

Kevin M. Day

*Sailor's
Anthology*

Book II

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KEVIN M. DAY

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An Imprint of Kevin M. Day Book Publishers

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Fiction;
except for the parts that aren't.

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Comair

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Preface

Not all stories have happy endings. Comair is a story that blends recent U.S. Naval history with an all-too-plausible future terrorist scenario. The ending is shocking, and sure to leave frequent flyers with a good dose of goose pimples.

Martin Sheer watched from his rented Chevy Impala as the men boarded the crowded city bus. The group of eight was still together. They had remained inseparable for the last three months since he started shadowing them back in Islamabad, Afghanistan. Just leaving the low-key Centro Cultural Islamico de Mexico building located in the crime ridden southern outskirts of Tijuana, Mexico, he knew the group of men was most likely headed to their rented apartment about five miles away.

For the two weeks since arriving in Mexico, the men had kept the same routine. They were always together, spending their entire days in prayer or study under the direction of Sheikh Muhammad Kamil Feiz – the outspoken and controversial imam with suspected ties to Islamic extremists the world over.

Belching a cloud of black smoke, the bus left the curb and bullied its way into the heavy traffic crawling along Boulevard Fundadores.

Martin put his car in drive and left in the opposite direction. He was on his way back to the rental car agency at the International Airport of Tijuana to trade vehicles. Martin was a professional and had learned years ago to never drive the same car two days in a row.

There was simply nothing more for him to see today – the men’s apartment was bugged and he would continue to monitor them electronically.

Martin Sheer was an ex-CIA operative turned freelance security consultant. His current assignment had so far been easy money. His employer was paying him extremely well to track and report the activities of the suspected terrorist sleeper cell. The men had never presented any challenges, kept to themselves, and had not even caught the attention of the local authorities. Martin Sheer seemed to be the only one watching the men. His personal intelligence network was vast and he was fairly sure none of the agencies in North or South America had shown any interest at all in the group.

Interesting because the group was definitely planning something – their training in Afghanistan had lasted several months. All of the men had become accomplished sky divers and each one an expert in close quarters, hand to hand combat. But what were they planning?

That was the question Martin was hired to answer and so far, nothing seemed to make sense to him. Today’s operations report to his employer would be nearly identical to the one he made yesterday - and day after day before that.

Captain Kevin Johnson made his one hundredth and final lap around the deck of the U.S.S. Lake Champlain. Since taking command of the AEGIS Cruiser seven months ago he kept the main deck of the ship open for running during lunch whenever the ship was at sea. Although he wasn't dictatorial about it, he strongly encouraged his sailors to stay in shape. Leading by example, the captain looked forward to his daily run on deck. His fitness program was starting to work too; the command climate had definitely changed for the better during his tour onboard. Winded from pushing out the last two laps, Captain Johnson stopped to catch his breath on the ship's forecastle.

The sight before him was absolutely beautiful. Calm azure seas and a clear blue sky with only a small line of puffing cumulous clouds along the far horizon to the east towards the Mexican coastline. A light breeze caressed his sweating body, cooling him down nicely with its eighty five degree temperature. He marveled again that the Navy actually paid him to do this. He thoroughly enjoyed his job as the captain onboard the Lake Champlain, a Ticonderoga class ship with impressive offensive and defensive capabilities.

True, like most Surface Warfare Officers that he knew, he would have preferred being assigned as the Air

Defense Commander for a Carrier Strike Group and pulled a Western Pacific deployment. Nevertheless, chasing drug runners hadn't turned out to be such a bad deal either. Since arriving on station off the coast of Baja California, Mexico two months ago, his ship had made a total of twenty three boarding's. The crew had seized over eighteen tons in pure Columbian cocaine and nearly eighty tons in high grade marijuana.

With Operation IRAQI FREEDOM winding down, he had probably gotten the best deal anyway. His ship and crew had made a good name for themselves back home in San Diego with Commander, Third Fleet. With a long and successful career under his belt, he knew he was on a short list to make Admiral.

Taking in the view, Captain Johnson turned to head up to his at-sea cabin – the daily operations brief was scheduled to start in about thirty minutes. Just enough time to shower and eat the Caesar salad he knew would be waiting for him. He took great care of his crew and they consistently returned the favor.

The International Airport of Tijuana was even more crowded than usual. In no obvious hurry, Martin waited patiently in line. He was an experienced operative and always did his

best to blend into the crowd, never making a scene – probably how he managed to stay alive as long as he had. He planned to pick up his new rental car and return to the safe house located on the cities outskirts.

A master of disguise, Martin could transform the way he looked almost at will. From the bored looking business man he was today into a nerdy bespectacled college professor tomorrow. He would observe the group mostly from a street side coffee stand in the morning and a location he had chosen close the run down borough library during the day. There was no need to remain in close proximity to his quarry. In fact, avoiding contact had allowed him to remain undetected. His assignment was simple and direct – observe and report only. That was easy money for a man like Martin Sheer.

Nearly to the Enterprise Rental Care service counter, Martin watched CNN Headline News on the television monitor suspended from the ceiling. Nancy Grace was reporting on a story from North Island Naval Air Station in Coronado, California. The U.S.S. George H. W. Bush was holding a Change of Command ceremony tomorrow and numerous dignitaries were expected to make an appearance for the event including ex-President's Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, William Jefferson Clinton, and George

W. Bush. The report focused on the elaborate security precautions that were being taken as demonstrated by the video of heavily armed boats patrolling the harbor.

“Next customer please!” Martin heard a young female saying. He turned his attention away from CNN when he realized the young lady was speaking to him. Finally, it was his turn at the service counter.

“**He was there** again. Watching us from a rented Chevy this time,” Mohammad bin Dicwaadi said into the satellite telephone.

“Good. The operative still doesn’t suspect that he’s working for us. God is great. Tomorrow you will become a glorious Martyr,” Prince el Amandi replied from his sprawling compound in Saudi Arabia.

“God is great. We will not fail,” Mohammad ended the secure connection to the group’s leader and financier. He turned and headed towards the filthy stairwell leading off the roof.

“Aktar, everything is in place. Get the things ready – we leave before first light tomorrow!” Mohammad barked to his second in command when he returned to the group’s tiny apartment.

The men lounging around the small space immediately sprang into action. Tomorrow was the day they had long planned for. Although their plan was simple, everything had to go just right or it would surely end in a very public and shameful failure.

Martin Sheer was wide awake. He'd learned from his electronic eavesdropping that the terrorist group was making their move tomorrow, but to do what exactly? What in the hell did they have planned? Although he was fluent in Arabic and Farsi, he was unable to learn anything more of real tactical value coming over the bugging devices he had planted around the group's small apartment. Sure, he knew they were leaving early tomorrow but to where? The group either did not have a need to say very much to each other or they knew their small apartment was bugged. Whatever the case, he simply needed more information.

Martin decided he would have to set up surveillance close to the group's apartment and follow them when they left. He quickly keyed an updated report to his employer into the encrypted burst transmitter, changed his disguise and raced to his car down on the street.

As soon as Martin Sheer turned over the key of his rented Toyota Rav4, a specialized explosive device ripped

him apart. The small specially shaped C4 explosive hidden under his seat killed him instantly. Most of the damage was neatly contained within the body of the small SUV.

Martin Sheer died never knowing that he had actually aided the terrorist cell that would become known around the world as Allah's Wind Walkers. He had been cleverly used, his detailed surveillance reports making it clear that the Western intelligence agencies had no idea what was to happen tomorrow in sunny San Diego, California. A martyrdom that would be broadcast live to astonished viewers around the world.

“Sir, your flight to Bogota boards through Gate 11. Have a great flight and hope your team wins!” the lady at the Aero Mexico check-in told the group of athletes standing in front of her.

“Thank you,” Mohammad bin Dicwaadi replied in a pleasant voice on behalf of his group. They were all dressed in neatly tailored green sweats with Tijuana Soccer Club embroidered in four inch lettering across the chest.

The group received their boarding passes and baggage claims from the Aero Mexico employee and turned towards the large overhead sign that read All Gates. The eight men

each carried a small carry-on duffle bag that matched their team soccer logo and uniforms.

“Captains in Combat!” Operations Specialist First Class Brent Jones yelled out as soon as Captain Johnson walked into Combat Information Center. CIC was the nerve center of the ship and having grown bored with looking at paper work in his cabin, the captain had decided to head down to see what was going on.

“Hey Captain. It’s pretty quiet right now. No surface contacts within fifty miles of us and no suspect vessels in the area being reported on GCCS-M or over chat,” LCDR Steven Guy reported as soon as the captain took his seat at the front table area of Combat.

“Very well, just stopping by to see if anything interesting was up,” replied Captain Johnson. “I think I’ll just hang out a while and listen to you all do your thing,” the captain continued conversationally.

“Aye, Aye sir,” replied the tactical actions officer.

Captain Johnson was extremely relaxed in Combat, an adroit tactician with many years at sea. He was one of only two people on the ship that had ever seen actual combat action. Incredibly, both of them were on the U.S.S.

Vincennes together many years ago and were now serving together again onboard the Lake Champlain.

The captain kicked back in his chair and donned his headset. He had about an hour to kill before he was expected down in Engineering for the zone inspection. The captain listened briefly to the routine internal communications of his watch standers and studied the large screen tactical displays in front of him. His TAO was right, no surface contacts around and the only air traffic was the commercial type over Mexican airspace. It was shaping up to be a pretty routine day at sea – or so he thought at the time.

Mohammed bin Dicwaadi sat quietly in seat 3B going over in his mind the carefully scripted plan he and his group were moments away from enacting. The men had easily cleared security and the flight to Bogota, Columbia had taken off without incident. The captain just announced the plane was passing ten thousand feet and he was turning off the fasten seat belt sign.

Grabbing the small duffle bag from underneath his seat, Mohammed nonchalantly removed his seatbelt and walked the short distance up the aisle to the lavatory at the front of the plane.

Once inside, he opened the bag and removed the shaving kit from within it. Unzipping the kit, he removed the small plastic bottle that read Aqua Velva on the label and placed it on the counter. Mohammed then closed his duffel bag, cracked open the door to ensure Aktar was next in line, and left the small space to return to his seat.

Aktar entered the lavatory just vacated by Mohammed and secured the door behind him. He opened his duffel bag on the small counter area and removed a thick roll of wool yarn. He tore the yarn into short strips with his hands and placed the pieces in a gallon size Ziploc baggy. He then removed his own fake bottle of aftershave lotion and poured the liquid into the plastic baggy, ensuring the yarn was evenly soaked. Aktar waited a few seconds until the special liquid was completely absorbed into the yarn.

Aktar quickly palmed the Aqua Velva bottle that Mohammed left for him on the counter and exited the plane's forward bathroom.

Right on cue, a third member from their group walked from his seat in 17C towards the front of the airplane. He joined Aktar at the secured door leading onto the plane's flight deck.

Aktar opened the Ziplock baggy and removed a large clump of the sticky knitting yarn and starting slapping it

vertically along the left side of the cockpit door. The pair would continue until the long door hinge was completely covered from top to bottom. They knew the hinge was constructed of ordinary aircraft aluminum and resembled the type often used to secure a lid to a common tool box.

“You two, what ...” the watchful flight attendant never finished her inquiry before she was crumpled by a well-placed blow to her neck by Mohammed bin Dicwaadi. He then caught her fall and gently placed her on the deck in the cross aisle galley area in the forward most part of the plane. The action was so smooth and non-confrontational that only a few passengers in the front of the plane even suspected that something was going on. It looked as though the flight attendant simply fainted and was helped to the deck by the swarthy looking man standing next to her.

Moving quickly the two men finished placing the clumps of sticky yarn to cockpit door. Next, Aktar removed the lid on Mohammed’s Aqua Velva bottle and squeezed the reactive liquid vertically along the line of yarn. Instantly, the two liquids combined in a fierce endothermic chemical reaction that dropped the temperature of the yarn to around minus eighty degrees Fahrenheit. The aluminum hinge under the line of yarn immediately froze, becoming extremely brittle.

Aktar heard the galley cart rolling towards them before he even saw Mohammed and two of the other men in their group pushing hard behind it. As he and his accomplice jumped out of the way, the cart smashed solidly into the cockpit door. The sharp impact caused the entire length of aluminum hinge to instantly crack and fail. Mohammed quickly ripped the door from its frame and entered the flight deck. Moving swiftly, he knocked the startled co-pilot unconscious with a hard punch to the back of the jaw. Mohammed then confidently dragged the junior pilot from his seat and took his spot at the controls.

The entire operation took less than two minutes and most of the passengers onboard were still unaware that something was wrong.

“Captain, my men and I have no intention of harming your passengers or your airplane. Do exactly as I say and you can have your airplane back when we leave,” Mohammed calmly explained to the airplane’s wide-eyed senior pilot.

The terrorist’s sinister smile was greeted by the captain’s frozen look of shock.

Commander Neil Richards visually surveyed the area around the pier again. As the Executive Officer of North Island

Naval Air Station, he was in charge of coordinating security arrangements between the civilian Secret Service officer in charge and his own uniformed security personnel. Redundant layers of security were in place and all communications networks were operating flawlessly. He felt confident that he'd done everything in his power to ensure the safety of the VIPs that were now arriving on the base.

Three road blocks with .50 caliber machine guns were set up, Seal Team Five was patrolling the harbor in several Mark V watercraft, and a Combat Air Patrol station was set with a section of F/A-18F fighters just off the coast of San Diego. Commander Richards knew the Secret Service had similar arrangements in place but was not cleared to know what they consisted of.

The base was secure as it would ever be – good thing too because no less than four ex-Presidents were expected to arrive shortly before the ceremony began at 1300. The dignitaries would all be seated in the low-rise bleachers that were set up on the pier beside the U.S.S. George H.W. Bush, the United States Navy's newest nuclear powered aircraft carrier. Right behind the speaker's podium and VIP bleachers was a beautiful panoramic view of the San Diego skyline. Sailors dressed in sparkling white dress uniforms

would be manning the perimeter of the guest section in front of the podium. The arrangements were carefully designed to maximize the view for the numerous television crews that would be filming the ship's change of command ceremony.

Commander Richards had attended all of the security briefings and knew the current terrorist threat to be minimal. The consensus opinion was that North Island Naval Air Station was not the most likely place for terrorists to strike – it was too hard of a target. Isolated on the Northern tip of Coronado Island across the bay from downtown San Diego, the base was considered an extremely secure installation. Any strike would most likely occur either before or after the event when the dignitaries were in transit – definitely a security concern but not, technically, the concern Commander Richard's.

As he turned to speak with one of his assistants about some last minute details, the Navy commander couldn't have imagined just how horrifyingly wrong the intelligence assessments would prove to be.

“TAO, Air, track 2045 is well off the airway and looks like its departing Mexican airspace,” reported Operations

Specialist Senior Chief Mark Talbert over Net 15, the internal communications net in Combat.

“Roger, I was just looking at that. It was on the airway heading south and then turned west towards the coast – directly at us. Are we sure there isn’t an air route right above us here?” asked LCDR Guy.

“Absolutely sure sir, there is no airway above us. The major east-west air corridors are well to the north and south of our position. The track looks to be a commercial airliner, its squawking Modes 3 and Charlie, originated at Tijuana International Airport, and assumed normal speed and altitude on the airway heading south. EW reported the track correlating to COMAIR ES on that bearing as well. It’s definitely COMAIR but not where it should be,” Senior Chief Talbert continued.

The airplane conformed to the profile of a commercial airliner including the electronic emissions detected by the ship’s electronic warfare operator.

“Senior, this is Captain Johnson. Have you received any 7700 type IFF squawks?” asked the captain after becoming interested in the unusual air contact. He was inquiring whether or not the ship’s Identification Friend or Foe system had detected the international code for high jacking.

“No sir. But the contact has now descended to twenty thousand feet and appears to be turning North,” added Senior Chief Talbert.

“Roger that Senior. Continue to track and report,” replied Captain Johnson as he reached for the Task Group Command Net, a secure satellite radio to Commander, Third Fleet in San Diego. Since the terrorist attacks on 9/11, commercial aircraft were unfortunately no longer considered to be absolutely benign. In fact, a commercial airliner might even be shot down if there was no other way to prevent another 9/11 type attack. The aircraft they were tracking now was probably nothing to be concerned about, but the captain wasn’t taking any chances with it either.

Captain Johnson and OSCS Talbert knew each other well and had stood hundreds of hours of watch together twenty one years ago onboard the U.S.S. Vincennes. They were both in Combat when their previous ship and crew mistakenly shot down an Iranian commercial airliner in the Arabian Gulf killing all 290 passengers onboard. Both men had carried that painful memory with them to this day and had trained hard to prevent it from ever happening again. Shooting down a second airliner was definitely not part of either man’s career plan.

Captain Johnson was a Lieutenant and Senior Chief Talbert a Third Class Petty Officer at the time of the incident. They had both been in Combat Information Center that fateful day. Although neither man was directly involved with the shoot down itself, they were both involved with the events leading up to the tragedy.

The U.S.S. Vincennes was inbound the Strait of Hormuz on the early morning of July 3, 1988 when the ship's helicopter was fired upon by several Iranian Boghammers, a type of Iranian military fast patrol boat. When Captain Will Rodgers decided to close the distance between the Vincennes and her helicopter, the patrol boats turned inbound to the ship and opened fire. Lieutenant Johnson was the ship's Surface Warfare Coordinator and returned fire on the Boghammers sinking eight of them with Vincennes' 5" guns. Operations Specialist Third Class Talbert was seated at the console next to Lieutenant Johnson keeping solid radar tracks on all twenty three hostile surface contacts headed towards the ship. Both men were awarded Navy Commendation Medals for their competence in defending the ship. If the story had simply ended there, it would have been a great news day for the United States Navy. However, that was not to be the case.

During the running surface engagement, a lone airplane launched from Bandar Abbas, a joint civilian-military airport located in Iran at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz. Due to numerous mistakes made by watch standers on the other side of Combat, the airplane was misidentified as an Iranian F-14 inbound for Vincennes. After several radio warnings to turn away from the ship went unanswered and mistakenly convinced the plane had hostile intentions, Captain Rodgers ordered the aircraft to be shot down. Vincennes fired two SM-2 surface-to-air missiles and Flight 655 crashed into the sea killing everyone onboard.

The Lieutenant Johnson onboard Vincennes in 1988 was now Captain Johnson, Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. Lake Champlain. Operations Third Class Talbert was now Senior Chief Talbert, Captain Johnson's most senior and trusted operator.

“Captain, listen very carefully to what I’m about to tell you. The lives of everyone on this airplane depends on you doing exactly as I instruct,” Mohammend bin Dicwaadi said to the pilot. Mohammed then handed the captain a small piece of paper with a latitude and longitude location written on it.

“Fly to this position and put the plane in a slow left hand turn. Maintain twenty thousand feet and do not leave Mexican airspace. When we get there, I want you to release the locking mechanism on the aft port door of the aircraft. My friends and I will be jumping out. Then, you can return your aircraft safely back home,” continued Mohammed.

“By the way, if I were you I wouldn’t turn on your IFF distress call either. You know as well as I do what they’re likely to do to high jacked airplanes these days,” Mohammed added by winking his left eye at the captain.

The captain could not believe what he was hearing but immediately entered the latitude and longitude position in the plane’s navigation system. The position was only twelve minutes distant by air and would take them to the northern edge of Mexican airspace, just south of the U.S. Mexico border and San Diego, California.

Mohammed then keyed the plane’s public announcing system to make his intentions clear to the passengers.

“Listen carefully. We are about to open the back door of the airplane. Don’t worry, you will all be fine if you make absolutely sure your seatbelts are fastened and keep your heads down. The sudden change in air pressure will have the affect of sucking things out of the plane. Don’t let

it be you,” Mohammed explained to the terrified passengers.

The terrorist immediately heard startled shouts and cries coming from the cabin of the plane.

“Be calm! You will all be safe. My men and I are jumping out and giving you your airplane back. The captain will still be able to land the plane safely back in Mexico,” Mohammed finished telling the horrified passengers.

He and his men were now all dressed in slick sky blue colored body suits and goggles. The suits contained a layer of Thinsulite that would protect the men from the sub-zero temperatures they could expect. Ingeniously designed, the suits had extra material sewn in between the underarms and the chest area and also between the upper parts of the legs. When filled with air, the men would become aerodynamic and could glide for great distances. In training, his team became very skilled at jumping from twenty thousand feet and then traveling eighty miles or more across the Afghanistan desert before deploying their parachutes mere feet above the ground – a military technique known as High Altitude Low Opening or HALO jumping.

Aktar released the door arming mechanism and swung the emergency escape release bar up in the direction of the large red arrow. The heavy door instantly slammed open against the airplanes outer skin causing a tremendous bang. Aktar briefly heard frightened screams from several passengers as he was immediately sucked from the plane. He rolled out expertly allowing his body to quickly disappear into the slipstream behind the aircraft.

Holding on initially until the air pressure equalized, the remaining seven terrorists followed out the door at six second intervals.

Mohammed bin Dicwaadi rolled out of the violent torrent of air generated by the airplanes massive jet engines. Quickly recovering and assuming the flying form, he soon spotted all seven members of his group in a line, down and away in front of him.

After many months of death defying practice, the group had become extremely adept at this free-fall formation which resembled a string of pearls flying through the sky. Each member was separated by approximately five to six seconds of flight time. Although every one of the men was capable of independent navigation, they all

followed Aktar who had proven himself to be the most highly skilled at it.

Aktar was using the GPS wristwatch he wore to make his initial flight corrections that lined the team up with the San Diego coastline which was now clearly visible on the near horizon. Located at the northern most tip of the narrow peninsula just across the bay from downtown San Diego, North Island Naval Air Station made an ideal visual navigational reference point.

Mohammed smiled to himself knowing that nothing could now stop the *Will of God* – like on 911, the infidels would once again find themselves totally defenseless against their ruthless ingenuity and utter fearlessness.

Only this time, instead of the spectacular destruction of mere buildings, the world would witness the bloody assassination of America's former leaders.

In a headlong plunge towards earth, Mohammed bin Dicwaadi likened it a glorious flight into Heaven. Very soon now, he would surely greet Allah as Islam's Greatest Martyr.

“Sir, the airplane just began squawking Mode 7700. Looks like we have a definite high jack in progress! It's in a port turn and steady at twenty thousand feet, still well within

Mexican airspace,” Senior Chief Talbert updated his captain.

“Roger, keep a firm track on that plane. We just received orders to shoot it down if it crosses into United States airspace and begins to descend,” replied Captain Johnson dryly.

Unable to believe what he had just heard, Senior Chief Talbert delayed a moment in responding. His thoughts immediately returned to the Vincennes incident in the Arabian Gulf twenty one years ago.

“Senior, did you copy? We may receive orders to fire if the plane crosses into U.S. airspace,” repeated the captain.

“Yes sir. I copy. Birds affirm track 2045. Standing by to fire on your orders.”

Captain Kevin Johnson knew his Senior Chief had to be deeply troubled by what was happening – understandably so. The captain could not believe that they were both in a position to, once again, shoot down a commercial airliner. Commander Third Fleet had just informed him of the ceremony taking place at North Island Naval Air Station and raised the possibility that the Comair they were tracking might be a potential terrorist threat. If there was any indication that terrorists intended to use the

airplane as a missile like they did on 911, Captain Johnson knew he could be ordered to shoot it down.

“Jesus, Tom Clancy himself couldn’t make this shit up,” Captain Johnson reflected quietly.

“Welcome distinguished guests and visitors. Thank you for coming out to sunny San Diego to be a part of this historic occasion,” Admiral Kutkelvin began in an upbeat voice as soon as the National Anthem ended and the guests were all reseated. The day was gorgeous and a clear blue sky rose above the audience seated before him. The high rise buildings of downtown San Diego loomed large behind him forming a perfect backdrop for the historic event.

“On behalf of ...” the Admiral started but suddenly stopped short. Something had caught his attention in the sky, just beyond the audience. Hushed murmurs began as several heads turned to see what the Admiral was looking at.

The Admiral stared, frozen in place at the podium as the line of skydivers homed in on them from the west. He thought they were much too low and too damn close! Something was very wrong - *all of their parachutes must have failed!*

“...*What the ... TAKE COVER!*” Admiral Kutkelvin yelled his warning as loudly as he could.

At that moment, Aktar slammed into the front row of guests at nearly two hundred miles per hour. At that speed, his 193 pounds of body weight carried a devastating amount of kinetic energy.

Broken pieces from the metal folding chairs instantly became flying shrapnel – wickedly impaling and slicing through arms, legs, and heads of those seated closest.

The sound of the impact was sickening. The paralyzed shock of the guests seated safely beyond the impact zone was brief, turning quickly into panic. The spray of blood and splattering human gore started the crowd into terrified motion away from the scene.

Several of the more alert Secret Service personnel immediately jumped on top of the former presidents who were seated just beyond Aktar’s kill zone. Seconds later, the next human missile smashed into the speaker’s podium tearing Admiral Kutkelvin roughly in half. The tremendous force propelled the admiral’s upper torso completely through the VIP bleachers and out onto the pavement beyond – his waist and legs cart wheeled crazily across the pier like an abused rag doll being tossed aside.

In full panic, the crowd tried desperately to flee as even more human kamikazes rained down. Choosing their point of impact by making minute aerodynamic adjustments, the terrorists vectored in unerringly on the VIP bleachers. Then, as quickly as it started it was over.

The aerial bombardment had proven horrifically effective. Ground zero was now a flattened mound of still recognizable humanity. Gleaming white bone and mangled organs stood out grotesquely from the broken corpses that were strewn about as if some enraged giant had stomped on the crowd, squishing people between his massive toes. What remained of the formerly idyllic scene on the pier was now a hellish nightmare – an ugly vomit glaring back at the world through live television cameras.

Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, William Jefferson Clinton, and George W. Bush were among the dead. America's last four living presidents had been horribly assassinated.

Reluctantly, Captain Kevin Johnson reached for the radio handset to answer the Task Group Command Net.

The foreboding urgency in the caller's voice clearly telegraphing the dreaded orders that would follow.

Captain Rogers in Command

~
Preface

Captain Rogers in Command was penned on July 4, 1988. The day after Flight 655 was shot down in the Arabian Gulf. Kevin swears the damned lines wrote themselves – he woke up in the middle of the night and could not rest again until he'd finished copying down all of the 398 words that literally came from someplace else.

Vincennes made record time
cutting the Pacific West,
with Captain Rogers in command
as one of America's best.
It was a fearless company
that tore to a holy war,
where two nations of the Persian Gulf
nearly closed the tradesmen's door.

Most free nations on the earth
cried peace could be won.
This eight year war had cost young lives
since the day it was begun.
Captain Rogers kept eternal vigilance;
his crew might have to fight.
He knew the sailors of the Stark
died on one dark night.

The cruiser watched the bloodied straits
with her helo in the air,
When shots were fired from small boats
that almost downed it there.
Captain Rogers ordered: "Fire!"
to defend his ship and crew.
When high speed boats raced towards Vincennes
and dodged the rounds that flew.

Into this heated battle
a lone aircraft broke the sky.
Was it friend or foe that tried his ship?
He had minutes to decide.

The captain's men were trained for this;
they did not tell him lies.
Captain Rogers would fight his ship,
and his crew would not die.

The roar was felt by every man
as two missiles flashed away.
Cheering voices released the stress
from the fighting of that day.
Silent prayers were offered
for those that would be killed.
And the thundering missiles found their mark
with a blast heard round the world.

It was the 3rd day of July,
Iranian Summer '88.
Flight six five five exploded
falling to her fate.
All passengers who rode that flight
fell to their destiny,
As the flaming silver airplane
slammed into the sea.

To protect the innocent
Vincennes hastened to that place.
When they learned what they had done
they prayed to God for grace.
Their eyes were wide in disbelief,
all hearts in misery.
They could not even fathom
such a ghastly tragedy.

“Rogers was engaged in battle,
and forced to protect his crew.”
This is what the world news said;
it was the common view.
His men stood firm behind him,
Team Spirit one and all.
The brave crew gave their captain faith
and courage to stand tall.

Those two nations in the Gulf
then signed a Peace Accord.
The death of their own children
was too costly to afford.

Sometimes fate is strange
in what it has in store,
placing Captain Rogers in command,
to checkmate senseless war.

~

by:

Operations Specialist Second Class
Kevin M. Day
United States Navy
July 4, 1988
Onboard U.S.S. Vincennes (CG 49)

Hoover

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Preface

Unlike many of Kevin's stories that have elements of factual accounts woven into them, Hoover is a work of pure fiction. Also unlike his other stories, Hoover isn't a story about the sea. Instead, he immerses the reader in a terrifying tale of what could happen to the Hoover Dam – and the huge man-made lake lurking behind it. How hard would it be for a determined terrorist, even while acting alone, to bring down the great dam, one of the strongest structures ever built by man? Impossible you say? Read Kevin's entertaining little tale to find out just how possible it might actually be!

Prolog

The huge woolly mammoth crept slowly down the narrow path leading to the swiftly moving river far below. Choosing her steps with amazing agility, the massive beast led her calf down the sheer canyon hugging the rocks with her thickly muscled shoulder. The walls of the prehistoric canyon loomed nearly six hundred feet above them, separated by a long thin ribbon of angry gray sky. Even now another sheet of heavy rain swept down the river canyon, heralded by fierce gusts of wind that threatened the animal's thin purchase on the stony trail. Lured by thirst to the smell of fresh water still several hundred feet below, the mother and her offspring would not be the first thirsty creatures to fall to their deaths from the walls of the ancient and narrow canyon.

Stopping on the path, the mammoth did her best to shelter her calf by taking the brunt of the powerful wind with her massive body. Suddenly, starting as a low rumble that was felt more than heard, the earth beneath her began to tremble. Slowly at first, the powerful earthquake built as rocks and debris rained down on them from above. Unable to stand, the woolly mammoth fell on her side along the

narrow path, her massive legs wind milling the air at the edge of the cliff. Letting out a fierce trumpet from her frantically grasping trunk, the huge mammoth rolled off the trail into empty space.

A deep bend in the river broke the great creatures fall. Dissipating much of the energy with a tremendous splash of water, the mammoth broke her back. The force of the impact cleanly severed her spinal cord but cruelly did not kill her. In total panic now, the mother flailed about half in, half out of the water, her eyes searching desperately about for her calf. She could not have known that her newborn lay buried underneath mega tons of earth in the rock slide just up river from where she lay in agony.

Several minutes later, the river all around her hairy body began to recede. A gigantic landslide had completely damned the river above and the water below very quickly withdrew downstream. For that night and most of the next day, the mammoth laid along the ancient river bank unable to move. Pelted by unending sheets of rain and terrified by massive clasps of thunder, the tormented beast waited to die.

The relentless force of the river water generated from hundreds of miles of nearly vertical river canyon quickly built up against the earthen dam. Fed by unseasonably rapid

glacial melt in the towering mountains to the east and the torrential rains along the canyon, the river level steadily crept up the sides of the steep canyon behind the temporary dam.

In the end, nearly four hundred feet of swirling confused river pressed unmercifully against the half-mile long, five hundred foot high earthen dam created when a geologically unstable section in the canyon walls collapsed in the powerful quake.

No longer able to withstand the tremendous water pressure, the trillion tons of earth making up the dam suddenly gave way. Instantly, billions of cubic yards of water began roaring down the narrow canyon in a truly epic geologic event. The woolly mammoth knew death was imminent. Her last view on earth was of a gigantic wall of water, rock, and mud plowing down the canyon towards her pain racked body.

For hundreds of miles downriver reaching all the way to the prehistoric Gulf of California, nothing would withstand the ancient rivers fury. Thousands of square miles of flat land were completely inundated.

Millions of animals and several groups of prehistoric peoples all perished together leaving only their fossilized remains to tell the story to a future generation of man.

Professor Yaksir was a tormented man, quite insane really. Deep within his soul he knew he was being punished by Allah for abandoning his past. He had forsaken everything - his parents, his country, and yes, even his faith, in order to pursue the American dream. To what end? His daughter Arilyn had grown up in Las Vegas and knew none of her own heritage. Stupidly, he had even forbid the speaking of any language except English in their home. Entirely Westernized, she had also died a Westerner's death.

Seeing her beautiful young body lying dead in a casket was too much to bear. Why did she never listen to him? Why did she insist on going out with her friends? Why did she get into that car when she knew her friend must have been drunk? Akheil knew that blaming his only child was foolish though. This was his fault – Allah had exacted a punishment befitting of his terrible transgressions. Just like his little girl lying lifeless in front of him on the day of the funeral, he was also now dead. And in his death throes he would make them pay. Yes, they would pay a very high price because Akheil knew there was only one way to regain the grace of Allah. He must become a martyr.

Akheil's thoughts raged as he worked alone in the small run down metal foundry he had purchased earlier that year with the proceeds from the sale of an apartment

building he owned in the northern part of town. Very soon now he would have enough of the clever devices to carry out his plan. Entirely his own design, he had made the devices using parts, chemicals, and electronics easily obtainable from the numerous Radio Shack, Home Depot, and Rite Aid Drug stores he shopped at throughout the Las Vegas area. Always paying in cash and never visiting the same store twice in a row, he knew he had left no paper trail.

His makeshift laboratory had all but guaranteed the success of his efforts. He had tested and retested his devices and knew they would work precisely as designed. Akheil bin Yaksir was a brilliant chemist and research scientist. The design, testing, and fabrication of his devices all well within his capabilities. He had the knowledge, time, and money to carry out his plan – and, that was exactly what he'd accomplished over the last few months.

He smiled again at the thought of knowing he was the perfect terrorist cell. All alone in his plan, there was no way anyone could know of his glorious redemption with God. He had no contact with any other Muslims – none. He had so completely abandoned his past that he didn't even know where the closest mosque was located. To the outside world, he was nothing more than a retired Professor of

Chemistry at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Akheil was a highly respected, and trusted, member of American society – and, very soon now, a perfectly able mass murderer.

Even though it was just past 9:00 a.m., the June sun was bright and full as Akheil eased the seventy foot houseboat out of the slip. The Lake Mead Marina was already busy with tourists and vacationers and the surface of the lake would soon be full of all manner of boats and watercraft. Akheil was not interested in fun in the sun. Instead he navigated the boat out between the docks and into the open waters of the massive lake.

He set a course that would take him east and a little north of the marina to a location between Sentinel Island and western slope of Fortification Hill. Yaksir knew the bed of the ancient river was below him at this spot and the underwater currents still flowed in their original direction – a fact that was critical to the success of his plan.

Arriving at his predetermined location, Hoover Dam was about four miles south from where the houseboat now idled on the lake. Akheil had made this same voyage every morning now for the past three weeks. By all outward

appearances, he was just another houseboat enthusiast out enjoying the beautiful lake.

Akheil leisurely made his way below decks. Removing the cover from a large tube that extended up from the bowels of the vessel, he heard the familiar sound of water slapping around at the bottom about eight feet below where he stood.

Next to the tube was a large box of his clever devices - bright yellow water polo balls with Lake Mead Marina Water Polo Club emblazoned in large black letters on the side of each one. Taking the first ball, Akheil dropped it down the tube hearing it splash in the water below. He continued until the box was empty, carefully counting the twenty five balls as they went into the lake.

Since beginning his mission in late May, he had placed a little over five hundred of his devices into the lake. In two more weeks, his mission would be complete. Just in time for the infidels 4th of July celebration. Allah willing, he would give them a show that would be remembered forever. Smiling at the thought, Akheil replaced the cover on the tube and made his way back topside.

After spending a short time to observe no telltale debris floated back to the surface of the lake, he turned the boat around and set his return course for the marina.

Johnny Doll's decision to get an early start was going to pay off in a big way for him. The outside air temperature was already reaching 105 degrees as he pulled onto the dirt road just past Milepost 13 on Highway 163 in a swirling cloud of dust.

He had been up here once before when the Verizon cell phone transmitter station was being built. Located on the southern shoulder of Spirit Mountain, at three thousand feet and with unobstructed views to the east of the Colorado River basin clear to Cottonwood Cove far to the North and south to the Mohave Valley, the small station provided cell phone coverage to Laughlin and Bullhead City, Nevada. Although Johnny knew he would enjoy the breathtaking view up at the site and had his camera ready to take a few shots, it was the 4th of July and holiday pay or not, Johnny wanted to get back home to Phoenix as early as possible.

Johnny thought he would probably complete his work at the station pretty quickly. He was sent to investigate why the transmitter station had suddenly switched over to auxiliary power during the night – and hopefully switch it back to the main power source. Normally, small rodents were the cause and nothing more than a simple reset of the units electrical power system was required. Johnny would

also top off the diesel tanks that provided fuel to the auxiliary power generator. Once again, he would be getting paid nearly ten hours for a five minute job – he smiled thinking that, what the hell, somebody had to do it.

Remembering the transmitter sight for its scenic beauty, Johnny had decided to get up there early before the temperature became too unbearable. Heading up the small dirt road that also led to the site of the ancient Amacava petroglyphs in Grapevine Canyon, he kept his eyes open for the even less seldom used service road that wound its way past massive boulders and a huge variety of cactus and mesquite trees on its way to the top of the small peak where the transmitter station was located.

With nothing else to do as his body bounced around on the trucks stiff seat, he decided to search the AM radio dial again for any station that was broadcasting in English.

“This elevator goes down through solid granite for 596 feet in about sixty seconds,” continued the scrawny tour guide. Jeff Gero looked at his fellow passengers as the elevator began its plummet down to the foot of the dam. He saw written on their faces the same thing he was thinking – this guide must have gotten his job by virtue of some government outreach program. It was either that or all the

time spent in the deep tunnels below Hoover Dam had done a number on the mental makeup of the strange young man. He had to admit that being that deep in the earth and with a six hundred foot deep lake brooding overhead was more than a little unnerving – he knew he would not want the young man’s job.

“When the elevator door opens, we will be in the original Nevada side service tunnels. We will then walk a short way to a larger tunnel that houses the thirty foot wide steel penstock that takes water from the 395 foot tall twin Nevada Intake Towers and feeds it to the Nevada power generation facility. The Arizona side of the river has the same general physical construction”, the young tour guide explained as the elevator began to slow. The elevator stopped and the doors opened revealing a cave-like space hewn from solid rock.

Natural rock arched tunnels led off in several different directions. The place had a cool damp feel to it that didn’t help to hide the sensation of trillions of tons of mother earth looming overhead. Jeff realized that this tour was definitely not for people prone to claustrophobia. It was more than a little eerie down here and he suddenly had a greater appreciation and respect for his geeky little tour guide. Although he would enjoy this tour, a part of him

was not going to be too upset about returning topside to the visitor's center either.

“Follow me please. We will now head to the Nevada power generation facility,” the tour guide said after the group made a short stop at the penstock tunnel.

The massive tunnel was also hewn out of solid rock and the gigantic steel penstock threaded right through it – the engineering required to do this staggered the imagination. The clearance between the sides of the thirty foot wide penstock and the rock walls of the tunnel was mere feet. How men were ever able to maneuver such huge pieces of solid steel in such a tight place was almost impossible to imagine. Construction of the penstock must have been a very slow, frustrating, and dangerous operation – Jeff was sure that men had died here.

Shaking his head in wonder, Jeff fell in behind the group. He was in awe at the incredible engineering and shear brute force that had obviously been expended down here.

The last of the water polo balls quickly sank into the dark depths of Lake Mead. Not really sports balls at all, the heavy objects were constructed of thick cast iron

painstakingly molded in Akheil's foundry and cleverly painted to look like innocent playthings.

Plummeting to the preprogrammed depth of three hundred feet, Akheil's devices suddenly split in two releasing ten smaller objects from within each one of them. The cast iron halves continued sinking for another one hundred feet or so and came to rest on the muddy bottom of the lake. Neutrally buoyant, each of the baseball sized objects released from the fake mother-balls slowly separated from each other. Caught in the slow moving currents deep in the lake, they soon unraveled themselves fully deploying their specially designed spider web like nets.

Within the center of each of these webs, ingeniously designed to ride the lake's submerged currents, was a pound of homemade C-4 military grade explosive with its own miniature sonar activated detonator.

Caught in the underwater river system and drifting at a stable three hundred feet below the surface of the lake, the explosive charges silently began their slow journey towards Hoover Dam. Like the thousands of similar charges clandestinely deployed by Akheil bin Yakir over the preceding five weeks, the explosive devices would drift along in the weak current until their specially designed

webs snagged or caught on some submerged object deep in the lake. Many had been caught in this way to the Nevada and Arizona Intake Towers just above the dam.

Most of the devices however, were now clinging undetected to the lake side of the dam about the four hundred feet below Highway 93 and the thousands of passenger cars that daily made their way across the top of the incredibly scenic roadway.

Akheil knew the houseboat was about four miles north of Hoover Dam. In the half-knot current deep in the lake, it would take about eight hours or so before the last of his submerged devices reached the vicinity of the dam. Just past noon on July 3rd, the terrorist decided to simply wait overnight on the lake – there was no reason for him to hurry.

At noon the next day, Akheil would lower his re-engineered fish finding sonar in the lake and transmit a very low frequency sound in the water. The sound wave would travel easily through the lake and trigger the sonar detonators on the 8,700 pounds of military grade C-4 now sticking half way down the lakeward side of Hoover Dam.

The greatest martyr in history relaxed in the sun, smiling contentedly. He let the glorious rays of Allah penetrate deeply into his soul.

On the 4th of July he would finally find his redemption in God. Joyously, he would unleash a hell not seen on earth since before prehistoric man first hunted the ancient river canyons now covered by billions of cubic yards of deep, deep lake water.

Built in Black Canyon at the extreme southwestern end of the area known today as the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam stands as a monumental human achievement. Standing 726 feet high and 660 feet in width at its base, the dam is one of the seven manmade wonders of the world. The 110 mile long, six hundred foot deep Lake Mead is the largest man-made lake in the world – created in 1935 when the newly constructed Hoover finally blocked the ancient river that we call the Colorado.

The Hoover Dam is considered a manmade wonder for good reason. More than seven thousand men labored in brutal temperature extremes reaching 125 degrees in the summer. The colossal construction lasted a surprisingly short five years from 1931 to 1935 - killing an estimated four hundred men.

The construction crews used more than 3.25 million cubic yards of concrete. Enough to build a one foot thick,

four foot wide sidewalk around the earth's equator, the dam holds back nearly 3.5 billion cubic yards of water.

Today, the water stored in Lake Mead services the combined populations Los Angeles, San Diego, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Tucson, as well as numerous smaller cities and towns in Nevada, Arizona, and California. Canals have turned massive areas of fertile but arid soil into rich farmland producing an estimated \$1 billion dollars a year in agricultural products. The electricity produced by the staggering volume of water behind the dam lights a huge portion of southwestern United States – more than four billion kilowatt hours a year.

To this day, Highway 93 winds its way down the canyon walls and runs across the 1244 foot arched span at the top of Hoover Dam.

An unbelievably daring achievement during America's Great Depression, many of today's engineers believe that the Hoover Dam would be unachievable. Now, the price of such a feat would simply be too high.

As many engineers also know, if the unfathomably strong Hoover Dam were to ever fail, the pent up fury of the ancient river behind it would unmercifully blast its way through the narrow canyons and quickly inundate the

thousands of square miles of flat land below – as it has done several times throughout prehistory.

For modern humans, the event would arguably become the world's single greatest disaster.

Exactly the twisted, yet brilliant plan of Professor Akheil bin Yaksir. A Prodigal Son of Islam who thought to become the religion's greatest martyr ever.

Jeff Gero stood on the catwalk overlooking the massive water turbines that made up the Nevada power generation facility. The eight generators were feed by smaller penstocks branching off from the thirty foot main penstock his group had just visited.

Located at the very base of the dam, the Nevada and Arizona power generation facilities sit between the face of the natural canyon and about two hundred feet above the surface of the river that separates them. Although he could not see it from within the facility, Jeff was aware that the face of the dam towered nearly six hundred feet just behind where he now stood looking in the downriver direction.

As Jeff stared down the long rectangular shaped facility, he was strangely comforted by the bright daylight that shown through the openings along the top of the left wall closest to the river.

“The facility you are looking at generates ...” an astonishingly loud boom suddenly rocked the entire building, causing the tour guide to instinctively duck. Almost instantly sirens began to wail throughout the facility.

“Quick! Follow me!” the tour guide yelled at the startled tour group.

Not waiting for the ungainly tour guide or the rest of his group, Jeff Gero ran as fast as he could for the elevators. He instinctively knew that something was terribly wrong and that he must get back above the dam as quickly as possible.

Luckily for Jeff he reached the elevator just as it was closing to take another group back to the surface – he ignored several dirty looks as the doors momentarily paused to let him in. As another low rumble shook the earth, the elevator started up.

Jeff had no idea what was going on but he did know that being at the top of a seven hundred foot tall dam was far better than being at its bottom if something bad was about to happen to it!

Akheil's submerged explosives had settled in a rough line on the dam about three hundred feet below the surface of

the lake – resembling a sort of weird, unseemly smile across its underwater face.

Amazingly, the natural underwater currents in the lake had somehow created the ideal explosive pattern needed for destroying an arch gravity type of dam. The random deposits of Akheil's devices could not have been improved upon if a team of expert divers had individually placed each and every one of them.

The specialized frequency that Akheil transmitted from his modified fish finder traveled unimpeded through the lake at seven times the speed of sound – triggering all of the sonar detonators. The massive underwater explosion instantly induced a countless number of microscopic cracks that radiated deeply within the surface of the dam.

Alone, the spider web of cracks would not be enough to ever cause the unfathomably strong dam to fail. However, the 8,700 pounds of C-4 had also instantly vaporized a billion tons of water creating a gargantuan bubble deep under the lake. Lasting a mere nanosecond, the tremendous force of the water pressing in from all sides instantly collapsed the empty void.

The full weight of the 110 mile long lake slammed back against the surface of the dam with an incalculable amount of destructive power. Tiny jets of water sought out

the myriad of microscopic cracks wedging them even deeper into the virgin cement within the dam.

It was the combined effect of millions of still growing cracks and the unbearable assault of the great lake that doomed Hoover Dam. At first, it was only small marble sized chunks of cement that began to fall away from the submerged face of the dam, sinking quickly into the abyss below.

Within a few minutes however, the cracks had traveled completely through the heart of Hoover Dam and began to appear on its dry side.

Jeff Gero had never been so scared in his life. Escaping the foot of the dam, the group of tourists in the elevator had no idea what was happening. Above the wail of sirens they could hear groans and rumbling emanating from all sides.

Jeff knew the elevator rode in a shaft sunk straight down into ancient rock. He also knew the source of the unsettling noises was not the elevator equipment but the very earth itself. It sounded as though the granite was tearing itself apart just feet away from where they raced towards the surface.

The unashamed stench of fresh human feces suddenly filled the small space. Jeff guessed the fat lady, who was

doing her best to wedge into a prized corner in the back of the elevator, must have just shit her pants. Jeff couldn't blame her either – he too was terrified almost beyond the ability to function.

Finally, the elevator slowed and the doors opened. Jeff ran out of the visitor center and out onto the open air view deck that overlooked the dam and the river canyon far below.

At first, he didn't notice anything wrong. However, as he studied the top of the dam more closely he saw several lifeless looking people strewn across Highway 93. Still more were running, crawling, and limping along the roadway in both directions off the dam. The surface of the road held large standing pools of water and the face of the dam looked as though a sudden torrential rain had just passed by. Most of the cars caught traveling across the dam had been abandoned as their occupants ran for the safety of solid ground.

Although he was nearly a quarter mile away, he could hear many panicked screams above the wailing sirens. Pure pandemonium was underway, but why? He knew there had been a tremendous explosion, but where? Other than injured and panicked people trying to flee a wet dam, nothing looked like it had been damaged.

That's when Jeff saw them. Barely visible at first, a spider web of cracks began to appear on the seven hundred foot face of Hoover Dam. The rumbling sounds increased as the cracks raced down to the foot of the dam. At first it was just a small finger of water that shot straight out from the face of the dam about half-way down. The force must have been awesome because the jet of water extended out nearly horizontally for several hundred yards. Then, a car-sized chunk of cement launched away from the face of the dam spinning crazily through the air. As ice cold terror seized Jeff's heart, he witnessed the misshapen projectile somersault for several hundred feet and punch through the roof of the Arizona power generating facility at the foot of the dam.

Jeff vomited forcefully over the deck railing as he suddenly realized the magnitude of the unstoppable carnage that was about to be unleashed.

Jeff stood frozen in place as he watched a huge cleft suddenly appear in the face of the dam. Then, two sections of solid concrete the size of football fields peeled away as several hundred feet of water parted the heart of the dam. Two dozen cars and most of the people too slow in fleeing tumbled into free fall as the roadway at the top of the dam crumbled away beneath them.

All Jeff could do is watch in horror as a towering wall of dark lake water leaned over the disintegrating structure and begin its plunge into the river canyon far below - hungrily devouring the assortment of cars, huge sections of the dam, and far too many unheard screams with a sickening finality.

The sudden displacement of such a huge volume of air caused a tremendous rush of wind from the bottom of the canyon. As Jeff gagged over the view railing, his upper body was hammered with the force of a medieval battering ram. Instantly knocked unconscious, he flew through the air like a lifeless crash test dummy for at least twenty feet before impacting the concrete decking flat on his back.

Johnny Doll was nearly finished inside the windowless cell phone transmitter station when he heard the low rumbling begin. A native of Los Angeles, Johnny knew it had to be an earthquake. As the sound built in intensity, he decided to move outside just in case. Grabbing his camera off the work table, he quickly exited the small building.

Momentarily blinded by the strong daylight, Johnny struggled to clear his vision. Although he could plainly hear the rumble as though a huge train was approaching, he did not really feel the ground shaking like it had in previous

earthquakes. Scanning the river valley below him, a cloud of dust far to the north caught his eye.

Captivated, Johnny slowly gained the realization that he was watching a huge wall of water roll across the top of Lake Mohave. Still about fifteen miles to the north of the small peak where he stood overlooking the river valley, the torrent raced towards him. The water was so deep that it reached astonishingly far up the sides of the river canyon – worse, the inland tsunami was heading directly towards Laughlin and Bullhead City, Nevada!

Johnny also knew there would be no way to stop the mysterious tidal wave that was now flooding out of the north. Davis Dam just above Laughlin was about to be run over like field mouse on an airport runway.

Johnny fell to his knees as he helplessly watched the inexplicable deluge mass its power at the southern end of the valley, rising even higher as it climbed the canyon walls. Then - as though the Devil himself had suddenly paroled every lost soul in hell - the ungodly torrent mindlessly stampeded over the small dam and trampled Laughlin and Bullhead City underneath. Johnny just watched in horror as the unearthly plain of water continued the exodus south out of his field of view – Needles, the Mohave Valley, Lake Havasu City, Blythe on Interstate 10,

and Yuma on Interstate 8 where all next in the path of the unstoppable disaster.

As Johnny looked on from the safety of the high hill, the mother of all alluvions inundated the narrow river valley below him. Several times he had to turn his eyes away from the flotsam, some of it not quite dead. Capsized boats, crushed cars, intact buildings, and what looked like pathetic human forms still clawed at the undulating surface of the passing cataclysm.

Akheil had grossly underestimated the astonishing power of the water. Caught up in an insane religious fervor he'd carelessly forgotten to factor in his own safety.

His engine at full throttle, the houseboat was actually being sucked backwards towards the deafening roar of the epic cataract in the earth! Was it just his imagination or was the boat actually trying to move uphill?

Soon after the massive explosion caused the catastrophic failure of the dam, Akheil knew there was no way he was going to make it all the way back to the marina. Instead, he was desperately trying to angle the houseboat towards the much closer eastern shore of the lake. If he could just escape the clutch of the water, he would beach the boat as best he could.

His mind began to scream in torment – he couldn't die now! No one would ever know it was he, Akheil bin Yaksir, who had accomplished such a spectacular Martyrdom. He cursed himself that he'd left no trace – no clues!

The houseboat finally lost the battle and was hopelessly caught in the mind boggling power of billions of cubic yards of water moving, faster and faster, in the same direction. Knowing he was going to die, Akheil turned to face his destruction.

Moving downhill, he stared into the mist filled space just beyond the edge of the monstrous waterfall. Cheated of the pleasure of watching the infidels flail in anguish in the aftermath of such an unprecedented disaster, Akheil cursed God. Had he not returned to Allah and bravely carried out his will? Why then was he being rebuked – so unfairly cheated of experiencing the glory he had earned?

Akheil braced himself as best he could in the open air wheelhouse and stared down his own death. As the boat careened over the falls and launched into the abyss below, Akheil fell.

Strangely, he thought he must look like one of those crazy American base jumpers he had watched on television. Airborne, Akheil cursed as loudly as he could for several

hundred feet before being swallowed up in the maelstrom of the river below.

Although Jeff Gero had only lain unconscious for several minutes, the level of the lake behind the dam was noticeably lower by the time he regained his spot at the view railing. A mixture of blood and tears stung Jeff's eyes as he suddenly remembered the group of fellow adventurers he had so callously abandoned at the foot of the dam. If he'd known then just how many people were now doomed or dying downriver, he would have even been crying harder.

From the eagles' eye view he had from the Hoover Dam Visitors Center deck, it appeared to Jeff as though the entire contents of Lake Mead was now pouring over the broken dam. It was impossible for him to comprehend the volume of water that was entering the river canyon seemingly all at once.

Remembering his small digital camera, he fished it out of his back pocket and zoomed it in for the best close-in shot he could get. The picture he took appeared on the front page of every major newspaper in the world. The *New York Times* headline read, "Professor Courageously Confronts Own Death".

Jeff Gero's amazing photo showed Professor Akheil bin Yaksir's tiny looking houseboat at the precipice of the roaring falls. The professor himself could be clearly seen standing upright at the helm of his boat. Professor Akheil's arms were raised high over his head apparently flipping Death the bird. News commentators throughout the world naively marveled at the respected university professor's bravery. The Whitehouse spinmeisters used the photo in their propaganda war against Islamic terrorism - suggesting that the strong, multicultural American society would never give in without a fight.

The Professor's memorial the following week was nondenominational and attended by thousands of his former students and grieving colleagues. The professor's body, along with a half million other victims, was never found.

With al-Qaeda quickly blamed for the attack, the world would never learn that Professor Akheil bin Yaksir was in fact the deadliest terrorist ever.

Or that Jeff Gero's famous photograph had really captured Islam's greatest martyr using the universally understood American gesture as he screamed blasphemous renunciations at his God.

Just a Dream

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Preface

Have you ever had a dream that was so life-like, so *real*, that it haunted you for several days? The following tale is about such a dream – sort of anyway. There are Navy ships, exotic countries, beautiful girls, bizarre twists, and even a little crying at the end if you feel so inclined once you get there. And just like those pesky vivid dreams, please don't be too upset if Kevin's little story continues to haunt you for a few days too.

Prolog

Pretending he was a shark swimming silently through the gentle surf, Roger Hammond stalked his prey. Spotting her sun tanned ankle as she moved towards shallower water, he grabbed it and pulled her with a splash down into his arms. Noi giggled loudly, her pretense at being scared quickly turning into a display of passion for the beautiful young American sailor. Secluded in a small cove at Nai Harn Beach, they kissed long and hard as the foaming water and soft white sand caressed their young bodies.

Together for only three weeks, what had started out as a one night stand in Phuket, Thailand had turned into something a little more serious. Sadly though, this was their last day together - Roger's ship was leaving tomorrow.

That was tomorrow though. Noi smiled thinking about the whole day ahead that still remained.

The U.S.S. Gridley had been in Phuket for nearly three weeks awaiting the return of her commanding officer. The night before the ship dropped anchor in Patong Bay for a four day port of call, the ship's captain received the terrible news that his wife and daughter had been killed in a car accident. He immediately left for home on emergency

leave. Commander, Seventh Fleet decided the ship should remain in Phuket until the captain's return. What was bad news for the captain had turned into great news for Fire Controlman Third Class Roger Hammond. On his first Western Pacific deployment, Roger was having the time of his life in beautiful and exotic Thailand.

Not yet 9:00 a.m., the two love birds crawled into the shade of a palm tree and fell asleep in each others arms. Later they would probably catch a taxi and drive around the island, making plans for a future together that they both knew would never happen. That didn't matter though. They had right now and they had each other.

“Roger, wake up,” he heard Noi saying. **“You were talking in your sleep,”** she continued. The girl was propped up on her elbow staring at him. Her sun burnished face was glowing radiantly. Her beautiful hazel colored eyes were twinkling with a deep inner happiness. Roger knew that if he wasn't careful he could easily fall in love with this girl.

“Wow, how long did we sleep?” he asked.

“Not long, I think,” Noi replied. She was fingering the necklace that Roger wore on a long silver chain around his neck. **“Where did you get this?”** she asked.

“I made it. I took a jewelry class my last year in high school. Here look, you can see my initials,” Roger explained as he showed her the tiny RAH engraved on the bottom of the pendant.

“It’s beautiful,” Noi said.

“You really think so? Look, it comes apart,” said Roger as he removed the necklace from around his neck.

He pushed the piece together slightly and twisted. The pendant became two pieces each with its own place to fasten onto a chain.

Noi marveled that the young man lying before her had made such a beautiful thing. It was silver and joined two pieces of quartz crystal together so cleverly that they looked like one piece of stone.

Roger then hung the pendant that was still attached to the silver chain around Noi’s slender neck.

“You keep this half. I will keep this one. That way we will both be protected until the pieces are rejoined again,” Roger offered, making up the phony reason on the spur of the moment.

“Really? Are you sure? Of course, that means we will have to *see* each other again!” Noi said excitedly before kissing the fascinating young man.

“We will! How else will I ever get my necklace back?” asked Roger teasingly.

As Noi played with the pendant around her neck, she instead thought she would probably spend the rest of her life wondering what became of young Roger Hammond.

A much older Roger Hammond splashed cold water on his face before placing a small dab of toothpaste on his toothbrush. Trying his best to wake up, the Chief Fire Controlman was headed up to Combat Information Center for the early morning watch. Even though he had been riding ships like the U.S.S. Cowpens for over twenty years, it still took him about three days of being underway before he got his sea legs back.

Being one of the ships primary watch standers didn't help. In addition to his day job as the Combat Systems Leading Chief Petty Officer, a department with over one hundred personnel, he was also one of only four qualified Combat Systems Coordinators on the ship. A fact that meant he was on a round the clock rotating watch bill. Needless to say, life underway for FCC Hammond meant long hours and very little time off for anything else.

Dressed in coveralls, the crew's underway uniform, Chief Hammond entered the Chiefs Mess located adjacent to the sleeping area. He was greeted by an empty mess and the smell of burning coffee. The clock on the starboard bulkhead read 0319 – just enough time to make a fresh pot and check his email before heading two decks up and forward to Combat Information Center. He cleaned out the old pot of coffee and filter basket in the small sink located

in the starboard aft corner of the mess. Opening the cabinet below the coffee mess, he reached around the can of Folgers for the bag of Starbucks he hid there soon after getting underway from Pusan, Korea. He filled the basket, set the pot on the burner, and hit the automatic water dispenser. He then grabbed his plastic spill proof cup with the U.S.S. Cowpens ships crest nearly worn off, rinsed it out in the sink, and set it down next to the coffee pot. In about five minutes, he would have a fresh cup of coffee to take with him on watch.

Chief Hammond then left the mess area for the Chiefs Lounge where the computer workstation was located. He logged on and checked his email.

Holding his coffee cup out in his left hand and using the rest of his arm to hang his jacket over, Chief Hammond punched in the four digit code to enter CIC. With a loud clank, the lock disengaged. Chief Hammond grabbed the lever that secures the water tight door and pulled it up. The door opened, he stepped over the knee knocker, entered the darkened vestibule, and turned around to secure the door behind him. He parted the blue curtains that separated CIC from the vestibule area and walked the short distance to the Air side of combat to relieve the watch.

“Good morning, anything happening?” FCC Hammond pleasantly asked the CSC on watch.

“Hing do thang,” replied the sailor seated at the console.

“What?” replied Chief Hammond trying hard to remain in a good mood.

“Roo fa pi,” continued the sailor as he turned to face the chief.

FCC Hammond dropped his coffee cup and jacket as he quickly back peddled away from the console. Losing his balance he fell hard to the deck smacking his head on the watch stander’s chair behind him. He used his hands and legs to push himself along the deck to get even farther away.

Completely in shock, Chief Hammond stared back in terror at the strange beings looking down at him. The closest one had his right hand over the back of the chair, tapping his long white fingers as if contemplating what to do about the human lying there on the floor. Chief Hammond nearly fainted as he realized the aliens were real – Grays he vaguely thought. Every seat in CIC was manned by honest to god fucking aliens!

Strangely, SH3 Thongvanh appeared to be the only other human in Combat. But, what in the hell was she

doing here? As a junior member of the ships supply department she had no business standing around in CIC – especially not a 0330 in the morning!

Beep, Beep, Beep, Beep, Be ...

Startled, Chief Hammond turned over and quickly silenced his alarm. The big red letters read 0307. Jesus, what a weird dream he thought as he shook his head to clear it. Instinctively he felt the back of his head. Somehow he actually had bumped it – pretty hard too by the lump that was there.

As he swung his feet onto the cool deck of the berthing compartment, he thought he must have somehow banged his head while sleeping. With a dream that fucking real – he shouldn't be too surprised. Reacting to the dream alien as he slept, he must have jerked his head back and smacked it pretty good on the side of his rack.

His heart still raced from the incredible intensity and startling vividness of the dream as he stood up to head for the shower.

The U.S.S. Cowpens had left Pusan, South Korea two days ago on its way to Singapore, the next stop on the strike groups' port visit schedule. As the Air Defense

Commander for the ABRAHAM LINCOLN Strike Group, the Cowpens was one of five ships that were slowly making their way from their homeport in San Diego across the Pacific Ocean. Stopping on several goodwill visits during their Western Pacific Deployment, the naval group was due to relieve the JOHN C STENNIS Strike Group in the Arabian Gulf. With Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in full swing, FCC Hammond's ship was just one of many that would be making this trip in the years to come.

For Chief Hammond though, this would be his last deployment. Due to retire from the Navy shortly after returning from WESTPAC, Chief Hammond was looking forward to beginning a new job in San Diego as a defense contractor. Bill Leo, his long time friend and past shipmate, was now a Program Manager at Raytheon and had already promised him a job. Although the pay was a little below what he wanted, he would be a Systems Engineer supporting Ballistic Missile Defense. With his background, he felt really good about taking the position.

“Roger, what did you think of Pusan?” asked Hospital Corpsman Senior Chief Gary “Doc” Smith as soon as FCC Roger Hammond sat down for breakfast. Roger had just

arrived back in the Chiefs Mess after his morning watch up in CIC.

“I’m not attached to a ball and chain like you Doc. I had a great time. Texas Street is still like I remember it!” replied FCC Hammond with a sly smile.

“Ha! I thought I saw you take off with that girl. How old was she anyway, eighteen?” replied Doc laughing at his shipmate. The thirty nine year old Roger Hammond was a sailor’s sailor, never married, and always did well for himself whenever the ship was in port.

“Fuck you Doc. You just wish you could still pull them in like me!” replied Chief Hammond jokingly.

It was true though. Roger Hammond’s exploits overseas were legendary. He was one of those rare people who could party like rock star but never seemed to lose control of himself or the situation. With natural good looks, a trim build, and an outgoing personality, most of his fellow chiefs liked to hang out wherever he was because they knew it was going to be a great time. And the ship’s last stop in Pusan, South Korea didn’t disappoint them.

Known for its raw night life, Pusan is a favorite stop for the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Located on the east coast of South Korea, the city has a reputation for good cheap entertainment. Texas Street has to be seen in order to be

believed. Along each side of the long avenue are store fronts with large plate glass windows. Lined up inside the buildings are girls – each one wearing a number on her chest! Every establishment has its own unique theme, some of them bordering on the down right bizarre. In one store there might be nurses, the next one has French maids, then its school girls, after that airline stewardesses, next its wedding dresses, on and on for block after block. Young, old, fat, or skinny – just order by number!

South Korea is a fascinating country with the same type of societal Yin and Yang found in most Asian countries. In some ways the people are very conservative and in other ways, as in the case of Texas Street, not at all. In fact, many of the so-called working girls are just college students making a few extra bucks whenever the ships of the World's navies pull into port. Without the same social stigma that prostitution has in other parts of the world, South Koreans are a good people just trying to make do in a hard place.

FCC Roger Hammond finished eating his breakfast and placed his dirty dishes in the opening to the scullery. With about an hour to kill, he decided to kick back on the couch in the lounge. Although he had just gotten off watch,

the rest of the ship was just waking up which meant he still had a full day ahead of him. Intent on catching a catnap before Officers Call, he pulled his ball cap low over his eyes and covered himself with his jacket.

“Hey Roger. The XO was looking for you at O’Call,” said the voice waking him up.

“Shit! I missed Officers Call,” replied FCC Hammond glancing at his wristwatch.

“The XO said he would be up on the bridge. He wants to review the in-port watch bill for Singapore. I guess the ship got a message about increased security measures while we’re there,” continued Operations Specialist Senior Chief Ray Lemont.

“Roger that. Thanks man. I can’t believe I fell asleep so fast.”

FCC Hammond had prepared the in-port watch bill before going to bed last night. He was supposed to see the ships Executive Officer right after Officers Call went down that morning. With the new security requirements though, he would probably need to rewrite it. He got up from the couch and went to his rack to grab the folder containing his work.

He left through the back door of the berthing area and went up the ladder leading to the ships mid-ship quarter

deck. He continued to the starboard side of the ship and gathered his thoughts in the fresh air on the main deck feeling the wind on his face. The morning was bright and pleasant. The water was calm and a slight breeze cooled the air. About nine miles away he could see the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln as she proudly sailed south. Taking it all in, he headed up the ladder past the starboard boat davit, crossed forward on the ships 03 and 04 Levels, and then ascended the final ladder heading up to the ships bridge. He walked onto the starboard bridge wing and opened the water tight door entering the bridge.

“No! Make it come the other way George. Towards that big boat over there! Jeez, can’t you do anything right?” the five year old boy said in exasperation.

The boy sat in the captain’s chair wearing plaid brown shorts and a green t-shirt. His legs hung below the elevated bridge chair swinging freely back and forth.

“I’m trying. This wheel don’t turn that good you know,” replied a tiny voice from behind the Helm. Small hands could be seen grasping the bottom of the ships wheel.

Three little girls wearing brightly patterned summer dresses sang merrily as they ran around in a small circle on the port side of the bridge, just aft of the XO’s chair.

“Ring around the rosies, pockets full of posies, ashes, ashes, we all fall down!” with that, all three girls fell hard to the deck. They were totally unconcerned that their little dresses had come up revealing their underwear.

FCC Hammond just stood there stunned. He’d somehow walked into a very strange and out of place kindergarten fun house.

The only thing even half way normal was the fact that SH3 Thongvanh was standing on the port bridge wing staring into the bridge. Her young Asian features clearly visible through the glass.

“Roger, wake up. Dude, you were humming a nursery rhyme,” laughed CTTC Shiela Lee, the ships senior cryptologist. “O call is in five minutes,” she continued.

FCC Hammond was quite startled and more than a little disoriented. Obviously he had been dreaming again. But the vividness of his dreams was starting to freak him out a little. He glanced at his wristwatch and saw that it was 0755. Shaking his head, he tried hard to wake himself up – to bring his mind back to the here and now. Jesus, what in hell is wrong with me? he asked himself. Seeing that the rest of the Chiefs Mess had already emptied out, he thought

he better get up to the Ward Room for Officers Call before he really was late.

Chief Hammond used the same ladder as in his dream on his way to the mid-ships quarterdeck. Interestingly, the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln appeared to be exactly where it had been in his dream. Still feeling a little groggy, he entered the passageway heading aft into officer's country. He respectfully knocked a couple of times on the Ward Room door and walked in.

Chief Hammond immediately came nose to nose with a fully grown zebra. The animal sniffed at his collar once before pawing the deck with his left front hoof. Stepping back in fright, he shouldered into a very large ostrich standing next to the door. The bird immediately ruffled her feathers releasing a thick cloud of dust and dander.

Looking around the room he spotted several animals common in many city zoos. A very unhappy looking cheetah, several deer, a cute baby elephant, a rather mean looking Cape buffalo, and two fully grown giraffes lying down with their long necks looking really uncomfortable up against the ceiling.

Perhaps strangest of all though was the presence of SH3 Thongvanh. The girl was seated at the center table staring into empty space.

“Officers call! Officer’s call will be held in the ship’s Ward Room!” the ship’s general announcing system startled Chief Hammond from his catnap.

He was almost too afraid to open his eyes. Of course, he was still on the couch in the Chiefs Lounge where he had fallen asleep after breakfast.

Several chiefs were walking past on their way up to the Ward Room. Chief Hammond coughed nervously a couple of times to convince himself that he was really awake this time. Rubbing his eyes, he grabbed his baseball cap and headed out of the mess towards officer’s country.

“Doc, we have to talk,” FCC Hammond said as he walked into the ships infirmary shortly after the real officer’s call.

“Sure, have a seat. What’s up?” replied HMC Smith a little concerned for the serious look on his friends face. Roger wouldn’t be the first crewmember to show up for a shot of penicillin. Several of the ships sailors had contracted gonorrhoea while in Pusan.

“I’ve been having dreams,” said Roger a little unsure of how to begin.

“Well, welcome to the human race. Nice to know you’re actually mortal,” replied the Doc a little relieved but not exactly choosing the best bedside manner.

“No Doc. Listen, you don’t understand. These dreams are incredibly vivid. I’ve never had anything like them before. Jesus, they’re so real, so *bizarre*, they’re scaring the hell out of me!” Roger paused searching his friends face. He felt incredibly stupid for even coming here.

“Go on.”

“The dreams somehow seem so fucking real. Last night it was aliens manning CIC. And this morning after watch, I had a dream *while dreaming*! First, it was kindergartners driving the ship, and then I thought I had woken up. But when I went to the Ward Room for Officers Call, it was full of zoo animals!” continued Roger.

“Well, at least your dreams are somewhat based in reality,” replied the Doc trying his best to humor his friend.

“Very funny. If I wasn’t so disturbed by the whole thing I would be laughing too. Probably the most perplexing thing though is that SH3 Thongvanh is in every one of my dreams,” explained Roger with a serious face.

“Well, that isn’t so strange either. Hell, she is probably in the dreams of every man on the ship!” said Doc, instantly picturing the beautiful young Asian girl in his mind.

“Doc, this isn’t a sexual thing. She’s in my duty section but I doubt if I’ve ever said more than two words to the girl,” Roger finished explaining.

The Doc just looked at his shipmate. Obviously he was deeply troubled – and probably a little embarrassed as well about coming to him about something so unusual. Realizing that light humor and a listening ear weren’t going to help his friend, he decided to change gears a little.

“Look Roger, sometimes stress effects us in very strange ways. Often we don’t even realize we are under stress but the symptoms can still persist. You’re getting out of the Navy soon. You’ve spent a good part of your life here and maybe you’re starting to deal with it on a very deep, very personal level,” explained the corpsman.

“I don’t know. I feel great. I don’t feel especially tired and I’m able to concentrate just fine. It’s just these dreams. God damn they’re weird,” replied Roger.

“If you start losing sleep I need to know about it. I can get you off the watch bill for a few days and give you some medication to help,” the Doc paused, seeing the concern on his friend’s face. “Look, don’t worry, nobody will know about it either,” he continued.

“Look Roger, you’re probably the most sober, most level headed person I have ever met. Don’t worry too much

about this. It's just a dream," the ship's hospital corpsman continued.

"Thanks Doc. I think I'll be just fine too. I probably just needed to hear it from you," said Roger.

Chief Hammond wasn't really convinced though. There was something about the *dream girl* that was strangely familiar. He knew it was SH3 Thongvanh from the ship, and somehow it wasn't her either. He had the weirdest feeling that he knew the girl in his dreams from somewhere else. Some other place and time - but he had absolutely no idea where or when.

The U.S. Army UH-1N "Huey" helicopter hugged the terrain as it flew extremely low over the jungle canopy. On their way from a clandestine location on the southern coast of Mindinao, Captain Lewis Arnel concentrated on piloting his aircraft. Although he had made this same trip many times before he focused intently. It was his job to ferry the American and Pilipino special operations forces between their remote operating bases spread throughout the thick jungle and the friendlier territories on the eastern side of the remote island in the southern Philippines.

He preferred to fly manually instead of relying on the aircraft's autopilot. The Huey helicopter is fully capable of

automatic terrain hugging flight, which is normal operating procedure for instrument flight rules navigation – like during times of low visibility and almost always at night. Now however, it was full daylight with the sun to the southwest providing good visibility of the terrain ahead of him.

Good thing too because the Captain was able to react quickly as the small arms tracers from the ground sliced the air just in front of them. Banking hard to the right, the pilot put the helicopter into a series of evasive maneuvers until he was able to clear the next hill bringing the helicopter safely into the valley below.

“Call in the location. We can’t have that happening later tonight,” Captain Arnel calmly said to his co-pilot.

“Solid location. Making the report,” responded Captain Sherry Howell as she keyed the mike on the helicopters encrypted UHF radio.

“Zeus, this is Charlie One Niner, fire mission, platoon adjust, one round, shell HE, fuse quick, deflection 3024, quadrant 247, two rounds in effect, over,” said Senior Chief Operations Specialist, SEAL, David Richardson into the compact PRC-177F radio set.

“Fire out,” came the only reply.

Covered in heavy foliage and moving extremely slowly, Senior Chief Richardson's four man team had finally spotted the expertly camouflaged campsite of the Abu Sayyaf terrorists on the hillside about two thousand yards north of them.

The goal of his reconnaissance team was to take out the insurgent's camp without coming into direct contact with the enemy. The fire mission he just relayed instructed the distant fire support base, call sign Zeus, to fire one high explosive type round that would detonate on impact. The SEAL would observe the fall of shot and adjust their gunnery onto the target.

Moments later a single round from the distant Howitzer screamed through the air above them and impacted the hillside just a little south of the insurgent's campsite.

"Deflection 2978, quadrant 218," said Senior Chief Richardson as he directed correcting fire onto the target.

The second round flew overhead and exploded in the heart of the enemies sprawling encampment.

"Two rounds, fire for effect," the SEAL watched closely through his compact binoculars as the insurgents reacted to the sudden and unexpected bombardment by firing wildly into the jungle around them.

All four ground fire support Howitzers fired two rounds each at the last position given. The rounds screamed over the concealed position of the SEAL team and landed dead center in the insurgent's campsite in a thunderous fusillade. The SEAL briefly surveyed the area conducting his battle damage assessment.

“End of mission. Gun emplacements destroyed. Troops dispersing,” Senior Chief Richardson finished.

“End of mission, out,” Zeus immediately replied.

The SEAL team had finished their mission and would now move slowly to their prearranged evacuation location. The SOF transport helicopters wouldn't have any more trouble from this area for quite awhile.

Rashid ibn Nadil stopped the service van at the gate to Changi Naval Base and rolled down his window. The Singaporean Naval officer looked inside the cab and instructed him to pull over for inspection. Fully expecting the security routine, Rashid nodded his head, put away his identification, and pulled off to the side of the road into the fenced off vehicle inspection area.

Rashid was a contract worker for SingTel, the large Singapore based telecommunications provider that held the contract for Changi Naval Base. His job was maintaining

the miles of fiber optic cables on the piers that serviced a large variety of commercial and naval ships that docked there.

Pulling the van over, Rashid exited the cab and opened the hood. He then walked to the rear of the vehicle and opened the doors. The technician then stood out of the way as the security personnel proceeded to thoroughly search his vehicle.

Finding everything in order, the security officer cleared him through. Rashid got back into the cab and crept past the gate waving to the guards – his wave quickly returned. He was just one of many regular and familiar workers that supported operations on the base.

On routine maintenance of the installation's largest pier, Rashid had been sent to inspect everything in anticipation of the U.S. aircraft carrier that was supposed to dock there in a couple of days. Ships that large consumed a huge amount of bandwidth and Rashid would make sure that the system was operating as designed.

Granted a foreign workers visa called an S Pass, Rashid had been in Singapore for more than a year now. A Malaysian national, his work in Singapore helped to support his mother and father back in Malaysia – also his

twin brother who was now fighting in the jungles of Mindanao, Philippines.

Although Rashid could never reveal his allegiances to his employer or host country, he was a devout Muslim that actively supported the Abu Sayyaf freedom fighters in the southern Philippines and Sulu Archipelago. His courageous brother was there fighting for an independent Islamic homeland under Shariah law.

Rashid planned to rejoin his identical twin in the new Islamic state once independence was won. Their father was native Pilipino and their mother Malaysian, both of them devout Muslims who had raised their sons under the most fundamental precepts of the Islamic faith.

Traditions he and his brother feared were in jeopardy of being forever lost as Asia became increasingly westernized.

Rashid parked the service van next to the large utility trunk on the pier. He made the connections from the trunk to the testing equipment in the back of the van. Over the next hour or so the specialized equipment would stress the SingTel broadband connections at more than twice the anticipated demand. With nothing else for him to do while the tests ran, he decided to eat his lunch and read the letter he just received from his parents in Malaysia.

As soon as Rashid opened the letter, he knew it contained terrible news. Wiping angry hate-filled tears from his eyes, he learned of his brother's death while fighting the infidels in Mindanao, Philippines. Worse, it appeared that he had been killed as a result of an unprovoked aerial bombardment on his company's encampment – once again, the infidels were too cowardly to engage the freedom fighters in a fair fight!

Enraged, Rashid ibn Nadil also knew his own life would soon come to an end. His dreams, his very purpose for living in Singapore and working so hard, were also now destroyed. His parents were old and they now had enough money to sustain themselves for the rest of their lives.

Rashid was bound by the tenants of his faith – he had no choice in the matter. He must attain vengeance for the death of his brother! Although he was not trained as a warrior, he did have an idea of how to accomplish what he must do.

And more importantly perhaps, he had to access to Changi Naval Base where he would carry out his jihad.

FCC Roger Hammond was a happy man. Things had gone exceptionally well underway as the Strike Group headed south towards Singapore and the Malacca Strait. Also, he

hadn't had any more of the strange dreams since his talk with the ship's corpsman. Even better, he had the evening watch in CIC tonight meaning he would be getting good nights sleep before the ship pulled into Changi Naval Base in Singapore tomorrow. Just waking from a restful nap, he was headed to the ship's mess decks for the Ice Cream Social. It was the Chiefs Mess turn to host it and he had about an hour to volunteer as an ice cream server before he needed to be on watch.

Making his way aft along the port side main deck of the ship, Chief Hammond passed the ship's galley waving at the mess specialist who was busy baking tomorrow's bread and cinnamon rolls. Already hearing a lively commotion on the mess decks, he opened the door located port side aft where he knew the ice cream serving station would already be set up. Everyone was facing forward, listening the ship's captain talking about how well the crew was doing and putting out a few words about the upcoming liberty port in Singapore.

All at once, the entire crew on the mess decks turned around to face Chief Hammond.

"Sorry Captain, didn't mean to interup ...," he never finished his apology.

His voice caught when he saw that none of the crew had a mouth, nose, or any eyes! Nothing but a smooth sheet of skin covered their faces from chin to hairline. Unseen tongues rolled the undersurface of their skin-faces, as they somehow enjoyed the comically huge bowls of ice cream they held.

One of the sailors brought a mountainous scoop of ice cream up to his ... his face? using a spoon the size of a serving ladle. The gooey glob of Rocky Road left wet brown smears on his weirdly moving skin-plain before trailing down the front of his coveralls and plopping loudly on the deck.

That's when Chief Hammond saw her. She was sitting in the middle of the mess decks staring into empty space. SH3 Thongvanh had the only normal looking face in the room.

Beep, Beep, Beep, Bee ...

Chief Hammond reached over and turned off his alarm. Immediately knowing he had been dreaming again, he quietly swore to himself. When will these fucking weird ass dreams stop? he thought in frustration. Looking at his clock, he had about an hour and a half before he needed to be up on watch.

Swinging his feet onto the deck, he stood up, grabbed his towel and shaving kit, and headed for the shower. Chief Roger Hammond was becoming more and more concerned about his own mental health.

“Moored. Shift colors!” the announcement of the ship’s arrival blared from the general announcing system. After several hours at sea and anchor detail, the U.S.S. Cowpens was finally tied securely to Pier 3, Changi Naval Base, Singapore.

Once the ship was clean and the watch had been set, the Captain would let the crew go on liberty. With the exception of the duty section, the sailors would be mostly free to explore the fun and exotic city-state.

Chief Hammond was actually happy he had duty the first day in port. He would have the next two days and nights free and he planned to make the most of them. He had reservations at the Novotel Clarke Quay Singapore located in the heart of Clarke Quay.

Chief Hammond had discovered the place several years ago and was looking forward to returning. Located in central Singapore, the quays came alive at night. As he knew well, Singapore is a very fun place if you know where to go.

That was tomorrow though. He still had to get through today as the Duty Section Leader. Among other things, it was his job to ensure all of the required watches were assigned and that watch standers stood a proper watch.

The first day in port for a U.S. Navy warship is almost always hectic. And before Chief Hammond knew it, it was nearly sunset and time for evening Colors. He decided to observe the lowering of the American flag from the pier. He'd wanted to get off the ship all day now and this was a great reason for doing so.

Shifting his paperwork to his left hand, Chief Hammond smartly saluted the Officer of the Deck and received permission to go ashore.

The jasmine scented breeze barely lessened the stifling humidity out on the pier. Chief Hammond was already sweating profusely by the time he dropped his salute at the end of the National Anthem.

As Chief Hammond turned to walk down to the end of the pier, a refreshing burst of wind caused some of his paperwork to fly out of the folder he was carrying.

As several sheets of paper fluttered down the pier, both he and the Cowpen's watch stander ran after them, stepping on top one piece of paper, grabbing it, and then

running after the next, crisscrossing each others path as they went.

Rashid ibn Nadil had the perfect target picked out for avenging his brother's death. Unable to believe his luck, the young female sailor had said hello to him as she passed by his service truck. He returned the wave, hiding his disgust for the young Asian girl that had become an infidel whore to the U.S. Navy. She would rightfully die for her sins and vengeance would be his.

Rashid had cleverly hid the AK-47 assault rifle in the electronics cabinet in the back of the service van. Removing a small panel, he freed the weapon. His hands were shaking badly. He wasn't scared, just nervous that he had only fired a gun like this once before back in Malaysia. He was a student, not a soldier like his brother. Just then he heard the music out on the pier. The infidels were observing sunset and he knew that everyone and everything would stop until the ceremony was over. Hiding in the back of the van, he ensured a round was chambered and the ammunition clip was secure as he waited for the music to end.

Taking a deep breath, Rashid exited the back of the van and quickly spotted the young female sailor on the pier.

About twenty five yards away, she was bending down to pick up some papers.

As she stood up, he framed the girl in the rifles open sights and fired.

Quickly realizing that he'd missed her, he steadied his aim and fired again.

Nothing happened.

Staring down in panic at the gun, he saw the bolt carrier was stuck in the open position. Rashid fisted the sliding lever as he madly tried to jiggle it free and chamber another round.

Chief Hammond felt the crippling pain even before he heard the deafening boom. Instantly realizing he had been shot, he lay on the pier in agony trying his best to stop the flow of thick black blood pumping from his chest.

“Halt! Don't move!” came loudly from up the pier followed by much louder staccato blasts of gunfire.

Chief Hammond turned his head to look and saw the Singporian security personnel pointing their automatic weapons towards a figure lying motionless on the pier – hopefully the assailant who had shot him.

“Chief, don't move. You're hurt,” said a voice above him. He turned and saw SH3 Thongvanh leaning over him.

She was using some of the recovered papers to cover the wound in his chest, her efforts actually helping him to keep a breath a little easier. He realized he had been shot in the lung.

“How ... how bad is it?” Chief Hammond asked, already suspecting the answer.

“It’s not too bad,” she bravely lied. As she leaned over farther, a necklace swung out from her uniform blouse.

“Jesus, I ... I *know* that pendant,” said Chief Hammond in astonishment. He was trying his best to fix his gaze on his old handmade pendant - unbelievably swinging just in front of his eyes! Blood was in his throat and beginning to choke him a little.

“Don’t move Chief, your hurt ... *bad*,” Petty Officer Thongvanh started as Chief Hammond pulled out the matching quartz pendant he wore around his own neck.

Using the last of his strength he caught the girl’s pendant as it swung above him. Struggling, he rejoined the long separated twins. Even though the pieces had been apart for over twenty years they still snapped together perfectly.

“My god, my *mother* gave that to me ... how ... how?” the girl asked as tears began to flow down her cheeks, her show of bravery now gone.

“Because ... I ... I gave it to *her* ... a long time ago. We were friends ... *close friends*,” Chief Hammond whispered. He thought he must be dying.

Everything was very clear to him now and he knew he had to quickly tell the girl – *his daughter* – the truth.

The strange dreams underway suddenly all made perfect sense to him. The mysterious girl in his dreams was not the one talking to him now. It was her mother Noi, his long ago girlfriend from Phuket, Thailand.

He didn’t have to say anymore more though, his eyes revealed everything to the girl.

“You’re my ... *my father*? But ... but she said you ... *d-d-died*.”

Slowly exhaling his last breath, Chief Hammond then did die. He passed easily into peace.

A growing crowd on the pier watched as the young Cowpen’s watch stander leaned over the dead Chief. She was crying uncontrollably, her small hands protecting a necklace that was worn by both of them.

Epilog

“Roger, wake up!” he heard Noi saying. “You were talking in your sleep,” she was giggling.

They were laying arm in arm, two young lovers napping beneath the palm trees on Nai Harn Beach. The beautiful azure seas of southern Thailand stretched out before them.

“My God ... you wouldn’t *b-believe* the dream I just had,” Roger stammered, crying openly as he woke. Sunlight danced happily on his unashamed tears.

Her easy mood now gone, Noi’s heart pounded.

“She’s ... she’s going to be *b-beautiful* ...” Unable to say more, Roger’s soulful eyes told all.

Noi’s belly stirred, wondrously moved by words not spoken. It was to become an unforgettable moment, both cherished and cursed by her forever.

Because then, a congenital birth defect of the major carotid artery in Roger’s brain suddenly hemorrhaged - the massive aneurysm causing him to jerk violently in her arms.

Under the gently swaying palms, Roger Allen Hammond died.



Recruit Training Command, San Diego, California, September 1986.

About the Author

Kevin M. Day is a 22 year Navy veteran. Serving his entire career in San Diego and Hawaii, he completed 7 Western Pacific Deployments and visited many of the countries that touch the sea between the West Coast of the United States and the Middle East. Retired from active duty in November 2007, he is now a Systems Engineer for a Department of Defense contractor.



Kevin at the Highway 93 Hoover Dam Scenic Lookout in April 2008.