Five deuce and half trucks would be needed to transport the men and equipment to the flight line. Weather would not be a problem. The temperature was in the mid fifties with a wind of five to eight miles an hour from the west. Perfect, maybe winter was moderating, yeah sure.

The C-119 aircraft were loaded according to Recon unit; Jim's on number one. Then came Ken's unit Three. Joe's unit Two was on the third aircraft and the ROK Marines all 32 of them were on the fourth. Pappy and Kennedy were on Joe's plane. They would jump last so they could evaluate the mass jump from the air. The aircraft would fly in parallel paths at a 120 mph into the wind. When all of the aircraft were unloaded, the number three aircraft would do a 180-degree turn and drop Pappy and Kennedy over the drop zone. Then the exercise itself would begin.

The first C-119 departed exactly at 0800 hours followed by the next three aircraft spaced at two-minute intervals for takeoff safety. Normal separation for aircraft traveling in the same direction as similar altitudes was a five-minute separation. Combat zones have a way of changing some rules. The four aircraft flew at five thousand feet with five hundred feet wing to wing separation. An unusual formation for cargo aircraft but fairly normal and necessary for airborne jump operations. At the drop zone all aircraft descended to one thousand feet and flew into the prevailing winds. The final jump altitude was to be eight hundred feet, lower than the last two missions.

Exiting the aircraft was quick and efficient no time wasted. Jim and Ken could watch the ROK Marines exit their aircraft; they used both side doors to exit the plane. Very efficient jump technique thought each of these unit leaders. The ground comes up very quickly to an airborne jumper who is fully loaded. The jumper may weigh half again

more than normal because of equipment and weapons. All four aircraft circled the drop zone, not a normal procedure. The crew chief of each plane was having pictures taken for later review and critique. To the men on the ground the drop was a real success. The expected markers were right where they should be and so was the terrain as expected.

At ground level it is very hard to see where other groups landed. Jim contacted Ken on the handheld radio and got a quick response. Both units had arrived intact and on target. Jim wondered about Joe Werner's unit and called him to find out how his unit made out. Okay, everyone is accounted for and from what I can see the ROK Marines are assembling okay as well. Joe decided to contact S/Sgt. Spiers and got a positive response from him as well. "Very well" commented Ken Daro "Let's collect all of the equipment and go home." Just as he finished the statement one of the C-119's made it's final pass and both Pappy and Sgt. Kennedy came tumbling out of the plane. God what a pretty sight, two billowing chutes and perfect form by the jumpers. These two old timers were good at their jobs.

Normally chutes and packs would be destroyed or buried, on practice jumps the deal is different. You collect your chute and roll folded it so it doesn't billow and blow somewhere else. To hold it down, the packs, harness and the unused emergency chute pack, are stacked on top. Previous instructions told each group what direction to head into and for how many miles. In very short order, the units were separated by several miles distance. Each unit's instructions had them heading in opposing directions. Aircraft flying overhead, heard but not seen, would be taking recon photos to assess how quickly the unit's could reach the assigned ground target area.

After more than an hour the first unit called in saying it had arrived at their assigned target area. The first to arrive on target was the ROK Marine unit. They ran all the way with full packs and gear. The ROK unit included their officers who would not normally be jumping with the unit. As each unit checked in, the time was noted and injury reports completed. There was no one injured to report, all hands were safe.

At each objective was a series of airdrop containers to put chutes and harnesses into. Except the chutes and harnesses were back at the drop zone. Clever, very clever this has got to be Gunny's idea. Most agreed.

The instructions in the containers told the Marines to use the newly altered containers by attaching the accompanying support rods. The containers could be carried like a stretcher. Two of the containers had two wheels strapped inside. Two poles were placed on either side of the container and the wheels attached to the poles alongside of the container. The instructions stated that if this method proved satisfactory all containers airdropped would be equipped this way.

No more drag sleds to get the munitions and stuff from the drop zone to the tunnel site. Great idea. Each unit would haul its own containers back to the drop zone with two men to carry each container without wheels. Only one man was needed to drag the containers that had the wheels attached.

Gunny, via the handheld radio announced that a break for lunch could be taken now; small fires were okay to make coffee. As a precaution, each unit was to post guards while having a break. He and Sgt. Kennedy would meet them all at their individual drop zones, in three hours. That meant a faster pace going back then when traveling to this location. Double time for twenty minutes and route march pace for twenty minutes should do just fine. Jim checked in with Ken and they both agreed that pace would do just fine. Joe Werner concurred; his guys were having a problem with the rods that attached to the containers.

At the time no one knew who had come up with these two ideas for hauling the airdrop containers. They would find out when they returned to K6 and their Recon area. Jeff Ingrahm had doodled some sketches while thinking about how the Recon team had to haul the airdropped explosives and material from the drop zone. The sleds looked like a hokey idea to him and he devised several methods for moving them over rough terrain. His drawings led Sergeants Kennedy and Papushka to reevaluate the container problem. Jeff showed them both, using cardboard tubing how to fabricate the carrying poles. By using a similar system he added solid rubber tired wheels. Exactly like the airplane fire crews use, to maneuver the foam bottles, to move the containers.

Jeff had no idea that this exercise would be using his designs. The motor pool personnel made the prototypes from one and a quarter inch diameter aluminum tubing. They created a sleeve that the two long tubes slid into to make a long enough pole so two men could lift the container easily. The wheeled method was ever easier. One long

pole for each side with a short axle at one end of each pole to accommodate the wheel, one pole per side and away they went. By using 24-inch wheels they could fit easily into the airdrop containers, which were a cube of 36 inches by 36 inches by 36 inches. The poles were airdropped in a tubular container strapped to an airdrop container.

This exercise was supposed to be a serious evaluation of these modifications but also of the use of aircraft in a simultaneous assault. The Marines' had turned it into a chariot race using the pulled containers versus the carried containers. Switching off without stopping became a sort of game. Neither Ken nor Jim could see each other's team but each had the same problem. Keeping the guys focused on the exercise. Instead it was a time for goofing around running up and down hills and into small streams with these containers. Jim considered it a product evaluation in the event the Gunny asked him. "Just what in the hell are you and your men doing sergeant?" Be prepared was not just the Boy Scouts motto but also one that Jim lived by, especially when it came to the Gunny.

Back at the original landing zone everyone began to load the used chutes, harnesses and reserve chutes into the containers. Pappy asked each group for an evaluation of these changes. Everyone agreed the addition of the poles and the wheels made retrieving the containers much easier. These were more effective and a great deal lighter in weight than the sleds used on the two previous missions. Ortega showed Pappy how he used his parachute harness to hook up the wheeled trailer to the harness straps. This way he could keep his hands free to fire his weapon. "Good thinking Corporal but why did you not leave your harness with your chute and reserve?" "Just plain forgot Gunnery Sergeant." Ortega always had an answer; Pappy just shook his head and went looking for Cunningham. Jim explained to the Gunny "During a real mission we leave our harnesses on. We can carry more stuff into the tunnels and keep our hands free at all times." Pappy knew that he was not going to win this discussion, so he moved on.

The helicopters showed up before the trucks did to pick up the jump paraphernalia. All twelve men of Unit One hopped into the HRS 1 for transport back to base. The exercise is over now it is time for evaluations. The chopper ride was noisier than expected and smelly too. These things looked like they leaked oil and gasoline all

the time. They were back at K6 in less than an hour and now had to wait for the two Recon Senior Non Coms before heading back to the Recon area. The chopper transport took six helicopters; one each for Jim, Ken and Joe's teams and three to carry all of the ROK Marines and the two officers.

Kennedy and Pappy had flown back with the ROK Marines and Sgt Williams and looked a little under the weather. Chopper rides were not what either of them had expected. When the ROK Marines deplaned they looked ready for a parade. Jim and Ken's team had wet utilities and mud on their jump boots and looked like they had been to war. Each team leader knew he would hear about that, but when? Checking out Joe's two teams, Jim and Ken felt relieved. Most of his team had forded the streams and played at infiltration exercises and looked the part. Joe was not the least concerned about appearances but combat proficiency. Over half of his new two teams had never fired a shot in combat. He wanted them prepared, or as much as you can be so on an exercise.

Back at the Recon HQ Base an evaluation session was held in the Meeting Room, all went satisfactorily. That is where Jeff's contributions to the days exercise were explained. Everyone wanted to congratulate him and thank him for his efforts but of course he was in the hut, probably studying Korean.

While the assembled units were in the Meeting Room, Captain Sinclair and Major Wallace showed up to make an announcement. Pappy was being promoted to Master Sergeant with the title of "First Sergeant of the Recon Units" Sergeant Kennedy was now going to be the "First Sergeant of the Recon Battalion Headquarters." The size of HQ was growing and two new Non Commissioned Officers would be arriving to back fill the two now vacant positions. Both replacements are Recon trained and served in WW II for the OSS.

"Our missions will be accelerated in accordance with the amount of personnel we have to accomplish the missions assigned. Our first challenge will be in two weeks and the three mountains that the Park's have identified." Major Wallace was letting us know that we were not resting on our prior accomplishments. "I received good news about today's exercise, nicely done. And don't forget to thank that soldier Jeff Ingrahm for his contributions", "We won't." Captain Sinclair started to get up to say something and when



Major Wallace turned to leave the Captain stopped and left with him. What the hell is that all about? It is always something to keep us wondering.

The following day was one of rest and learning Korean, the method of learning was good. One pair of instructors in the morning and after lunch the other pair of instructors took over the instructing duties. Most of the time in the hut was spent cleaning weapons and loading and unloading cartridge clips and ammo belts. Laundry after yesterday's exercise took time also. That Korean mud dries as hard as adobe.

"Not today, but tomorrow is another jump exercise. Basically the same as the first one except the "I & I" units will be jumping after the other units reach their targeted areas. This is to simulate their assisting in combat situation. The ROK Marine unit's will be jumping with twelve man unit's as separate demolition teams." Jim, Ken and Joe had just returned from the Orderly Room and were passing on the poop from the powers that be. "Okay, look sharp, we have to remember that these drills are to iron out the wrinkles of the mission plans." Jim had just used his mother's cliché and the team all knew it. He just smiled back at them to prevent any humiliating remarks.

The morning lesson for today was over and Jim, Joe's and Ken's teams all found themselves in hut #15. Most were waiting to see who was going to share next. Ro and Chin both raised their hands to be next. Chin Lee won the "one-two-three shoot" so he was going first.

"Yoboseyo, chonun Chin Lee imnida," that is how Chin lead off his story. What he received back was "Kamsahamnida" a thank you from most of the assembled teams. "Wow, that was terrific, a big "thank you" back to each of you also. I noted some strange foreign accents in that response however, we will have to work on that." That comment got the desired laughter.

"I am Chin Lee and I was born and raised in San Diego California. My parents are Korean and own a dry cleaning business. My dad was a soldier in the US Army and served in Europe. He was put into a unit that was of Japanese ancestry. In those days of 1944 very few argued as to where they were assigned and with whom. Since the Japs controlled Korea for over 30 years my folks had very little problem in not being sent to one of the internment camps in the desert."

“Mom and dad could always prove they were really Americans. You see, after they became citizens, the two of them always had copies of their naturalization papers. I had a much harder time trying to enlist in the Korean Army after the Japanese surrendered. I wanted to do my part in freeing my parent’s country of oppressors. When the Russians pushed the Korean northerners to come across the demarcation line, I joined the US Marine Corps. I wanted to do what I could so the entire country, not just the south, could enjoy democracy.”

“We always spoke Korean, Japanese, Chinese and English in our home. My sisters, both are older than me and were my tutors. My parent’s customers were always pleased to hear me speak their language. I showed off a lot and entertained them by singing in different languages. I even learned Spanish. My father thought that was dumb. He told me that no one would be using that language in California any more.”

“I had just completed my second year at UCSD, that is the California University at San Diego, where I was majoring in political science. I want to get into politics either here in Korea or at home in the US. I am a ham radio operator, I use Morse code and voice and now am planning to buy a setup that will allow me to communicate all over the world. This new company Hallicrafters is making a transceiver unit that can use the atmosphere to bounce signals off of it. I heard that you too are using a new radio system of VHF and UHF that can follow the curve of the Earth’s surface. I want to get my hands on one of those real soon.”

“I don’t have a formal religion; we practice Buddhism, with a lot of meditation and self-criticism. We give ourselves absolution; it is much easier and certainly faster. Some of my Catholic friends spend an hour doing what they call penance. Lots of mumbling and stuff just for cursing and thinking sexual thoughts, we find that rather quaint. My girl friend is Methodist and she finds my humming while meditating strange so I guess to each his own when it comes to practicing your faith.”

“I don’t know about the rest of you, but jumping out of an airplane and having that chute open is one of the best thrills of my life. Well I am going to let my friend Ro take over from here. I want you to know I am proud to be here and will do whatever it takes to earn your respect and confidence.”

That said he simulated a jump out of an airplane door and landed with both knees bent. He got a smattering of applause for style.

“Are you finished?” The question came from Ro who had been smiling through Chin’s whole presentation. “For now yes, I will divulge chapter two tomorrow.”

“Like hell you will, you get one chance to share here and when it’s over, it’s over. Is that correct Staff Sergeant Cunningham?” “Yes it is, once you have shared, its over, not redoes and no extra innings either.” Jim was feeling very good, life was okay and everyone seems to be making the best of it on a day-by-day basis. “Ro,” Jim said, “Why don’t you do your share and then we can get to our afternoon language class? That is if you can keep your time under an hour.” “Can do sergeant.”

“Hello everyone, my name is Ro Chou, sounds just like chow in the mess hall.” He received one boo for that remark. “I, like Chin am 24 years old and was born in Los Angeles. My parents left Korea a few years before I was born. One of my two sisters was born not too far from here in Seoul City. My younger sister was born in the City of Angels like me. My dad and mom both work for the County of Los Angeles, we don’t refer to the city or the county as LA in our house. Dad works for the County Police Department and mom is with the County Water Department. Like Chin’s parents, mine do not travel anywhere without their naturalization papers. Citizenship is a major part of their lives. I think I have heard this everyday of my life, “Do not take your US Citizenship lightly, it is a privilege.””

“My dad is one of the Counties few Asian police officers to achieve the rank of Captain. He is very well liked; he still gets kidded about his accent and how he murders some words. He is very self-conscious but takes the kidding well; he claims it helps to build his character; I am not too sure on that score. Mom has no accent at all and both are fluent in what we refer to as Oriental languages.”

“Unlike my pal Chin I know very little about radios. I like the big band sounds and boogie- woogie but beyond playing a radio really loud; I know nothing technical about them. My college major was Political Science. A Marine recruiter was in one of my late classes and encouraged me to enlist and use my language skills in the Corps. Midway through boot camp at Pendleton, I wanted to look him up and give him a whooping. Just like all of you I too survived and have forgiven him but have not forgotten.” That remark

got a lot of reaction. Most Marines, after boot camp, wanted to thank their recruiter or the person who sent them to the Marine Corps because boot camp changed you, for the better. The hooting lasted only a few moments but it was heart warming to hear it.

“My goal is to get into government and to help change the way the little people are heard. The Hollywood crowd and the upper crust, if I can call them that, always have their say. But the voices of the average citizens are ignored and have little effect on how our elected politicians behave. These guys make a lot of promises but don’t follow through; I want to make a difference in everyone’s life, for the better.”

Ro thought he needed to change gears here, he was preaching and not sharing.

“My family and I practice the Methodist religion. A friend of my dad was a missionary in China and the church helped my family leave Korea through China. Mom and dad felt obligated to join the church and liked it once they could handle the language. Most of all the concept of someone such as Jesus giving up his life for the sins of the entire world is a hard thing to digest. Most oriental dogmas have you as the center and you carry your sins with you forever. Now they are very involved with the church, sponsoring missionaries and in all the aspects of outreach.” Getting preachy again, better wrap this up.

“I am looking forward to becoming a full-time member of this Recon unit and hope for the opportunity to serve you as a demolition man and as an interpreter. Thank you all for sharing and also for listening. May God keep us all safe?” He received a giant “Amen” from many in the group.

Each man knew that he was in a war zone and that everyday could be dangerous here in Korea. It wasn’t only the other guy who died for his cause or country.

“Okay everyone, wow they were two powerful shares, thanks to both of you. We are all looking forward to working with you on these next missions.” Jim turned to Ken and to Joe, each nodded and Jim continued. “Language lessons in twenty-five minutes, better hit the head and be ready to go. See you at mess formation at 1700 hours.”

The noise level rose considerably as the footlockers were returned to their original place and with troops heading out the door. Most were making a beeline to the heads. Some were going back to their huts for the manuals and their notes first.

The language lessons went well. These small groups help determine who needed assistance and who didn't. After the session it was time for PT and the groups all marched to the workout area. The MP's had just concluded using the rope climb and were all muddy from sliding down the ropes. They were having as good a time as the Recon members were. The MP's and Recon's required strength and endurance and this was an ideal way to work on both. In a couple of months the running track would be completed. Now the ground was thawing and with the increase in foot traffic was becoming a soupy mess.

Post PT required a shower for everyone and that meant a later assembly for mess. Like all things, the fickle finger got to the Marines. Liver and onions were on the menu and not many indulged in the vile concoction. Navy and Marine Corps cooked liver always had a "green" look to it, unappetizing to say the least. The vote at the table was to indulge themselves after mess with a Dinner pack of K-rations. They all still had two meals left from the exercise and that would be dinner. The cooks chided the men by telling them anything that was leftover would be in the breakfast omelets. Gee I hope they're kidding was Joe's comment. He was only eating two slices of bread with margarine and some string beans. Dessert was a bummer too, yellow Jell-O, he called it solidified piss.

Jim and Ken had no trouble eating the liver; both families had it regularly at home. No big deal. Joe in his defiance moved to another table. Ken and Jim were not particularly fond of yellow Jell-o but made a positive fuss over it just to annoy Joe Werner. It was very obvious; the units were all merging together very well. A lot of give and take between the individuals regardless of the unit they happened to be in. Any animosities were well hidden. Keep it that way. The ROK Marines ate everything without comment; it was just the way it was in that unit. Here is reveille and here is whatever, just do it and don't complain or comment.

The next exercise was to be an extended one with the ROK Marines split into three assault teams. Again the "I & I" teams would drop to simulate assisting whatever unit was deemed to be in trouble. Joe's men would be jumping from an R4D instead of the larger C-119. That unit would be held back at K-6 until the commanders' ordered

them into the air to assist the assigned unit in trouble. Evacuation again would be via the HRS-1 helicopters.

Jim turned to Ken and commented "These exercises are becoming more realistic every time we do one. Any ideas about what next they will throw at us?" "I don't know for sure but I think we will see us using the choppers for an assault instead of the air drop." Jim thought about that and nodded. "It is probably the reason they cut the units to the twelve man teams again." "Boy that figures well Ken, the range of those babies is pretty good too." Ken thoughtfully said, "Why don't you propose that to First Sergeant Papushka and see what he says?" "Why me and not you, it's your idea?" "Pappy likes you better, you know that." Jim scowled at him but knew it was true. For all of Jim's time here Pappy had treated him well.

"Hey Doc, Ken is going to lead the units home, I am going to the OR to see the new First Sergeant." "Okay Jim, are you gonna complain about the liver?" "You're damned right I am." Both laughed and knew that was not the agenda item on Jim's list.

"Staff Sergeant Cunningham to see the Recon First Sergeant." Jim had his formal face on now. The Corporal on duty asked if Jim had an appointment and Jim smart-assed him, asking if the First Sergeant was a doctor or a dentist. The Corporal got up and walked back to Pappy's new larger office. "I heard that Cunningham, I am thinking of putting in one of those number systems like they have back at San Diego in the post bakery." Each one laughed at the other and the orderly just shook his head and returned to his desk. "What's on your mind Jim?" When Jim told Pappy about Ken's idea the new First Sergeant thought for a moment and nodded. "We have been toying with that idea for about a month now. What has kept us wary is the lack of success the Army has had with the choppers doing air assaults." This was the first Jim was learning about the Army's use of helicopters.

"What kind of losses have they had?" Jim waited as Pappy caged his remarks to not sound hostile towards the Army. "Mostly crashes before delivering the troops. The losses have been hard, these are seasoned airborne troops and pilots; yet for some really unknown reason, no success." Jim let Pappy off the hook. "If we Recon's do it successfully then the Army will look incompetent, right?" "Exactly so; sometimes you

piss me off with your assessments. They are so on the nose, but couldn't you once be wrong?"

"Then I would be the First Sergeant instead of you." Both men looked at each other and what Pappy saw was a personal growth sitting right in front of him.

"Someday smart guy you are going to have someone just like you in your command." The old Pappy smile was there in all its glory. "I will be laughing all the way to the geedunk when that happens; and it will happen too, mark my words." "Yes First Sergeant I am sure you will too." "Jim, let me talk to the boss and to Major Wallace. Could your guys be ready by the next exercise to try this new maneuver? That is if I can gather up that many helicopters on short notice." "They most certainly can be. One day of on the ground training disembarking and recovering the munitions and we should be okay." "Now that is a great idea, do a training session on the ground first. Now that I can sell easily, thanks Jim, for everything." "Semper Fi, First Sergeant" and Jim stood turned and left Pappy with a bunch of new ideas.

"How did it go?" Ken was all excited. "Very well, I did not tell him it was your idea, in case it goes badly, I didn't want you to lose another stripe." Ken knew Jim was kidding, he would never say something like that seriously. "Pappy seemed genuinely interested, if it happens we will most likely do an on the ground exiting exercise to get used to getting out of the helicopter as it lands." "Makes sense, that's your idea right?" Jim just smiled; these two were getting closer and closer all the time.

Dinner was over, retreat had been played the stars and stripes lowered and it was again time for someone to share. When Jim returned to #15 it was over half filled with people. They too were anticipating the next person to share. Jim sent Danny and Thom to the other huts to let them know that sharing would begin in fifteen minutes. "Is Bozeman here?" "Yea Sarge, over by Ortega and Ott" was Arthur's return comment to Jim's question. "Good because you are up next, grab a footlocker and be ready. I told the other huts to be here in fifteen. Okay?" "I am ready as I ever will be."

"Hi and I have rehearsed this opening line in my head for over a week now." He shared what most every other one who has shared did before him. Be prepared so they would not embarrass themselves.

“My name is Arthur Bozeman from Jerome Idaho. I am here because of a choice I had to make.” A sigh came from his lips. “I had been having problems with my girlfriend’s father, who just happens to be the under-sheriff of Jerome County. She and I have been going together since seventh grade and the relationship is fine. Her mom is supportive but her dad is a suspicious character. A family court judge recommended that I get away for a while and suggested to me that the military is a good place to start a new life.” There, I finally got that said and off my chest.

“I did very well in school, especially high school and Jerome County JC. I was studying general sciences with an emphasis on physics courses. My girl friend also attends the JC and wants to be a librarian. She loves to read and goes to several of the homes with aged people and reads to them.” He had a picture in his mind of her reading at the county home. “My family consists of Mom and Dad, an older sister with one child, a girl. Her husband is the manager of a potato farm, now that is a tough job. Very hard work and migrant farm hands are not very reliable.”

Getting back on track. “My older brother Kenny had polio as a kid and walks with those hand crutches. He is really smart and wants to be a lawyer. Ken is the one who encouraged me to get involved with radio. We built these kits from a company in Texas called Radio Shack. I would climb onto the roof while he would listen for the best signal. There are not a lot of radio stations in Idaho. But we could pick up ones from New York and Alaska it was great fun and something he and I could do together.”

“One of my science teacher’s gave me a subscription to American Radio Relay League as a gift. It was better than Life magazine to me I loved it.” He had drifted again. “Oh about my family, we go to church regularly we all belong to the Lutheran Church, both my family and my girl friend’s too. It sometimes gets awkward if her dad happens to attend. My mom thinks the man is a jerk. My mom got us a post office box so I can send my girl letters without her father knowing about them. Her dad mostly throws his weight around because he can, as a small county law enforcement type. I think he is “dirty” and covering up some kind of illegal activities. I don’t know for sure so I don’t say anything.”

“My long-range plan is to go to U of Idaho and major in physics and then my girl and I can get the hell out of Idaho.” He thought for a moment and added. “My short



range goal is to keep from getting killed over here. I am looking forward to becoming an integral part of this Recon unit. There is a lot of talk out there about the exploits of the Recon teams. I hope to hear some of them and learn from your experiences. Thank you for listening, I know I forgot something real important but I can not remember what it could be.”

He bowed slightly and got a round of applause for his efforts.

## **Chapter Thirty-two**

### **Mission Three Coming Up**

The four units' that made up Recon Battalion One were getting antsy at the prospect of more training, rehearsals and planning. The least vocal of course were the ROK Marines, but little signs were showing there too. Like their US counter parts they too had trained and trained now they wanted to execute that training. Logistics were not a part of these enlisted men's concern. Fly us there we don't care on what; just get us to the target area. The general feeling by all involved was primarily, the longer we wait the more chance the enemy will have gotten ready for an assault.

Unfortunately, the following day brought more training. Today's training was at the K-6 flight line, far off in a corner of the facility. Two HRS-1 Sikorsky helicopters were sitting on a large PSP landing area. The troops in teams of six practiced exiting the choppers only door, which was on the right side of the chopper. These rotary aircraft reportedly held 12 persons, but not ten fully equipped for combat and demolition purposes.

Lift capacity of the HRS-1 was not too much of a concern. These are powerful aircraft, and the explosives and other demolition material took up a lot of space. Each airdrop container was a 36-inch cube and weighed over 190 pounds when loaded. Jockeying these out the door was a two-man job. The landing team would have to

secure the area and two of the team would remove the containers' from the chopper. Not a good plan.

An alternative plan was to fly the helicopter with a cargo sling carried beneath the aircraft. The demolition tools and explosives would be carried in the sling. This would reduce the forward speed of the aircraft somewhat. However, the advantage was two-fold. First, the cargo could be set down and the sling link released allowing the chopper to be clear of the cargo load, next, the chopper could touch down. The Recon teams' would exit the helicopters unencumbered. They would secure the area and the helicopters could depart in a minimum time over target.

The HRS-1 helicopter is a large, slow moving target and an easy target for a bazooka-equipped enemy. For all of their size, these helicopters were fragile flying machines. The less time they spent in a stationary position the better and safer for the pilot and crew.

One of the practice challenges was equipping the helicopter with its sling cargo container. This sling was very large and could fit around a Dodge Weapons Carrier or Ambulance and carry the cargo to anyplace it had to go. Loading the sling with six demolition containers was easy, unloading proved to be more of a challenge. Jim, Ken and Tyler were trying to put on a "good face" but somehow the frustration was growing.

Two officers in the ROK contingent asked Tyler if their unit could use the airdrop method using the C-119's. The other Recon Unit's could use whichever delivery method their headquarters determined best for them. "That may work for the ROK's but Kennedy will not be pleased nor will Sinclair" Jim was more than just thinking out loud.

Jim asked Tyler "Who would present that to HQ staff?" Tyler's answer was, as expected. "That is my job as the coordinator for this ROK unit." Jim furrowed his brow and Ken was shaking his head. Neither of them envied Tyler William's position, but knew that in his shoes they would present the idea as well. Ken said to both Tyler and Jim as well, "You know we all may be using the aircraft approach if we don't get any better at this helicopter stuff than we are today."

"This is only our first crack at using a chopper," said Jim. "It may take some getting used to but I see a lot of promise in them. We have to learn how to get those

damned containers out of the cargo sack faster.” Jim again was looking on the bright side of this new assault method.

On the way back to the Base Operations building for their ride back to Recon HQ Jim had a revelation. “We don’t need to use those airdrop containers. We can use the boxes that the C3 is shipped in. They are sturdy and only weigh forty-five pounds and can be handled easily by one person.” He was beaming from ear to ear and Ken was shaking his head. Poor Tyler was just happy that Jim had all of a sudden become visibly happy. “I thought this was going to be a long sad ride back to the hut, but I guess not.”

Tyler’s comment startled Jim for a moment and he was suddenly concerned that his mood had been so gloomy. “I hope my lousy attitude didn’t rub off on the teams.” Ken interjected at this point, “Those guys have so much confidence in your decisions and your ability to figure things out; they don’t get discouraged. Just look at them.”

The ride back to HQ was fun; the three teams were making fun of each other. The ROK Marines were pantomiming the US Marines getting up into and out the door of the choppers. The ROK Marines were physically smaller. They are shorter by several inches and much lighter in weight and very agile. They could actually put twelve persons into the hull of the chopper and still have room for cargo.

When that teasing was exhausted the ROK’s tormented the US guys with pretending to learn Korean. As with most things in the military you had to be there to appreciate the humor and the pathos. Language was less of a barrier than first thought.

Ken noticed it first and commented “These ROK Marines are much more relaxed when their officers were not around. Maybe we should invite them to the game room tonight.” “Sounds good to me, can I join too?” Tyler was playing the part of a kid left out of a sandlot ball game. “Sure, but after Kennedy and Sinclair get done with you, will you still want to play some chess?” “Oh my plan was to invite them to the game room and then tell them our plan.” “What the hell do you mean our plan, buddy you are on your own with that one.” Now Ken was becoming the playful one.

“Saved by the bell,” Jim said as he stood up, the bus was making the turn into the Recon area.

Sure enough the dogs were on patrol and the bus had to wait while the inner gates were closed and the dogs could not reach beyond the first row of barbed wire.

The gate arrangement was simple but clever; each half of opened gate closed the path that the MP's and the K-9's used. Even though the handler was right there with the dog, no one took any chances and waited before crossing the two rows of wire. "Recon Marines were brave but not stupid. Gee I wonder where I have heard that before?" That was Tyler Williams comment.

"Chow formation in 30 minutes, that's 1745 hours, and for Doc and Andy, the big hand" he was interrupted by an obscene finger gesture from the usually stoic Senior Corpsman Otto Schmidt. "Back atcha Doc," was Cunningham's quick reply.

Things were okay and getting back to normal, "Jim stop the damned worrying about everything little thing; it's all going to work out." More Jim Cunningham talking to himself, again.

Evening mess was not a quiet affair, the discussions that had started on the bus had continued during the meal. The ROK Marines were no longer eating as a separate unit but were intermingled among the US soldiers and US Marines. Interpreting was as hilarious as were the topics of conversation. Arms were swinging in the air and some were standing up to make a point. Others were just talking louder to make their point. Jin, Hyun, Ro and Chin kept the level of animation pretty high as the ROK Marines teased them about their funny accents. "Very American sounding pronunciations and very British singsong accents too you are all definitely tourists."

The other Marines in the mess hall were interested in the whole discussion, what are all these Korean's doing on a US Marine post? They did not learn anything from the discussion as it was mostly jabbing and teasing each other. This was really the first social interaction between the units, it was bound to become routine.

It was also obvious the Korean Marines knew what the US Recon's had accomplished on their previous missions. Jim decided he would leave the mess hall and straggle back to the hut. Before he could dump his tray and utensils half the group was getting up too. Ken would later comment that Jim was the pied piper and these were his faithful followers.

Everyone fell into the marching formation, Doc with his guidon and Ken was calling cadence. One more long parade around the Recon complex this time designed to walk off dinner and the prior festivities. There was more sharing to come after a thirty-

minute head call. More and more new faces were seen along the marching route. The HQ staff was growing but what were these new guys assigned to? When the marching units finally arrived at the huts, Jim announced that the two new members to share would be Marty Mancuso and Ernie Luring. Be back in #15 on time, Ken handed Jim a note that was pinned to #15's door. After reading the note, Jim read it out loud for all to hear.

"Tomorrow morning at 0800 in the Meeting Room Hut all Recon personnel including the ROK unit were to attend a mandatory briefing regarding the upcoming mission. US Army personnel are invited, attendance for them is optional." Jim as part of the emphasis to the note added; "The note is signed by Captain Sinclair." Since Jim had not dismissed the units there were no comments made to the directive. He now dismissed them and the four non-com unit leaders went into hut #15.

"I guess there will be no training exercises tomorrow, most of these meetings last two to three hours. What do you guys think?" Joe Werner was curious as to what prompted the meeting in the first place. "You and your teams were not at today's exercise. It seems we have some changes being implemented about getting to our new mission targets. I reckon the HQ folks have figured out how we are going to approach these new targets." Jim was summarizing the conversations and difficulties of today in a few sentences. Ken added quickly that he felt the helicopter approach was a tricky one since no one had demonstrated any successes. "The US Army had used them and was unimpressed with them as an assault vehicle." He let that sink in. "Now the Army was using them, as was the Marines, as medical air evacuation vehicle and successfully so."

As if to stifle the leaders conversation, a fairly large number of Marines and soldiers came through both the front and back doors of hut #15. Bunks and footlockers were moved into what was now a familiar sight. The men created an amphitheater of footlockers and bunks being used as seats. By putting three footlockers together side-by-side five guys could sit comfortably.

Ernie and Marty knew they were next to share and had decided to let Ernie go first. The usual method of "one, two, three shoot" was invoked and Luring lost.

"Good evening everyone, my name is Ernie Luring, mom still calls me Ernest, which I detest." He burped, "Excuse me. Chow was not that good the first time around,

but chewing on it the second time was pretty terrible.” He swallowed hard stifling another belch.

“I am 20 years old and was raised in Silverton, NJ on a large chicken farm. My grandfather owned the farm and the big farmhouse. My dad and mom also lived on the farm and we had our own smaller house.” Ernie had this picture in his mind and tossed it away. “Some folks think that living and working on a farm is glamorous and fun, that is a load of crap. My grandfather, during the war, had a contract with the war department to provide chickens for the military. We had to slaughter and dress, you know get the feathers off and the head and feet too, four and a half to five thousand chickens every week, six days a week.”

He fumbled a little bit finally putting his hands in his utilities pockets. “The chickens never got real big, they had to fit in a number ten tin can, that’s the size of a tomato juice can. The filled cans were then picked up by a Campbell Soup Company tractor-trailer, which also dropped off another empty five thousand empty cans, and driven to their plant in Camden. That’s where they put the tops on the cans after adding some chicken broth.” His hands now were out of his pockets.

“Everything we owned smelled like either chicken guts or chicken manure, the smell of ammonia was everywhere. Honest, I can still smell the place right here and now.”

“I had the usual schooling, most of it was boring except science. The best part was being able to do homework on the bus. After high school I was going to study to be a pharmacist, but the only school of pharmacy was way up in Newark over an hour away. Besides that, they wanted nine dollars a credit to go there. I didn’t want to buy the school I wanted only go there. Instead of pharmacy, for two years and next to free, I went to Ocean County JC and studied general science. Oh yes, I have an older brother who was deferred during the big war because of the farm contract. I also have three younger sisters.”

“Our church affiliation is with the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod; mom is a regular and dad not so much. We kids went so we could get in some playtime with the other kids. Farm kids all say the same thing, no farming after I graduate. It doesn’t matter if it is high school or college.” Ernie was finally relaxing.

“My girl friend and my mother would like me to become a science teacher, they both say that I am good with kids. I don’t know about that. The only thing I have ever taught was a Summer Vacation Bible Class to a bunch of elementary school kids. My girl friends mom is a widow; her husband was killed in some kind of an explosion in PA. No one ever talks about it or him. Her mother works in our Ocean County offices something to do with the council and the court system.”

Time to wrap this up he told himself. “Someone mentioned in boot camp about having the GI Bill of Rights to help pay for our education after an enlistment is up. If anyone can show me where to get that information, I would be very grateful.” Jim made a note to get that info for Ernie, in Jim’s ever-present memo pad.

“Thanks for listening and lets all be well and get home safe and sound.”

“Hey Ernie, ya got any pictures of your sisters?” Ortega was at it again. “Yeah I surely do Mario. The girls are pretty picky though, and insist their boyfriends be good looking, too bad for you.” With that he sat down and motioned for Marty to take over.

“Hi I am, as Ernie just said, Marty, Marty Mancuso, I am 21 years old from Philadelphia, PA. I attended Temple University but financial difficulties cut my classes and studies in half, as I had to work part time to help pay my tuition.

“My dad is a veteran of the US Army in WW II and fought in the battle of the bulge, with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. He and his buddies jumped into France on D-Day. He still suffers from wounds and injuries he received in that battle.” Marty looked at the assembled faces, they somehow look different from up here on this footlocker. “Dad drives a city bus and hopes the union will let him get into management. Not too likely but he always has hope, always.”

“Dad positively hates General Patton and doesn’t like the recognition he keeps getting from people who never saw George S. Patton in action. Dad sees him as a blowhard and a braggart. Patton claimed to be for the troops but was only concerned with his own image. General Montgomery is also high on dad’s shit list. Mostly because of Monty’s lack of planning for the airborne invasion called “Market Garden”. A lot of troops, Brits, Yanks and Dutch died unnecessarily because the brass did not listen to the boots on the ground.”

“During the war my mother worked at the Philly Navy Shipyard and when the war ended so did the job. Getting another job was tough for her but she landed one working for the Philadelphia Sports Authority, she still works there. Her job is to introduce new sports clubs to the Greater Philadelphia area and promote the opportunities for their success. She is currently working on a project to bring a pro hockey team in the city. She loves her work and the interesting people she meets.”

“I don’t have a girl friend, I would like to have one but I am too busy, and too broke to afford one. My family and I are Roman Catholic, the Masses are said in Italian and Latin, the whole magilla. My church smells like the old country. At least that’s what the elderly parishioners tell me; you know, warm bread, meatballs, sausage and spaghetti gravy. Ummm, I can smell it even now.”

Marty stopped his talk, closed his eyes and inhaled like people do when they enter a bakery. “Can you guys smell those smells, out of this world.”

Some of the seated audience inhaled with Marty, it sounded strange but some came up smiling after the inhalation. “I attended Parochial schools for all twelve grades. I had to go the public school for kindergarten after that it was all nuns, priests and brothers.” Marty was thinking about his family; he was slightly homesick. “I have an older sister and a younger brother, both think the best thing I have ever done is to become a US Marine. They love having their pictures taken with me in my Dress Blues, I agree with them.”

“Originally I joined and wanted sea duty, but in boot camp I scored real well on the range and was offered sniper training. Dad told me to never turn down an opportunity the Marines offer you; the DI’s are trained and look for traits that you can’t possibly see. Well I took to that Springfield ’03 rifle like a duck to water. I had never seen or even handled any kind firearm in my life. The only people in Philly that have guns are the criminals.”

“I do miss sitting around the little corner deli listening to the WW II vets talking about the war and what the down days were like. One guy told me the hardest days he had were the days off the line. He said that all he wanted to do, after he got some sleep and chow, was to go back to the fight and get the war over with. I will know better about stuff like that in a few days I guess.” Relaxed now, and feeling calmer he added.



“Well that is it for me, I hope to fit in with this unit and not always be the “new guy” and earn your respect as a unit sniper. Aaroogah and Semper Fi.”

Marty jumped off the footlocker, made a perfect feet together parachutist’s landing, and was greeted with slaps on his butt as he went back to take his seat.

From the back of the assembled group someone asked what time lights out was, Jim answered at 2200 hours. “Good, who’s up for some shuffleboard?” He got some takers and off several of them went to the game room. “Let’s go get the ROK Marines.” The remainder either stayed and chatted with friends or grabbed their toilet kit and headed for the showers. “It looks like business as usual Jim,” Ken was assessing how relaxed the guys all seemed.

“Even with an 0800 meeting they all appear to be pretty calm, what do you think Joe?” “Yea Jim, I guess the only ones concerned about the damned meeting is us.” Jim had to agree, “I was going to write a letter tonight but I guess I will wait to see what the morning brings.” Ken looked at Joe and said, “I rest my case about who does the worrying.”

Joe and Ken were still laughing as they went through the back or Avenue B door of hut #15.

Reveille came as it always did at 0600 hours and the troops always acted like it was a big surprise. Shit, shower, shave and shine was the order of the day. Jim pulled an inspection at 0700 before going to the mess hall. Not one person was giggered for anything out of order. These guys are good and the newbie’s are fitting right in too. Outside the weather was still cold but not the biting stuff of last month, the wind here was nowhere near as harsh as it is up north.

The routine was unchanged, march to chow, salute the raising of the colors, eat chow, but today they went directly to the meeting room arriving at 0750 hours. The units’ formed up outside the mess hall and marched all of two hundred feet to the meeting. Some routines are not to be tampered with, so they didn’t.

Inside the meeting room was Recon First Sergeant Papushka and Battalion First Sergeant Kennedy. Neither looked any different today then before their promotions. Of course Pappy had one additional lower stripe now, but he still looked like the same old Gunny. Probably always would look that way too.

When everyone was seated Pappy took to the lectern. “We have had several requests and suggestions for changes to our next mission day.” Jim and Ken looked over at Tyler, who just smiled back at them. “There is little reason to believe that the Chicoms or the NK’s know we are coming after these storage tunnels.” He turned to the flip chart and showed a high altitude photo of the Yellow Sea coastline. “The movement of troops and armor are away from our targeted areas. The enemy is marshalling up and down the west coast of North Korea. It looks as if they are anticipating either an amphibious landing or a massed airdrop.” Pappy let that sink in just a bit.

“Now one of your non coms has suggested this next jewel.” He looked directly at Tyler who stared right back at the First Sergeant. “Here is his plan. The ROK Marines are to use the C-119’s for a traditional airdrop of cargo and personnel.” Pause for effect. “The US Recon Teams One and Three would use the HRS-1’s with a cargo bag to carry the demolition tools. The helicopters would land, discharge the teams and then depart. Time on target is estimated at 10 minutes tops for the choppers and crew.”

“That is the big picture,” Pappy flipped the page and continued. “Staff Sergeant Cunningham has solved a major flaw in our previous training for this mission. His proposal is to not use the cargo containers, because of their size, weight and bulk.” Pappy watched as the heads of the troops turned to look for Cunningham. “He proposes we leave the C3 in its original wood shipping boxes. That reduces the weight the chopper has to lift and allows for a faster unloading of the sling cargo net.”

What he saw in the faces of the teams was a lot of agreement of Jim’s suggestion. “I see some agreement to the Cunningham plan, is that right?” “Yes First Sergeant” was the response. “Good, because immediately after this meeting the US Recon units’, except for the “I & I” unit, will return to the helicopter landing area. You are going to do a full scale rehearsal using four HRS-1 with boxes to simulate the explosives in cargo carrier slings.”

No one seemed surprised when Pappy had explained the rehearsal; most were expecting some kind of additional training for themselves. “Okay this meeting will be a short one, I want you out at the flight line in one hour.” Pappy’s pause was a ploy to check again the expressions on the Marines faces. “I will be joining you to measure the level of performance and determine if this method is going to be workable.”

He shrugged his shoulders and called the room to attention. "The bus will be at the OR platform in thirty minutes, get your gear and lets find out if these changes work." He then barked, "Dismissed." The two Master Sergeants left the room and the rest of the men fell in on the road to march back to their huts and get their weapons and gear. During the march back Jim and Ken reminded the men to bring two canteens of water and whatever K-rations they had leftover.

The bus ride to Base Ops was silent, the couple of attempts at humor fell flat and no one tried to sustain any conversation. The ROK Marines were also headed for the flight line on a separate bus; they were to board two C-119's to do a separate rehearsal jump. Their method of extraction would be using helicopters; the size of their unit would require at least three or four choppers. This could be an interesting day.

Instead of dropping the Recon Units at Base Operations, the "Follow Me" jeep lead the bus in front of the Aircraft Control Tower and past the POL dump to the Helicopter Landing Pad Area. There were four HRS-1's with their engines running and blades turning very slowly. Almost like slow motion. The pilots later informed the troops that the rotors were put into "neutral" to conserve the engine and extend its life by not having the blades engaged.

Today's exercise was to take place outside of the MAG 12 Base. The Recon units One and Three would load up six into each HRS-1 and be transported to a remote area where the cargo slings were laying empty. The exercise was for the men to load the cargo slings with the demolition boxes, twenty boxes in each sling. That gross weight would be the equivalent of four fully equipped Marines. Each helicopter would carry six men of each unit, plus the cargo on a short, twenty-mile hop. The cruising altitude would be at one thousand feet. At the target area the helicopter would locate the landing zone, descend to the cargo sling extended height, and put the sling on the ground. When the pilot released the connecting link, the cables would fall to the ground. The helicopter would move away from the cargo sling area, about one hundred feet, and land to let the Recon teams exit the helicopter.

The teams would go to an area outside of the rotor downdraft and dump their packs and extra gear. Keep your weapons. Two snipers and one radioman would setup as perimeter observers. The remaining eight demolition men of each unit would wait for

the helicopter to depart and then they would retrieve the boxes of demolition equipment and the other supplies. Each Corpsman would stay with the unit's backpacks and gear. The two helicopters were expected to land about two hundred feet apart far enough distance, so the "rotor wash" would not interfere with the men during recovery of the cargo.

When Pappy and Kennedy had finished their instructions, there were no questions, thank you. Jim and Ken put their heads together to fine tune the instructions given. How to divvy up the men? Each unit leader needed to pick one of their men to be a surrogate leader for the other half of the team when aboard the helicopters.

Jim had no problem picking his lead man that would be Bruce Strong, not only was Bruce a thoughtful Marine, he had good people skills. It did not hurt one bit that he also carried the BAR and was becoming an expert demolition man. Bruce's team would have Mario, the sniper, Sean on the radio, with Danny, Ernie and Chou as his demolition team. Jim would have Doc, Thom on radio, Mel as his sniper and Willie, Charlie and himself as the demolition team.

Ken selected MJ Cook as his lead man, mostly based on MJ's work in the large tunnel during the last mission. He made some very mature decisions and is a hard worker. MJ's team would be Andy the corpsman, Louie as sniper, with Julian, Chin and Artie as the demolition team. Ken's team would have Marty as sniper, Wallie on BAR, and the demolition team of Tony, Steve and Ira.

Jim and Ken did a run down of each other's list and discovered that Ken had no radio coverage. Remembering the men who had recently shared, Jim grabbed his notes and told Ken, "Artie is a Ham radio operator. How about we give him Thom's radio gear, this way Morgan can help with unloading of the cargo net." "Let's give it a try." Looking directly into Jim's face, Ken added, "That sharing stuff really helps a lot." Ken lowered his voice and spoke directly to Jim. "At first I thought it was a bunch of crap. But after I got into it, especially when I shared. It was not just therapeutic but the guys understand us better."

"Hell this is a live exercise, let's find out how everyone does their job in this new small team action." Ken was actually excited about today's exercise.

## Chapter Thirty-three

### Plans versus Reality

The bus ride from Base Operations back to Recon HQ was like a high school senior trip. Everyone was feeling good, happy for the most part many were even playful. Ken and Jim were seated together in the back of the bus comparing notes; Jim as usual had notes about his notes. Ken on the other hand had some notes scribbled on a two three-by-five filing cards, some of his writing was undecipherable. The two patrol leaders good-naturedly made fun of the each other. Today's field exercise was a live evaluation of the helicopter method of inserting troops into a target zone, unloading the cargo nets, and simulating blowing up a tunnel complex.

The team member selection was judged to be satisfactory. Both Bruce Strong and MJ Cook performed their jobs well. The team's responded very well to the instructions and directions they received from these two new leaders. The chopper ride at one thousand feet was much different than in an enclosed aircraft. This ride was noisy and bumpy, not good characteristics for men that were used to a less confining airplane ride. These cramped quarters made for some interesting comments. Those by the door claimed to be 'freezing their asses off' while the ones away from the door could not see anything.

The person that was quoted as saying "Complaining troops are happy troops" is full of crap according to MJ Cook. MJ's quote was "Complaining troops are a pain in the ass no matter what the circumstances are." MJ made one attempt to move some of his

team around while in flight. That effort produced just more complaining and the next time someone wanted to move or change positions MJ threatened to shoot the complainer.

Both Jim and Ken got a chuckle out of that story when they heard it later at the K-ration lunch breaks. Ken pretended to count heads to see if MJ hadn't already shot somebody. They all laughed, especially MJ, leadership had its moments, some of them good ones, the others you had to forget about. Ken also knew that he had made the right decision when he selected Corporal Cook to be that team's leader.

At the lunch break, Ken and Jim swapped radio contacts with each other on how each unit was making out with the new teams and unloading systems. Ken had Jim laughing when he related the MJ story about shooting a complainer. Of course both units were working on the same channel, so everyone heard the comments. Some tried to guess which guy the complainer could have been, most were convinced it was Luigi Rossellini. MJ wouldn't say who it was and neither would Ken push the issue.

The landing area for troop insertion was a mile from the target zone. The boxes of C3 were humped individually over that distance and required more than a few trips. The two snipers and the radioman were exempt from the carry detail. Both Ken and Jim wished they had thought of having the wheeled cart or the sleds to be able to haul more than one case at a time. There was no snow here but the sled would have made traversing the rocky ground easier.

Once unloading the cargo net began it was only matter of a few minutes until the nets were emptied and the helicopters departed each site. That part of this operation went pretty smooth.

When half of the cargo had been transported from the landing zone to the target zone, one of the snipers was relieved from protecting the "Landing Zone" and was moved to the "Target Zone". The need for protection shifted from one area to the other, a sniper was needed to guard and protect the newly moved cases of C3 and the men hauling them. One more detail not covered in the planning sessions. "That is why we are doing a rehearsal" would be Pappy's comment, Jim was certain of it. The rest of the exercise went well. The little cave that was the target zone provided shelter from the late winter wind and blowing dirt.

Using the Japanese miners lamps some of the men searched the cave. These are pretty interesting, but why were they dug out in the first place. Both Chin Lee and Ro Chou had varying opinions about them. Both considered them rest areas for travelers from the early part of the century. Most of the openings were not natural, they had been humanly hacked out of this low mountain and no road could be seen nearby. That made the traveler assumption a wild guess. This was another mystery to ponder and to discuss at a more leisurely time, "Hell let's ask Mr. and Mrs. Park, they would surely know."

One of the items that were working as expected was the VHF/UHF radio. Prior to this most of the radio contact had been with aircraft flying overhead. Today the two groups were separated by more than twenty miles and could not see each other, yet the radio contact was superb. If there were aircraft overhead monitoring the exercise, no one was saying. In this war there was always some kind of plane in the air surveying the area. These aircraft were looking for easy targets or as the flyboys called them, "low hanging fruit." Just so long as they don't mistake us for Chicom's all will be well. This exercise was only a short distance from the DMZ and not an unlikely area for infiltrators from the North.

At 1500 hours an aircraft overhead announced that the exercise was over. The helicopters were inbound to each target zone with an ETA of fifteen minutes. Everyone scrambled to gather the stuff they had laying around and put on their gear and backpacks. C3 crates were left inside the two caves; the crates had been filled with sandbags that weighed the required forty-five pounds. Whoever may find the crates in the cave could have them, sand and all at no charge. These were a free gift from the US Marine Corps.

The helicopters arrived on schedule; they could be heard miles away from the target zone. It was hard to determine which direction at first but by the time anyone figured that out, they were right on top of the zone. To a ground pounder Marine, these sure looked like tempting targets. Everyone wanted to climb on board and get the hell out of there. MJ had to remind his team that this exercise was on "Our side of the DMZ", so relax. He noted that in the next week or so, this insertion will be for real and on the

Chicom held side of the DMZ plus a hundred or so miles. Some of the new men got sober in a hurry.

Surprisingly, once aboard the choppers, the four teams were rather quiet. This exercise had been tiring work. They all had been crammed into a noisy, smelly helicopter for an hour or so flight to the Landing Zone. A quick mental review of the day's effort explained why so many were so tired.

Once at the LZ, the rotorcraft would hover for a few minutes. It would lower its' cargo net and release the connection and then land. The troops aboard would exit the chopper and unload the net. When the net was empty one of the Recon team would reattach the cargo net cable connector to the hovering helicopter.

After the helicopter departed, the pile of cargo was moved from the LZ to the target zone. All of it hand carried, one forty-five pound box at a time. All the while each fully armed Marine had to be alert for a surprise attack from the enemy. The reality was to simulate a real insertion and iron out the "bugs" in a controlled environment. No one wanted to iron them out under enemy fire or some other adverse condition. It was no real surprise that many of the men were so tired at the end of the exercise.

The helicopter ride back to base seemed shorter, maybe because so many of the Recon teams fell into a nap like mode once off the ground. Sleep and rest when you can, this is a soldier or a Marine's best friend.

The bus was pulling into the Recon HQ area. As always, the vehicle must wait for the guard dogs' to be isolated and the second gate opened. Then the bus could drive through to the Orderly Room platform. There was no heroes welcome home today, only a message for Ken and Jim to see the First Sergeants in the OR at 2000 hours. Each Patrol Leader was to bring his notes from today's exercise to the meeting. "Oh crap Jim, I don't take notes like you do, and Pappy is going to have my butt, again."

"Don't sweat it Ken, when the guys get back to the hut, question each one about his part in the exercise. You will have more info than you could ever want." "See that, I don't think like that, but I guess I had better start thinking that way." "Ken, just be yourself, if you think for one minute that either of these Master Sergeants ever took notes during an exercise, let alone a mission, you're crazy. They are mostly pulling our chains, just don't let them see you are in any way worried."



Ken slapped Jim on the top of Jim's helmet as a way of thanking him. They each departed for their respective hut at a fast walk. As fast as anyone can walk when weighed down with a full combat load at the end of a tough day's work.

The mood in the huts was positive, the heads and showers were the same; jubilation about how successful the exercises went today. The "I&I" teams were interested in how the training went; they could see a real need for this kind of transportation on their missions. Only the positive aspects of using helicopters were mentioned. A shower and some clean clothes and the smells of oil and exhaust gases and the cramped space on the ride into the Landing Zone was a forgotten story.

MJ could only shake his head, the biggest complainers were now extolling the virtues of helicopter insertions; go figure. Jim and Ken still used the enlisted men's head and showers instead of using the Non-Com facilities. This only bothered those non commissioned officers that were not involved with the Reconnaissance units themselves. To Jim and Ken both, the closeness of the unit's was a primary concern, not the trappings that being a Non Commissioned Officer brought. These Recon units were their families and they were sticking together, both Pappy and Kennedy avoided any mention of Jim and Ken relocating.

Cleaned up for the march to late chow and in a mild but windy thaw the units' all moved out. The US Army soldiers were interested in the day's events but were waiting to be included into the conversation. After all this time and shared experiences, the soldiers still maintained their military distance. They were after all is said and done, not Marines. Let alone Recon Marines.

During chow some of the seasoned Recon unit were sharing with individual soldiers the events of the day. The discussion took on the same characteristics of the personal sharing. Soon other tables and chairs were pulled into a sort of circle, so everyone could hear what the exercise had been like.

Sergeant Holloway came into the mess hall looking for Jim and Ken; he informed them that the temporary team leaders from today's exercise should accompany them to the meeting with the two First Sergeants. MJ and Bruce were notified of this request and both looked as if they had flunked out of boot camp, utter fear was on their faces. The ribbing began immediately, of course started by the units' chief antagonist Corporal

Mario Ortega. "That's what you get for sucking up to the Patrol Leaders guys, you should have known better."

Even the soldiers were concerned until Ken put an end to the harassment, even though he was enjoying the show.

"Pappy will ask you a couple of questions and maybe Kennedy will too. These are regular Marines, they have done what you are doing." Jim was almost to a point of parenting these two Corporals. Ken jumped in and told them. "Neither of the 'First's' is out to embarrass or belittle you in any way, relax." "Besides," Jim added, "Staff Sergeant Daro and I are there to protect and defend you both." MJ and Bruce saw the humor in that last statement and began to laugh at themselves.

No games tonight, everyone was dead tired and had weapons to clean, utilities, underwear and socks to set aside for the laundry and K-rations to hide away until the next exercise. As vile as these rations were, the unit members always wanted to have an extra day or more meals' in reserve. On each exercise that used rations, they each slipped several more meals into their backpacks, "You know, just in case."

For the first time in weeks the units did not march back to their huts. They instead straggled back in groups of three and four, a mixture of Marines and Army. The marching was missed but somehow it was better left for those days when there had been no mission rehearsal or such.

At 1945 hours Jim called Ken on the radio and the four men joined together outside of the two huts for the walk to the Orderly Room. The Charge of Quarters was doing some paper work as they entered. He told the four of them that First Sergeant Kennedy was waiting for them and the First Sergeant Papushka was getting coffee from the mess hall. "Pappy is serving coffee to the troops, look out fellas here it comes." Ken was just finishing his comment when Pappy came through the door with a steel pitcher and a bag of goodies. "You were saying Staff Sergeant Daro?" Pappy had not heard the whole comment but he knew when to set somebody up. "Just surprised that you were the coffee server First Sergeant."

"Well, this may be a long meeting so I figured black coffee would be needed." Pappy was setting them up for something, but what? "The bag has cookies, candy and stuff from my kids school, they packed a goodie box for me. Ain't that nice?" The Recon

First Sergeant was beaming like a dad at his kid's recital. "Okay, let's see what Kennedy is up to. When I left him he was trying to reach the Commander of the HMR 161 chopper squadron in Taegu."

The First Sergeant was leading the parade to the conference room that was between Pappy and Kennedy's offices. First Sergeant Kennedy could be heard through the closed door. The voice was too muffled to be able to hear anything clearly. "Don't worry, whatever he is talking about, he will fill you in completely, no need to eaves drop." Ken smiled, as that was exactly what he was doing. Pappy just smiled back.

On the wall closest to Pappy's office was a large map of North Korea; it was brand new and in color. "Just like the ones in The National Geographic Magazine" was MJ's comment. "That is where I got it from Corporal Cook, very observant. My wife included it in the package we are dining from tonight."

When First Sergeant Kennedy came into the room, his face was expressionless. No give-away from this man, his thoughts are private. "Gentlemen, I would like to review today's exercise and the pros and cons of using the HRS-1 for your following missions." The man was all business and there was no question about the topic for the evening. Jim opened his thigh notebook pad, and saw Pappy trying to read Jim's printing upside down. The temptation to turn the pad so the First could read it passed and Jim started to read from his notes.

When Jim had finished Kennedy asked Cook if he agreed with everything Jim had said. MJ said smartly, "No not everything First Sergeant, the guys in the chopper I was in were restless and on edge until we dropped the cargo net." Corporal Cook did not want to be a rubber stamp for Jim. Nor did he want the First Sergeants' to think that these chopper rides were some kind of a fun outing.

"Well how did you handle that situation of restlessness Corporal?" Pappy was now the enquirer. "I promised to shoot the next person who complained, that was what I told them." "Good work Corporal Cook, that was exactly the right thing to do." Pappy was only slightly teasing. "MJ, I asked that because I overheard some of the team talking about the incident in the game room. You have earned a lot of respect in a short time and on just one day's excursion. Keep up the good work."

Kennedy pushed his cup of coffee around the table pondering something in his head. "I am waiting for the BCO and the CO to call me, they should have finished their meeting in Taegu by now. Let's wait another five minutes for them to contact us." Jim, Ken and the two Corporals did not dare look at each other. This could not be good news; it almost never was in situations like this. Holloway stuck his head into the conference room doorway. "The bosses need to speak with either of the Firsts or both if convenient." Of course it was always convenient in the Marine Corps to be available when your command structure requests it. Both First Sergeants left the meeting and went to Kennedy's office.

The voices were muffled and indistinguishable, no one sounded agitated or angry, not that that was a surprise. In less than five minutes both Master Sergeants returned to the meeting room. Their faces were unreadable although Pappy seemed to show a slight smile on his face. "Well gentlemen, the missions are back on schedule, you will be ready to go in six days." Kennedy did not go any further and looked from face to face at the Recon team members. "Your next missions will be by plane, not helicopters. The folks at HMR 161 gave Major Wallace and Captain Sinclair some real life examples of helicopter warfare and its limitations."

"Pappy why don't you finish with some of the details?" Ken, Jim, MJ and Bruce's heads all turned to the other end of the table to look at M/Sgt Papushka. "As you men have found out over the last few days, these helicopters are cramped and may be okay for a short run, both in miles and time." Pappy was his usual serious leader, "Our missions, actually your missions, require no less than twelve members, including a medic and a patrol leader. Leaving ten to execute the demolition and site security. This would, according to HMR 161 planners require at least four HRS-1 choppers to transport your team over one hundred miles using an aircraft carrier as the launching and landing platform."

Pappy took a sip of coffee and extracted a raisin wafer cookie from its package. He passed the now opened package to Ken who also took one and passed it to MJ. Pappy continued his message. "We have the carriers, we have the choppers and we have the personnel to pull this off. We lack one thing, time. We need to get these tunnels blown and move on to the next series of targets. The Park family has ID'd no

less than twenty major target tunnels and a total of eighty that have good possibilities. If the North Koreans and the Chicom sign a cease-fire or some other agreement we will have to stop these missions. These tunnels need to be made unusable. Is that really a word?" "If you said it is then it is Sergeant," was Bruce's flip comment.

"James, I like this kid more and more all the time, I have no idea why you don't like him all that much." Pappy was changing the tone of his speech and also trying to get his team more relaxed. It did not work. "We all recognize how hard you have all worked at learning to use these helicopters. We just are not in a proficient enough place to use them on these dangerous missions." He looked directly at Jim and asked. "Is this a hindrance or a help to your teams effectiveness Cunningham?"

"Neither Sarge, we were effective using the C-119's and the LCVP extraction methods, the choppers were an added dimension." "Christ Jim, you sound like an officer already. Have you been hanging around Lt. Northcutt?" "Sorry to say Sarge but no, did my answer sound like I was trying to be a big shot or something?"

Kennedy jumped in at this point, "No Jim, I think Pappy expected more of an argument and less agreement with the continuing the missions using transports instead of helicopters." "Sergeant Kennedy, if you and First Sergeant Papushka tell us to attack these sites using Piper Cubs, we would do that as well. The guys just want to get back to work. We know our jobs and somehow enjoy doing just that. The details are not for us to judge or pre-judge."

Ken's head was bobbing like someone at a Halloween party ducking for apples. The two Corporals were stunned at the conversation and were determined to just be quiet. Bruce had all kinds of things he wanted to ask Ken and Jim, but after the meeting would be time enough. He also wondered if Kennedy really didn't like him and how do I find out something like that? Shut up stupid, just sit here and listen and learn.

"Before the BCO and the CO went to Taegu, we had two alternatives to using the helicopter approach." Sergeant Kennedy was now going to explain the next series of missions. "You have proven that the airdrop method works, and works well. We have always had that as a given. Now that we know some of the restrictions of helicopter insertion; those difficulties can be worked on simultaneously with the operational missions."

Kennedy looked for some acceptance of this information and got none. “The three units currently on base will be the primary tools of this command.” He still saw only blank looks on the faces of the four leaders. “It is now our intention to let someone else figure out how to use the chopper approach. Our missions will be to blow up every tunnel we can find in the next six to seven months.

Ah ha, Strong has a question, “What is it Corporal Strong?” “Sarge, why is there a time limit or a date limit on these operations?” “Good question, again I will go back to the so called “peace talks”. As long as the Chicoms can win the delay game the better it is for us. The political side wants this over now, at least our Washington D.C. types do.”

He did not state this out loud but the JOC in Japan wanted a cease-fire also. The war disrupted their humanitarian efforts, which were ill, conceived and even more poorly executed. Their plan was to feed the North Koreans and win their hearts by not bombing and further disrupting the political climate. They would eventually underestimate the puppet government in the North.

Kennedy was getting into an area of discussion he needed to get away from, “Our missions will reconvene in six days from today. The ROK unit will experience no changes; each of your units One and Three will resume training as if this past few days never happened. There will be no more practice jumps or field training exercises.” The four of them smiled; just like me they hate training exercises. “Do any of you have any religious objections to begin the next mission on a Sunday? Good, I like no objections.”

Pappy started to get up and Kennedy reached over and grabbed a couple of cookies from Pappy’s stash. “He thought he was going to run away without me having some of his treats.” The two Staff Sergeants saw the humor but the two Corporals were still watching the Battalion First Sergeant intently.

“Go ahead gentlemen, help yourself, Pappy can tell his kids how he shared their gifts with his men. Can’t ya do that Pap?” “Whatever you say James, go ahead take the food right out of my mouth.” Pappy was showing his warm side again, be careful. “Do you also want to read the cards and stuff they put in the box?” Pappy laughed when Kennedy made a hand gesture and said. “Nah, all that mush stuff drives me crazy.” Kennedy then turned to MJ and Bruce, “Oh one more thing, you two Corporals are now officially assistant Patrol Leaders and will assume those roles effective immediately.”

The two Marine Corporals were not sure what that meant but now was not the time to question either of the First Sergeants, "Thank you Sergeant Kennedy," Bruce was the first to respond. "Yes, thank you both was Cook's added comment." "You both earned the job and your Patrol Leaders will tell you what your assignments are tomorrow. As soon as we tell them." He then turned to Pappy and asked, "What time do you want to meet with Jim and Ken Pappy?" "Lets do that after the CO's return so we don't have to re-chew our instructions and assignments, okay?" "Okay by me, you gentlemen are dismissed until you hear from us sometime tomorrow. Get some sleep, all of you. Good night."

The four excused Non Coms left the Orderly Room and wished the CQ a "good night." They all walked back to their respective hut, silently, no one said a single word but the wheels were turning in each one's head.

Jim told Strong that he would put off telling the unit about the new Assistant Patrol Leader assignment until morning. This way everyone will be together before mess call; Bruce agreed whole-heartedly. When they entered hut #15 everyone was waiting for them and wanted to know what was said at the meeting. Jim announced Bruce Strong's becoming the Assistant Patrol Leader and then told Bruce to bring everyone up-to-date. With clarity and no nonsense voice Bruce covered the meat of the meeting. He even included the playfulness of Pappy and Kennedy.

Jim was impressed with Bruce's recall ability. Jim was checking his notes and Bruce's mental list matched Jim's written list almost exactly. Bruce's final words were for everyone to get good nights sleep; then he added "Conditioning will begin tomorrow at 0900 at the PT Area." A few obligatory groans were heard and ignored by both Jim and Bruce. "Good job Bruce, tomorrow we can see about getting you moved to the other cubicle." "Ummm, let's talk about that in the morning" was Bruce's reply.

The morning head call and shower was like a celebration of each one congratulating Bruce and MJ on their new assignments. "Hold off guys was MJ's approach, we have no idea what the brass expects of either of us in this job." Most did not care what the job was, only that two of their original unit was recognized as leaders.

Early breakfast and back to the hut after a march around the area. The ROK Marines were anxious to know about the missions'. Jim and Ken told them what they

could and about the BCO and the CO arriving later today to give all the units the what, when and where and who of the next missions.

Bruce and MJ took it upon themselves to organize the exercise routines for this mornings PT time. Jim and Ken were happy to turn that over to the two assistants. Now all Jim and Ken had to do was to follow the instructions from these two and do the routines. A good deal for them. The ground was getting less muddy, the cold had moderated and left a spring like effect at this hour of the morning. The usual muddy areas were covered with some hay-like covering; actually it was the stalks from the rice fields called chaff. Whatever it was it worked well, very little slipping and sliding when coming off the landing net and the slide ropes.

Running was also not too bad, the grading had not been done yet, but the paths were well outlined and covered with the rice chaff. The track was not exactly Olympic quality but was suitable for the teams to stay in top shape. At 1000 hours was the ROK Marines and Unit Two's time for PT. Of course the two units' got there early enough to harass the units' using the PT area. Each day the four groups became more and more compatible. Since the Army soldiers were split up between the two Recon demolition units they too received and gave the harassment.

As the units swapped places in the PT area, a runner from the Orderly Room arrived with messages for the four patrol leaders. A meeting is scheduled for 1300 hours for ALL units. The US Army is again welcome to attend, and it is your choice. Recon units bring your notepads, maps and radios to the meeting. Sidearms are the only weapons permitted; bows, arrows and spears are definitely excluded. The orders were signed by the XO, maybe this will be a fun meeting, or as usual, maybe not.

Jim noticed during lunch that the conversation was not about the meeting but what kind of assignments MJ and Bruce were to be given. Unexpected enthusiasm about this new position and the guys liked it a lot. The soldiers expressed amazement at the way the Marine Corps promotes or recognizes its' members, the Army is much more formal and rigid in the way it does acknowledgements. Every US soldier was going to attend the meeting at 1300 hours, although they did not contribute to any discussion. Being included was considered by them to be an honor.



Everyone was seated in the Meeting Room and the guidon was in its stand by the first row of tables. Doc always had the same seat in the front row to the left of the podium with the flagstaff and guidon at his side. He took as good care of this flag as the Marines took of their weapons and ammo. In truth, he too was a Marine, his pay came from the Navy but everything else was Eagle, Globe and Anchor.

The officer contingent consisted of seven officers, all familiar faces. The BCO and the CO lead the way with Lt. Northcutt between them and the spook officers both Naval and Marine Corps. After the usual "attenhut, at ease, be seated" the BCO took the microphone and began the meeting.

"A lot to cover today men, let me first congratulate you on your efforts to learn the techniques of helicopter insertions." He looked up from his notes to look at every man in the room. "The failure was not yours but the limitations of the helicopter itself. That issue is being addressed at Quantico and by 1955 we should have an answer." He got the levity he aimed for, "Hell in three years even the Marine Corps could make helicopter insertion a reality. They have only been working on this program since 1947, be patient." Now he got a lot of laughter.

"Next item is for those of you who were wounded or injured on your last mission, you are to report to the Base Infirmary for a full physical. I do not need Nurse Barrow harassing me about this item. This physical also includes all of the US Army soldiers who were formerly held as prisoners." The Major looked at Emil Mankewicz for and received an acknowledging nod, "Thank you Corporal."

"The next missions for the Recon Demolition Units are to be using C-119's for a cargo drop and a jump drop. Extraction will be via the US Navy Frigate fleet. There are now four vessels in the fleet outfitted with LCVP's and some kind of fast boats for smaller units." Even though the BCO had his notes, he was looking directly at each man in the audience. "The three targets are fairly close together, twenty miles or so apart. The jumps and drops will be coordinated for maximum confusion to the enemy."

He went back to his note cards and continued. "Unit One, Staff Sergeant Cunningham's team, will attack the tunnel located in the town of Hoch'on," he was smiling when he looked up from his cards. "I can tell by the looks on the faces of the Koreans' in the room that I butchered that name." The BCO made a funny twist of his

mouth and said, "Just wait I have more names to mis-pronounce. Recon Unit Three, Staff Sergeant Daro's team will hit the target at Songp'a and our ROK Unit with Staff Sergeant Williams assisting, will attack the tunnels at Sangnong."

Most were looking at their maps to find the target areas. These targets were closer to the eastern coastline of North Korea than the last two jumps that is good news. "The unique item of all three target areas is the river. All three of the tunnel complexes have something to do with a source of running water. Mr. Park has lead us to believe that these tunnels may be for housing large numbers of troops for a late spring or summer offensive. Intelligence does not want to bring any attention to these sites by using air strikes against them.

Your role is a dual one, assess the caves and tunnels and if it is feasible, destroy as much of these tunnels as possible." He made that strange face again, "If these tunnels are to be used by personnel, it is most likely they will have stationed at least a garrison force to guard and defend the targets." He looked directly at the ROK unit commanders. "The ROK unit will provide tactical support for the demolition unit on the tunnel complex at Sangnong if support is needed." Now he looked in the direction of Joe Werner. "Recon Unit Two will provide tactical support for both Cunningham's Unit and Daro's Unit." He looked at his First Sergeants and said, "If more help is needed, Sergeants Kennedy and Papushka will be there to assist you."

The laughter built slowly but was definitely the tension breaker the BCO wanted and needed.

## Chapter Thirty-four

### Final Preparations

“The conversations I have just completed at Taegu proved to me that our original methods are the correct ones for us to continue using.” Major Wallace was changing gears away from what was becoming a “doom and gloom” report. “The successes you have had, with no loss of life, on our side, says that we will continue doing what has proved successful. No one wants or expects you to become complacent. I know you all better than that.”

“The only, and I stress the only, intelligence we have on the next twelve targets is what the Park family is providing.” He looked directly at Jim and Ken who were sitting dead center and side by side. “I know how much faith you two have in this family, and their information is more current by far than anything we have been able to gather.”

Jim and Ken each nodded their heads at the BCO’s remarks, each was thinking about the mountain tunnel complex Mr. Park told them about and that the flyboys had taken out. Both Jim and Ken would stake their lives on what the Park family said about the tunnels or the purpose of these caves and tunnels. “At the close of this meeting, I will notify the Air Force at K-55 of the new plans and also the K-6 MAG 12 unit commanders that support us.” Jim could just picture Major Wallace picking up the phone and being put on hold, what a sight that would be.

“The Navy was also at the meeting at K-3 Taegu when the decision was made to go back to business as usual.” The Major made eye contact with Jim and said, “The skipper of the FP166, Commander Correy, cannot guarantee the same accommodations at the end this mission but his crew will try their darnedest to at least be hospitable.” Emil and his brother soldiers were smiling at that comment, talk about accommodations, wow.

“Gentlemen, I am going to turn this meeting over to the Intelligence personnel and my staff. I am going to make a few phone calls.” As he turned, the call to attention was made and the room stood as one until the “At ease, resume your places” was given.

Captain Sinclair took the microphone and using a slide projector displayed a map of the eastern coast of North Korea. The detail was usually good for intelligence briefings but this map had details most in the room had never seen. Minor rivers and streams some of which were non-existent in winter, due to the extreme cold.

Few westerners appreciated how the Siberian winds that began a thousand miles north of Korea affected the temperatures in Northern Japan and Korea. Most found out the hard way as troops who were equipped with uniforms and gear designed for a more moderate climate. The cold weather gear that was initially issued was for places like Canada and the mountains of Europe. Not the biting, bitter and long term cold of the Asian north where it is not only cold but the cold is sustained for weeks at a time by the always present wind of double digit speeds.

The Captain laid out the next six days training and conditioning. “No qual jumps and no practice mission exercises.” The troops liked that part. “Language lessons will continue and a daily review of each units responsibility at their target area.” He paused and motioned to one of the Intelligence officers to join him. “Let me have Captain Peabody explain what the dailies are about.” “Hello everyone, my job is to gather information from informants, civilians, who live in North Korea and are not sympathetic to the Communists. Some of these informants we have just recruited through the Park family.” He noticed an increase in the attention paid to his comments, “Some of you know this family very well, we had to take our time to be as certain as you are. We finally came to the same conclusion you had already reached.”

“They have become an invaluable asset to our clandestine efforts. Not just Mr. Park who as a petroleum merchant, traveled extensively up north, but Mrs. Park too. Her knowledge of persons’ in the Korean women’s movement during and after the Japanese occupation are providing more contacts each week. Their connections and influence are very far reaching, they are loved and trusted by their neighbors and fellow countrymen.”

“Yeah, and to think we were told to eliminate them by some fool officer in Japan.” Yes, it was Mario Ortega saying out loud what others in this room were thinking. “Marine, that is unfortunately a true statement, luckily for them and for us, you and your unit did the right thing. The Park family will always be cheerleaders for the US Recon Marines.” He himself was beginning to sound like a cheerleader.

“Oh, while I am on the subject of the Park family I need to add this too. Their two sons are now on detached duty, from the ROK Army to us in Pusan. Their role is to make us aware of the anti Communist youth movement they grew up being involved in.” His pause was deliberate, an almost lecture like one. “If we can recruit some of the Park sons’ peers who are living in the north, we could have a lasting effect on beating the Communists before they indoctrinate the entire region.”

Peabody was still in his lecture mode. “Good intelligence always starts with a disgruntled populace; we need to locate them, isolate them and help them to help us.”

“Once the commies get into the education system, we have lost any advantage we may have had. The Korean people know one thing very well. They do not want to be subjected to a regime such as they had for over thirty years with Japanese domination.”

He let that sink in to their heads for a moment. “However, they are susceptible to just that if the communists come in and provide a plan for feeding them and giving them jobs. Once that has happened we will no longer be able to disrupt the current movement.”

The Captain stopped and looked around at the young faces in front of him. “If that sounded like a lecture, it was. I teach at the Naval War College and I could not in good conscience not let you know what and who we are fighting, and who we are fighting for.”

Some of these young men looking back at me are sympathetic to the plight of the Koreans; others are confused as to what our goal is here. “Gentlemen, permit me to close with this statement. If we do not succeed in isolating the Communist movement in the north of Korea, it could be fifty or sixty years before another opportunity comes along.”

“Peace is not pacifistic where people just give up; peace is when the governed people decide who leads them and for how long and in what direction. That is what the

Park family, and you, are trying to do in North Korea. Thank you for being so considerate of my lecturing. God Bless all of you.” He turned, left the lectern and sat down. No one took his place to speak next.

The seated men started to fidget when no one took the microphone. Sergeant Kennedy at last stood up and went to the microphone. “Okay, I was completely surprised by the last speaker, but I am glad that we heard about the Park family.” He straightened up his shoulders and began. “We have worked on initiating the position of Assistant Patrol Leader for want of another title. When on these next missions, the APL will be responsible for the demolition teams and its effectiveness. The Patrol Leader or PL will be accountable for the overall success of the mission. His primary job is to provide site integrity and protection for the demolition teams’ working in the tunnels.”

“Therefore the snipers, corpsman and the radio team will be outside of the demolition area allowing the demo teams to more speedily do their jobs.” He looked directly at Jim, Ken and Tyler. “These are not reconnaissance missions anymore, these are demolition missions. Destroy as much as you can as quickly as you can and get the hell out of the area.” Kennedy’s abruptness was noted; the chat he had with Jim, Ken, Bruce and MJ was just the tip of the iceberg.

“We have a full plate of targets, so the sooner you get the first three taken care of, the more we have to put on your plates. Our goal is to have a minimum of three mission events every three weeks. A fourth mission team is hoped for, if and when the ROK Marine unit can be split into two operational parts.

The Air Force says it has the horses to get us there and the Navy says it can pick up as many as six teams easily with the refitted Patrol Frigates. Our job is to keep all these organizations busy.” He got a chuckle with that statement. “Your down time between missions will be minimal. Less time to get into trouble.” The Battalion “First” was trying to lighten the tense mood the meeting had somehow become.

“The Air Force has also taken on the responsibility of loading the air drop containers, the explosives, detonators, rations and supplies. We gave them the quantities and the items needed and they will do the packing. This will save you at least one days work to concentrate on the job and not the logistics.”

“You will be responsible for your weapons, ammo, grenades, markers and flares. Whatever you need can be requisitioned from the Master at Arms Building, I am sure you are all familiar with that location.” Kennedy once again went to his notes. “Your main and reserve chutes will be waiting at the Base Ops building Annex.” He saw some quizzical looks and added quickly. “It is the building next to the Control Tower, where you tested the radios.” He had underlined a note.

“Oh speaking of radios, the tech reps for Gilbarton will be here the day after tomorrow to change the batteries in all of the radios currently issued. Those that don't have a VHF/UHF hand held radio, see your Patrol Leader or Assistant PL.”

“PL's and APL's, make a list of the persons who do not have a radio, the tech reps will have ones to issue with them. The battery replacement will be done unit by unit, no stragglers and no excuses. The OR will have the schedule posted this afternoon.”

Kennedy looked at Papushka and said. “Pappy, I am hoarse from all of this talking, do you have anything you want to add, please?” Pappy smiled at the Bn First Sergeant and asked the assembled men. “How many have the Japanese Miners helmets with the lamps attached?”

Only four hands went up. “We have some in the Motor Pool Storage facility and also have the Navy Emergency Lanterns and new batteries also in the storage building. How many demo men don't have the lanterns?” All of the team member's hands were raised. “What the hell do you guys do with these things, eat them?” “No Sarge, we blew them up with the tunnels, that is except for Doc's and the two radio guys. Those lanterns are too friggen heavy to carry on the way out.”

For once it wasn't Ortega, this time Danny Ormond was speaking out. “Thank you Corporal, for that information.” “You are indeed welcome First Sergeant Papushka, is there anything more I can do to help?” More than a few men looked at Danny, those were the most words Danny had spoken since he shared his personal story last month at the range.

“Are you feeling okay, Ormond?” “Yes Sergeant, I am just getting stir crazy waiting for the next mission to begin, sorry if I spoke out of turn.” “No, no that's fine, I was just surprised by your response that's all. I think you spoke for many of your

teammates; the time between missions is harder than the missions. For what its worth, it was the same way in WW II and probably that way in WW 1. You will have to ask Sergeant Kennedy about that one though.”

All Pappy got for that remark was a middle finger from Kennedy and a lot of laughter from most of the assembled men. Some had no clue what had just happened.

“Patrol leaders, let me know tomorrow morning how many lanterns you need.” Pappy had the meeting back on track. “I will get them over to the flyboys at K-55 so they can be packed in the airdrop containers. Remember, you are not going exploring, just blowing things up, so don’t ask for a lot of lanterns.”

He looked specifically at the ROK Marine unit and asked if Staff Sergeant Williams had any idea what was being discussed. “No First, no idea what-so-ever. I was going to check with Jim and Ken, since you don’t need an answer until tomorrow.” “Good response, fast on your feet eh Tyler.” “Whenever I can Sarge, whenever I can.” Each laughed at the other one, good-naturedly.

“Well, unless there are no questions about what was discussed, we can adjourn this get-together.” He turned to the officers who were still sitting watching the Recon Battalion conduct a mission planning session. “Do any of you gentlemen have anything you wish to add or comment about before we dismiss the men?”

“No First Sergeants’, we are going to be here for the next few days to observe how you put together these meetings and the mission planning sessions. Not to criticize but to learn and to be informed.”

He looked at the other officers and said to Kennedy and Papushka. “The four of us have enjoyed being a part of this session and hope to be allowed to attend the other meetings you have this week.”

“I am certain our BCO and the Recon officers will be pleased to have you attend. Our schedules, such as they are, are posted in the Orderly Room and I can have a schedule sent over to the BOQ as well.” Pappy looked at Kennedy and added to the officers. “Well I really can’t, but First Sergeant Kennedy will see to it, that you get a schedule.”

The four intelligence officers smiled at the horseplay between these two senior non commissioned officers. “Thank you both, and thanks too to each Recon Marine



Unit. I would also like to thank the US Army for attending also. I understand that you are always invited to these meetings. Nice to see inter service cooperation, we don't always see that."

He turned, toward the two First Sergeants who called the room to attention and the four intelligence officers strode out the door single file. Very sharp indeed, thought Pappy these were more than just the usual reserve officers. Sergeant Kennedy then dismissed the men with the caveat of checking the schedules that were posted in their respective huts. As the men fell out onto Broadway, they all "formed up" with Doc as guidon and each unit fell into their usual place.

Early dusk was settling in on the Pyongtaek area, spring is on its' way as were the spring rains and with the rain came the slippery, slimy, stick to everything mud. Jim asked Tyler to "Take 'em home the long way Sergeant Williams." Off they marched down Broadway towards the Motor Pool a right turn at the PT facility and all around the perimeter back to the Orderly Room up Avenue B stopping at #15 and #16. Tyler gave them the "fall out" command and the men each went to their respective Quonset hut.

A number of the US soldiers stayed with Jin and Hyun to talk to some of the ROK Marines. A new bond was growing, naturally. Formation for evening chow, no one really called it dinner, was an hour away at 1800 hours.

The replacements were making certain to ask the experienced Recon team members what they needed on this up coming mission. No one was bashful about asking anyone anything, when it came to mission readiness. There was a lot of interest by the ROK Marines and the US Marine replacements as well, when it came to the lanterns and the Japanese helmets with the headlamps. Rather than explain the evolution of these two unusual tools to individuals, Jim and Ken held a mini-session in the mess hall. Gunny had given Ken the Japanese Mine Safety helmet he kept in his office as well as the US Navy emergency lantern.

Everyone had to try on the helmet, typical of one-size-fits-all stuff; it really doesn't without some help. In the case of the Korean Marines the size was pretty good with one or two exceptions. The US Marines had a different situation, on two members the helmet sat above their ears, not a very safe helmet. The straps inside the helmet would have to be cut to accommodate a size seven and three quarter's noggin. Of course the

usual cracks about people with larger than usual heads went on for a few minutes. Jim and Ken let the teasing go on for a while; this was mostly pre-jump and pre-mission nervousness, being let out to roam.

The next four day's schedule was posted and the 1000 hours meetings were back on. No afternoon meetings were scheduled but the physical training time was increased to two hours each day.

Emil asked about the content of the meetings since he and the soldiers had never been to one of the mission planning meetings before. He was asking for two reasons. First to be somewhat prepared and second if he could not transfer from the Army to the Marines; he wanted to be able to bring some intelligent input to the US Army mission planning. He had commented several times before tonight about how little his patrol was told about their mission and he wished to prevent that from happening again.

Jim and Ken had talked with Emil about the how and why of Emil's patrol being captured so quickly once the patrol had gotten underway. Not being able to use some alternate route or method of escape, capture was inevitable. The informants' knew a lot more than just that the patrol was looking for DMZ infiltration tunnels beneath the barbed wire and security gun emplacements.

They also knew that the patrol had no exit route; their mission instructions were woefully inadequate. Emil had considered the lack of information deliberate and not a tactical oversight. It is always hard to prove stuff like this. Especially when senior leaders take the side of the planners, so called, and not the victims of poor planning.

It still burned Emil's butt that no one from his US Army unit or HQ had even interviewed him or his patrol members about the capture. The ROK Army officer, the one who made the Syngman Rhee Citation awards, had asked only Jin and Hyun. He seemed to be interested and even that was in a very informal manner.

Emil was going to carry this grudge for a long time; he could feel it in his gut. Jim and Ken and Doc too made an effort to help, but there is a limit to what friends can do, as opposed to getting some professional help.

### **Mission three planning**

“This is what we have been waiting for,” suggested MJ Cook, who was relishing his new position as Assistant Patrol Leader. He was anxious to find out his duties and responsibilities. The US and ROK Marine Recon Units’ plus the US Army patrol were all seated in the Meeting Room. There were no officers or Senior Non Coms present and the hour was getting close. Meeting time is 1000 hours and it was one minute before that time. The chatter, as usual in the Meeting Room, was subdued, this was a place to listen and learn and be seen only when addressed.

Right on the schnozzolla, as Jimmy Durante used to say. Exactly as the hands on the wall clock moved to 10 o’clock, or ten hundred hours in military time, in walked Pappy, Kennedy, the BCO the CO and XO. All looked relaxed and comfortable being just on time for the meeting, not that anyone seated was going to mention the time.

Staff Sergeant Williams called the room to attention and the XO told them to stand at ease and be seated. “This meeting is expected to last just one hour, questions will be entertained if they pertain to what we are discussing this morning. No speculation please.”

“The first thing on my list” the XO was reading from a file folder, “Is about the ROK Marine units’. Their complement for each team will grow from twelve men to fourteen. We are adding a combat medic to each team plus one additional USMC NCO as a liaison. All will be jumping as a unit on missions after this one.” He looked at some of the questioning faces and added. “We added two persons because the ROK Marine CO did not want units’ to number thirteen. Yes, I know they are residing in Quonset hut #13 but I am only following their request.”

He continued looking at his notes. “Language lessons are doing very well, keep it up. Physical Training has been increased from one to two hours each day, the schedule is posted in your huts.” The XO was having difficulty reading his notes. “Oh, I’ve got it, the Flight Surgeon is concerned that you are eating too many K-ration meals and wants to be certain that you are drinking the powdered drink in the meal packages.”

He noted the scrunched up faces on some of his audience. “This lemon flavored beverage helps prevent tooth decay and scurvy.” He was squinting and holding the paper at an angle to be able to read the words.

“This package is concentrated vitamin C, it may taste terrible but it is essential for your continued good health.” The XO looked up at the faces in front of him and remarked. “This guys handwriting is awful, it looks like scribble and scrawl as my grandma used to call it.” As he put the page away into the folder he said. “Anyway, please indulge the Flight Surgeon and drink the damned stuff.”

“Now on to mission details, for that I turn this meeting over to my boss, Captain Sinclair.” That comment got an Aaroogah from Mario Ortega. “Aaroogah to you too Corporal Ortega, thank you.”

“Incidentally, I understand they want to change that yell to something more dignified. I have no idea what that would be, but hold on folks, changes to the Corps’ are happening every month.”

The Captain grabbed his note pad and started reading. “Your target arrival time will be for all three units, 0545. Which means you will be loading the aircraft at somewhere around midnight.” He checked to see if that bothered anyone, apparently not. “Due to the length of the flight, you will not be “chuted up” but will put your main and reserve parachutes on while in flight about one half hour before reaching your target zone.”

“Now, about the length of the flight. You will be aloft, I like that word, aloft, for three hours, give or take a few minutes.” He saw some smiles, hopefully about my aloft comment and not something else, like my fly is open or something. Hey stay on track here. “All aircraft will depart K-6 with ten minutes of separation. The northernmost target team will leave first since it has the farthest to fly. That will be Cunningham’s team Unit One.” Sinclair looked to see if Jim got that, Jim’s nod indicated that he did.

“Next will be the ROK Marine Unit, now fourteen strong, including Sgt. Williams and the new medic.” Tyler too acknowledged with a nod, as did the entire ROK unit. “Unit Three, with Daro at the helm, will take off last. Times will be calculated at the time of becoming airborne due to weather and winds aloft.” He smiled at his own statement.

“Your in-route flight path will be from here in Pyongtaek to Yang yang, where a new emergency field is being constructed for the Air Force.” A little news thrown into this dry detail stuff he thought.

“The aircraft will then turn northeast to avoid the coastline of Korea. When each plane reaches the area adjacent to Wonson, the pilots will swing out over the Sea of Japan. This is to coordinate their aircrafts ground speeds so as to be able to air drop you all simultaneously.”

He looked at these very attentive young faces and smiled. “Hey, the Air Force says it can do this. The three target sites are about twenty miles apart but site one is further inland than the other two target sites so that flight crew has more ground to cover.” He realized how silly he sounded; he was speaking to a very well educated group of men. These men are tasked with doing dangerous work and he was trying to make this sound simple.

“Sorry gentlemen if I made that sound as if I was talking to a bunch of kids.” Now he felt better and the faces in the chairs were mostly smiling back at him. “Jump and dump speeds will be about 120 to 125 miles per hour, these planes are not fully loaded so the cargo drop should go rather quickly.”

Referring to his notes again he continued. “This mission is planned for three days, plus one day for evacuation. You will be picked up at sunset of the fourth day. So don’t go looking for trouble to get into. Get in there, make an assessment or verify what the cave and or the tunnel may be being used as and get the place blown back into a pile of rocks.”

The CO was on a roll now. “When the BCO was with us in Taegu, we were briefed by some US Army First Cavalry officers.” Now the soldiers were really interested too. “It seems based on some recent success with the helicopters, our HRS-1’s, they call them something else. Well anyway, the Army has had some success with inserting teams of airborne units’ into North Korea. Not many, but enough so they are pursuing what they are calling Air Mobility.”

Now, what the hell was my point in telling them this? Oh yea, I got it. “The Sikorsky helicopters we both are using don’t hold enough men to make major insertions such as you are doing, worthwhile. Their input is what sealed the deal for us to return to cargo carrier aircraft for your missions. We would need too many choppers to get this much cargo and personnel on the ground after a long ride.”

The CO then reached for a set of pictures that he shuffled through and found the ones he was looking for. "Aerial reconnaissance shows only minor activity at all three target sites. These two photos were taken five days ago at site number one, and these two are of site two. Little to no truck activity and only light vehicle traffic at both sites." He now put those photos on the bottom of his stack and pulled out several others.

"These were taken yesterday at site three, based on activity of five days ago, we asked and received additional intelligence." He was holding up eight by ten black and white photos as if everyone could see them, of course no one could, not even the front row. "These site three photos show a large amount of daytime activity, large trucks and medium size military vehicles.

Tonight, VMF 513 is sending two F3D's to do some night reconnaissance, they have infrared sensors and can detect vehicles by the heat they give off." He smiled broadly, the kind of smile when you know the punch line of a joke. "I have no idea what the hell that all means but the intel folks said they would make an assessment and get back to me."

He looked at Ken and said. "As soon as we know something, we will let you know." He suddenly remembered something. "I want you all to know that Unit Two will be in two Gooney Birds ready to support whatever unit may need additional firepower if under siege by the Chicoms. Unit Two will be located at Yang yang where the new emergency airfield is being constructed. The PSP temporary runway is in but not much more."

He checked to see if Joe Werner was in the room; he was. "Joe, you and your two teams will be following the C-119's. When you land at Yang yang, the plan is for you and your men to deplane and you will "saddle up" after the demolition teams arrive on the last leg of their approach. We may rethink that plan; it takes over two hours for the R4D to make that distance to the drop zones. So stand-by for more information, I am certain there will be changes."

"Speaking of changes, each of Unit Two's two teams will be carrying a bazooka and a heavy machine gun. These are to be carried in by the team members and not air dropped." He recollected a tragic situation he was part of when someone dropped a box of bazooka projectiles from a deuce and a half, some of them went off injuring several

Marines. “The newer, larger bazooka projectiles are safer to handle than the older ones, but still I want you all to be careful. Handle this stuff with care, got it?”

“Got it” came the reply from the Unit Two members, who up to this point had been very quiet. Joe Werner was pleased that his unit had responded so quickly, it meant they were paying attention. Joe took a moment to consider how his unit was armored, each man carried a sidearm, four had Thompson’s, two had BAR’s and the rest had M1 Garand rifles. The bazooka would take two men, as would the thirty-caliber water-cooled machine gun.

He continued listening, but was now writing on his pad. Each Thompson’s carrier could carry one case of machine gun ammo on his jump. The bazooka team would have to either carry a carbine or a sub-machine gun. Go with the carbine he told himself. Now how to get the case of bazooka ammo on the ground safely? I had better check to see how secure it is packed before I make a decision.

“Corporal Werner, do you have anything you would like to ask or contribute to this discussion?” Joe did not realize that the CO had asked him a question; he had been too busy writing.

“Sorry sir, I was trying to, oh forget it. What was your question sir?” “I asked if you wanted the machine gun and bazooka ammo air dropped or what plan you had to get this stuff on the ground?” The Captain was grinning from ear to ear, so Joe knew he was not in any kind of hot water. “That is what I was writing on my pad sir, I think some of the thirty cal can be carried in by the Thompson guys, the bazooka stuff is a whole other ballgame.”

“I could always have the two First Sergeants carry it in for you if you wish Corporal.” Sinclair was still smiling. “No thank you sir, me and my team’s will figure this out by tomorrow’s meeting.” “Good, it is always best to consult the team. Good thinking Marine.”

“It was stated that this meeting would last one hour and it is now ten minutes past that time.” The CO was ending the meeting; there was work to do, for everyone.

The rest of the day was a blur to everyone involved. The two hour PT regime was mostly running. Not just the PT course but around the perimeter roads as well, inside the compound, and not inside the K-9 enclosure. The non-Recon members of the

battalion could tell that another mission was imminent. The Recon guys were all business and training with intention.

The Master At Arms would issue the mission level of ammunition and other personal explosives after evening mess the night before the mission. Each Marine had his own ammo and grenades with them at all times in the hut. The level of ammo for a mission was a much larger quantity and was considered excessive for casual storage.

Joe, Ken, Jim and Tyler had their hands full with sorting through the mission details and being certain nothing was overlooked. The Recon First Sergeant Papushka would have his own list and would be double-checking each team the afternoon before the mission D-day.

Joe Werner confided to his cohort Mission Leaders his concern for bringing a heavy water cooled machine gun and an M-20 bazooka plus the ammo for both. In less than ten minutes these four leaders solved the problem. The "I & I" teams would jump with their usual combat arms plus two air-cooled thirty caliber machine guns. These teams would have to assign two men to each machine gun, one as the gunner and the other to be the ammo feeder.

Joe went immediately to the OR to see the First Sergeant and advise him of his decision. Pappy concurred and had Joe select his machine gun teams so they could be excused from PT and go to the range to practice setting up, firing, loading and breaking down the equipment. Not all Marines trained with the 30-caliber machine gun and it was important that Joe find men who could handle this piece of weaponry.

Joe and Pappy had a pleasant chat about the decision not to take a bazooka along on the mission. All of Joe's answers pleased the First Sergeant. The physical size of the newer M-20, and more to the point the size of the new projectiles each one weighed over 9 pounds and was designed to take out a large trucks and tanks.

In order for Joe's teams to be effective when supporting any unit needing additional firepower, his teams needed to be very mobile. Lugging a heavy bazooka and its' rockets was not a way to be mobile and be of much assistance. "Beside that, if we encounter tanks we can call in the Close Air Ground Support aircraft with their rockets and stuff."



Pappy listened intently to this young Marine who had survived an "I&I" mission recently on the west coast of North Korea that had gone very bad for his Unit. Luckily they fought their way out of the encirclement but had significant loss of life and several seriously wounded team members. The team had been "Missing In Action" for over two weeks. This Marine knew what he needed and how to use what he had; Pappy was going to go with Werner's changes and his plan for the additional training.

Joe was pleasantly surprised when he asked his "I&I" team members for volunteers; three of his unit's replacements were previously machine gun trained and range qualified. Others stepped forward to be an assistant gunner.

It struck him like lightning, the sharing that Jim and Ken had their Units go through probably would have provided what Joe needed to know about his men. Joe barely knew any of the nine replacements he had been assigned since returning to duty. His not wanting to get close to any of the new men was foolish, they deserved his undivided attention, what was past was past. He had to get over his last mission and its' failure.

He made a promise to himself to get to know all eighteen men of his unit, the new and the not so new members. Joe realized he had some catching up to do. He planned to privately interview each member of his two teams before the next mission was underway.

Both Ken Daro and Jim Cunningham approached the coming mission similarly; the assignments were clearly spelled out. The demolition men had their tasks to do, once on the ground and the rest of the Unit was being refreshed as to the jobs they were expected to do. Doc Schmidt had taken it upon himself to give some mission orientation to Andy Hughes, the Navy corpsman for Ken's unit.

Andy was a quick study, he knew human anatomy pretty well, and he had been reviewing a Navy Medical textbook on bones and muscles of the feet and legs. He reasoned, and Doc agreed, that guys who parachute out of a plane must at some time or other injure either their legs or certainly their feet. Doc kidded him about learning to be a Podiatrist on the US Navy's time.

Jim encouraged his Unit to again write a letter home or wherever, to take their focus off the mission. This may help reduce the stress some of his men were showing.

He made it a point to Ro and Ernie, the two new members, to hang close to Willie and Charlie. Although he did notice Bruce, his assistant patrol leader, shepherding the two new men in mission preparation.

The talk at breakfast was about counting down the days until the mission actually came off. Some said it was three more days and others considered anything after midnight to be an additional day. As with most talk of this type, it would all be dispelled at the meeting in two hours.

One more formation and one more march around the compound, still looking sharp and more and more new faces observing this quite large group, marching wherever they go to everyday.

The meeting of course started on time with only the First Sergeants in attendance. Pappy had the microphone and a large folder of papers. "Okay, here is the way it is going to go; Cunningham's Unit One, Daro's Unit Three and the ROK Marines Unit Five, will all load up at 0100 hours. You will be transported from here to the flight line at 2300 hours the day after tomorrow. Unit Two, Werner's "I&I" teams will load up at 0200 hours and be transported to the flight line at midnight.

Pappy continued to look at his notes and then stated. "I don't see the actual time of takeoff, it says here the 350 mile trip will take about two and half hours." He flipped a page and continued reading. "You will not be "chuted up" the trip is such that it will be better for you to put on your parachutes while in flight." He looked over at Joe Werner and said. "Unit Two will chute up after landing at Yang yang, your departure time from K-6 is 0300 hours."

"One more item to cover for Unit Two, you will not be carrying a Bazooka of any kind and the water cooled machine gun is out also." Looking directly at Werner Pappy stated. "Per your request, each of your teams will carry two Browning M1919 A6 thirty caliber air cooled machine guns." Pappy now addressed the other units. "These are lighter in weight than the water cooled and have been refitted with a bipod so there will be no tripod to carry. This means the assistant gunners can carry more ammunition containers."

The Recon First Sergeant looked around to see if he could pick out which one of Joe's men were assistant gunners, he couldn't. "The men assigned to these weapons

will become familiar with them and the changes later today on the range. Werner, have you selected your machine gun teams yet?" "Yes First Sergeant I have, and they are experienced and ready to go." "Okay, sounds good, instead of PT those men will go to the range and practice. I suggest they use a weapons carrier. I will make arrangements with the sheriff to have the weapons ready."

Pappy paused for a moment, "This is just a suggestion, however, and have the men you've select plus two others as ammo carriers go with them." Joe did not hesitate one instant. "Thank you for the suggestion First Sergeant, I will see that all six men get to the range."

A voice from the other side of the room, in a squeaky high-pitched tone, imitated Joe's response. "Thank you First Sergeant Sir, I will do whatever you suggest that I do. Most honorable First Sergeant Papushka, sir. Oh exalted ruler of the Recons'."

The meeting room immediately became a room of laughter and catcalls. First Sergeant Kennedy was getting the most fun out of the mimicking; he knew this was the right moment for the fun. These guys have been up tight for several days now; this will break that mood, good. Pappy too was grinning, he was partly the goat in this bit of humor, but so what.

After a few minutes of fun, Pappy rapped on the podium and that brought everyone back to the meeting. "Thanks for the laugh, but if I find out who that was, you will be walking with the dogs at midnight for a month."

No one responded, but it was obviously Mario Ortega, the class clown and best-damned scout sniper in the Marine Corps. Pappy deliberately did not look at Mario or they both would have started laughing and Pappy had more information to cover.

"If Unit Two is needed to assist any of the demolition teams, they will be needing ammunition. I want to remind each of those teams' members. You are all going to jump with your own gear plus two cartridge canisters of machine gun ammo. The gunners will be jumping with their weapons; a sack and sling arrangement will accompany each machine gun when you sign them out this afternoon.

Remember also, each of the machine guns weighs thirty-two pounds that's the weight of a concrete building block. Your back up weapon is your sidearm, you will not be carrying a rifle."

First Sergeant Kennedy broke in at this point and suggested. "When you get back here from the range and return the vehicle. Go over to the PT area and practice jumping from the lower level with the weapon to simulate the landing impact with a chute on." There was no response to this suggestion. The gunners' were waiting to see if he was kidding or not.

"I'm not kidding, practice from the four foot level and get the feel of impact while carrying the machine gun." The squeaky voice again sounded. "Yes oh master, most honorable Battalion First Sergeant Kennedy sir."

Kennedy looked directly at Ortega and scowled, Mario pretended he did not make the remark; he just smiled back at the scowling First Sergeant. "You know something Corporal Ortega, I was just like you, a smart ass, just be careful, someone may take you out behind the woodshed one day."

"That happened to me and see how well I have improved."

The laughter was subdued at first and then when Pappy started clapping his hands the rest of the men did too. Kennedy gave them all a middle finger and sat down.

The only ones who were not appreciative of the horseplay was the ROK Unit, they were thoroughly confused. There was no way any translator could convey what was happening in this mission planning session. The new US Marines were almost as confused but chose just to join in the fun.

## Chapter Thirty-five

### Fine Tuning the Units'

“Okay, back to work men.” Pappy was still smiling but had more to cover. First Sergeant Kennedy pretended to be annoyed and sat sullenly with his arms folded across his chest.

“Just like anything else in this man’s Marine Corps, everything is flexible. Make the best with what you have and keep sharp.” Yes sir, he had this meeting back under control. “Get your ammunition and other personal explosives and marker canisters from the Master at Arms.” He looked at one of the replacement demolition members. “Be sure you have two canteens, and keep them full at all times.” He received nods back for his efforts.

“The weather looks like it is breaking up even in the target areas. The safety of winter snow may well be gone when you get to your targets. This being Korea, the nights will still be cold and ice will form where you least expect it to.” He checked his sheets of paper, and found nothing more to discuss. “Okay, First Sergeant Kennedy, if you are finished sulking, you and I can get back to work.”

With that the meeting was over. Everyone stood up as the two “Firsts” left the room. The parade back to the huts was a short one. Up Avenue C turn right stop on Avenue B and the units were dismissed, some went to the heads, some to their own hut and more and more were mingling with the ROK Marines. A very good sign, Jim noted that someone had explained the horseplay between Pappy, Kennedy and Ortega, to the ROK unit as they were all laughing and pointing at Mario.

The afternoon was busy for each of the groups. The gunners who were destined for the gunnery range had to be driven there by a motor pool driver. None of the Recon machine gun team had a valid drivers license to check out any vehicle. The NCOIC of

the motor pool took care of the situation and had the teams driven to the range. He would square it up with Pappy later in the evening.

The new PT schedule left time for acquiring the necessary ammunition and other personal explosives. Unlike mission number one, the Marines just contended with the paper work and being issued these tools of war. At least on this trip the Recon teams did not have to requisition parachutes and C type plastic explosives. That stuff was being taken care of by the higher ups in the chain of command.

When the additional ammunition was being issued, many of the men were surprised that the waterproofing gunk had already been removed. The grenades were clean and so were the machine guns, all spotless. The Master at Arms had the prisoners cleaning this stuff for days in advance of the requisition day. The air-cooled machine guns were also in a padded bag with a drop strap. That strap attaches to the parachutist and hangs below him during the jump. The padded bag hits the ground first and the Recon Marine releases the strap as he lands. This whole contraption adds fifty pounds to the jumpers weight so descent is a bit faster and less maneuverable.

Each man was issued two cans of belted 30-caliber machine gun ammunition to carry with them on the next jump. They too had a bag that the jumper wore under the parachute harness with one can of two hundred rounds of ammo in each bag. None of the jumpers would be wearing a reserve chute and the two ammo bags would be fitted into that space that the reserve would take up. Each can measured ten and a half inches by four inches by eight inches high. The empty cans weighed in at four pounds each and with the ammo they weighed almost twenty pounds.

Several trips later and each Marine was sweating like a horse. The guys who were at PT were going to be beat by the time they requisitioned their stuff. The early guys would kind of drag through their PT; or so they thought. The ROK Marines were fortunate in one respect; only half of their unit was being mobilized so they had extra hands to carry the ammo back to Hut #13. The teasing of this morning continued between the four units, pre-jump jitters and bravado.

Recon Units Two and Three returned from PT, and looked beat. Units' One and Four had been drawing their tools of warfare and were tired. Now it was their turn to go

to Physical Training and get a break from lugging stuff from the armory to their huts. Once more there was a surprise waiting for them, this surprise was at the PT area.

Units One and Four marched to the exercise area only to discover several Marine Non-coms they had not seen before. These had a different look about them from the Non-coms they saw everyday. One of the non-coms jumped onto the middle level platform of the tower and introduced himself as Technical Sergeant Havemeyer. He was going to be in charge of everyone learning the PLF or Parachute Landing Fall. "The US Army at Ft. Bragg, NC has developed this new technique to reduce landing accidents and injury to the jumpers." He was telling them and not instructing yet. "It consists of six steps, very easy to learn, sometimes difficult to execute but by practice from the low level table practice can make for perfect."

Two of the non-coms moved members of the two units into several rows about six feet distance front to back and six feet apart side to side. No one spoke a word; it was all done with hand movements. When all of the rows were in place Sergeant Havemeyer told everyone "Eyes on me, thank you." He had his canned speech ready.

"It starts when you are about 100 feet above the ground. Your feet should be together, legs bent slightly at the knee with the balls of your feet lower than your heels." He looked around and saw some assuming the position very naturally. "Keep your focus on the horizon and be prepared to swivel your arms in front of your face to protect your face at impact."

With no pause for taking a breath he said. "Your normal descent rate is eighteen feet per second, at one hundred feet up you have about five seconds before impact. If you are looking down at the ground you will have a tendency to reach for it, this is natural. What happens is, you will push your legs down and try to make contact sooner. That increases the likelihood that you will break bones. So don't do it."

"When a jumper hits the ground, it is in this sequence. Balls of the feet, your calf, next your thigh, then your hip and finally your pushup muscles, the ones on your side between your hip and shoulder. This will make you the jumper roll into the PLF resulting in a "head over heels" kind of tumbling action. Depending on what you are lugging into battle, this could either be fun or a pain in the ass."

“You, yes you in the front row. I need a volunteer and you are it.” His smile, the first time anyone saw it was broad and friendly. “What’s your name Marine?” “Ott, Sergeant, Corporal Mel Ott Recon Unit One.” “Good, how many jumps have you made so far in your career Corporal?” “Thirty-four practice and two combat jumps, all successful.” “And you did all them without knowing what I am going to show you, that is true too?” “I guess so, Sergeant but I consider any advice from a veteran useful, whether I use it or not,” replied Mel, feeling very comfortable with this new Non-com Marine.

Havemeyer looked at the faces of his audience and remarked that “Ott here just made me feel very old by calling me a “veteran” I got all these scars learning how to jump out of airplanes the wrong way. Seriously, I am going to demonstrate using his body the six steps you will be practicing this afternoon for the next hour or so.” He turned back to Mel “Okay Ott turn sideways so they can see your profile, good. Now, pretend you are at one hundred feet from touchdown, bend your knees with your feet together. Very good, now everyone out there do the same position as Ott here.”

He looked out at the assembled Marines while the other Non-coms walked between the rows of men assuming the landing position. “Don’t look down, keep your eyes on the horizon, now tuck your chin into your chest keep the neck muscles tensed.” He checked his fellow Non-coms for compliance. “Good, as your feet hit the ground allow your knees to spring in a little bit. Now, using a twisting motion and bending from your hips, roll into the direction you are moving, for this exercise, assume it to be straight ahead.”

He moved over to check out Mel who was bent into an almost fetal position. “Too much Ott, way too much, that’s better. Now don’t stay on the balls of your feet but roll onto your calf muscle. Okay, now continue to roll onto your thigh, your buttocks and finally onto the side of your back. Be sure your chin is still tucked in all the way through the landing.”

Havemeyer motioned for Mel to resume his normal standing position. “Good for the first time, you are going to practice this today from the lower level platform. It should be about four feet to simulate ground impact. We are using the higher platform so you could all see. I don’t want Ott here jumping off at this height and injuring himself.



Sergeant Papushka will make me go in his place on your next mission. You don't want that and neither do I."

At the sound of Pappy's name all of the heads turned to the platform. "Yes, I too survived your Recon First Sergeants tutoring. I understand that he has mellowed quite a bit. When I knew him he was a mean SOB." He got no committed looks from any of the Marines in front of him. They too loved this guy, as I do, Havemeyer thought.

"There is room for three at a time on this platform, I tried four with the last group and that did not work, so we will stick with three. The first position is knees bent, feet together, chin tucked into your chest. We will start with the first row, Mel you stay right there and go through the landing sequence as we tell you." "Yes Sergeant, wilco." Mel got a smile for that remark.

Each row went through the drill, they became very good at climbing onto the platform, doing the prep then the jump, contact, roll and get up and out of the way for the next jumper. Havemeyer acknowledged to himself, both of these groups today are very used to taking and following orders and instructions. Very disciplined and under self-control, self-motivated too he suspected.

To break up the routine some were directed to the landing net to climb and slide down the angled ropes and then get back in line and continue the PLF. After a couple of "jumps" everyone's utilities and jackets were covered with mud. This became a badge of honor; it meant that you had landed off of the hay covered exercise area. The ROK Marines seemed to enjoy this too. For one of the first times these men were animated and excited and showed it outwardly. It did not go unnoticed that their officers were not in attendance either.

Two hours had passed with almost no notice, this was tough work, but fun too. Seriously, this practice could save someone's life or at least a limb or two. As is typical in Korea, when the sun was low on the horizon, the weather turned cold. The influence of the Yellow Sea was never too far away. The breeze was always cool, damp and constant, in the winter the breeze was damned cold. Between the mud the sweat and the wind most of the men were feeling uncomfortable but not willing to call it quits. If these non-coms wanted to keep this up all night, bring it on, we're ready.

The whistle blew signifying the retreat ceremony. Everyone in the Physical Training area stopped in place faced the direction of the flagpole, which was at the Orderly Room. Staff Sergeant Cunningham called the unit to "Parade Rest." At the second whistle he called for attention followed by "Hand Salute" as the colors were retired for the day.

This being a combat zone no American flag flew at night since protocol dictated the flag is to be illuminated after dark. At the third whistle, all finished the salute and Jim called for a "parade rest." Jim addressed Sergeant Havemeyer and informed him that the workday was over. He and these two units were heading for the showers and then to the mess hall. "Hope to see you tomorrow at the same time Sergeant Havemeyer or maybe at breakfast at 0700 hours." Havemeyer nodded and thanked Jim for the invitation. The four Non-com instructors walked toward the Orderly Room in single file, ramrod straight.

Back in Hut #15 dirty utilities were heaped in one pile, field jackets in another pile, socks. Underwear and other small personal items like handkerchief, neckerchiefs were in a separate pile. Everything was numbered with the individuals "last four" of his service number. This would be the new houseboy's job to get all of this clean, folded and back to the correct Marine. This houseboy was not just some kid off the street, he was enrolled in a local school and doing well. He could not have been hired if he wasn't. The military did not encourage the South Koreans to forgo their education to work at the base. The people who came to work at any part of the base were scrutinized very carefully.

Kim Yong Po was his real name, but he preferred to be called "Skosh" which means small in Korean. He enjoyed the interaction with the Korean speaking men. Especially Ro and Chin who were really Americans, born and bred, who volunteered to help their parent's native country. Skosh's father had belonged to the Diet, or parliament of South Korea. Marauding North Korean soldiers had killed his father early in the conflict. In private he told the two Americans that he was glad to not be working in Hut #13, those Korean Marines act like bullies and are not very friendly. The Americans smile a lot and tease him and the other houseboys, they like that too. The other boys try to help the Marines by repeating the phrases they are learning daily.

The houseboy for Sergeant Papushka's hut say the men in that hut are teaching him to play Poker and dice. They even have an ironing board and stuff in their hut; he is very impressed with all the Senior Non-coms in this compound. Some of the other places where houseboy's and girls work on the base are not as friendly or as generous to the houseboys and their families. The base rules are that all indigenous personnel have to be at the main gate by 0700 hours with their base pass and their work area pass. The bus takes them to their work area and picks them up at the same stop at 1700 hours and no later than 1730 hours for those who work at the flight line.

The Marine base K-6 houses many military groups, some Air Force, some Navy, a group of US Coast Guardsmen but predominantly Marines. The largest group reports to Marine Air Group, MAG-12. The base for ease of access control is divided by what facility is in the area and that area has a color code. The POL dump area is red, the base motor pool is colored yellow, and headquarters for the fighter groups are colored blue. The Marine Recon Battalion is colored green as is the brig and K-9 units. Anyone working in these areas has to have their ID visible at all times and the ID must be the proper color. A simple system but an effective method to maintain a high level of security.

The laundry facility was part of the Motor Pool Complex; each hut had a scheduled time to have their laundry and stuff done. There was no preferential treatment, this was the houseboy's time slot and if he missed it, too bad. The cooks and bakers had seven day a week houseboy's. Everyone else had them six days a week with Sunday as a day off. Last Sunday was Skosh's first Sunday as a houseboy and he was allowed on base to attend church service with several of the Recon Marines. He was learning the words to some of the Hymns and really liked the one about "Eternal Father Strong to Save" an all time Navy and Marine favorite. This kid was learning to fit right in; he not only was hard working but very personable too.

Danny Ormond suggested to the group that they pool some money together and buy "Skosh" some clothes for church. "Easter is coming up in a few weeks. I think it would be nice if we could get him some nice duds to wear when he goes to church with us on Easter Sunday." No one disagreed, now how to purchase these things and how do we get some money to anyone who could or would purchase clothes for him. The

only money was MPC scrip or fake money, somehow backed by US currency. No one had access to real US dollars; it was against regulations to have any US dollars in your possession.

Jim waited to see if someone had a better idea than he was going to propose. There was a lot of talk and hope but no solution, so he offered his idea. He would send his mom, "Skosh's" measurements and sizes, as best they could estimate. She would purchase the clothes with Jim's allotment he was sending home each month. When the bill for the clothes and stuff came through, those who signed up for buying the clothes could reimburse Jim in MPC, simple. "Great plan Jim, now how can we get his sizes without him being suspicious?" Danny added, "We may even hurt his feelings, being asked personal questions by a bunch of Americans."

Ro had the answer, "Skosh" has really taken a liking to me and Chin, and we can ask him his sizes because we can get him some stuff in the Village of Pyongyang. Chin and I can meet him in town and get him a shirt or something and get his sizes that way." Bruce put a damper on that idea quickly. "Sounds good but we have a mission in two days and won't be back for at least a week. We need to get this done before we leave here this Sunday."

A plot was brewing and Danny was not about to let an opportunity slip by him. "Let's wrestle him to the deck and someone or two of us, measure his waist and legs, neck and arms. His shoe size will be in his shoes." Ormond was getting excited about the prospect of gathering this data for Jim's letter to his mom. Hearing no better way, the plan was made. Get a tape measure from the Orderly Room or use the demolition wire as a measure, it had marks painted on it every foot.

Assignments were handed out, who would grab his feet, which one was at his shoulders and head. The guys who would do the measuring had their jobs too. Jim would write the numbers down as the guys called them out. "Skosh's" limited English would prevent him from knowing what these guys were actually up to. "We don't want to scare him," said Jim. "So be careful not to hurt him, let him think we are playing." Danny ran to the Orderly Room to borrow a tape measure. To his surprise, the Orderly Room had a form for uniform and utilities sizes. If someone needed a new something or other,

and didn't know his size; one of the clerks would do the measurements. They gave the measurements to the quartermaster for uniform or utilities issuing, perfect.

The following morning the deed was executed like a Recon mission. Skosh came through the door and looked at the pile of clothes to be laundered and moaned. Danny grabbed him, tickled him to make him laugh. The rest joined Danny and wrestled Skosh into the pile of dirty clothes. While some wrapped him in stuff, others took his measurements. Skosh was laughing so hard he had tears in his eyes. No one had played with him like this since he was a child and his dad would tickle him until he cried and sometimes wet his pants. Oh no, don't let me do that, he thought, just go along with the teasing and tickling.

The horsing around was over in just a few minutes. All of the data was gathered and Skosh was none the worse for wear. He had not soiled himself but the tears were still there. Some of the guys tried to help him resort the dirty utilities but Skosh was now suspicious of being tickled again and shooed everyone away. "I do, I do, you GI's numba hucking ten, he said back to the Marines who were all smiling at him. "Clazy, GI's all clazy."

Jim had already written the letter and only had to add the form; which was now filled out with Skosh's sizes, including his hat and shoes. He ran it down to the Orderly Room to make the early morning collection. One good thing about being in a combat zone, no stamps needed, you only had to print the word "FREE" where the stamps went. Everything from Korea went by air, no boats for this mail; most letters reached the recipients in eight or ten days.

Jim had polled his unit about contributing everybody gave ten dollars. A lot of money in 1952, but these young men were receiving combat pay; jump pay plus their regular pay. Money as such had very little meaning or value when measured against the job they were performing. No one talked about life expectancy but at some point the reality of a long life was questionable. The risk was considered part of the bargain of being a Recon Marine. The Recon motto was, "Swift, Silent and Deadly" but most of all invincible, if you asked any one of them.

One and a half days left of preparation, the new guys were all specked up and the veterans, such as they were, had everything under control. Doc had briefed Andy

and the medic assigned to the ROK Marines. Like Doc this medic was working toward being a medical doctor. He spoke passable English and caught on fast to the items he might need that were not included in the basic Medical Corpsman's bag. The medic's jump experience worried Doc; he had only made the training five jumps, the minimum necessary to graduate.

Doc encouraged him to spend more time at the PT area learning and practicing the proper "fall" techniques. Doc explained how these new techniques made him feel more comfortable when landing. Thinking to himself, Doc vowed he would never strap on another parachute harness once he was out of this combat environment. If the Navy wanted to take away his jump pay, go ahead and do it. I am not jumping out of another plane as long as I live when this is over.

Time again was flying by quickly; the meetings were quick, to the point and over. The PT was stressing leg and lower body strength and running. The mud continued to make everyplace you went a mess. More straw had been brought in but the oozing mud made the attempts to keep the landing areas and the running paths clean, futile. The locally grown rice straw was much finer than wheat and barley straw and the wet and mud seeped right through. Several of the farm type guys wondered how the Korean's made leak proof roofs out of this stuff.

The four Marine instructors no longer participated in the PLF drills; they instead stood off to the side of the area, observing the progress these Recon teams' were making. Pappy and Kennedy stopped by a couple of times, no comments, just checking their Marines out. The BCO and the CO stopped a couple of times too, never getting out of the Jeep, just spent a few minutes watching. Only Lt. Northcutt spent any time at the PT area. He became as muddy as the troops when he made a practice PLF off of the lower platform. He not only enjoyed the practice jump, fall and roll in the mud, but the razzing he took for getting all messed up.

Some "night before" jitters were noticed after evening mess, little arguments about the order of jump and how to carry the ammo cans. One of the more negative comments was about the two canteens. The new PLF made sure your body was going to land on if not one more than likely both canteens. None of these discussions was worth interrupting; they just wore themselves out over time. Ken noticed that the

replacements seemed to hang away from the more experienced Marines; he had seen this before with infantry Marines. He wanted to jump in there and get them all working and talking to each other. Thinking back to his own experiences, he decided to leave them all alone.

Saturday's routine was similar to the other days; there would be no afternoon PT or drills. Every one would return to his hut by 1400 hours for a two-hour nap or rest period. After evening mess, the men could go to the game room for one hour and after that return to their huts for rest, hopefully some sleep. The assembly time, loading time and the takeoff times were reviewed again and again. The last item that Lt. Northcutt discussed was the three units' extraction instructions. All three units would be exiting via the adjacent river and the paths or trails that paralleled the river. If any unit came in contact with enemy forces immediate contact was necessary with the other two units to avoid that area.

Northcutt was quick to add, "Marine aircraft would be overhead not to engage the enemy only to monitor the situations and report back to HQ. If engagement was needed it could be on site quickly, the birds flying overhead are not carrying a bomb load. They will be fully loaded machine gun wise. Each one will have extra fuel tanks strapped on, keeping them in the target area longer." He smiled at the assembled Marines. "Most likely the aircraft will be Corsairs. The flying Sergeants have offered their services to you Recon Marines and we have accepted their offer." These flying Sergeants were on duty for Recon Unit Ones first mission. "VMF 513 will be your night cover, those are the F3D night fighters. They are mostly Navy pilots who like landing on solid ground instead of the pitching deck of an aircraft carrier."

"Speaking of aircraft carriers," he checked his notepad and continued, "The Princeton and the Oriskany are currently patrolling in the Sea of Japan. If air cover is needed from them, they have been alerted and will assist us." A reminder he thought quickly. "Your extraction method remains the same. An LCVP will be taking each Recon unit to a Patrol Frigate standing about twenty miles off shore. The more we get into these missions the more we have other people and equipment involved."

Northcutt was now into his command mode. "The anticipated number of caves and tunnels has grown to over forty, four zero, this is a lot of workload for three teams to

accomplish before we run out of time to do these missions.” He stretched his upper body to get some kinks out. “That new PLF is tough on the body of an older Marine. I either need to practice more or stay in my office.” Everyone in the room laughed, those who were at the PT facility and saw him all muddied had told the other groups about him. “Next time take Pappy with you to practice.” The voice could only be that of Mario, “I will take that into consideration, if there is a next time.”

Stretching once more he continued. “More Recon trained personnel are on their way here. At least eighty men in total, about half will be here next month. We are having trouble finding qualified Corpsman.” He smiled at the three-corpsmen sitting together. “Or at least Navy Corpsman, crazy enough to jump out of airplanes with a bunch of Marines who are blowing things up once they get on the ground.” Doc gave the Lieutenant an “Amen.”

“Amen to you too Doc” Northcutt stopped suddenly, “Is it okay for me to call you Doc, Petty Officer?” “Sir, yes sir, anytime and anyplace Lieutenant.” “Good, thank you Doc.”

The meeting ended on that note, the ROK Marines were getting their final instructions since only half of the unit would be going on this mission. The ones not going were sitting alone in a silent huddle. The members who had been selected to go were engaged in an intense conversation with Tyler and their officers’. The discussion it turned out later to be about who would exit the aircraft and in what order. Mostly the higher-ranking men wanted to jump first, regardless of their assignment. Tyler wanted the non-demolition guys on the ground and ready to secure the area as quickly as possible since the demolition team had a different objective.

By convincing two of the ROK Marine officers the validity of his plan, Staff Sergeant Williams won the round. Now he had to be certain there was no resentment by those who didn’t win the argument. Hyun and Jin made an attempt to help Tyler explain to the Korean’s why he needed those machine guns and snipers in place as quickly as possible. When all was said and done all the Korean Marines were laughing and joking. Tyler knew it was at his expense and Jin let him know that he had no concern about “losing face” in a discussion with these ROK Marines. “They very much respect your



ideas and willingness to discuss and argue for what is a better procedure. These Marines like and trust you. They are anxious to follow you into combat.”

Jin and Hyun shook hands with a bunch of the ROK Marines. The Marines revered these two survivors who had been captured by the Chinese and survived, even if they were in the ROK Army. Inter-service rivalries exist no matter what the nationality, most of it in good-natured fun. The two Korean soldiers had work to do in their respective billets so they excused themselves and departed. Hyun promised Marty Mancuso to help him with his Korean pronunciations. Somehow all of his Korean phrases had an eastern Pennsylvania accent.

In spite of the closeness of the mission, several of the men were in the game room hut as if it was just another day. Jim couldn't relax let alone even dream about playing any games. Ken too had his concerns but masked them pretty well. Neither Patrol Leader shared their feelings or concerns with the other; this was odd because the two men had become very close. There was something very different about this mission. The planning and the missions' scope with the three units jumping as one on three different sites seemed overly complicated. The more he tried to solve the dilemma in his head the more scenarios he created that he could not resolve or even justify his thoughts about them.

Jim decided to write his thoughts and concerns on paper. He planned to leave it in his desk and review them when he returned. He could not remember being this concerned about the other two missions. Not just the outcome that he was comfortable about. His constant concern was trying to pre-suppose any and all situations. Just as he was entering his first thought into his notepad, Ken walked into the front door of Hut #15.

“Hey Jim, I am having a hell of a time trying to get this next mission out of my head. I constantly run all kinds of situations in my head and if I get a solution, I deliberately screw it up and have to start all over again. Have you ever had that feeling?” Jim smiled and could have hugged this fellow Recon Marine; instead he just smiled at Ken and nodded his head. “You bet, just as you came through the door I was getting ready to write my thoughts and concerns about Sunday's mission. I have been,

for the past two or so hours questioning everything that has been said or talked about for this mission.”

“Why the hell would you write something like that down on paper? Someone is liable to find it and send you off to sick bay or someplace like that.” Ken was deadly serious, and could not figure out why Jim was smiling so broadly at him.

Ken was deadly serious. “What, you don’t think it’s strange that a person would put private thoughts on paper. Christ that is positively weird.”

Jim was still smiling at Ken when he replied. “I wasn’t going to post it at the Orderly Room, I was going to keep it in my desk for when we get back. I just want to see if any of my before mission thoughts and concerns really materialized on the mission.”

Ken finally sat down; he messed up Jim’s bunk in doing so. “You had better fix that bed the way you found it Daro. My rack is always squared away.” Ken gave Jim the finger and continued to mess up Jim’s bunk. “There that feels better, much more comfortable now.” This playfulness had been missing these past four of five days and Jim just recognized it. “Ken, we have put a lot of stress on these guys, do you think they are feeling it like we do?”

“I don’t know Jim, I checked my guys just before I left #16 and nothing seems different. A couple of them were wrestling in the open bay area. Even Doc and his two new cohorts were acting pretty relaxed; and you know Doc better than anybody. He almost never really relaxes. Maybe we have what an old Gunny told me about years ago, “leadership pain”. He said it happened when he was concerned he was going to lose someone in his platoon because he did or said something stupid. I forget what he really called it but he said most good leaders suffer this feeling at some time or other.”

Jim was trying to remember if he was having thoughts like that and couldn’t think of any time he thought about losing one of his team. “Maybe our success has me worried Ken. You have experienced being under attack because you have been in the middle of real combat.” Jim turned to look into Ken’s face to see if he had crossed the line by bringing up his combat experience. “Well, not all combat is the same. Some of it is up close and personal and some is at a distance. I prefer the distance kind, old buddy.”

“You see what I mean Ken, I was just afraid I had brought up a painful subject and that you would be pissed at me.” Ken looked at Jim and nodded several times. “Jim, you are a great leader, not just as a Recon Patrol leader. You try to put yourself in the other guys shoes, like just now being concerned about my feelings.” Now Jim was concerned; “That is what that Navy Lieutenant on the frigate saw and the brass around here see in you, good leadership qualities.

It’s the reason they want you in Officer Candidate School. You just ooze being a good leader.

“It’s not the least bit fake and you can’t see it. You don’t see it, do you Jim?”

“I guess not Ken, I feel confident and know when something is not right. I don’t feel scared or unprepared about this mission as complicated as it seems to be getting. I just want all these guys to be successful at doing what we are asking them to do.”

“Jim whether we are successful depends on many things, almost all of them outside of yours and my control. All we can do is to be as prepared as we can possibly be and let the chips fall where they may.” Ken sounded almost like a dad would when talking to a son about the dangers of driving an automobile.

“Thanks Ken, I wish we had this conversation earlier in the day, but then again, I wasn’t having these concerns early in the day.” Ken said nothing, only reached out his hand and squeezed Jim’s shoulder. Jim winced a bit and Ken squeezed harder. He finally let go, and laughed as he left Jim’s bunk area. He announced to the men in Jim’s Hut that he was going to church tomorrow evening right after early mess. This announcement caught Jim by surprise. Ken had not gone to any services since they had returned from the last mission. At least not according to Jim’s knowledge.

“Hey Sarge, you making a list or do we just show up at your place?” “Just show up at the OR and I will have the bus there to take us over to the new Chapel, it just opened last week.” Jim knew the new Chapel was open but was again surprised Ken did. “You never fail to amaze me Staff Sergeant Daro” was Jim’s comment. “I love to keep you guessing Jim, see you later, g’night.” Out the back door of #15 he strode waving to the guys sitting around cleaning gear. “G’night to you too Sarge.”

## Chapter Thirty-six

### Ready, Set, Go

The bus had seats for forty and fifty-two men showed up to go to church before the mission. Every unit was represented, including the ROK unit and the US Army. Many of the US armed forces were surprised at the number of Christians among the Koreans. The Koreans like the Chinese had experienced the impact of Christian missionary's since the early Twentieth Century. Lacking any other religious exposure, Christianity was gaining a large Korean following.

Nighttime was almost upon the base and not conducive to sightseeing. When the bus came to its' destination most were surprised at the progress of construction. The newly built base chapel had been erected in the center of the Marine Air Base. Directly behind the main headquarters buildings, everyone on base had the same distance to travel to get to these locations.

The three-mile bus trip had taken twenty minutes. The bus passengers were surprised at the changes on the main base. It had been several weeks since the infamous bus tour after the first mission. Tents were being replaced by Quonset Huts and more permanent structures were being built of steel and concrete. It looked to many that the Marines were here to stay, at least for ten or so years. Some had never seen the main part of the K-6 base but were still awed by the bases physical size and the number of buildings that it took to make it run.

Jim made a promise to himself; when he returned from this mission he was going to spend some time walking around in the other areas of the base. The couple of times he had left the Recon compound he drove directly to the old chapel. It was six old canvas tents erected like a circus tent. It reminded Jim of the old revival places they had

shown in the movies. When he was driving, it was usually in a jeep, and he had to be careful, there was no time for sightseeing. All the streets were marked as “one-way” which made driving somewhat safer but you had to know where you were going or you would be making a lot of extra turns.

In spite of the hour, regular mess had been over for about an hour, there were lots of personnel busily coming and going. All military locations in a zone such as this part of Korea were at war but not in the thick of daily battle, except in the air. The pilots and flight crews were busy twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Many had trouble knowing what day of the week it was; few had any kind of regular hours. When you were needed; you went regardless of any sleep or lack of.

### **The K-6 Base Chapel**

The new chapel was nicely done; gone was the dirt floor of the tented chapel. In place of the wooden backless benches that gave attendees “butt splinters”, were folding chairs that linked together side by side. The little portable organ had been replaced by a much larger and better sounding one made by Hammond. The Corporal playing it tonight was really a professional musician assigned to the Marine Corps band. His part-time Marine job was that of Chaplains Assistant. Being a Marine however, he carried his unloaded M1 Garand rifle with him, its’ fully loaded clips in his ammo belt. If the shooting started up again, he was still an infantry rifleman everything else became secondary.

The altar was pretty nice too. It could accommodate the three major faiths’ of Catholic, Protestant as well as the Hebrew services. The altars were elevated about a foot above the plywood floor allowing everyone to see the preacher, priest or rabbi. The whole altar arrangement rotated like a carousel and locked into place. The pulpits were all portable and moved to where ever the Chaplain wanted to speak from.

Tonight’s minister, a US Navy Chaplain, seemed surprised by the turnout. Lots of faces he had not seen before this. Occupying several of the rows of chairs on his left side was one large group of US Marines, ROK Marines and US Army soldiers who seem to be somehow connected. When they walked in each one sat down in the order in which they entered, and sat side-by-side, one by one, and not the usual way most took a seat when they came to church.

Obviously these Marines and soldiers all worked together, but why are they here on a Saturday night? He would make certain to ask them on their way out of the chapel. He always exited the chapel after services, using the main entrance so he could shake hands with the personnel who attended his services.

Father Sean Flynn, the Catholic Chaplain, had recently teased him of trying to recruit his Catholic parishioners. "Shaking hands and passing out tracts, now that is sneaky." Both men liked being Navy Chaplains; it was much harder work than people thought. That was okay. The only One that mattered knew what was in each man's heart.

At present there was no Jewish Chaplain so each of them took a turn providing the Hebrew service for the Jewish service men and women. Father Flynn had finished that service just prior to this one. The two of them, with the Assistants help, rearranged the altar. "It's all about teamwork" was Flynn's comment when the transition had been made.

Each Chaplain had a private office in part of a double Quonset hut immediately behind the Chapel. Their living quarters were close by also, they both lived at the Bachelor Officers Quarters. The Base's BOQ was part of the HQ complex a short distance away.

While delivering his sermon, Reverend Carty noticed several faces in the group of Marines sitting together. He noticed too, the "bloused" pants in their jump boots usually worn by the Airborne. That's the young man who Major Wallace and Lew Sinclair were bragging about. His picture was part of the K-6 information bulletin of a few weeks ago. During the singing of a hymn, his mind connected these men to the bulletin.

While delivering his homily his brain had a different revelation. These are all members of Sinclair's Unit that live inside the barbed wire compound over on the closed side of the airbase. He caught himself, and continued his sermon, "Sorry folks, at age forty-one I had a senior moment and lost track of what I was talking about. Oh yes, the significance between killing and murder." He continued on, still having in the back of his mind who and what these folks were. How could he help them? The least he could do was to make the offer of his help.

“Killing in defense of yourself or your neighbor is not a sin. Murder for self-gain is. It is not a very complicated thing at all. Some lawyers would want you to think it is, and some psychologists too. But that is another sermon at another time. Now, please take a moment to bow your heads and let us pray.” Suddenly it struck him, these are the Reconnaissance Marines and they are headed out on another mission, probably early in the morning. That’s why they are here at this service.

“Bless, O God, all who have left their homes to fight for the world’s freedom, and those who risk their lives to serve them. Give them wisdom, courage, and fidelity to the highest. Let no ordeal separate them from the love of Christ. Sanctify the strong, uphold the weak, stretch forth thy gracious hand to the dying, and in mercy receive the dead. And hasten the coming of godly peace, through the power of the Holy Spirit who cometh from thee, O Father, and thee, O Christ, world without end. Amen.”

At the end of the closing prayer there arose a joy filled “Amen”; Chaplain Carty was well pleased. The organist played the Navy Hymn softly as the chapel emptied. Skosh’s favorite song thought Jim as he hummed the hymns melody.

A number of the men thanked the Chaplain for his sermon, “Right on the money”, “It helps a lot to know that,” were some of the comments. The Reconnaissance Marines were among the last to leave. They had been driven here by bus, and had to wait for it to arrive back here to make the return trip.

The ROK Marines were shaking the Chaplain’s hand and practicing their English at the same time. The Chaplain answered them in a kind of mixed Japanese and Korean. These ROK Marines were much too polite to indicate that he was not speaking either language correctly. It did not matter to them. Most acknowledged his effort with the minor bow of submission as they shook his hand. He too returned the bow.

“You are the Marines behind the barbed wire are you not?” Jim looked at Ken who looked at Tyler and all three laughed and said that yes they were the ones behind the barbed wire. “Sorry, that came out all wrong. What I really want to know is there anything I can do for you either now or whenever?” He was speaking quite fast but couldn’t stop himself. “I can come over to your facility if you prefer or you can come here anytime.”

“Well Reverend, we are going to be gone for a while but when we get back, one of us will be in touch. Maybe we can have you do a sermon or a bible study at our place sometime,” Ken had this situation under control. “I will check with our BCO Major Wallace to see if that would be okay? He is a stickler for proper procedure and protocol.” Ken knew that Major Wallace would know the Chaplains’. “He is also a long time sinner too.” The Chaplain knew that he was being teased and smiled at the comment.

He looked at Ken’s sleeve and retorted. “If the Major heard what you just said he would most likely take at least one of those stripes, what do you think?” “Yeah, probably true,” Ken shrugged his shoulders, “But then a again, easy come easy go.” The two men were smiling at each other and thinking about who was going to get in the last comment. The Chaplain stopped smiling and softly said that he would keep all of them in his prayers, “Please be careful and most of all be safe. We want you all back here in one piece.”

The three Staff Sergeants said as one, “Thank you.” “You are welcome, now go with God and may his angels all look after you and your men.” With that he turned so as to not see their faces, he wanted to remember them as smiling and playful.

There was some small talk among the bus riders on the way back to the Recon HQ. Mostly muted private talk about the chapel service and the message. “At least the Padre didn’t make one of them “altar calls”. “You know what I mean; anyone who wants to meet Jesus come forward and prostrate yourself before Him.” It sounded as if Danny had experienced something that he hadn’t enjoyed. He probably did not understand the message but he sure was vocal about the experience.

Andy Hughes, the new Navy Corpsman asked Danny if he wanted to learn more about Jesus but without the “altar call.” “Yeah, sure but I don’t want to be looking all stupid and stuff doing it. I think that God has his own way of reaching all of us. Regardless of the kind of life we have had or what we may have been.” “I agree,” answered Andy. “Danny I will make a deal with you. When we get back, you know, after the mission and all that. You and I will get together privately and together learn about Jesus as our Savior. Whaddya think?” “It’s a deal Andy, after we get back here will be fine.”



That was the last conversation on the bus, for the rest of the trip it was silence and darkness. Some of the guys commented later about the streets being one-way. At night you can't see a thing, driving after dark is damned dangerous.

Back in his respective hut, each man finished checking his gear, one more time. Mission utilities and jackets were laid out, as were six changes of socks and two extra Marine green tee shirts and shorts. That chore done, each man hit the sack for a couple hours of "shut-eye." Lights were out at 2000 hours with no comments. Some men were already "cutting wood" the sound of those snoring was both soothing and comforting.

Jim's alarm went off as planned at 2250 hours, ten minutes before the announced wake up time. He heard others stirring in the main bay of the hut. No one was going to have to be awakened. This unit was much too savvy for that kind of stuff. A quick run to the head, most had showered and shaved prior to going to church. The head call was a quick one.

Carrying this much ammunition and weaponry required that transportation be by "deuce and a half" no buses and no small vehicles such as weapons carriers. Two trucks per unit made for a lot of noise in the middle of most peoples' night. Unit One's trucks were idling at their front door. Unit Three's trucks were at their back door leaving Unit's Two and Four using their back doors. This way there was no chance of a traffic jam when leaving the compound.

There is something different about this mission, Jim again was pondering, he had more "what ifs" in his head than he could process. There was no fear; this dilemma was one of logistics. Prior to this mission, the unit went in, did what it had to do and left. Wait one minute James. His memory said, "You are sloughing off a lot of stuff if you are thinking the first two missions were simple or easy". His thoughts were interrupted by the First Sergeant who was supervising the process of loading the trucks. It was time for him to get his gear on board and pay attention to the now not events a couple of months old.

Cunningham greeted Pappy cordially; Pappy's response was to motion Jim off to the side away from the rest of his unit. "Don't start worrying about shit before it happens. That is a sure way to screw something else up." Jim nodded his agreement; obviously Pappy had been in a similar situation and recognized the signs.

“I can’t get all of this stuff that’s happening at once, out of my head. I am trying to concentrate only on my Unit’s assignment yet I am worried about Ken and Tyler too.” It was the first time Jim had verbally expressed his concerns.

Pappy understood Jim perfectly. “Jim a long time ago someone said to me “All you can do is all you can do, and all you can do is enough.” You can’t fix everyone’s problems by yourself, that is just not humanly possible.”

At that moment, Staff Sergeant James Cunningham looked directly into First Sergeant Papushka’s eyes and saw the truth. Jim could only fix Jim and no one else. He reached out to hug Pappy but instead took Pappy’s outstretched hand and shook it harder and longer than usual. “Thanks Gunny.” “You’re welcome Jim, see you when you get back.” “Roger that, see you in a few days.” Jim was feeling much better knowing that Gunny knew how he was feeling.

### **Load ‘em up and move ‘em out**

Recon Unit Three trucks were facing the Orderly Room direction and moved out first followed closely by the two assigned to Unit One. Everyone sat in the back of each truck with his gear and weapons. The ammunition bags created an added impediment so it was decided to put all of the bags containing the sub-machine gun ammo into the body of the truck last. This way it would be taken out first and easier to deal with than each Marine carrying his own two ammo cases. Things have a way of being worked out if someone puts some thought into what the problem was.

The ride was quiet; no one was particularly talkative or grumpy. Jim wondered how the other half of his unit was making out. Then he realized that any problem in that truck belonged to Bruce, his Assistant Patrol Leader. After all, now the demolition part of the team was under Bruce’s direct authority and judgment.

Jim had some thoughts about the assignment of these assistants. He saw it as a way to develop new Unit leaders and Patrol Leaders. He wondered what the “brass” had planned for this arrangement. As new men came into the Recon Battalion there would be a need for experienced Unit leaders. The assistant’s position is from where that leader should logically come.

Part of what Jim was thinking did not ring true when he thought about the Unit’s first mission. He was the only leader and had been the only leader since finishing Recon

School. When the Unit went on to Demolition School, he was the assigned leader. Over all Jim had over a year's leadership role with most of the men in these two Units.

Reality set in as the driver was pulling into the Base Operations Area of the Air Base. The downshifting that the automatic transmission made indicated it did not want to slow down let alone come to a complete stop. "Almost here guys, when the truck stops, wait for the drivers to lower the tail gate. No point in anyone getting hurt before we get to where we are going." Jim noticed his voice had an unusual authority to it; no one seemed to notice except himself.

"I will get out first and then you can start handing the ammo bags out to the drivers and me." "Sounds good Jim, do you want your gear first and then the ammo?" Doc had been sitting across from Jim on the way to the flight line. These were the first words either had exchanged.

"Yeah Doc, good idea, thanks" "No sweat, I will need help with all the stuff I have too." Doc was letting Jim off the hook. He knew Jim had something on his mind and wouldn't share it until he came up with a solution. The Doc had spent almost a year with this Unit and was getting to know them pretty well indeed. He liked the feeling. "Here's your weapon, and belts," Jim grabbed them and put the belts on the ground with the sub-machine gun on top. Automatically he had checked the safety and the chamber to sure it was clear, he wanted no accidents.

Next came the ammunition bags. Clever things Jim thought, the straps that went behind the neck were used to lift the bags out of the truck. These made it easy for the men to pick up a pair of bags put them on and walk to the waiting aircraft. The Air Force aircrew and the Marine Parachute Shop had previously loaded the chutes into the center row of the C-119. The reserve chutes were stacked there also, another "just in case". No one would be able to carry the ammo bags and get the reserve chute opened if the main failed anyway. Ken had referred to this as a compromise, yeah some compromise.

Jim was to be first out of the aircraft followed by the radio and electronics men, the snipers would be next and then Doc. Last out were the demolition team members; one of them had the BAR. Ken was using the same order with his Unit. The two Patrol Leaders tried and mostly succeeded in making these kinds of decisions together. It

seemed to be working okay; they would both most likely continue this mode of working together. "Don't fix what ain't broken", that was a favorite phrase of Ken Daro's and a good one too.

Because of the dark very little could be seen of Ken's Unit. Of course the C-119 was clearly visible but not the loading ramp and side door. The Base Operations Area was completely dark. Only the red glow from the Control Tower was visible and only when a person was within a hundred of feet of the tower. Beyond that distance, all appeared as shadows in the darkness.

The trucks had left the loading ramp on their way back to the Recon Motor Pool. The pleasantries exchanged after the trucks had been unloaded stuck in Jim's head. "See you on the return trip, have a great flight and be careful." These Motor Pool guys were as much a part of the Recon teams' as anyone. They took pride in providing whatever services the Recon's needed in getting these jobs done.

The airdrop containers that the Air Force personnel had packed were all stored forward toward the pilots cabin. They would be moved into position after the Unit "chuted up" and the center cargo rail was cleared of all equipment. The big "clamshell" rear doors squealed shut as the pilot readied the "Flying Boxcar" for takeoff.

Now the interior of the plane took on an eerie look. The dim lighting and dark clothing everyone wore made the place look sinister.

Eyes adjusted slowly and after a short period of time each person could more clearly see one another. Most of the Unit secretly looked up to check the "static line cable" overhead. Yes it was there, yes it was unobstructed and no I was not afraid that it would have been forgotten.

It is strange what goes through the head of someone who is willingly going to throw his body, and about a eighty pounds of war making tools, out the door of a fast moving, low flying, perfectly good airplane. But that was exactly what would happen in less than three hours.

As the C-119 taxied out from Base Ops the other C-119's could be seen by the airplanes crew, all looked closed up and ready to go. The takeoff sequence was going according to plan. Unit One takes off first. Followed by The ROK Marines, technically Unit Five. Unit Three, Ken Daro's teams, trailed that plane.

The aircraft taxiways were lighted in blue, and the runway lights were not turned on yet. That would occur when the aircraft completed its "run up" to make certain everything on the airplane was functioning correctly. The trip to the holding area at the end of the runway was not exactly smooth or quiet. The planes brakes kept making a squealing and scraping noise.

Doc put his head down and tipped his helmet down to shield his eyes. Quietly he was praying for a good mission with no losses or injuries. He could deal with whatever came along, but he would rather not. This time, please, just peace and quiet. Quiet, my God Otto, these guys are going to blow up another tunnel complex. Quiet my ass.

Then he thought about how funny and strange it was, what went through a persons mind when they are anxious. He was anxious this time around. He thought too about Andy Hughes, it's his first combat jump and his first jump from a C-119. And he is carrying an extra load of sub-machine gun ammunition. Oh well, he will do okay I know he will.

Doc was roused out of his daydream state by the aircraft making a sudden left turn. With both engines screaming so loud not only his hearing but also every other part of his body experienced the unseen forces that are exerted during a rolling takeoff. Two radial engines, delivering 3500 horsepower each were running at close to maximum revolutions per minute. None of the Marines were able to see out of the aircraft's side window. The windows were mounted higher than the aluminum framed web seats that ran down the side of each plane. Even the crew chief was seated and buckled in against the forces of nature, both gravity and inertia.

After only a short period of time, the passengers all felt the nose of the aircraft tip up as he plane reached flying speed and slowly escaped the pull of earths gravity. All of a sudden they were airborne and the sound of the main gear and the thump of the nose wheel folding into their respective wheel bays. Other noises indicated that the flaps were being retracted to reduce the lift needed for takeoff but which were an impediment to flying if left in the down position.

The C-119 made a large arc after a few minutes of straight flying. The pilots were coordinating their flight plans and some maneuvering needed to take place for the three

aircraft to fly in formation. The three would break the formation when they arrived at the IP or initial point of the final approach at the jump site.

The sky was moonless and several of the Marines stood on the webbing of their seats in an attempt to see the other aircraft. Since planes flying in a war zone do not turn on their wing, tail or belly lights, seeing the other planes was not possible. "We are going to stay at five thousand feet for the next thirty minutes or so and then climb to our assigned altitude of ten thousand feet for the rest of the trip." The voice was from the "flight deck" and no explanation was offered as to why they were flying at half their mission altitude.

With the same abruptness as the first message came the answer. "A flight of Navy night fighters are headed north and are using the altitudes we were to use to get to ten thousand." The voice continued after a slight pause. "The planes are from the Princeton and Oriskany in the Japan Sea. They are joining with those from the Wake Island in the Yellow Sea. This should be some shindig with that many carrier planes involved at one time."

All kinds of thoughts were going through the Recon team's heads. Murphy sort of summed it up with his offer. "This should make our jobs easier, the Chicoms will be more interested in getting these Navy and Marine planes and not so interested in us."

"Sean, what the hell kind of logic is that? Those planes could be bombing the same place we are going to jump into." Bruce almost sounded angry about Murphy's statement. "Nah, the brass knows where our missions are located. They wouldn't do anything like bomb the place we are going to blow up now, would they?"

"Those electrons you are always talking about must have made mush of your brain. We are on missions' stamped "Top Secret." Bruce knew he had the radioman in a no win discussion. "Whaddya think they publish where we're going in the Navy Times so everybody can read about it and join the party?" Sean shot back quickly, "I only meant that the upper levels would know about us and avoid the area, that's all. Gee, you get harder to talk to everyday." Just for good measure he added, "That new position you have has already made you a dumb ass. I can only imagine what making you a sergeant will do, heaven help us."

Jim had heard enough and told both of the antagonists to button up and get some rest. “You can continue the discussion when we get back to number 15, okay?” “Okay sarge,” and a moment later, “Yeah okay sarge, sorry Sean.” “No sweat Bruce, see ya later.” With that exchange the only noise heard, was the air passing the outside of the aircraft, and the ever-constant drumming sound of those two big Pratt and Whitney engines.

A few slept, most used the time to catch the catnaps of five minutes or so. They would wake up refreshed and after a few more minutes again catch another nap. These naps are the trademark of Marines who pull twenty-four hour a day watches. Usually the naps are coordinated so someone is always alert and on watch. This was a luxury; a full two hours to sleep unfortunately most didn't sleep. Between the cold and the constant engine noise, sleep was fitful at best.

Jim noticed Bruce Strong writing in his notepad. Bruce must be preparing himself for when they get in the tunnel. Jim had not prompted Bruce about taking notes; he had decided to do this on his own. Good experience and good for him and his team. Jim was not the least bit put out by sharing responsibility on this mission. He was the one who was ultimately responsible. It will be nice to have someone else shoulder the details of getting these tunnels blown up and made useless.

This seemed like an efficient way to accomplish more and in less time, at least he hoped it would. Jim also remembered that this was one of his recommendations in one of his AAR's to headquarters. It had better work. Or what Jim?

Just as Jim and some others were getting comfortable to catch some more shuteye, the aircrafts claxon sounded. It woke everybody up; no one sleeps through one of these horns being activated. The flight deck announced that the jumpers needed to “Get those chutes on and clear the cargo delivery area.”

Two Air Force crewmembers came into the troop area from the front of the aircraft to assist with the donning of the parachutes. One man lifted and the other helped each Marine with getting the straps of the harness on correctly. Once the chute was on and buckled, that jumper moved aft to be checked by the Cargo and Jump Master. After receiving his okay the jumper moved up the line to allow the next Recon Marine to have his parachute mounted and checked.

The entire task took about thirty minutes and when complete each Recon Marine was again seated in the webbed seat. Not quite so comfortable now especially with the ammunition cases hanging around each jumper's neck. The Cargo/Jump Master had six Marines on one side of the aircraft and six on the opposite side. The plan was to use both exit doors at the rear of the plane for both the cargo drop and the airdrop of the Recon teams. This sounded okay to Jim and Bruce. The quicker they were out of the aircraft the better and it should take less time assembling when on the ground. "We'll see," mumbled Bruce who was not inclined to appreciate changes to any routine.

Once the jumpers were seated, the aircrew members moved the cargo containers along the floor mounted roller bearing cargo track. Then they re-latched the containers to prevent them from shifting in flight. The container's parachute harness strap hook was attached to the planes overhead static line. The Air Force crewmembers made this look easy, but most of the Recon team knew how heavy those containers really were.

Once on the ground it would take at least two men to remove the parachute's harness and move the containers from the drop zone to the tunnel location. Before moving any containers Jim's team would have to search the tunnel entrance and secure the area. When that was done the rest of the unit could work on the cargo containers.

The containers would have their skids attached to the bottom of the container. The demolition team then dragged each one to the demolition site. The cargo parachute and harness was to be left where they landed. All parachutes would be disposed of during the demolition. Remembering the previous mission, the parachutes and harnesses would be treated carefully because they had been used to save lives.

"The IP in ten minutes" announced the flight deck. This meant the formation that the three aircraft were flying in would be disbanded. Each aircraft would turn to its new heading that would take the plane and its cargo to the correct target zone. "Descending to five thousand feet and we are on a heading of two six five degrees." This was the moment of truth coming up.

Once the aircraft descended to eleven hundred feet all the jumpers would hook up their parachute's static line. It attached securely to the overhead cable connected to the airplanes airframe. Each man checked and re-checked the hook.



“Cargo doors unlatched, prepare to open.” First, two of the crew opened the starboard door and it slid into its latches to stay open during the cargo drop run. They both moved across the aircraft and repeated that operation to the port side door. “Doors open and latched,” came the voice from the speaker system.

“Prepare to launch cargo in five minutes.” Two additional crewmembers came to assist the first two. One was obviously a radio operator; he still had his headset on top of his head. The jumpmaster was standing dead center of the aircraft between the two rails of rollers. One path of rollers lead to the port door and the other set lead to the starboard door.

The track mechanism was clever. Every even numbered container stack would go out the starboard side door and the odd numbered ones would go out the port side door. Once the cargo area was cleared, the roller rails were repositioned back to the center of the aircraft, away from the path of the jumpers.

The jumpers would line up in the door and jump after the pilot had executed a “one eighty” to return to the drop zone and give the Recon Unit the green light to jump.

Jim wanted to write in his thigh pad notebook how efficient this whole trip had been. There was no way he could do that so he made a mental note to do that at his first opportunity.

“Cargo ready to go, drop zone is one and one half miles ahead, altitude is one-hundred feet, unlatch first container.” Another pause. “On my signal let the party begin, five, four, three, two, one. Drop one and two.” With that said the twelve double-stacked cargo containers all slid toward their respective door and exited the aircraft. Twelve doubled-up containers went through each cargo door. Standing inside, the Recon team could hear the cargo chutes catch the slipstream of the aircraft and a “pop” signifying that the containers’ chutes had opened.

“Everybody hang on. We are going to make a one eighty here and drop you Marines right on top of the containers.” The jumpmaster gave a “thumbs up” to the flight deck. The cargo had landed where it was supposed to, now let’s get these Recon guys down there too.

Each member felt the pressure created by the sharp turn. It was a good feeling. It meant there was no enemy ground fire happening. If anti-aircraft fire or even ground

initiated rifle fire had been encountered the pilot would have taken some kind of evasive action. None was needed at this point. Good. No, very good. Jim looked around as best he could. The wind was whipping past him as he stood in the doorway waiting for the “go” signal. He could not see anything to his side. He looked down and saw snow and some rock ridges peeking through. Yep, it was still winter in North Korea, and Easter was right around the corner. What made me think about that he wondered? Oh yeah, Skosh’s clothes for Easter.

“Ready to jump in ten seconds.” All were quiet, waiting; “five, four, three, two, one, go.” Jim let himself be pulled into the wind stream. As he jumped he felt the strain of his “static line”. Immediately the unmistakable sound of his main chute being pulled out of its’ pack. In seconds he felt his chute open. He would never get used to the jerk of the harness when the parachute opened.

Surprising, he could still hear the claxon horn of the aircraft signaling everyone to jump.

Jim looked up at his open chute, mumbled a “thank you”. He folded his arms across his chest over the top of the ammo bags. Jim took time to check the horizon and check the other jumpers. “Everyone present or accounted for Sir.” he said out loud.

“Feet together, chin tucked into the chest, knees bent, balls of the feet below your heels. Get ready to land and execute a perfect PLF.”

Staff Sergeant James Cunningham was smiling as his feet touched the rocky and snow-covered surface of another North Korean mountain.

Mission three was underway.

Aaroogah, Semper Fi,

*Words For Those Who Ever Served*

*Some gave a little*

*Some gave a lot*

*Some gave their all*

*But everyone contributed something*

*Sometime, somewhere, somehow*

*Each in their own way*

*Helped win the battle*

*Maybe not the war*

*After all is said and done*

*Wars are always a series of battles*

*Some successful, some not, some a toss-up*

*And when all the battles are fought*

*And the war ceases to be*

*Then those that can, come home*

*Those that can't, are remembered*

*By those who loved and miss them, but*

*In the end, and forevermore*

*It is God who remembers us all.*

*Hank Acker, September 7, 2009*

Acker/The Hills Went Boom