

**Allakaket Airlines**  
**Book III**  
**In the**  
**North to Alaska Series**  
**by Fleataxi**  
**Chapter 1 - New Kid in Town**

Ron moved Anne into Jim's house, and moved into his new house on the hill. It was huge, cold, and lonely. The wood walls were over a foot thick, and the huge garage housed 2 pickups, including a brand new Ford F-350 4x4 turbodiesel, the older diesel truck, a snowmobile, and a used diesel Kubota L-48 4wd tractor with a front bucket and a backhoe. Even with all the new toys, he still had money left from the half-million his dad gave him. Bill Ayer called and asked him if he'd like to spend a week with him in Hawaii. It was the dead of winter, and Ron thought that a trip to a warmer climate would improve his mood, so he accepted. Ron drove his truck to the airfield, pulled the TurboGoose out of the hangar, preflighted it, then pulled the truck into a parking spot next to the hangar, and took his bags out of the cab. He jumped into the pilot's seat, and finished the pre-flight, called the tower for permission to take off, and programmed the nav computer with the coordinates for Anchorage Alaska. Bill had told him to park in Alaska Airlines VIP lot, and he would be waiting with a Gulfstream II to fly to Hawaii. When he parked the TG, there was a Gulfstream II parked right next to him, and Bill was already in the pilot's seat. He grabbed his gear, and locked the plane. After he tossed his bags into the Gulfstream, he walked forward; Bill motioned him to the co-pilot's seat. "Bill, I'm not qualified to fly this plane!"

"You're not flying it, I am, besides, with your ATP you're more than qualified to fly right seat. The company has a condo on Kauai, and I've booked it for a week."

"Are there any dive shops around there?"

"Why?"

"I'm a PADI certified Open Water diver, and you wouldn't believe how beautiful this world is underwater."

"Wanna Bet? I've had my Open Water cert for almost 10 years, looks like we're going diving!"

"Great, let's get this show on the road!"

Bill finished preflighting the Gulf Stream, taxied toward the runway, and got permission to take off, then he turned southwest toward Hawaii. He didn't fly straight to Hawaii, but flew the Northern west-bound corridor, which added 100 miles to their trip, but reduced the chance of a

mid-air collision, since all the planes in the corridor were flying west. They landed at the private airstrip on Kauai later that afternoon, checked into the condo, which Ron was glad to see was a 2-bedroom suite, and dumped their suitcases and changed into their shorts. Not thinking, Ron had packed his SEAL shorts. Bill picked up on that immediately, and asked him how he got a pair of official SEAL swim trunks. Ron related his experiences with Bear at MacDill. Bill was impressed to say the least, because he had several SEAL friends, and they never told him to call them by their Team names, and these guys were really good friends! Bill picked up the Yellow pages, and quickly located a dive shop that could rent them not only the diving equipment, but a chartered dive boat for as long as they wanted it. Bill asked Ron what kind of wetsuit he wanted, and Ron told him a Men's medium 4/3 suit. Bill ordered the suits, and 2 sets of tanks/regulators, etc. He rented cameras, lights and everything else they would need. The condo came with limousine service, and he called the front desk to reserve the limousine for first thing tomorrow morning to take them to the dive shop. They spent the rest of the afternoon goofing off pool side, then went inside for dinner. Bill liked this condo complex, because everything was informal. He liked the change from always having to wear a suit.

The next morning, they rode in the limousine to the dive shop. Bill handed them his Alaska Airlines AMEX card, and signed the receipt. They showed their PADI dive cards, then were escorted to the boat, which was fueled and all ready to go. Since Bill knew all the hot dive spots in Kauai, he checked the GPS navigation system, and selected several sites they wanted to visit. Ron checked out the boat, and saw it was equipped for live aboard, and wondered why they got the condo. Ron thought he had seen beautiful reefs in Florida, but the reefs they dove over the next couple of days made them look like an aquarium. Ron shot dozens of rolls of film, as did Bill. They became even closer friends over the trip. On the way back home to Alaska, Ron asked Bill why he never married. Bill said he was married, but his wife ran out on him years ago, and he never got over it. He found out later that she had multiple affairs while they were married, and she had married him for his money. Since she had abandoned him and left the state, he was granted an uncontested divorce by the courts, and an annulment by the church, but never found anyone who would love him for him. He told Ron to pick his future wife carefully. Ron told him about the incident with the barracuda, and Bill laughed his head off then said "I would have paid big money to see the look on her face when you said that - I'll have to remember that one! I'll bet the rest of the barracudas will leave you alone from now on!"

"I hope so Bill, my dad died recently, and I built a huge house on the hill above Allakaket, but without a wife and children, it's a big empty museum."

"Don't be in too big a rush to get married Ron, you might make the same mistake I did."

Ron told him the story about Samantha, and what she was doing now.

"Ron, I don't know if I would have exhibited the self-control you did. You really were a friend to her. You gave her exactly what she needed with no thought of receiving anything in return.

She's saved now, and going to become an ER doc. You could have done worse."

"Bill, it really killed me to let her go, I still miss her, and I'm still tempted to fly to North Carolina and ask her to marry me."

"Don't, you'll regret it. Even if she agrees, it will be all wrong, and odds are now that she's into Medical School, she's there to stay. If she says "No", you'll really be hurt."

"You're right, but I'm so lonely I could cry!"

"Believe me Ron, I know how you feel."

"I've got an idea. Let's double date so we can get two opinions on our dates. I'll keep you from getting trapped by a phony, and you can do the same for me!"

"That's brilliant Ron. The main reason I didn't date is I was so lousy at evaluating women I was dating, but with a neutral 3rd party there, it would work, also that way the women wouldn't feel so vulnerable and defensive like they do when they think some rich guy is trying to come on to them."

"Bill, I've got the entire winter with almost nothing to do. Why don't I rent an apartment in Anchorage for the winter, and we can start on that list you gave me.

"I've got an ever better idea. I've got a huge 4 bedroom house in Anchorage that feels like that house of yours in Allakaket. We could entertain there, or take them out to dinner, and that way I'd have a roommate, someone to talk to, and you could live in a nice place rent-free and it would be so much more convenient for me instead of sending the limo for you first, then getting our dates."

"Great, I can move enough stuff to stay the winter."

"Make sure you bring your guns!"

They landed in Anchorage a couple of hours later, and Ron flew back to Allakaket, told Bill he was spending the winter in Anchorage, and left Bill Ayer's number in case he needed to get in touch with him, and said that the other Goose pilot could fly any deliveries or emergencies that they needed over the winter. He went to his house, packed his guns and ammo, and enough clothes so he didn't need to wash more than once a week, and drove back to the plane, loaded it up, and taxied back to the lake and took off for Anchorage. Once he was airborne, he called Bill's office on his sat phone, and gave him his ETA.

When he landed, he taxied to his space at Alaska Airlines private aircraft parking area, shut down the plane, and was met by a guy with a truck and a note from Bill to put his stuff in the

truck, and he would meet him at his house. The driver knew where it was and could be trusted. The driver introduced himself as Sam, and was the Baggage Handling supervisor for Alaska Airlines. Ron thought Sam was big enough to pick up a 747 by himself. He handled the rifles and ammo cases gently, but you could tell that they were no strain on him at all. Finally when everything was loaded, Sam got in the driver's seat, and Ron got in the passenger seat. Ron was still wearing his shoulder holster, and he could tell it was making Sam nervous, but he didn't know Sam from Adam, and he had almost \$50 thousand dollars worth of firearms in the back, and had no intention of taking off his holster. Sam didn't say two words to Ron on the drive over. They drove through downtown Anchorage to the westernmost end. Bill's house was a magnificent house on a bluff overlooking the Inland Sea surrounded by trees. It had huge picture windows to take advantage of the view. Bill greeted Ron as he drove up the drive, and Sam put Ron's bags in his room. Bill gave him the grand tour. Bill's house was huge, and definitely designed for entertaining. It had a huge floor to ceiling rear-projection screen with surround sound stereo system and a popcorn maker. Downstairs was a game room with a pool table, and a 10-person Jacuzzi/hot tub on the rear deck inside a screened gazebo. The kitchen looked like it came from a set of a cooking show, and the bathrooms were opulent with lavish fixtures, Jacuzzi tubs, and huge walk-in showers. Bill showed Ron his room, and it was on the opposite side of the house, with a separate entrance so Ron could come and go as he pleased without waking Bill. Bill handed Ron a set of keys and an alarm transmitter. Bill looked kind of funny at Ron, and asked him what in blazes he was doing wearing a double shoulder holster in Anchorage, it wasn't the Wild West anymore.

Ron explained that he always wore the shoulder holster and fanny pack when he flew, and explained why. Bill agreed that it was a good idea while flying, but portrayed the wrong image in Anchorage. Bill had an oversized soft-sided briefcase he could put them in if he wanted to carry them around. Ron decided to hang his holster in his bedroom closet, and switched to his P-14 Limited in the Bladetch IWB holster with the dual mag carrier. Ron was still armed, but Bill didn't know it - out of sight, out of mind. They spent the rest of the day getting organized, then tomorrow was Sunday, and they had a social scheduled after church the 3rd Sunday of each month.

The next day, they drove to church in the limo, and Ron was amazed when none of the Barracudas gave him a second glance. After church, Bill introduced him around, and he met some really nice girls ranging from about 18-23 years old. Most of them worked in Anchorage at various entry level jobs. One of them was a junior programmer, one was a veterinary assistant, and the rest were various types of clerks trying to climb the corporate ladder. Ron made a short list of the women he was interested in, compared notes with Bill, then they went back and invited the most interesting prospects to dinner that night at Bill's place. They felt much better when they learned it was a double date, and they would be picked up by Bill's limo driver. Bill suggested they dress conservatively casual, and that dinner would be at 7:00pm. Ron found out later that Bill was a gourmet chef that loved Italian food. He made 3 different types of pasta, a vegetable dish, and even had time to make homemade Spumoni.

Their dates arrived promptly at 6:30, and Bill thought they were dressed appropriately. They were both wearing long skirts and blouses in different pastel shades. Ron's date was Nancy, a 20-yr old veterinary assistant, and Bill's date was Sue, the 35 year old programmer. Over dinner, they talked and had a good time. At 10:00, Bill cut the evening short since he had to be at work at 0800 the next morning, and had the driver drive them both home. After the girls left, Ron and Bill compared notes. They both liked Nancy, but Sue seemed to be severely uptight. Ron decided that Nancy would get a second date later after the first round was completed. The next several weeks, they double-dated at least once a week. When they were finished, Ron found 6 girls he'd like to ask out again, and Bill had 3 since he was pickier. Ron noticed he had picked mostly blondes, and Bill had a redhead and 2 brunettes. All of Bill's picks were divorcees, so there would be some additional baggage involved. All of Ron's picks were single never-married girls. Over the course of the winter, Ron started dating just 2 girls, then just one. It seemed Nancy and him really hit it off. Bill had struck out, but had found some new friends, so when he wanted to do stuff, they wanted to go with him as friends. That would come in handy at business dinners, since showing up stag was seriously embarrassing.

Ron and Nancy were spending more and more time together, and sat together at church. Nancy was a city girl that loved animals, had originally lived in Wisconsin and learned to hunt white tail deer there, but got grossed out at the process of skinning to the point that her dad often skinned her deer. She liked camping but had never lived outside of a city. Finally Ron took her to Allakaket to meet Anne. Anne approved of her, but Nancy was a little skittish about moving into the "middle of nowhere."

Anne explained to her that until she met Roy, Ron's dad, she lived in Dallas and was a big-city nurse. She moved to Allakaket to help her brother out when he got assigned there as a doctor, and met Roy when a tree fell on him and broke his arm. Her bother wanted to join the Air Force, so he fixed her up with Roy as a private duty nurse, and they fell in love and were married. She spent the next 17 years living in a 2-room cabin that made Allakaket look like Anchorage. She said something very important "Home is where your heart is, I was in love with Roy, and Roy lived in a cabin, so my home is back in that cabin in the woods."

Nancy said "How Romantic!" Ron asked her if she'd like to see the cabin, it was another hour's flight. She said yes in a heartbeat, and they boarded the TG after Ron kissed his mother goodbye. An hour later, he landed at the lake, and taxied up onto the beach, then they walked to the cabin hand in hand. Ron unlocked the door and they went inside. Nancy's first comment was "It's so small", to which Ron replied "More like cozy and comfortable. In the deep woods like here, you heat everything with wood, so you don't build big houses."

Nancy said "You're not planning on living here are you?"

"No, I've got a house in Allakaket, do you want to see it?"

Nancy said yes, and they walked outside. Ron locked the door and they walked back to the

plane. They landed in Allakaket an hour later, and Ron took the older truck. They drove for miles until they came to the end of a road. “It’s right up that road Nancy.”

They got out and walked. Nancy was sure it would be another log cabin until she stepped into the clearing and saw the huge house made of logs, like a dream come true. “I could live here.”

“That was the general idea. Want a tour?”

They walked throughout the whole house, and Nancy knew she could live here. There weren’t any malls, shopping, or anything in Allakaket, but Anchorage was just over an hour away by air. “Ron, how many kids did you want?”

“I’ve got a 4-bedroom house, so how about 4 kids?”

“I always wanted a large family, and 4 kids sounds just about right.”

“Did you want to home school them, there are no schools in Allakaket.”

“Actually the way the schools are now, I’d prefer to home school the kids.”

“Nancy, I already know you like hunting and fishing, but could you give up a social life, live in a small town and raise your kids?”

“Depends on the father.”

“Ok, how about a father that was home every night, and loved you to pieces, was great with the kids, and helped around the house, and most of all, was a God-fearing Christian Man?”

“Where do I sign up?”

“How about right here?”

Nancy realized she had been neatly set up. Ron was barely 18, but a very mature 18. He wouldn’t have any problems supporting the kids, and he really was in love with her. She wasn’t sure how she felt about Ron. She thought that if he could meet her mom, that would give her an idea.

“Ron, before I answer that question, I want you to meet my mom, she’s a real good judge of character, after all she married my Dad.”

“What happened to your dad?”

“He died recently just like yours.”

“Where does your mom live?”

“She lives in Seward with her sister.”

Ok, the TurboGoose has enough range for that. I’ll have to gas up. Do you think your mom would mind us dropping in?”

“This is all a little sudden, don’t you think?”

“Well, you met my mom, I think the least I can do is meet yours, and I’ve got the time.”

“Well if you put it that away, let’s go!”

They got into the plane, and Ron taxied to the fuel pumps and filled the tanks as full as he could, then made sure everything was secure. Nancy liked riding in the copilot’s seat. She’d like to have her pilot’s license one day, but never told anyone, since they were too expensive to get.

Ron found Seward in his navigation software, and was glad to note they had a fuel depot with JP-5. He contacted the tower and received permission to take off, then headed south to Seward. It took 4 hours at 250 knots, then he called the tower, and landed the plane at the municipal airport. Seward was almost as big as Anchorage, he was glad to note. They called Nancy’s mom, and drove over to her place. Since it was near dinner, she invited them to stay for dinner. Since Ron was IFR qualified, he was OK flying home after dark. They took a cab to Nancy’s mom’s house, and were met by a little old lady that Nancy immediately hugged and called Mom. When they broke their clinch, Ron stuck his hand out and said “Mrs. Henderson, I’m Ron Williams.”

“My, my such nice manners. I was always hoping Nancy would meet a nice boy like you.”

“May we come in?”

“Why yes, where are my manners, come on in.”

Their house was small but cozy, and there was one cat in the living room, sitting on her sister Ester’s lap. Ron walked over and introduced himself, then asked if he could pet her cat.

“Yes of course, Old Thomasina loves company.”

The cat was so mellow Ron could swear it was on Thorazine, but it seemed to enjoy Ron petting it. He remembered petting Lucky and quickly withdrew, shaking his head.

“What’s wrong Ron?”

“I just miss my dog Lucky.”

“I know how you feel, when I’m working with the vet, and they have to put an animal down, I start crying too.”

Nancy’s mother noted approvingly that Ron seemed to have a soft heart.

“So where did you two meet?”

“Mrs. Henderson, we go to the same church.”

“Ron, please my name is Gertrude.”

“Thanks Gertrude. Don at the FAA office invited me to his church the Sunday after I went to the Christian Businessman’s Prayer Breakfast on Saturday with Bill Ayer.”

“You know William Ayer?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Mom, Ron’s being modest, he owns Allakaket Airlines. We flew one of his planes down here from Allakaket.”

“Ron, you live in Allakaket?”

“Yes Ma’am, I was born just 100 miles north of there in a small log cabin, and lived there all my life.”

“Sounds exciting. I wish Sam would have settled in the interior instead of Seward.”

“Gertrude, you know he got a job here, otherwise he would have.”

“Right Ester.”

Gertrude looked at her watch and said “I believe Dinner is ready.”

“Do you need any help serving dinner or setting the table?”

“You can set the table if you want Ron.”

Gertrude was really impressed by Ron so far. Maybe Nancy found someone that she could settle down with.



Ron set the table, then Gertrude said grace. Ron bowed his head and said “Amen” at the end. Gertrude had made stew for dinner. Ron thought it was delicious, and it was. They talked for a while, then Gertrude turned to Nancy and said, “It’s getting late, are you OK getting home after dark.”

“Mom, Ron owns a big Grumman Goose with a full modern instrument suite. He’s got his Airline Transport Pilot’s license, so he’s fully qualified to fly at night.”

“OK, anyway you kids better get going.”

“Mrs. Henderson, thanks for a lovely dinner, and I hope to see you again.”

Ron turned to leave and Gertrude whispered to Nancy “This one’s a keeper, better get married before someone else grabs him.”

“Thanks Mom, I needed to hear that from you.”

Nancy kissed her mom on the cheek, and said “Bye Mom. See you later.”

Just as they were walking out the door, the cab they had called showed up. He drove them back to the airport, except this time Nancy was much more cuddly. Ron paid the cab at the airport, and they walked hand in hand to his airplane. They taxied to the fuel depot where he filled the tanks up, then turned toward the runway. He set the nav computer up for Allakaket, and set the cockpit lights so he could see the instruments, since he would need them to fly tonight. It was already dark and getting darker by the time they took off.

Ron concentrated on his flying until they were at cruising altitude, and could engage the autopilot.

“Nancy, I was really glad I got to meet your mother today, she’s a really nice lady.”

“Ron, is that offer still open?”

“Nancy, Are you sure you are OK with living in Allakaket? It’s pretty remote, especially during the winter. The upside is fishing, hunting, camping, and hiking during the summer and fall, and cross-country skiing or snowmobiling during the winter. If we want to socialize, I have a 4x4 diesel truck we can drive to the café, or we can take snowmobiles if the weather’s not too bad.”

“Ron, remember what your mom said about home is where the heart is?”

“Yes!”

“Well I can tell you where my heart is, it’s with you. I wasn’t sure at first, but my mom cinched it. I’m a lousy judge of character, and I’ve been burned before, but my mom can smell either a Rat or 24-carat gold from a mile away, and she thinks you’re 24-carat gold. I really liked you from the start, but I’ve been suckered by some jerks before, so I’m very careful about giving my heart away.”

“Nancy, will you marry me?”

“What took you so long to ask?”

Nancy gave Ron a kiss that made Samantha look like an amateur, then Ron said “Holding out on me? I didn’t know you were such a good kisser?”

“Well you do now Ron.”

“Are you OK with long engagements?”

“6 weeks too long?”

“Depends on how many times I see you in that six weeks Nancy. How would you like to learn to fly?”

“I’d love to, but I could never afford to.”

“Until we start having kids, the best way to spend the most time with me would be as my co-pilot. If you were fully certified, we could fly longer routes that necessitated IFR flying like now. If you were a paying passenger, I’d technically need a co-pilot since darkness is usually an IFR condition unless the moon is so bright you can see well enough to navigate by it.”

“Great, when do I start?”

“As soon as you want to.”

Ron reached for his sat phone and dialed Bill Ayer. “Bill, I hope I didn’t wake you, but guess what? Nancy and I are getting married!”

“Terrific, when’s the wedding?”

“Nancy said 6 weeks if we can wait that long - she’s a good kisser!”

Nancy gave him another kiss - just for luck.

“Bill, we’re going to stay overnight in Allakaket so we can give my mom the good news.”

“Ok, it will take me that long to arrange the Engagement party at my place tomorrow. Dress is formal, so wear your suit!”

“Yes sir! Nancy, do you own a suit?”

“Just my swimsuit!”

“I don’t think that’s what he had in mind.”

Bill was listening to the whole conversation, and started laughing. “Ron, you wear a suit, Nancy can wear a dress! NOT the other way around, this isn’t San Francisco!”

“OK Bill see you tomorrow!”

“I can’t believe it; I’ve finally found Mrs. Right!”

“I thought your last name was Williams?”

## Chapter 2 - Engagement

Ron and Nancy landed at Allakaket around 10:00 pm, and were met by a very tired mayor, who gave them separate rooms for the night at the newly remodeled inn. The next morning, they drove over to see Ron's mom, who was so happy she was crying. Nancy received enough hugs to last a week. Anne said "I wish your dad was here to see this!"

"He is Mom - I'm sure he's grinning from ear to ear from his perch near St. Peter saying "That's my Boy!"

Anne gave Ron a big hug and told him to take care of Nancy. Ron said they lived just a couple of miles away, and could be there if she needed them, and Bill was just a phone call away.

"Don't you worry about me, I'll be just fine!"

They got back in Ron's truck, drove up to his house, and Ron brought out several large Pelican cases and some big green boxes. Then he packed a couple of bags for each of them, turned off the lights and locked the door.

"Ron, what's in the cases?"

"They're a surprise. I promised Bill we could go long-distance shooting some time, and now seemed to be the best time, since we're going to be busy planning a wedding, and getting you your pilot's license. We also need to stop by a jewelry store on our way to Bill's. It's not really an engagement party unless you can show off your engagement ring."

"Ron, I don't want a huge rock, so don't buy me anything bigger than a ½ carat please!"

"Your wish is my command!"

"Just remember that when the sink is full of dirty dishes, and both kids need their diapers changed!"

"Yes Dear!" <Like Father Like Son!>

When they reached the TurboGoose, Ron lugged the cases into the passenger compartment of the plane, then he opened the door for Nancy and she sat in the co-pilot's seat as he ran around and got in the pilot's seat. He started the Allison turbines and taxied to the fuel pumps, and filled the tanks with JP-5. He sealed the caps, did a quick walk-around, and climbed back in to do the pre-flight checks. Once everything was ready to go, he moved the throttles from idle and the propellers engaged and he taxied out to the lake. Once they were fully waterborne, he retracted the landing gear, and set the plane up for take off while programming the nav system

for Anchorage. After receiving permission to take off, they were airborne and flying to Anchorage at 250 knots. Once they reached cruising altitude, he set the autopilot and gave Nancy a big kiss.

“What’s that for?”

“For saying you’ll marry me!”

“Well in that case…”

Ron was glad that he learned to hold his breath; otherwise he might have passed out from that kiss. They flew along in prenuptial bliss as the plane winged its way to Anchorage. When they were 10 minutes out, they called Anchorage for landing instructions, and were told to park the plane in Alaska Airline’s VIP section. Wondering what Bill had up his sleeve besides his arm, Ron taxied to the VIP ramp only to see Bill’s limo waiting for them. When they got out, the driver handed Ron a note.

Ron, the limo is yours to use today, I’m sure you have some shopping to do. I took the day off to plan and cook for all the people I invited. Buy Nancy a beautiful dress on my card.

Bill

Ron was holding Bill’s Alaska Airlines AMEX card.

The driver wished he would have gotten one of the baggage handlers to help load these cases into the limousine. They barely fit in the trunk, and he had worked up a pretty good sweat by the time he was finished loading the limousine. He asked Ron “Where to Sir?”

“Take us to the best jeweler in town, then we need to buy Nancy a fancy dress for the party tonight.”

“Yes sir.”

He opened the doors and they got in, giggling like school kids. There was a bottle of sparkling cider in an ice bucket with 2 glasses in the limousine.

Nancy saw it and told Ron “Open it.” So he opened the sun roof and pried the top off the bottle. Good thing he opened the sun roof, because the cork went flying, and he poured 2 glasses. Before they drank, Ron proposed a toast “To Love!”

Nancy’s smile could have lit up the Boston Gardens all by itself.

15 minutes later, the limousine stopped in front of a fancy jeweler’s store. The driver got out,

and held the door open for them. The owners of the store recognized the plate number, and were bowing and scraping and fawning all over them. Ron said they were looking for a half carat engagement ring for his fiancé. She was shown several trays of half carat diamonds, and decided the marquise cut was the most flattering for her long thin fingers. She also preferred white gold to yellow gold. They showed her a dozen unmounted stones with their GIA certified ratings. Ron saw one that he knew she would love, it was a D color VVS1 stone that just looked like lasers were coming out of it. The owner liked Ron's taste, and suggested a low-mount ring so she wouldn't snag it on things. Ron liked the design elements, and Nancy liked the way the stone gleamed in the mount. Ron asked them if they could put a rush on it, they were due at Bill Ayer's house that afternoon for their engagement party. The jeweler assured them it would be mounted, polished, and sized within 2 hours. He slid a set of trial rings down her ring finger until he found a perfect fit, then wrote the number on the work order. Ron handed him his Allakaket Airlines AMEX card, and the owner was back two minutes later with a sales receipt for Ron to sign. He handed Ron a claim check, and wrote RUSH on the order, and a due by time of 2 hours later. Ron hoped it wouldn't take 2 hours to shop for a dress. He hoped Nancy was a more decisive shopper than Samantha.

They walked outside, and the driver was waiting with the door open, when he closed the door, he drove to the most exclusive boutique in Anchorage. Ron was glad that Bill had volunteered to pay for the dress, because some of these dresses cost more than Nancy's diamond. Finally after an hour and a half, Nancy asked Ron to come into the dressing room to see if he approved. She was wearing a baby blue dress with a non-existent neckline. Nancy looked stunning in it, and he realized that the dress was more modest than most of the swimsuits he had seen on the beach in Hawaii. Nancy was worried that the dress was designed to be worn braless, and she hadn't gone braless since she was 12. Ron assured her she looked stunning in the dress, and it wasn't too revealing as long as she didn't bend over too far. Nancy had to laugh at that image, then made Ron swear that if she dropped anything while wearing that dress, he'd pick it up for her. Ron held her and gave her a big kiss, and told her she was the most beautiful woman in the world. That kind of praise can earn multiple brownie points, so she told Ron to amscray so she could get dressed, since they weren't married yet! Ron made a hasty retreat, and when he looked back, Nancy blew him a kiss, and told him to wait up front for her. The dress was easier to get out of than into, and she also had to buy a special pair of panties to avoid any lines. She decided that she could dress like that for just one night, then back to her conservative mode of dress. The clerk picked out a pair of shoes that shaped and accentuated her calves. The clerk warned her not to walk very far in those shoes if she weren't used to heels, or she'd get a Charlie horse. The clerk bagged her purchases, and hung the dress on a special hanger to keep it wrinkle free. She told Nancy that the dress was OK to wear tonight, and it should only be dry cleaned after that. Nancy knew she would never wear that dress again in her lifetime.

She came out of the changing rooms back in her regular clothes just in time to make it to the jewelers. They paid for her purchases, and the Driver got them back to the jewelers within 2 hours and 5 minutes. The jeweler had a surprise for them. Bill Ayer had called them, and asked the jeweler to loan them a 1 carat Diamond pendant that matched the ring. The dealer made

Ron put a credit card deposit for the value of the diamond, with a 24-hour return. When he saw how much the diamond pendant was, he decided to make darn sure that they were back at the jeweler's first thing tomorrow to return it. He handed them the pendant in a leather covered satin-lined box. Then he gave Ron Nancy's ring, and he slipped it onto her hand. She gave him a big kiss, then they had to get to Bill's house. The driver had called ahead, and got one of the strongest of Bill's employees to meet them at Bill's house to unload the trunk. Bill met Ron and Nancy in the drive and said "Congratulations you two. Ron, put your stuff in your old room, Nancy can take the room between us. You're both staying the night tonight."

"Bill, I have a little surprise in the trunk for you."

He looked past Ron to his employee taking the huge Pelican cases out of the trunk, and he knew what they were. He was glad he had his secretary clear his schedule for the rest of the week.

"Bill, let's go shooting at Elmendorf right after we return Nancy's pendant. Here's your credit card back, and thanks."

"Don't mention it. Nancy is a beautiful woman, and she deserves to look like a princess tonight."

"Bill, I hope you didn't invite the pastor, Nancy's dress is kind of revealing, but no worse than anything we saw at the beach."

"He'll be there, but he's been to formal events before, and is used to women with braless dresses, since that's the only kind of formal dress they make anymore for anyone under 60 years old. OK you two, I need some help in the kitchen, then we all need to take showers and get changed, the guests will start arriving in 3 hours."

Nancy said "Aren't you cutting it a little close, I'm going to need at least 2 hours to put on the warpaint and feathers."

"We'll let you start early then."

They adjourned to the kitchen where Bill was whipping up tons of appetizers and finger foods. In another hour the servers would arrive and start setting up the house for a large party. Large was an understatement in this case, more like huge. Anyone who was anyone in Anchorage Society was invited to the engagement party. He needed 6 valets just to park all the vehicles, and all the limousines in Anchorage were booked. When the servers arrived, Bill dismissed Nancy and Ron to get ready. Ron's suit was hanging on a Dry Clean hanger. Evidently Bill had sent Ron's suit out to be cleaned while they were out. He got undressed and got in the shower, then shaved and got dressed. When he went to get dressed, he noticed that his shoes had been freshly polished. He walked out to the main room with 15 minutes to spare. Nancy was nowhere to be found, and Ron knew she just wanted to make an appearance. 15 minutes

later, she made an appearance, and Bill and Ron just stood there with their mouths open. Nancy looked like a Hollywood movie star with her flowing, shimmering long blond hair, the 1 carat marquise diamond pendant glowing between her breasts, and a matching set of diamond earrings in her ears. It turned out that she had a pair of cubic zirconia ear rings, but no one knew from looking, since the pendant was obviously real, as was the diamond engagement ring. Ron whispered something in her ear and she giggled. 10 minutes later the doorbell rang and the guests started arriving. An hour later, they were still arriving, and the room was getting crowded, so Bill opened the balcony doors and expanded the room by 50%. Everyone was admiring Nancy's ring and pendant, and saying what a lovely couple they were. Nancy made sure she didn't bend any further forward than she had to all night. By the time the last guest left at midnight, they were exhausted. Ron and Nancy went out on the balcony for some private time.

"Ron, I love you so much, thanks for doing this for me, but I hope I never have another night like this as long as I live. Half the men were staring at my breasts instead of my face, and most of the women were so catty that I thought they had claws. I could never live in this society lifestyle, it's so phony."

"Glad you feel that way. Hanging with Bill has been an education in more ways than one, and I agree I want no part of this scene. We'll shop in Anchorage when we need to, and I'll fly out for meetings with Bill, but I'm not going to do the social circuit, even if it costs me business." Ron gave his future wife a big kiss, then noticed something.

"Are you wearing underwear?"

"All that I could wear with this dress without some embarrassing panty lines was a tiny little thong."

Ron's hands drifted lower, and he said "I see what you mean!"

"Ron if you don't move your hands, we might not make it to our wedding date!"

He slid his hands reluctantly back up to her waist.

"Ron, let's get married in Allakaket, otherwise Bill's going to invite all his friends. I'd rather have a small wedding in the Allakaket chapel than a huge wedding in Anchorage."

Ron gave her a big kiss and said "I was hoping you'd feel that way, I wasn't looking forward to the circus that a big Anchorage wedding would become."

With that out of the way, Ron went to bed, but first he took a cold shower.

The next morning they returned the 1-carat diamond pendant, and made sure they got the



receipt, then they called the gunny at Elmendorf and made sure it was OK to shoot today. He said he would meet them at the gate. Ron said to watch for a limousine.

1 hour later, the gate guards were amazed when a stretch limousine pulled up to the gate. They were even more amazed when the gunny told them to wave it through. It parked in the Security parking lot, and 2 Air Force Police loaded the contents of the trunk into Gunny's Hummer. The driver was instructed to wait there, and the rest of the occupants piled like circus clowns into Gunny's hummer and drove onto the base. The gate guards just shook their heads. When they arrived at the firing range, Gunny told Ron that he wasn't expecting an audience. Ron told him that they were his Fiancé and Bill Ayer, the CEO of Alaska Airlines. Gunny thought they would be OK, so he unloaded the Hummer, set the 2 huge rifles on the tables, and had a team of runners (he learned his lesson from the last time - one runner soon becomes a walker) to set up and pull targets on the 1,000 yard line. Gunny handed out eye and ear protection, then they uncased the rifles. Bill was practically drooling, and Nancy was so curious she practically knocked Ron over to see what was in the case. She didn't realize what she was looking at but Bill did.

"Ron, that's not like any Barrett's rifle I've seen in their catalog."

Gunny spoke up. "Folks, these are prototype weapons from Barretts that Ron has been doing an extended Testing and Evaluation program on. The one that looks like its barrel is 3 times the normal size is a new suppressed design. It doesn't totally suppress all firing noise, so we still need eyes and ears when firing it. It comes with a daylight and a night vision scope. Since its broad daylight, obviously we can't use the NV scope, so we will shoot the daylight scope, which is pretty huge itself. The other rifle is an older prototype with the conventional muzzle brake, which was built to test the new daylight scope. The recoil of that weapon is about what you would expect from a 12-gauge shotgun, but the muzzle blast is brutal. You don't want to be within 12 feet of the muzzle brake and to the side if he fires it. Behind is safe. Further behind is even better. These rifles, and especially the new suppressed rifle, are capable of 12" groups at 1,000 yards. They are classified as Secret, so you can't tell anyone you saw or shot these weapons. With that understood, let's get down to shooting."

While Gunny was giving them the security lecture, Ron had set up the suppressed rifle, and was ready to shoot at the 1,000 yard target any time they were ready. Gunny broke out his spotting scope, and set another one up on another table so Bill and Nancy could watch too. Gunny and Ron put on their pair of headsets, and Bill and Nancy put on their hearing protectors.

It took Ron a while to settle down, then he started reciting the 23rd Psalm. That always worked. The crosshairs were locked on the bullseye as if the scope were fixed to a block of concrete. He touched the trigger, and the first round went right through the center of the x-ring. Gunny was silent this time, because Ron had told him that the cheerleading wasn't necessary, and might break him out of the zone. 5 shots later, when Ron had locked the bolt back, Gunny told him that he had probably shot his smallest group yet, and sent a runner to pull the target. He came

back with the target, and the calipers told the story. He had shot a 6 inch group at 1,000 yards. Gunny just shook his head, there were maybe a half-dozen people in the world that could do that. Ron decided to take a breather and let Bill behind the controls. With Ron acting as shooting coach, Bill got in a comfortable prone position, adjusted the stock to fit him, then sighted through the scope. He couldn't believe his eyes. The 1,000 yard target was bright, clear, and appeared to be no more than 20 yards away. When he was ready, Ron switched headsets with Bill, and explained how it worked. Once Bill was ready to go, Ron put on his hearing protectors and retreated back to the spotting scopes. Bill inserted the magazine into the rifle, and cycled the action. Looking through the scope, the target was wobbling slightly, but no more than when he shot that trophy Dahl's Ram in the mountains a few years ago. It was a really long shot for him, 400 yards away with his Remington 7mm Magnum rifle with the Leupold scope. He had shot so much that he could anticipate his wobble, and shoot through it. 5 rounds later, he was amazed that all 5 rounds were inside the bullseye. He wondered how small his group was. 10 minutes later he found out that he had shot a 10-inch group. The gunny had a brilliant idea, and had a tape recorder out when he asked Bill to evaluate the rifle, since Barretts might be interested in the opinions of Civilian Shooters. Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to try it. After Bill reassured her that the recoil was negligible, she said she would love to. Ron acted as the shooting coach again. Nancy wasn't as experienced of a shooter as Bill, but she listened, and did exactly what Ron told her. She got prone behind the rifle, adjusted the stock to fit her, then checked the image through the scope. She was amazed at how bright and clear the image was, she was looking at a target 1,000 yards away, and it looked like the image through the scope at the 100 yard range where her dad taught her to shoot. When she was ready to shoot, Ron handed her a loaded magazine, and retreated to the spotting scopes. She inserted the magazine into the rifle, cycled the action, and said a quick prayer, got behind the scope, and as soon as the image stabilized of the center of the bullseye, she touched the trigger. Ron was amazed when the first round was an X-ring shot through the center of the bullseye, since even Bill didn't get an X-ring shot. When she had fired all 5 rounds, she locked the action open, and stood up. Gunny sent a runner to retrieve the target, and Ron walked up to her "How was that?"

"Ron, you were right, the recoil was about the same as my deer rifle, I can't wait to see the target."

"Nancy, I've got some good news, your first round was right through the x-ring, just like mine."

Gunny measured her target, and was scratching his head, this couldn't be right, an inexperienced deer hunter had out-shot him and Bill. He measured her group at 9 ¾" When Ron saw the number, he picked Nancy up and spun her around in his arms. "You did it, it's amazing, but the calculator doesn't lie, you shot a sub-MOA group from an unfamiliar rifle at 1,000 yards. Gunny made sure he got her impressions of the gun, then they spent the rest of the afternoon shooting, until they were tired. They packed the guns back in their cases, and Gunny drove them back to the limousine. The driver had taken a nap, and when he heard the Hummer next to him, he woke up and opened the doors, then drove them back to Bill's house. They left the guns in the trunk of the limousine, and packed their bags for the trip back to Allakaket. On

the drive to the airport, Nancy turned to Bill and said “I hope you won’t be upset, but I’d rather get married in Allakaket in the chapel, and just have a small service with family and friends. Of course you’re invited.”

Ron looked at Bill and said “I need a best man, would you mind?”

“Ron, I’d be honored.”

“Bill, I’ll call you with the details. Thanks for everything.”

They got out of the limo, and an Alaskan Airlines Baggage handler was waiting to load the heavy cases into their plane. Bill gave Nancy and Ron a hug, and told them to keep in touch, then he got back in the limousine for the short ride to the office. Ron and Nancy bounded up the stairs of their plane, and climbed in the pilot and co-pilot’s seats once Ron had secured the air stairs and the door. Nancy gave Ron a kiss, then he started the turbines, entered the coordinates for Allakaket, and called the tower for permission to take-off. He talked Nancy through what he was doing and why, and she was fascinated. She never knew a big plane like this could be so complicated. Ron received take-off clearance, and taxied to the runway. Minutes later, they were en route to Allakaket. Ron called the tower when they were 15 minutes out, and he made a textbook landing. Before he taxied up the ramp, he made sure to deploy his landing gear, then taxied up to the hangar and shut down. Between the two of them they were able to lug the heavy cases for the rifles into the bed of his pick up, and drove to Ron’s new house. Ron smacked his forehead after they had unloaded the truck “Nancy, I’m assuming you’re renting an apartment in Anchorage.”

“Oh no, I forgot completely about that, I was supposed to be at work today.”

“Nancy, is there any reason you can’t quit and live here with me, I’ve got this huge 4-bedroom house, and it’s like living in a museum when I’m here by myself.”

“You’re not saying...”

“Like I said, a 4-bedroom house - pick a bedroom, and we’ll sleep in separate rooms until we’re married. I want our first time together to be our wedding night. My mom and dad managed to keep their hands off each other, and they were living in that small cabin.”

“I like that idea Ron, it gives us time to really get to know each other before we’re married.”

“I guess this means we need to fly back to Anchorage to move your stuff.”

“I’d like to get my stuff, luckily it was a furnished apartment, so the furniture stays.”

“Also we need to see the Mayor, since he’s also the Minister.”

Nancy said, "I'm ready if you are" and they got into the pickup and drove to meet Bill.

"Bill, we're getting married, and would like you to marry us."

"Great, when's the wedding?"

Nancy spoke up, "Ron mentioned 6 weeks, but I don't know if we can wait that long"

"Why's that?"

"Ron slid his hands down below my waist when he kissed me last night and I almost attacked him then and there!"

"Nancy, every engaged couple goes through that, but you need to learn patience. Sometimes you'll want to make love and it's not the right time, like before you're married, or say he had an important meeting the next morning, and he needs his sleep. You shouldn't refuse each other for trivial reasons, but sometimes it's best to wait. If I remember correctly Roy and Anne faced the issue of self-control as well, you might want to talk to Anne about it, and she can give you some pointers. Also, you need to schedule at least 4 marriage counseling sessions with me in the next 6 weeks. Are you ready to set the date yet?"

Nancy said "Bill, let me look at a calendar, what Saturday is 6 weeks from today?"

"That would be May 15th. Ron, is that OK with you?"

"Sure Bill, it's before my busy season so my schedule is pretty open until June or July."

"OK, I'll write that date on my calendar. Ron did you get a best man?"

"Bill Ayer said he'd do it."

"Nancy, anyone that can give you away, or act as a maid of honor?"

"Just my friend from Anchorage. We both worked at the same Veterinary Hospital. I guess this means she's going to have to find a new roommate."

## Chapter 3 - Moving day

The next morning they flew to Anchorage to move Nancy's personal stuff. Luckily her roommate let them use her pickup truck, and her stuff was cleaned out of the apartment by that afternoon. The Veterinarian reluctantly accepted her resignation, and gave her a final check that included 2 weeks of unused vacation/sick time, and 2 weeks as severance pay/wedding present. Not that she needed the money, but she used the money to buy some stuff in Anchorage she thought they could use in their new house. She knew they would get a lot of stuff as wedding presents, so she only bought what she would need for 6 weeks. They loaded it all in the TurboGoose, and Ron was glad the TG was much bigger than the DeHaviland, or they might have to leave some of her stuff behind! Ron drove over to the FAA office, and checked into the required training for an ATP co-pilot. Dan gave him a list of requirements, to act as his copilot, the absolute minimum was a Private Pilot's license with Sea, twin, and IFR ratings. He had all the books she needed to study, and she now had the time. While she was studying, he would clear the land behind their house and start a garden. Nancy told him that she loved fresh vegetables, but never had enough room for a garden, except when they lived in Wisconsin. Ron said room would not be a problem, since they owned 100 acres of forest behind them for a total acreage of 110 acres. Nancy asked him why he bought so much land, then he said that they also owned all the wood on the land, and it was cheaper to heat with wood, and between the tractor and a chainsaw, he could cut a lot of lumber in a short period.

When he got home, he realized he needed to buy a new chainsaw, since Roy's saw had seen better days. He called Bill and asked him his suggestions for a new chainsaw. Bill recommended several brands and models while Ron wrote furiously. Next he suggested a dealer to buy them from. Ron was glad he had transferred his DSL service to his new house when he logged on the internet and found exactly what he wanted for even less than the dealer pricing, even after he paid for it to be shipped to Anchorage. He placed the order with his credit card, and left special instructions to contact him via e-mail when it was at the UPS office in Anchorage, since he would go pick it up himself. He received a reply that the price would be \$20.00 less for FOB Anchorage. He could pick it up at the UPS office himself in Anchorage the next time he had to fly there. He also bought some sawhorses, a splitting maul, wedges, sledge hammer to drive the wedge, and a complete set of safety gear. He added a set of log dollies to the list, since he could pull several logs per trip with the tractor.

Later when he was driving around town, he spotted an auxiliary fuel tank that was mounted on a pickup bed for sale, and stopped his truck and knocked on the door. He asked how much they wanted for the tank. They were reluctant to sell, but needed the money since work was scarce. Ron asked him if he could pay him to deliver diesel to his place once a month. He handed the owner a check for the asking price of the tank, and told him that he had just paid their delivery fee for 1 year in advance. The tank held 200 gallons, and Ron owned the town's fuel tanks and the fuel in them, so filling his tanks at home would just be lost profit. Ron asked him to come to the house and get a passkey for the diesel and a receipt book. He explained that the pumps

only worked on a passkey, and this one coded the fuel to his personal use account, he could keep 10 additional gallons of diesel as well as the delivery fee, but his accountant would review the delivery receipts turned in versus the numbers on the pump, and any discrepancy in excess of 15 gallons per delivery would be charged to his account, and if excessive would result in the termination of their contract. Being one of the more honest citizens of Allakaket, he promised Ron that there wouldn't be any discrepancies beyond the 10 gallons allotted for delivery. They shook hands, and the contract was sealed. Later that day Bob, the owner of the tank, showed up and Ron gave him a passkey and a receipt book. Ron said each receipt had to be countersigned by him or Nancy only. Bob checked the level of diesel in Ron's tank, and decided there was enough space to deliver some fuel tomorrow. He delivered 200 gallons, wrote a neat and legible receipt for the fuel, and Ron signed it and kept a copy, and gave Bob a \$5.00 tip. He checked the tank after the delivery and it was full.

Later, Ron received an e-mail that his chainsaw and all the gear he had ordered were in the Anchorage UPS office. He called Bill and asked him if he needed anything delivered to Allakaket, since he needed to go to Anchorage and pick his saw and stuff up at the UPS office. Bill said he had a load that needed to be flown from Anchorage to Allakaket, and he could have his delivery driver pick up the shipment if Ron could e-mail UPS and authorize the delivery company to pick it up. Ron got all the information from Bill, then sent an e-mail to UPS authorizing Bill's delivery service company to pick up his shipment and deliver it to the Anchorage airport.

The next morning Ron flew to Anchorage, and the delivery driver loaded his plane, and he flew back to Allakaket, where someone unloaded the plane and put his packages in the bed of his pickup. He drove back up to his house, and unloaded the packages into his garage. He walked in the front door, and Nancy was sitting there studying. He walked up silently, slipped his arms around her belly, and kissed the nape of her neck until she said, "If you don't stop, I won't be able to either. By the way, I like the way you say "Hi Dear, I'm home!" I'm glad we decided to have 4 kids, because if you keep that up after we're married, I'll have a real problem keeping my hands off you!" Ron was mentally counting the days. He decided that now would be a good time to take the tractor out back and remove some stumps while he had some self-control left. It seemed the more time he spent with Nancy, the more he loved her. One very pleasant surprise came when Nancy cooked dinner for him the first time. It seemed that Bill with all his training was an amateur Italian cook compared to Nancy. She finally told him that her mother's maiden name was Romero, and she was a 2nd generation Northern Italian who learned to cook from her maternal grandmother who had all the recipes from the old country in her head. American-trained Italian cooks tended to drown pasta in sauce, instead of using it as an accent. Ron was glad he liked Italian food! Every night after dinner, he'd quiz her about what she had studied, and not only was she a quick study, she must have had a photographic memory like his. He checked with Dan at the FAA, and he gave Ron verbal permission to teach Nancy flight basics in the TurboGoose, but to go easy, since the TG could be a handful for a novice to fly.

Ron asked Nancy if she were ready to fly. He told her that Dan said it would be OK if he taught

her basic maneuvers using the TG for now, since Ron was an ATP rated pilot, his rating exceeded what was necessary for a standard VFR IP. Nancy squealed and gave Ron a big hug. He took that as a yes, so the next day, he filled the tanks on the TurboGoose, and while he was at the controls, talked her through the pre-flight checklist, radio procedure, and the take-off setup. She watched him like a hawk, and when he received permission to take off, he told her the trick was to push the throttles smartly to full, wait until the airspeed indicator read 80 knots, then to pull back on the yoke until the plane was at a 20 degree nose-up attitude, and hold that until they were above 500 feet AGL, at which point, she could ease off on the yoke until the nose-up was a more sedate 10 degrees, and the turbines were throttled back to their cruise settings. Ron climbed to 2,000 feet, then called the tower. "Allakaket Airlines Number NA17539 requesting clearance for student pilot training."

"Roger, pattern empty below 2,000 feet."

"OK Nancy, I want you to put your hands on the yoke and your feet on the pedals, and just get a feel for what I'm doing with the plane." Ron was doing exactly what Jim had done over 5 years ago with him - was it 5 years already? Ron performed the basic maneuvers without conscious thought, thinking of Jim. He looked up, and they were flying straight and level, but his hands and feet were off the controls, and Nancy was flying the plane.

"Great job Nancy, you're smoother than I was at this time. OK, now I want you to try some gentle turns to the right. Come to heading 180 without losing altitude or airspeed."

She remembered from her reading to hold the nose level, no more than 15 degrees of bank, and to add throttle if necessary. She came out of the turn at the same altitude, at a heading of 179, and the same airspeed.

"Well done sweetie. You remembered everything you read, and now you're applying it. OK, same turn to the left."

Either Ron was a better instructor, or Nancy was a better student, because she did everything he asked her to flawlessly the first time. She was fearless as well, because she had no problems flying the plane on the ragged edge of a stall. "let's see" thought Ron "She can cook, she's a good kisser, likes to fly planes, is a good shot, and likes animals - sounds like a winner to me." After another half hour of Nancy flying the plane, Ron took the controls and returned home. After they landed, Ron turned to Nancy, "That was the best job of student flying I've ever seen, are you sure you've never flown before?"

"Nope, just flying with you from the right seat, but I learned a lot watching you, you seem to have a very light touch on the controls, so I just copied what you did."

Ron leaned over and gave Nancy a big kiss. When they came up for air Ron taxied the plane back to the ramp, extended the landing gear, stopped at the fuel pumps and filled up, then taxied

to the hangar.

Ron spent the rest of the day with the tractor pulling stumps. When he was finished, Bill said he had a 10HP rear-tine rototiller that he could borrow, so he drove over there to pick it up, and came back home, rolled it down the ramps to the gravel, and out into the back yard. Whoever had cut the trees to build his house left piles of wood chips that Ron had distributed all around the garden plot, then he used the rototiller to turn them into the soil. It was too late in the season to plant this year, so he just left it so the chips would decompose and build up the soil.

The next day, Ron got an e-mail from Steve telling him Barrett's had another T&E project for him, and they needed him at MacDill ASAP. Ron replied, asking if he could bring his fiancé. Ron thought "what a way to find out I'm getting married!"

Steve replied "Sure, bring her along, Que Paso?"

Ron replied "Oops - forgot to tell you I'm getting married in a few weeks."

Ron called Nancy, and asked her if she'd like to spend a week at MacDill AFB. The look she gave him told him that she needed more information.

"Steve asked me to come to MacDill for that T&E project for Barrett's, obviously they have some new toy for me to try out that they don't want to get out of their control. Besides, they pay me \$20K per evaluation, and they gave me 2 Barrett's rifles and scopes worth over \$50K total."

"Why didn't you say so - let's go!"

Ron replied to Steve's last e-mail telling him that they could be to Elmendorf whenever they wanted them.

5 minutes later Steve said the JSOC's VC-20 would be on the ground at Elmendorf and ready to go at 0900 tomorrow, and they could leave their rifles behind this time.

Ron replied they would be there at 0900 and ready to go.

Ron told Nancy that they needed to be wheels-up by 0800 tomorrow, since they needed to be in Elmendorf at 0900 to meet General Shepard's VC-20 then for a ride to MacDill AFB.

Nancy went into her bedroom, set her alarm for 0600 (she was starting to think in military time from hanging around all these pilots) and packed enough clothes to last a week. She packed every piece of lightweight clothing she had, since even in May, Florida can be hot. She packed a light windbreaker since it was light and reasonably water proof. Ron walked into his room, and did the same, then they set their bags by the front door.



Nancy made a beautiful Italian dinner, and Ron said grace, then they ate dinner, laughing and joking. They watched a movie after dinner, and went to bed early. Their alarms went off at 0600, within a minute of each other. Ron was glad he had installed the 100 gallon hot water reservoir with a back-up heater unit. The heliostat outside was making more than enough hot water for them, and he considered putting in a Jacuzzi. They ate breakfast and were out the door at 0700. He pulled the TurboGoose out of the hangar, and while he parked the truck, Nancy started pre-flighting the aircraft and started the turbine start procedures. By the time he was in the pilot's seat, the turbines were warming up, and as soon as the gauges were in the green, he advanced the throttles and the propellers started spinning. Nancy entered the coordinates for Elmendorf into the nav system, and was in the process of setting the controls to take off while Ron taxied to the water and rolled into the water. He retracted the landing gear as soon as they were totally waterborne, and advanced the throttles to fast taxi. Nancy had completed the pre-flight checks and had set the plane up to take off. Ron turned to her and said "Nancy, how would you like to handle the take-off?"

She squealed like a school girl, and Ron called the tower, and received permission for Nancy to handle the take-off. He reminded her to let the plane get up to 80 knots, then pull the yoke back smartly, and hold a 20 degree nose-up until they were clear of the ridge and at 500ft AGL. They taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and Nancy turned the plane upwind with the rudder, since they had enough airspeed over the rudder surfaces. Once they were facing the correct direction, Nancy put her hand over the throttles, and said "co-pilot's plane" and Ron took his hands and feet off the controls. Nancy moved the throttles to full smartly, and still had half the lake left when she was doing 80 knots, and did just like Ron told her, and the plane screamed into the air. At 500 AGL, she eased forward on the yoke, reduced throttle to the cruise setting, and turned toward Anchorage, all without being told. She even remembered to clean up the flaps as the plane accelerated to cruise speed. Since she needed the stick time, they didn't use the autopilot. Ron sat back, grinning like the Cheshire cat. He could see Nancy really loved flying, and wasn't faking it. She wanted the controls in her hands. Ron made the radio call at 0845, and as they approached the runway, he asked Nancy if it were OK for him to land the plane, since a wheeled landing in the Goose was touchy. She reluctantly agreed. Ron called "Pilot's plane" and Nancy let go of the controls. Ron set the plane up for landing, with Nancy watching his every move. She noticed that he was going faster and flatter for a ground approach, and asked him. "Ron, the setup for wheeled landing is totally different than when you land on the lake."

"Nancy, for 1 thing, the runway at Elmendorf is almost 3 miles long, and we'd be taxiing forever if we landed at anything below 80 knots, so I hold it at 120 knots until I'm over the landing threshold, and retard the throttles slowly until we land at 80. Watch me carefully." Ron held a 10 degree nose-up until he cleared the landing threshold at 50 feet AGL, then retarded the throttles to 80 knots, and the plane sank to the runway, kissing the tires, and landing without a bounce. He let the plane roll, since they had over a mile of runway left. A "follow me" truck was waiting at the end of the runway, when it activated its lights, and Ron followed him. They pulled up next to the VC-20 at 0855 and shut down. They grabbed their

bags, exited the aircraft and locked it up, then walked over to the VC-20, where their ID's were checked by the crew chief, and they were escorted aboard the aircraft. At 0900, they were headed toward the runway, and were soon flying to MacDill. They were resting in their VIP seats next to each other and holding hands. Later that afternoon, they landed at MacDill, and a much grayer Steve was waiting for them. Steve hugged Ron, and when he was introduced to Nancy, he hugged her too. Ron said "Sorry I didn't tell you sooner, it slipped my mind."

"Well now I know what you're doing instead of the Air Force."

"Steve, you've got it wrong, I was set to go right up to the point that Congress basically disbanded the Air Force, sent all their transport and cargo aircraft to the Army, and their strategic bombers to SAC as a separate unit, then divided their fighter wings between the Navy and Marines, but only half of them were taken, and the other pilots were RIFed. There was no way I was going to fly the Strike Eagle, and I was already worth 2-3 Million dollars by then, and starting my own Airline. I met Nancy when Dan from the Anchorage FAA office invited me to church after I attended the Saturday Christian Businessman's Prayer Breakfast."

"Sorry Ron - I guess I figured this all wrong. Anyway you did the right thing. If I weren't in a Special Forces Command, I might have gotten RIFed as a junior Colonel, since there were dozens of Colonels in the Air Force with more seniority than me getting RIFed right out of fighter wings and Supply commands. Congress is really making a mess of the military, and if it weren't for George Bush's attraction to small mobile forces like Special Forces, MacDill might get closed too. You don't need to worry about Elmendorf, it has way too much strategic value for even those idiot politicians to even think about closing it."

"How's Bear Doing?"

"You mean Chief Simmons, he put in his retirement papers. He's a senior Chief, and he's not going to get promoted, and he already has his 20 years in."

"Is he still on base?"

"He has to serve another 3 months before they can replace him. He's still on base."

"So what's Barrett got up their sleeves this time?"

"You'll have to see it to believe it."

They got in Steve's Hummer and drove to the VIP quarters, where Steve had arranged a 2-room suite since they weren't married yet. Steve didn't say anything, but he thought Nancy was prettier than Samantha. After they had checked in, Steve asked Ron if he wanted to see what all the secrecy was about. The 3 of them got into Steve's Hummer again, and drove to the shooting range, where this big huge thing was covered by a tarp. The range master came out to greet

them, and told Ron “You’ll never guess what Barrett’s is up to this time!”

They walked over to the tarp, and Gunny removed it with a flourish. A huge gun was mounted on a 6x6 cube of reinforced concrete. The barrel looked like it was a foot in diameter, and the camera mounted to the top of the barrel had the biggest telephoto lens Ron had ever seen.

Being a big movie buff, Gunny said “I give you Robo-gun!”

When the chuckles died down, he explained that the military was so impressed with what Barretts did with their 50BMG rifle, they wanted to see what they could do with the Bushmaster 25mm Autocannon. This was the result, a suppressor and a precision traverse and elevation mechanism that could withstand the recoil energy of the 25mm round, and hopefully had the accuracy of the BMG-50 Barrett’s rifle. That’s where Ron came in. In this case, his sight was a TV monitor, and his control was a joystick/trigger combination that looked like it belonged on a video game. That wasn’t too far from the truth, the military took the Flight Stick, and asked the manufacturer to change it slightly and ruggedize it to Mil-spec standards. This was the result. It had a cage over the trigger, because the trigger was set to less than 2 oz of pull, and the vernier ratio of the control could be set from anything between 1:1000 and 1:1. They installed it in a bunker to protect the gunner for testing, and it would replace the Bushmaster in the Bradley and other US vehicles if they could make it work. It would take Ron 2 days just to read the manuals and learn to operate the controls before they did any firing.

They walked over to Gunny’s office, and he had 3 huge manuals, and a smaller thin paperback that he said would be the most useful. The other 2 were highly technical manuals for engineering, maintenance, and repair. Ron read the cover page and the table of contents. He was amazed at the level of technology, this gun was truly a point and shoot gun. It had a laser range finder/designator, ballistic computer, image and barrel stabilization system capable of compensating for travel over rough ground at up to 60mph, and a T&E mechanism that could track and fire at 10 separate targets per minute. All the gunner had to do was put the target in the crosshairs, and squeeze the trigger, sending a pulse of laser energy to the target, and as soon as the computer had calculated the trajectory, the gun fired, destroying the target. Or, the mode that he was most interested in was the long-range precision fire mode in which case it behaved more like the Barretts light 50, and fired a single round at a target over a mile away with a 95% or better probability of kill. According to the manual the camera system was an integrated day/night system capable of 100x magnification in either day or night mode, with an infrared laser illuminator/designator/rangefinder that selected its transmission power based on whether it was being used as an illuminator, as a designator for a laser guided weapon, or as a rangefinder for the gun. This was one smart gun. If the suppressor worked as well on this gun as it did on the Barretts, the only clue the enemy would have when they were being shot at would be when a BMP blew up. Enemy Generals would have to watch their step as well, because Barretts was attempting to make the Bushmaster 25mm Auto cannon sniper accurate out to a mile. Even enemy tank commanders would be forced to button up, or risk getting shot by a hidden Bradley with the new cannon. Ron finished the paperback manual, and asked Gunny what the T&E

protocol was this time. He told Ron they would have 2 days of day testing planned, 2 days of night testing, and then 2 days at a moving target range where they would test the gun's ability to engage multiple targets. Ron said he wasn't qualified to perform the last test, but Gunny disagreed, since they wanted someone with minimal familiarity with the gun to try to engage multiple targets at various ranges, because the average gunner wouldn't have thousands of rounds to practice with the gun either and it had to be extremely user friendly. They adjourned for the rest of the day, since the Barretts tech rep wasn't there until tomorrow morning. Ron asked Steve if they could meet Bear. He pulled out his cell phone and made a phone call. Then he handed the phone to Ron. "Bear, I'm here with my Fiancé, sure I'd love to go diving, but I wanted to ask you if Nancy could come too - OK" (covers mouthpiece and asks Nancy what size swim suit she wears - Medium in a one piece) "Bear, she wears a medium in one piece if you've got one. The commissary does - great, I'll buy her a suit and we'll be right over."

"Nancy, how would you like to learn how to scuba dive?"

"You're kidding Right?"

"Nope, Bear, excuse me Chief Simmons is a SEAL diving instructor, and also a PADI dive master and diving instructor. They've got a boat all set up to go, and if you can swim, we can start in the ocean and skip the pool stuff since I'm a certified diver too."

"Great, let's go."

"Steve, we need to buy Nancy a one-piece swimsuit at the commissary. Since you're the only one here with privileges, we need you to come with us."

Steve drove them to the commissary, and Nancy spotted the perfect suit. 10 minutes later, they drove up to the dock. Bear was waiting for them, and gave Ron a bear hug, and when he introduced Bear to his Fiancé, Bear said "Well let me be the first to kiss the bride" and swept her off her feet and kissed her lips. When she came up for air, Nancy was laughing "that tickles!" evidently Bear's fu Manchu mustache went up her nose. She grabbed her suit out of the Hummer, and they made their way aboard. Steve drove back to his office. Ron and Nancy went below to change. Ron changed first since it only took a minute to put on his trunks. When Nancy came out, Ron had a hard time breathing. The suit fitted her like a second skin. Ron said "I think we better get a dive suit on you right now, or else we'll never make it to the wedding." He handed her the 4/3 suit Bear had selected for her. The suit still was form fitting, but at least she didn't look like she was wearing blue paint and nothing else. Ron considered taking a cold shower before Nancy kissed him, and then he really needed one. He started to blush, and Nancy laughed when she realized what had happened to her fiancé.

When she got a good look at him she said "Maybe we better make that 6 kids!"

Ron put his suit on as well, and was glad to see it had the desired effect. He would be glad to

get into the cold water. Once they were all suited up, they came up on deck, and Bear's chin nearly hit the floor when he got a look at Nancy. He refrained from giving her a wolf whistle since her fiancé was standing there, and they were his friends. He set the autopilot on the boat now that they were out of the channel, and they went below to the galley where they could sit in comfort, and he could give Nancy her basic diving instructions. 2 hours later they arrived at the shallow reef they had first dived, and Bear took out the aqualungs, and Ron suited up by himself. Bear was pleased to note his confidence and expertise, and asked him about it.

"I went scuba diving with Bill Ayer last winter in Kauai, we spent a week diving the reefs, and I got a lot of practice."

"That must have been fun. Bill Ayer, were have I heard that name before?"

Nancy said "He's the CEO of Alaska Airlines. Ron owns Allakaket Airlines, and they just became a feeder airline to Alaska Airlines."

"Ron if that's true, you must be rolling in the dough."

"I've got more than I need, if that's what you mean."

Ron and Bear helped Nancy into her BC and tank assembly, and showed her how to attach everything. Ron did the hands-on stuff while Bear did the talking. Once they were suited up, Bear put on his gear, then Ron and Bear checked each other out as a final safety check. When they were ready to go, Bear stepped off the end, then Ron and Nancy, who made sure to hang onto her facemask and regulator as she went. She finished her step, which drew her legs together and stopped her descent as it was supposed to. Bear and Ron were close by, but she seemed at ease in the water so they let her get used to the equipment. After swimming on the surface, she spotted a fish and dove down to check it out, with Ron at her side. She sat there motionless admiring the fish, and breathing underwater like she had been doing it all her life. Finally Ron could stand it no longer, and gave her the "surface" sign. They both took their regulators out of their mouths on the surface. "Any thing else I need to know about you?"

"I used to go skin diving years ago when we lived in Florida, so Scuba is no major difference, except I can breathe under water."

"OK, follow me, just make sure you don't hold your breath, and if your ears hurt, stop and clear them before diving deeper."

They put their regulators back in, and Ron gave Bear the OK sign, and the "down" sign. The trio all dove and slowly swam for the bottom 30 feet below. Nancy's dive computer was strapped onto her left forearm, in the "beginner" position so she could monitor her air at a glance. They stayed down an hour admiring the fish. Ron pointed out some bigger reef fish, and Nancy was impressed, since as a skin diver she rarely got this deep, and wasn't able to stay

down more than a fraction of a second. An hour later, Ron looked at his gauge, and it was getting low enough that they should surface. Ron got Nancy's attention, and he looked at her gauge, and she had way more air than he did, but since he was getting low, he looked at Bear, and gave him the "surface" and "air" signs. Bear nodded, and the 3 of them slowly ascended to the surface. When they got to the surface, they swam to the boat. Bear climbed the boarding ladder first, then Ron and Nancy. Bear helped Ron, and they both helped Nancy. Once they had their tanks and gear off, Ron and Nancy went below, and Nancy gave Ron a bear hug. If he hadn't been wearing a wetsuit, Ron might have been embarrassed by his reaction, instead he held his fiancé and told her he loved her. "Nancy, I just figured out what we can do on our honeymoon?"

"Besides this?"

"We can do that all you want, but I think you really like diving. We can go diving anywhere in the world whenever you want."

"OK, let's get out of these wet suits and back into civvies before I give you a heart attack."

"You noticed?"

"Ron your heart was racing when I was holding you, and when I walked out in that suit, you looked like you weren't going to wait for the wedding."

"Sorry dear, it's just I didn't realize you had such a stunning body."

"What about when I was wearing the dress?"

"That was different. Your swimsuit was skintight - literally."

"Now I know why you wanted to get that wetsuit on me so fast - you poor dear."

"Even still, you almost gave Bear a heart attack when you walked out on deck."

"OK, Ron, I'll shower and change first, then I'll make sure to leave plenty of cold water for you!"

Ron hugged Nancy again, then smacked her bottom and told her to get in the shower while she still could. She scampered into the bathroom and locked the door behind her.

"What a woman!"

15 minutes later Nancy came out much more presentable, and gave Ron another hug and a deep soul kiss.

When they came up for air, he said “What was that all about?”

“I just wanted to give you a reason for the cold shower you’re going to have to take - they’re out of hot water.”

“Now you know why I installed that 100 gallon tank at the house.”

Ron got dressed and they headed back to the dock. Bear called ahead, and Steve was waiting for them. Before they left, Bear gave Nancy another hug and kiss, and Ron a big hug. Ron pulled one of his Allakaket Airlines cards out of his wallet, and made Bear promise to call him when he got out of the Navy. Bear looked like he was about to cry, so Ron turned to leave, and walked with Nancy to Steve’s Hummer. He took them back to the VIP quarters, then left since he had a ton of paperwork to fill out.

## Chapter 4 - Robo-Gun

The next morning Ron and Nancy ate breakfast, and Steve drove them over to the range where Gunny and the Tech Rep from Barretts were waiting for them.

“OK, Ron, we’re all set to do the preliminary daylight tests of the gun. We had Lake City make a special batch of match ammo that matches the specs of the military 25mm round, but with a solid bullet instead of High explosive. I’ve already set up a target at 1,000 yards. It’s your job to take these rounds, and see if you can shoot as small a group as you did with the Barretts.”

“Gunny, I hate to tell you but last week at Elmendorf I shot a 6 inch group at the 1,000 yard line with the suppressed Barrett!”

The tech rep was all over Ron asking him questions, it seems no one had managed to shoot a group that small yet with ANY Barretts rifle. His tape recorder was spinning, recording Ron’s every word for later analysis. Finally they led Ron and the rest of the group to a bunker and stuck Ron inside a cubicle. Gunny said they were inside a sound and explosion-proof bunker for their own protection, since if the gun blew up in testing, it could kill everyone in a 30 foot radius, and since the gun was electronically aimed and fired there was no reason for the operator to be anywhere near the gun. Ron agreed, but still preferred to pull his own triggers, not let some machine do the job. Then he remembered Robo-gun was totally a machine, not a rifle. He remembered something from a Bruce Willis Movie called The Jackal. He used a 25mm auto cannon just like this to attempt to assassinate the First Lady. He asked the Barretts tech rep and he admitted that they got the idea from the movie, but their weapon had several features the gun in the movie didn’t. The tech rep inserted a key and turned it, and Robo-gun came to life. The screen lit and Ron experimented with the joystick controls. Just like the manual said, he could control the sensitivity of the stick from a 1:1,000 ratio to 1:1 by turning a knob on either the azimuth or elevation control. Ron was amazed how steady the gun was even at the 1:1 setting. It slewed and stopped on a dime with no overtravel. He was running the gun in “sniper” mode so it didn’t track targets but it increased the accuracy of each shot by using the stabilization software to eliminate all vibrations in the system. He focused the camera on the target, then dialed up the zoom ratio until it was maxed at 100:1. At that point, the target looked like it was 10 yards away. He carefully centered the crosshair image on the center of the target, pressed the lock button, then uncaged the trigger and as soon as he touched it, the gun barked, and a 25mm hole appeared right in the center of the target. When the smoke cleared, Ron noted the crosshairs were still centered on the bullseye, and he triggered the gun again. Once the smoke cleared, he noticed there was only 1 hole on the paper. Either this gun was super-accurate, or way off. He hoped the former. Just to be sure, he tripped the trigger until he had fired the gun 5 times. The Tech Rep reached over, switched off and removed the key, disabling and safing the system. Once he was sure the system was off, Gunny sent a runner to pull the target. They almost fell over in amazement when there was just one hole in the center. Gunny laid the target on a light table, and examined it using a 10x magnifier. He could see the evidence of multiple



tears in the paper surrounding the hole, and theorized that all 5 rounds had gone through a 28mm hole at 1,000 yards. The Barretts Tech Rep was jumping up and down yelling, then he called Ronnie Barrett, “Mr. Barrett, yes Ron Williams just test-fired Robo-gun, and it works perfectly. According to Gunny, it just shot a 28mm 5-shot group at 1,000 yards! That means any deviation from that number from here on out is probably a function of platform instability, since when it’s bolted to a 6x6 block of concrete, it shot a one-hole group. Now all we need to do is test the software to see if it works in the other modes. Yes, thank you Mr. Barrett.”

“Ron that was Ron Barrett, the owner of the company. I think he’s dancing a jig about now, and he told me to tell you well done. It will take us a day to move and reset the gun to their moving target range, so we’ll see you at 0900 tomorrow at the moving target range.”

Ron had Bear’s cell number, so he called it. “Chief Simmons, this is an unsecured line.”

“Chief, its Ron. We have the rest of the day off, feel like going diving?”

“Sure, just tell your fiancé that the doc upped my BP meds thanks to her!”

“I know, she’s a hottie - Ok, see you in half an hour.”

“Nancy, that was Bear, if you want to we can go diving again today. By the way, he said the doc had to up his BP meds after yesterday!”

“Poor Guy!”

They walked out of the bunker and Gunny must have called Steve, because he was waiting for them. “Steve, I’m sorry you get stuck playing chauffeur to us, but I really appreciate it.”

“Ron, don’t worry about it; General Shepard just got a phone call from Ronnie Barrett, it seems that your first test was an amazing success. News like that puts him in a good mood, which makes my job easier. Besides this way I get to spend some time with you. So you guys set a date yet?”

Nancy spoke up, “Steve it’s May 15th, hope you can make it because you’re invited.”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world. I’ll make sure the general’s VC-20 is available.”

“Good thing Bill doubled the size of the Inn, we’ll probably need all the rooms for out of town guests. That reminds me, what about your family Nancy?”

“I lost touch with most of them, but I’m sure my mom can track them down, or is still in touch with them. I was the youngest of 4 kids, and everyone else is much older than me and scattered all over the US.”

Steve drove them to Bear's diving boat, then told Ron he would see them later.

Bear hugged them like long lost relatives, but didn't kiss Nancy this time.

"Bear, I'm sorry I almost gave you a heart attack. I didn't know the suit fit so well."

"That's OK Nancy, it just reminded me my heart still works at 100% rpm."

They all laughed at that, and they walked aboard.

"Nancy you better get dressed by yourself this time, or we might not make it to the wedding."

Bear spoke up, "Nancy, I hope you don't mind, but I switched your 4/3 suit for a 6/4 suit, I don't think I can handle any more excitement!"

Ron joked "Well Bear, I am a Certified Paramedic in Alaska!"

"That's great Ron, but I don't have a defibrillator."

"That's OK, I'll just use a couple of spark plug wires."

Nancy took the opportunity to duck into the forward stateroom and change. She spotted herself in the mirror after she put her suit on, and was amazed that Ron didn't attack her on the spot the first time. She quickly stepped into her wetsuit and zipped it up. She looked in the mirror again, this time she still looked curvaceous, but not too revealing. She'd have to make it up to Ron later. When she finished dressing, she opened the door and Ron was standing there.

"Better?"

"Much better Nancy, now poor old Bear won't have a heart attack."

"Sorry Ron, I got a look at myself in that swimsuit, and I'm amazed you were able to keep your hands off me!"

"Just wait until our wedding night, I'll make it up to you."

"Ron, take it easy, I'm already up to six kids."

Ron and Nancy had a good laugh, then she left the room to Ron so he could get dressed. 5 minutes later he was wearing a pair of SEAL trunks, but it was Nancy's turn to ogle him since he hadn't put his wetsuit on yet. All those years hauling wood and stuff must have paid off because his upper body just rippled with muscle. He didn't look like a body builder, just like a man in peak physical shape. She handed him his wet suit, and soon they were ready to go.

They walked up on deck, and Bear told Nancy “Much better - you better wear a 6/4 suit from now on.” They both had a good laugh and Bear told them they were about an hour away from their dive site. They spent the time training Nancy for her PADI cert, and giving Ron some refresher information. When they got to the site, a shallow wreck Bear and Ron had dove before, they suited up and checked each other, then jumped in the water. The three of them swam around the whole wreck, and Bear kept an eye on his dive computer, because they didn’t want to exceed their no-decompression limits. When his computer said they had 5 minutes to surface, he got their attention, and they rose to the surface. They both had air in their tanks, but Ron realized that Bear didn’t want to make them decompress by staying down too long, and they could go diving again tomorrow. Ron and Nancy got changed, and then they met in the galley after Bear had pulled up anchor, and set the autopilot for home. They continued Nancy’s training in the galley, and Bear told them that after a couple more sessions, Nancy would qualify for her open water cert as well.

The next morning, Steve drove Ron and Nancy to the moving target training area, and told them he’d drive them over to the dive boat when they were finished. Since they knew the gun was safe, they didn’t need the bunker, and used a plywood enclosure to duplicate the conditions inside a vehicle. Ron had been reading up, and as soon as the tech rep activated the system, Ron configured it for moving target, stationary vehicle shooting, and he told the gunny he was ready. He had the display zoomed out wide enough to ID targets as they appeared, and he slewed the crosshairs onto each target as they popped up, and pressed the trigger, designating them. The gun tracked the targets independently and destroyed them in the most efficient pattern. There were over a dozen targets moving at once, and the gun lagged behind Ron by 3 targets, but the target never needed to be re-acquired, and each hit was deemed a kill based on location. Ron thought this was just like the video games he used to play on his computer, except he was firing real bullets. 5 minutes later, the Gunny halted the scenario, he had run out of targets. Gunny checked his display and Ron had scored a perfect score, all targets from 100 yards to a half-mile had been engaged and destroyed.

Gunny and the Tech rep were incredulous, and grilled Ron. He explained that it was just like the video games he played growing up on his computer, except this one fired live bullets. The basic eye hand coordination was something any 14-yr old video addict developed naturally. All this scenario needed was some sound to make a good video game. The good news was the gun definitely worked. Now all they had to do was try this at night. The tech rep told Ron to be back at 2000 for the night test. Gunny called Steve, and an hour later they were aboard Bear’s dive boat headed to another cool diving spot. Nancy only needed 2 more dives and to pass the written test to get her open water cert. They got home later that afternoon, and Ron had to get right to bed because he had a long night ahead of him. At 1930, Steve knocked on his door, and they drove to the moving target range. Ron ran the same scenario with the same results. The camera worked the same day or night, and Ron had no problem designating and engaging targets. They spent more time writing up the report than he did shooting. He was home before 2200, and back in bed. The next morning they met in Gunny’s office to write the report, and then the Tech rep for Barrett presented Ron a check for \$50 Thousand. Ron Barrett thought the

extra was a well-deserved bonus, and Ron didn't complain. The rest of the test had to wait for another prototype to be built and installed in an existing Bradley. Ron made a couple of suggestions that the Tech Rep took extensive notes on, like how to stabilize the Bradley IFV for long-range precision shooting. He thought if they used outriggers like a crane used, but smaller and lighter since all they had to do was keep the vehicle from rocking while the gun was firing. He said if they used high-speed hydraulic rams, like they used in low-riders, the outriggers could be deployed and retracted in less than a minute, and the gun would then be able to "shoot and scoot" and engage targets at a much greater distance than previously thought. All they had to do to extend the range of the gun to over a mile was to install the stabilizer outriggers. The gun was capable of pin-point accuracy out to over a mile, and the software worked, all they needed to make it work in a Bradley was to work on the gun/vehicle interface. When they finished, Gunny called Steve, who brought Nancy with him, and they spent the next 2 days diving, and Bear gave Nancy her PADI open water cert after she passed her written test, since she flew through the skills tests. When they left, Bear gave each of them a bear hug, and Ron made him promise to call him when he got out, he had some ideas that Bear might be interested in.

When they got back to the dock, Steve was waiting for them. They were scheduled to fly back to Anchorage at 0800 tomorrow. They could have flown tonight if they didn't go diving. Ron told Steve that Nancy got her PADI open water certificate as well.

"I can guess where you guys are going on your honeymoon, someplace you can go diving."

"That and someplace with big comfortable beds and air conditioning."

Steve drove them back to the VIP area, and ate dinner with them, then they walked over to their room, kissed each other goodnight, and went to bed.

They were up at 0600, dressed and packed, then they went downstairs for an intimate breakfast by themselves, since there wasn't anyone staying in the VIP quarters right now besides themselves. Steve showed up at 0745 to take them to the VIP terminal for their flight back to Anchorage. They breezed through security, and boarded the aircraft. 2 minutes after they were seated and belted in, the plane taxied and took off. They slept through the flight. Ron found out Nancy's shoulder made a pretty good pillow. They put the arm up between them so they could be comfortable, and it worked. They landed in Anchorage around noon, and taxied right next to Ron's plane. They boarded the aircraft, and Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to take it off.

"You mean the plane of course?"

"No, I thought we'd join the mile high club, of course the plane!"

Nancy did just as good of a job preflighting the plane as Ron did, and he called the tower to get

take-off clearance. She taxied to the correct runway, and when they got clearance, she advanced the throttles, and pulled back on the yoke once they were going fast enough. Since there were no obstructions, she eased the yoke forward and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet and flew to Allakaket. Ron decided to let her handle the landing, and she did it perfectly. Bill was waiting for them, and he almost fainted when Nancy told him she landed the plane. Ron handed him a check for \$50 thousand and asked Bill to put it in their account. Bill said “Not bad for a week’s work!”

“More like 8 hours, and 4 days of goofing off and diving. Nancy’s got her PADI cert now.”

“Not bad. Ron, Slim died while you were gone. Ordinarily I wouldn’t need to tell you except you were the only person mentioned in his will. He owns a huge chunk of land, and he had half a million in his bank account left over from that gold strike on his land way back when.”

“Bill, what are you trying to tell me?”

“Slim owned several thousand acres of land, and its prime real estate he bought back when land was cheap out of the proceeds of his gold mine. The land’s worth millions, and he had another half million in the bank. You could retire today and never work another day in you life and your lifestyle wouldn’t change.”

Nancy hugged Ron and said “Oh My God, I never expected this!”

“Don’t worry Nancy, the money won’t change me. Matter of fact, I have a couple of ideas that I want to bounce off of you. Remember Bear, well he always wanted to retire to a nice spot, and he told me he might want to start a survival school or a dive shop. Bill, can I use your phone?”

They walked over to Bill’s office and he handed Ron the phone, He dialed Bear’s number from memory.

“Chief Simmons, this is an unsecured line.”

“Bear, it’s Ron - You might think this is a bad joke, but I have an offer you can’t refuse. As soon as you can, get yourself up here. How would you like to run a Survival School in Alaska?”

“You’re kidding Right?”

“Nope, that old miner my Mom and I saved a couple of years ago died and willed me several thousand acres of prime real estate and half a million in cash. I figure the land might just be big enough to run a first-class survival school. I’ll take care of all the start-up expenses up to \$500,000 in exchange for 50% of the profit.”

“Ron, you’re an answer to a prayer. I couldn’t find anything worth doing when I got out, and running a dive store for a bunch of snotty rich yuppies that I wouldn’t trust with a mask and snorkel wasn’t my idea of a fun retirement. Does Nancy have any sisters?”

“Sorry Bear, but they’re all married, but there’s some really pretty and nice women in Anchorage, and a whole bunch of single Eskimo women in Allakaket!”

“How many teeth do they have?”

“You mean between all of them?”

Ron and Bear laughed themselves silly.

“Bear, can you make it up here by the wedding on May 15th?”

“Just try and keep me away. If worse comes to worse, I can always swim there!”

“Keep in touch Bear!”

“Hasta La Vista Ron!”

“Bill, you’d like Bear, he looks just like a big Grizzly. He’s a Naval SEAL Senior Chief. He’s about to retire, and the news about Slim couldn’t have come at a better time. I’m going to set Bear up in business running a Survival School. Allakaket Airlines can fly his students to and from the school, and we’ll make money on both ends.”

“Ron, for being just 19, you’ve got quite a head for business.”

“That’s one thing I have to be thankful to Bill Ayer for - he helped me develop my business sense. He also showed us on the night of our engagement party that we want absolutely nothing to do with Anchorage’s Society scene.”

They drove home, and after a long cuddle session, they were both ready for dinner and bed. Even Nancy’s leftovers were good. She made Lasagna by the full-size cake pan full, and they ate leftovers for quite some time. They retired to their separate bedrooms, dreaming of their wedding day.

The next day Ron started cutting and stacking firewood. Between the chainsaw and the tractor, he made short work of dropping a bunch of trees and sawing them to length. Splitting them was hard work, but like his dad said, “No one ever drowned in sweat.”

Later that afternoon, he came in, took a shower, then Nancy treated him to a back massage since he ached all over. He’d have to split wood more often if he got a massage every time.

Nancy called her mom, and asked her to send a list of all her relatives that could make the wedding. They'd fly them from Anchorage to Allakaket, so all they had to do was get to Anchorage, except her, they'd fly down and pick her and Ester up.

A couple of weeks later, Ron was flying into Anchorage when his satellite phone started ringing. He picked it up since very few people had that number.

"Hello, Allakaket Airlines, this is Ron Williams."

"Ron, its Bill Ayer at Alaska Airlines. Did you make any honeymoon decisions yet?"

"No, but Nancy got her PADI diving certificate when we were at MacDill, so it's going to be a diving location."

"Great, because I was thinking what to get you for a wedding present, and I remembered that the corporation owned several condos at some major diving locations. We'd fly you round trip on the G, and all you'd have to pay for was the cost of renting the equipment and the boat."

Bill, that's great, but I'll have to talk to you later after I discuss this with Nancy."

"Ok, I'll e-mail a list of properties we have, then you can discuss this with Nancy."

"Thanks Bill, God Bless, Gotta go!"

"Talk to you later Ron."

Ron wondered what that call was all about, he hadn't seen or talked to Bill in weeks, and all of a sudden he calls up and offers the use of his G and the corporate condo at a diving location. He would definitely talk to Nancy about this.

## Chapter 5 - Wedding Bell Blues

Ron flew home to talk to Nancy, and when he got there, she had already read and printed his e-mail with a note written in red “We Need to talk!”

He found her on the bed crying, and he walked in and asked her “Nancy, what’s wrong! Bill sprang this on me out of the blue; he called me on my satellite phone, and asked me. I told him I had to talk to you first.”

“You did? This e-mail sounds like a foregone conclusion. I don’t like him being manipulative like this. He could just give us the cash and let us do our own thing, instead of using the “Company Plane” and “Company Condo” - I tell you I don’t trust this guy, something’s not right here!”

“Nancy, I agree, it’s like he’s trying to suck us into his world, and I don’t want any part of it. I went with him to Kauai before I knew you, and the only good thing out of hanging with him was I found you - and I don’t want to do anything to mess that up!”

“Ron, if it’s all the same to you - I’d like to have our Honeymoon right here - I get the distinct feeling we won’t get out of bed for 3 days anyway - at least!”

Ron pounced on her and started tickling her, and she returned the favor until she found out he wasn’t ticklish. Finally she yelled “Uncle” and gave him a big kiss. With that disagreement settled, he sent an e-mail to Bill saying “Thanks but No Thanks - we’re staying right here for our honeymoon! We want to make our life in Allakaket, and what better way to do that then to spend our honeymoon right here.”

Ron showed Nancy the e-mail before he sent it, and that got him a kiss and a backrub. He was glad he was 19, or he might need some Viagra!

Bill wasn’t happy when he got the e-mail, but he understood. He had noticed that Nancy was really uncomfortable with all the “Society People” ogling her in her slinky dress. Maybe he was hanging around the wrong crowd. Funny, he seemed to remember his ex-wife was a party animal, and he met her at a company party when he was an up and coming VP. Maybe Ron had the right idea. He called his realtor and put the house up for sale. Then he sent Ron the following e-mail:

Ron:

I’m sorry, but I think I might have led you astray. I’m glad you turned down my invitation. I’ve found the Anchorage social scene the totally wrong scene. I’m considering re-locating to a



small town and settling down. I think you have the right idea, and have your priorities straight!

God Bless,

Bill

When Ron got the e-mail, he praised God, then showed it to Nancy. They held hands and prayed that God would open his eyes, and get his priorities straight. Ron asked Nancy how many relatives she would need rooms for, and she cried and told Ron that the only people on her side that had confirmed with less than a week to go were her mom and her aunt. It seemed all her other relatives were too busy to send anything other than a card and a check. Ron held her tight until she felt better. "Nancy, I promise I'll never take you for granted. You're the love of my life, and hopefully soon, the mother of my children. I'll always put your needs first, then the kids, then mine."

Nancy looked in Ron's eyes and cried again. She had been hurt so many times before it was hard to trust, now here was the real thing, her Knight in Shining Armor. She melted into his arms and just held him. Finally she looked into his eyes "Ron I love you more than life itself, and I want to spend the rest of my time on earth with you, and I'd love to be the mother of your children. Together, we'll do our best to raise them right, and raise them to love God and their country. I talked to Steve, and up to 6 months ago, you were going to dedicate your life to your country, then come back and live the rest of your life here; then the government got stupid, and destroyed the very institutions that protect it in the name of Social Equality. I just hope their foolhardiness doesn't come back to bite them or us! Anne told me about the cabin in the woods, and if things got bad in the rest of the USA, we were to grab everything we could carry and bug out in your plane to the cabin, and stay there until it was safe. I used to be a city girl, but I've always had an independent streak, and I'll never let some despotic government destroy my freedom. We have the resources to prepare and plan just in case the worst happens, but I don't want that fear to run our lives either."

"Nancy, I can see you might have been raised in the City, but you're not a City Girl, you'll fit right in here. I can't wait until Saturday!"

"Me either, so you better keep your distance or the Minister is going to be mad at us!"

"I can still kiss you - right!" Ron laid a big kiss on Nancy and swept her off her feet like Bear did.

When they came up for air, Nancy said "My Hero!"

Ron laughed so hard he almost dropped her, she did a fairly believable "Scarlet O'Hara"!

They kept busy the next couple of days, and on Thursday, they had their final Marriage

Counseling session with Rev. Bill. “Ron, Nancy - you’re ready to get married, and in my opinion one of the best prepared couples emotionally for the life-time commitment of marriage. Just remember to keep the lines of communication open.” Ron and Nancy spent the next couple of days flying her mom and aunt in from Seward, and getting everything else ready. Nancy had picked out her dress, and Ron’s tuxedo arrived with the last delivery from Anchorage. Bill Ayer flew his Catalina Flying boat to Allakaket on Friday, and spent the day with the two of them. His realtor had no problem selling his house on the hill for a cool \$1.5 Million, and he had 30 days to find another house. Ron suggested another piece of property in Allakaket that was for sale, and he could get a beautiful log house built for around a quarter million on 10 acres, or if he wanted the additional acreage for wood for the fireplace, it would cost him \$300,000.00 more or less. They drove together into town for the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner, and afterward Bill Ayer talked to Rev. Bill about buying a large piece of property on the opposite side of Allakaket from Ron’s place. Bill quoted him a figure that he could easily afford without any additional cash. He decided on a house similar to Ron’s but with a kitchen 3 times the size of his, and 4 bedrooms. At the rehearsal dinner, he met a beautiful young widow with two kids, and they had hit it off. He realized that he was looking for love in all the wrong places. The next day was the wedding, so everyone went home early. Bill and Ron stayed up talking, and Ron told Bill that he knew the woman he was interested in, and she was a sweet Christian lady, whose husband died in a logging accident last year, and had two young children that needed a good Christian father. Bill realized he could run Alaska Airlines from Allakaket as easily as from Anchorage with modern communications gear, and checked into installing a microwave relay that could handle broadband satellite voice and data transmissions. Even with the extra cost, he still had money left over since his house sold for \$1.5 Million to another wealthy Anchorage social climber. Ron and Bill had both stepped off the treadmill, and were out of that rat race.

The next morning was their wedding day, and since they were living in the same house, they decided that the old wives tale about not seeing the bride before the wedding was not only silly, but impractical. Bill had set aside a room in the inn for Nancy to get dressed, so Ron dropped her off with a suitcase full of “girl stuff” and drove to the chapel. Bill Ayer was waiting for him, and they got dressed with 10 minutes to spare. Ron handed Bill the wedding rings, and then at 12:00 sharp, they walked out into a crowded chapel. Ron could see Bear and Hunter in the back row, and his mom Anne in the front next to Steve, with Nancy’s mom Gertrude and her sister Ester on the opposite side of the isle. At 12:05, Nancy marched in to the strains of Mendelssohn’s Bridal March. When she reached the altar, Ron was looking into her eyes, and had to be nudged by Bill Ayer to get the ceremony going. The whole ceremony was a blur to him, except the part where they exchanged their vows. He suddenly felt the solemnity of the moment. He wasn’t just making a promise to Nancy, but to God. With that moment past, he slid the wedding ring on her finger, and she on his, then Rev. Bill said the immortal words, and they kissed. When they turned to walk out the isle, Ron held tightly to Nancy’s hand, and realized he never wanted to let go of that hand. Outside they were pelted with rice, then after a brief walk to the Inn, they sat down for their reception. There was a beautiful 3 tier cake in the corner, and in the other corner was a stack of presents on a table. Some of the larger presents

had been delivered to their house, and there were cards on the table for those. Bill proposed a toast, they cut the cake, and ate, and finally it got to the good part - getting home and their honeymoon. The truck was loaded with presents, and they drove to their new home, and Ron picked up Nancy and carried her over the threshold and set her down gently. Then she said "Race You" and they didn't leave the bedroom for at least 3 days. It seemed Ron had anticipated his wife and had stocked coolers full of beverages and food that didn't need cooking in the house. One of the guys who was responsible for delivering the presents moved them to the master suite while they were gone. They hung a "Do Not Disturb" sign that Nancy had borrowed from the Inn on the bedroom door before closing it.

## Chapter 6 - The Morning (Week) After

When Ron and Nancy had finally worn themselves out, Ron opened the master bedroom door, and lay back in bed. Nancy lay next to him and said “Dear, I think we need a room addition.”

“Why’s that?”

“As much fun as we had the last couple of days, we’ve only got a 4 bedroom house, that leaves 3 bedrooms for the kids and if we keep this up, they’ll all be doubled up. There’s plenty of room on the north side of the house for a large room addition. That would give us another 2 bedrooms plus a bunch of storage. If you build it with a shed roof and make it the full width of the existing house, the snow will slide off and you’ll gain at least 3 or 4 big usable rooms, plus some attic storage. I’d dig a basement underneath it first for even more storage. Good news is we won’t need it for a couple of years, so we can do it right.”

“I’m a lucky man!”

“Huh?”

“Beauty, Brains, and she can cook - what a package!”

Nancy rolled over and kissed Ron. Later that afternoon, they finally had to get out of the bedroom - they had run out of food! Nancy went to go fix something to eat while Ron prowled around the house, looking to see what the guys had delivered for presents. He saw a tarp-covered object in his garage that wasn’t there before. He removed the tarp, and 2 brand-new snowmobiles were there with a note from Bill:

Ron & Nancy:

Instead of the trip, I decided to buy you something extravagant but way more practical. I also had a 500 gallon tank of Avgas installed next to your propane tank, there was plenty of room, and the installer said it was plenty safe since the propane and gasoline don’t vent inside the building. I’ll have to remember that when I build my house in Allakaket.

Bill

Once Bill’s house in Anchorage closed, he put everything in storage, and rented a small apartment in Anchorage to use when he had to stay in Anchorage for business, and started construction of his new house in Allakaket. He and Sally (The widow at the reception) had been steadily dating since then, and even her kids liked Bill.

Meanwhile Bear and Hunter had stayed in Allakaket, and forgot all about Anchorage when they

went to the Moose Café and met several middle-aged Eskimo women who had all their teeth. They seemed to spend all of their time with 2 women who were raised in an Inuit village way north above the Arctic Circle. When they moved to Allakaket as adults, they took English names, since everyone had problems pronouncing their Inuit names. Bear's girlfriend went by Mary, and Hunter's went by April. Mary had just turned 40, and Mary was the "spring chicken" of the foursome at 35. Bear had just turned 50, and was in no hurry to raise any more kids, which suited Mary just fine; but Hunter, who was 40, decided he wanted to have as many kids as possible, which suited April just fine. They were living together shortly after the wedding, and as soon as Ron popped up on the radar after his honeymoon, Bear got with him about the Survival School. Ron flew the 4 of them out to Slim's property, and the 2 women loved the area. Bear and Hunter surveyed the room only like a SEAL could, and discovered a hidden compartment in the floor with maps, paperwork, and a suspiciously heavy bag. Bear dumped it into his hand, and it was full of gold nuggets, several ounces of gold that Slim had stashed away for a rainy day and forgot about. Bear handed it to Ron, But Ron told them to keep it. Bear handed it to Mary and told her to put it someplace safe. The 4 of them agreed they would rather live out here than in town. Ron said he would take care of all the construction costs, and the start-up costs for the Survival School up to half a million dollars in exchange for 50% of the profit. Bear was more than happy with the deal, he could do a lot with a half-million to set up a first-class Survival School, especially since their wives were raised in the traditional ways, and knew a couple of tricks the military never taught them.

The 4 of them flew back to Allakaket. Once on the ground, Ron asked Bear point-blank if he were sleeping with Mary. Bear almost told Ron to mind his own business, then remembered he had half a million riding on his answer, and admitted that he was. Ron highly suggested both couples visit Bill and they marry their wives legally and morally. Bear turned to Hunter, and they approached their wives, and the resulting kisses gave them the answer they needed. They marched over to Bill's office, and he took the 5 of them to the chapel and married Bear and Mary, then Hunter and April in a simple ceremony, then handed them blank marriage licenses which they filled out. April and Mary included their native names on the forms as well. Ron told them to make a list of everything they'd need to open the school, and prioritize it since everything would have to come by air. Bear said they would be staying in town until the houses were done since Mary and April already had houses in town, so they would be easy to get hold of. Ron reminded them that if they needed to order anything over the internet, that Bill had a high-speed connection in his office, and since he was his business manager, he could help them with this project as well. Bear gave Ron a bear hug, and told Ron to get back to his wife, he'd take care of everything. Ron drove home to Nancy's warm greeting. She had dinner ready, but decided dinner could wait!

The next day, Bear and Hunter had a preliminary list, and they gave it to Bill. It included construction equipment, some of which they could borrow, some he'd need to order. Bill called Bill Ayer and asked him if he knew anyone who owned a heavy lift helicopter that had enough lifting capacity to lift a backhoe from Allakaket to the new survival school. BA (Bill Ayer) asked Bill if he knew how much the backhoe weighed. Hearing their conversation, Bear

interrupted, and told BA that a Chinook with a lift hook ought to be able to handle it easily, since Chinooks used to sling-load M-113s all the time in Vietnam. BA made some phone calls, and found the prefect setup, a helicopter pilot that worked for a logging company and owned his own Chinook, but wanted a different job, since he wanted to be home every night. BA called Bill back, and told him his idea. He called Ron, and he approved. They would need a chopper in Allakaket enough to make it worth making him an employee and buying his helicopter. BA called the pilot, and he jumped at the chance. 2 days later he flew to Allakaket and interviewed with Bill and Bear, then met Ron. Since there were plenty of vacant houses in Allakaket, Jim (the pilot) was told he could live in Allakaket rent-free for 90 days, then only pay market on his house. Since it was just him, his wife and 6-yr old son, it didn't take them long to move.

The day after they were settled, he started flying supplies up to the construction site, and carried Ron's tractor to the site. With the lifting power and maneuverability of the Chinook, the construction project went much quicker, and they erected two large cabins, 1 for Bear and Mary, and 1 for Hunter and April. They erected a huge lodge in the center of the compound with a separate room with bunk beds. Bear had a well drilled to supply year-round water to the compound, and they cooked on wood stoves and heated with wood. They installed a huge septic field since they had the backhoe, so they could have flush toilets and showers, both of which Mary and April really appreciated. Designing the system to work in the winter was a major headache, but they got it right. They cleared out enough trees when they felled trees for building materials for the 3 big buildings to build a 300-yard shooting range with 6 lanes, which could be used for pistols, carbines, or long rifles. It backstopped into a mountain, so they were OK. The rest of the space was a huge garden that Mary and April tended during the summer, and canned. Bear and Hunter found a huge clearing that should have caribou in the fall, so they ordered 2 7mm Magnum hunting rifles with Leupold scopes.

During his next visit, Ron strongly suggested they purchase 4 .44 Magnum revolvers, since there was bears in that area, and he gave Bear the contact info for the knife maker that made his knife and Ulu/hatchet. Mary and April really liked the Ulu/hatchet, and could use Ron's like pros since they were raised using a real Ulu to cut and skin everything. Ron watched them use his Ulu/hatchet, and wished his dad could see them work. They skinned rabbits they snared in a matter of minutes, and didn't damage the pelt, or waste any motion. Ron tried one under their watchful eyes, and learned how to hold and manipulate the blade properly, and while he wasn't as fast as Mary or April, they nodded approvingly when he successfully skinned a rabbit much faster than he previously had done. They liked his Bowie knife and asked him why the blade was so long, and in reply Ron told the story of his dad and the Grizzly Bear. To say they were impressed was an understatement. They had legends in their village of great hunters that had fought bears, but most had died in the process. Ron explained that Roy hit the bear in the chest with a .54 caliber ball from a flintlock first, and they nodded knowingly. Mary said the flintlock probably saved his dad's life, since the wounded bear might have been more ferocious, but severely weakened. Ron made a present to the newlyweds of a bearskin each, since he had several spares. By the way Mary and April reacted, you would have thought he just gave them the Crown Jewels. When they finished crying, Mary explained how revered bears were in their

culture, and a bearskin given as a wedding gift was a bond of friendship for life. It was Ron's turn to cry, and explain his relationship with Bear. Mary had heard part of this story, but was amazed by the rest of it. She couldn't understand why a man would willingly dive into the deep ocean, but thought it was very brave. When he told them that Nancy had done it too, she rose several notches in their eyes. These white people were brave.

Since it was now getting into their busy season, Ron and Nancy flew together every day, and soon she had enough stick time to earn her commercial ticket. She passed the test for the Commercial, Sea and Instrument ratings with flying colors. Dan said "Congratulations you two, you can now legally fly passengers for hire at night" and handed Nancy her commercial license including endorsements for Sea and Instrument. Ron swept her off her feet and gave her a big kiss. Dan joked "Hey you two want to get a room?" and all 3 of them laughed themselves silly. BA had baseball caps made with the Allakaket Airlines logos, and the titles Pilot and Co-pilot embroidered on the front, with scrambled eggs on the bill. Nancy had to tie her hair into a pony tail to wear the ball cap, and Ron liked the look. After he was done kissing her neck, she asked "Do we have any passengers on the return flight?" with a big grin on her face, and he told her "Sorry, the flight's too short for us to join the Mile High Club!" and they both giggled.

Later that day they delivered a bunch of supplies to the Survival School, and Nancy met Mary and April for the first time. They gave her a gift of a small dream catcher made into a pendant. From living so long in Anchorage, Nancy knew the significance of the gift and they had some quality "girl time" while Bear and Hunter showed Ron the operation. The good news was they had only spent a third of the half-million, and they were almost ready to open for business. Ron asked if there was anything they needed for the school that they hadn't bought already. Hunter mentioned that if they added weapons training, they could just about double their income since they now had a 300-yard range. Ron agreed, and asked what they would need to have a first class weapons school. Bear handed him a list that totaled about \$100,000.00, since they were under budget Ron approved immediately. The list was mostly hardware, target stands, reactive targets and shooting benches, as well as audiovisual gear for the classroom segment. They included 2 spotting scopes, and eye and ear protection. Ron asked them about insurance, and they admitted they missed that item. Ron pulled out his cell phone and called his insurance agent. He was glad BA had installed the Cellular network as part of his Communications setup. The phone connected to a repeater in his plane, which boosted the signal and connected to the cellular tower on his cabin property, which connected to the tower in Allakaket. Other lodges were setting up towers and joining the network as word got out.

A couple of months ago, when BA thought of installing a communications link from Anchorage to Allakaket, one of his board members suggested spending the extra money to set up a privately owned phone company to handle voice/data/cellular for the region, since the only existing service was a single line from Anchorage to Allakaket. BA crunched the numbers, and the potential return on investment made his board members vote unanimously to approve the expense. Alaska Air, Inc. (the parent company of Alaska Airlines) was now in the phone business. The people of Allakaket were happy, and BA made sure he installed switches and

gear sufficient to carry any foreseeable increase in load. They really appreciated the cellular network, and reserved the radio network for emergency communications, or if one of the cell sites went down in the winter. BA made sure the cellular service contracts contained a clause that indemnified the carrier for any loss of service. For his bigger customers, he included a rider for refund of monthly fees for loss of service of more than a day. He set his service fee so low that everyone signed up within a couple of months, and most of the residents of Allakaket who owned computers signed up for Internet service with his Internet Service Provider. He provided coax cable connection to each house in town, and outlying houses like Ron's paid to be connected to his coax backbone. The phone and internet service could be carried through the same cable, reducing costs, and increasing speed and bandwidth.

Ron got in touch with his Insurance Agent, and negotiated an all-risk insurance policy for Alaskan Survival Inc. as a subsidiary of Allakaket Airlines. He made sure the agent knew the company offered firearms training to experienced users only, and 2 retired SEALs were in charge of the company. The agent realized that most of the clients would be Federal or State Law Enforcement, so he gave them a huge break on the normally astronomical insurance rates for firearms instruction. Ron almost choked when the agent gave him a quote on costs, and thought the insurance companies were trying to run firearms related businesses out of business (Some were), but knew the money would be well spent. He had the agent e-mail him a rider, and activate the policy. Then he told Bear and Hunter they were now in business. Bear realized that Ron was a smart businessman, since their business would feed income to him on both ends, their students would fly Allakaket Airlines to and from the school, and Ron also received 50% of their profit, but Bear and Hunter would be making around \$100K a year each according to Ron, which was 2-3 times what they received from the US government, but less than they could have earned as "Security Consultants" to some rich Arab oil sheik. Bear and Hunter were computer savvy enough to make it worth having an Internet presence including a professionally done web page with all the information, and a password protected site for Federal and Law Enforcement only information. Within weeks, bookings started rolling in, and they were in business. One of their first customers was Bill Ayer, who had money to burn, but virtually no survival knowledge, and he realized that if he was going to live in Allakaket, he would need to know a whole bunch of survival stuff. Bear and Hunter spent 2 weeks with him on a crash course, and at the end, he felt he could survive just about anything, and wrote a glowing review in the airline magazine, which was picked up and copied all over the place. Soon Alaska Survival Inc. would be busy year round, with Firearms training during the spring and summer, and survival training all winter. Soon the federal government was sending LEO and military people to check out the program, and they agreed it was top-notch. Within the first year, Bear had to hire additional instructors from the Special Forces community that included skills like Field medicine, long-range shooting, E&E training, and several specialized courses that were taught on a contract basis. They expanded the compound to handle the extra volume, and soon they were making almost as much money as Allakaket Airlines.

BA had moved full-time to Allakaket and commuted 3 times a week for meetings. Eventually, he got down to 1 or 2 trips a week. With his house completed, he had been dating Sally long



enough to know that she was the woman for him, and she was in love with him too. Her son and daughter called him Dad on occasion, BA talked to Bill, who agreed to marry them the next weekend in a small ceremony. That Saturday, BA and Sally, her kids, Ron and Nancy, Bear, Mary, Hunter, and April gathered at the Chapel for BA and Sally's wedding. It was a simple affair, but very solemn. Bill cried when he recited his vows, and Sally cried too, but because she thought briefly of her dead husband, and knew he approved of BA. The reception was at Bill's house, and was more of a housewarming party than a wedding reception, except they had a simple wedding cake. Ron was glad that Bill had finally kicked the "Socialite" lifestyle and settled down. When Ron wasn't flying, he had a long list of "honey-dos" to tend, including cutting a couple of more cords of wood, and getting the house ready for winter. He made sure the propane and diesel tanks were kept full, and the 500 gallons of Avgas was stabilized. Nancy occupied her time decorating the house, cooking fantastic Italian meals, teaching BA at trick or two about "real" Italian cooking, and studying for her ATP rating, she needed thousands more hours of air time, and she got it every time they flew without passengers. By the end of the season, Anne had more landings and take-offs than most commercial pilots with twice the experience she had, since they flew every day. Ron talked to Bill the other day, and he was amazed at how much money they were making between the lodges and the Survival School. Bear was so busy he wished he were twins. Mary and April were busy canning vegetables for the winter when Bear and Hunter came back with 2 caribou each. They were really happy to see their husbands, and now they had provided a kill, which was the final test of a husband in some tribes. Some time later, April told Mary she was pregnant, and they celebrated. Mary thought she was too old, but figured Bear could probably still manage to get her pregnant too. As it turned out, she wasn't too old, and Bear said the dumbest thing in his life when he asked Mary "How'd that happen?"

With the onset of winter, things settled down in Allakaket, and the airline business shut down for the winter except for deliveries and emergencies. Ron was glad that he didn't have to put skis on his plane since the flying boat could land on snow as well as water until someone suggested he might need skis attached to the wheels. He called the maintenance chief at Elmendorf, who got hold of the chief at 19 Wing, who said the plane did take skis over the wheels in the winter, and he had several sets there along with the hardware to install them. If he hurried they could put them on while his runway was still dry enough for them to land conventionally. Ron asked them how long it would take, and he said they could do it in a couple of hours. Ron asked if they could do it first thing tomorrow, that he would take off from Allakaket at first light, and bring both of his planes. If they would copy their manuals so his mechanics could remove and install them, he'd pay them for the copies. The Chief said that they should have a copy in the manuals they gave them with the plane, and he read Ron the number. Ron wrote that number down, and said he'd call them back. He called the Allakaket airport, asked to talk to the Mechanic, gave him the manual number, and asked him to pull it. 10 minutes later, the mechanic said he had it right in front of his face. Ron called the chief at 19 Wing, and told him they had the manual. The Chief told him that since they would be already there, it would be safer to install them in Vancouver instead of risking another landing without them and installing it in Allakaket. He said he could do both planes for \$100 total, and fill them

up with fuel for cost. Ron took him up on the offer, and called Steve, his other pilot, and told him to prepare for a long overwater flight tomorrow to Vancouver BC and back. They were actually closer to Vancouver at Allakaket then at Anchorage, so it was only 1,000 miles each way instead of 1200. Ron walked in to Nancy and told her they were flying to Vancouver Island in BC tomorrow to have them install the skis on their TurboGoose. Nancy asked how long they were going to be in Vancouver, and he said just a couple of hours. Nancy wanted to see the town but knew better than to ask. She packed an overnight bag for each of them just in case.

The next morning at first light both TurboGoose airplanes were winging to Vancouver Island. Nancy had made muffins and coffee for the long flight. As soon as they were at cruising altitude he set the autopilot and asked Nancy if she wanted to join the Mile High Club. She didn't have to be asked twice. Several hours later, they decided to check the controls and make sure they were still on course. The autopilot performed perfectly, and they were on course and schedule, at their assigned altitude. They called Vancouver for landing instructions, and landed an hour later. After the planes were towed to the maintenance facility, Steve came up to him and whispered, "Ron, I've never seen a plane fly without anyone in the cockpit. I called twice, and when I got no answer, I cruised on up and saw the cockpit was empty. I guess that flying with your wife has its benefits!"

"Sorry Steve, we decided to join the mile high club, it won't happen again."

"That's OK; just let me know by blinking your clearance lights twice so I won't disturb you, too bad my wife doesn't like to fly!"

2 hours later, the chief came out and told them the skis were installed, and they included some spare hardware since the nuts and bolts took a beating each season. Ron looked at his plane, and it looked goofy with the skis surrounding both wheels. He hoped they were aerodynamically neutral, or they would have problems. The Chief explained that the skis were aerodynamically neutral, and they added negligible weight, and the wheels still worked fine with the skis on, but they needed to land flatter on a wheel borne landing with the skis on. Ron didn't think that would be a problem, since he almost always landed flat at Anchorage. They taxied to the fuel depot and filled both planes to the max, since it was a long flight. As they were getting ready to get back aboard, Steve couldn't pass up a chance to rib his boss and told him to remember to blink twice. Nancy didn't understand what was so funny, and he didn't explain either. Nancy was hoping for a repeat of the flight down, and didn't understand Ron's sudden inhibitions. Finally she lay back in the seat and went to sleep. When they got home, Ron got to try out the skis, and they worked perfectly, except a snow landing was considerably rougher than a water landing. He could feel the skis helping out as the plane slowed, and he brought it to a stop at the far end of the lake. He turned around and taxied back to the ramp and stopped at the pumps. Once the plane was in the hangar and they were home, Ron finally told Nancy that Steve knew they weren't at the controls, and it embarrassed him. He said he would make it up to her if she liked, but she was too tired, so they fell asleep cuddling instead.

## Chapter 7 - Winter of our Discontent

The winter of 2005/2006 was long and cold. Allakaket received a record snowfall, and business crawled to a halt since the storms made flying too dangerous. Even Bear and Hunter shut down due to the weather, since they had recorded temperatures way in excess of minus 100 including the wind chill, which was cold enough to turn survival training into a real-life survival situation, and the risk to the trainees was too great. They had plenty of wood, water, and food, so they snuggled into their beds with their pregnant Eskimo wives and hibernated. Ron was experiencing a major case of cabin fever, since all the stuff he liked to do was outdoors. Ron and Nancy wound up sleeping more and more, or at least spent time in bed. BA and Sally were head over heels in love, and still in honeymoon mode. Before the weather turned bad, he filed paperwork with the Municipal court in Anchorage to legally adopt Sally's children, Mike and Jill. Sally knew that BA was there to stay, and was secure in her relationship with BA. Mike and Jill were old enough to home school, so BA and Sally spent part of their days teaching them the basics including reading, writing, and arithmetic. BA had a real head for math, and was an excellent teacher. His spelling left something to be desired, since all his writing was filtered through a secretary even if he wrote and spell-checked it himself, since it wouldn't do for Alaska Airlines documents to go out with grammatical or spelling errors. Between the 2 of them they made sure the children got a well rounded education. Sally was their primary teacher, since BA still had an airline to run, even if 1/3 of his aircraft were grounded by weather. Alaska Airlines took advantage of the situation to get caught up on their maintenance. Ron thought that was a good idea, and asked the Mechanics if there was any scheduled maintenance they could do in advance on the 2 TG's. He reminded them not to put them both down at once, so they worked on 1 plane at a time. Nancy realized that Ron needed something besides her to keep him occupied, and called Bill, who checked around and called her back. During a break in the weather, she told Ron they were running an errand in town, and to get the truck warmed up. 15 minutes later they were driving into town when Nancy told him "Stop here!" Ron slid to a stop, and she told him they were here; so he got out, not knowing what Nancy had up her sleeve. When they opened the door of the house, they were mobbed by Husky puppies, and Ron knew why they were here. He guessed Nancy realized how much he missed Lucky. She told him, "Pick one."

His task was made much easier when one of the puppies tried to jump up on him. Since Ron was an adult, he wasn't having much luck, but when Ron picked him up, he proceeded to give his face a thorough licking. Ron said "I guess this one picked me, any ideas for a name?"

"How about Sitka?"

"How about Samson - nah, I'd probably call him Sam, and that might remind me too much of either my first dog or Samantha."

“I remember you telling me about her - what’s the story with her?”

Ron gave her the rest of the story, leaving out the gruesome details, and telling her that she was studying to be an ER doc in North Carolina.

“Ron, you really have a good heart. You went out of your way to help that poor girl, asked nothing in return, even when she was throwing herself at you, and now she’s studying to become a Doctor.” Nancy gave Ron a big kiss, then asked the owners how much they wanted for the dog. They said \$200 each, so Nancy wrote a check, and they took the dog. She realized they had no dog food in the house, so she called Bill to see if they had any puppy chow in stock at the store. Knowing that they were going to buy a big puppy, he had already checked, and told them to drive on over, they had 3 bags waiting for them. Ron thought “3 50-pound bags, how much does this moose eat?”

Then he figured out the dog’s name “Honey, let’s call him Moose!”

“Well he’s definitely big enough - Ok, Moose it is!”

Nancy had hidden a bearskin behind the back seat, and when she got in the truck, Ron put the skin on her lap, followed by Moose, who curled up and was fast asleep within minutes. When they got home, Ron was glad he spent all that time with big logs, since the bags didn’t feel as heavy as he thought they should. Moose was too tired to play, so Ron and Nancy decided that a nap was a good idea too.

A few days later, the weather cleared, and Ron decided that enough was enough, and told Nancy they were going visiting on their snowmobiles. They got into their snowmobile suits with clothes underneath them so they could take them off when they were inside. Ron laid a bowl of food and water in front of Moose, and he didn’t even move. This dog could sleep through anything! Finally they were ready to go, and Ron insisted they strap on their fanny packs, and he wore his shoulder holsters. Nancy couldn’t get used to carrying 24/7, so he decided that if she flew with him between his guns and the SU-16, they were covered. She had a Para-Ord P-14 she carried when she was alone or out of the house without Ron. Ron was glad BA had splurged and spent the extra money on the electric start, and the heater system. It still had a back-up recoil start, but he hadn’t needed it yet. He’d called BA and Anne to make sure they were home and OK to have company. Since Anne was closer, they stopped there first. Ron was worried about his mom, since he hadn’t seen or heard from her since the wedding. The first words out of Ron’s mouth were “Mom, are you OK?”

“Why would you say that Son?”

“Well for 1 thing, I haven’t heard or seen you since the wedding.”

Anne started laughing “Ron, I think we’ve got a role reversal here - that’s supposed to be My

line!”

When the laughter died down, Anne told her son what she had been up to. She was working part time at the clinic as the nurse. She received enough money from that so she didn't have to touch her savings, and it gave her something to do. After all, she was still under 60 and not ready for retirement. She spent the rest of the time working on her garden, reading books, or crocheting. Evidently there was a Craft Club in town that taught the younger women in town how to knit, crochet and other lost arts. Anne really liked Crochet, but could knit with the best of them, and had already made scarves that she was saving for presents. She said the only downside to knitting and crocheting was she had finally broken down and bought a set of “granny glasses” since she couldn't see the tiny needles she worked with on some projects. Ron told his mom that they got a new puppy, and she'd have to come over some time and meet him before he got big enough to knock her over. Nancy chuckled and told Anne that Ron had named him Moose, because Bill had set aside 3 50-pound bags of dog food for them, and Ron thought “How much does this moose eat?”

“Ron, he's in good company, According to Roy, Oliver was a chow hound, and I know Sam and Lucky were too.”

Now it was Ron's turn to laugh. A couple of hours later, they reboarded their snowmobiles, and drove to BA and Sally's place. BA met them at the door, and welcomed them. He had an inner foyer where they took off their snowmobile suits, and left them on hooks. Nancy noticed Sally was positively glowing, and the next words out of her mouth confirmed her suspicions. “Nancy, we're expecting!”

Nancy's heart was in her throat, because she had been trying ever since they were married, and now she was the only lady she knew in town that wasn't pregnant except for Anne. Still she felt like congratulating Sally. Mike and Jill took that moment to make their appearance, yelling at each other like brothers and sisters do. “Excuse me - looks like they need a referee” and Sally went to settle the dispute before stuff started getting broken. “You know, these two can be a handful sometimes. I could really use a tranquilizer!”

Horried, Nancy said “Wouldn't that be bad for the baby?”

“No, it's for them - they need to settle down, this pregnancy is taking a lot out of me.”

“Maybe instead of tranquilizers, you ought to invest in Duct tape?”

Sally laughed her head off and said “I never thought of that! Maybe if I keep a roll in plain sight, and just tap it on the counter when they misbehave, they'll settle down.”

“Either that, or we'll have a bunch of neurotic kids that will sue the heck out of us as adults for “mental abuse” or some other BS.”

“Now, Bill, we won’t have that problem unless they become Lawyers!”

That evoked a good belly laugh from the foursome.

“I swear sometimes I’d like to walk into my Legal department with an Uzi, except I might need them to protect me from someone else’s legal department!”

“Bill, if you don’t enjoy it anymore, why don’t you retire, you’re worth what maybe \$10 Million?”

“Last time I counted it was almost \$12 Million!”

“You could retire and live comfortably in Allakaket off the interest.”

“What would I do, I’m too young to retire?”

“Bill’s seriously considering stepping down as my Business Manager, he says it’s too much work for a man his age.”

“Ron, If I ever seriously consider chucking it all, I’ll definitely keep that in mind. I know you can’t pay what I’m earning now, but knowing how generous you are with your employees, I’m sure it would be enough to live comfortably in Allakaket and not touch my savings.”

“Bill, I know this is a bad time to talk business, but how does \$100K per year grab you? The Mayor just wants to go back to being the mayor and his small side business including the bank and deliveries. His bank is making money hand over fist with the \$10 million dollars in deposits between the two of us. He’s a really smart investor, and he’s made some very good loans with the funds we deposited.”

“One Hundred Thousand per year up here, I could live like a king and never touch either the principal or interest of my deposits. When do you need to know?”

“I need to know by April 1st, since that’s when things get busy. One thing, if you do, you better make sure you appoint a successor that won’t try to screw Allakaket airlines, or I’ll lose enough money to hurt.”

“If I do jump, I’ll make sure they draw up long-term contracts for Allakaket. Matter of fact, I’ll do it anyway, since it’s in Alaska Airline’s best interest to keep Allakaket Airlines as a feeder line. You realize that our profitability has gone up 30% since you signed up?”

“No wonder why you’re worth over \$12 Million, your stock options probably jumped 30%!”

“If I do step down, I’ll divest totally just in case he runs the business into the ground.”

“I’d just divest enough to cover yourself just in case. Trust me; you’ll still want to be a major stockholder.”

“Got something up your sleeve?”

“Just a couple of ideas.”

They talked and visited for a couple of hours, and finally Ron said they had to get home before Moose decided he couldn’t hold it any longer.

“Who’s Moose?”

“Bill, we got a new dog, and trust me, the name fits. You’ll have to come over later and meet the moose.”

“Ok Ron, you’ve got a deal.”

Ron and Nancy said their goodbyes, got dressed in their snowmobile suits, put their helmets and gloves on, and started their snowmobiles. They were home 20 minutes later, and Ron let Moose out. He searched the house, and couldn’t find any accidents. He came outside just in time to see Moose watering some nearby trees. When he finished, Ron picked him up and praised him lavishly “Good Moose, you’re such a good boy!” Anne got his ball and they played fetch for a couple of minutes, then Moose made it clear that he wanted back in, he was tired. Ron let him back in, and he padded over to the bearskin rug, and as soon as he had made himself comfortable, he was sound asleep. Nancy made dinner, and after a while, they decided to call it a night as well.

The next day Ron called Bill, the mayor, and told him that Bill Ayer might be willing to take over. Bill was ecstatic, since the stress of running this huge business was getting to him. Between keeping his side businesses running, and handling everything for Allakaket airlines, he was working 60 hours a week, and couldn’t take another season of it.

BA and Sally talked about it, and they agreed that he didn’t need to run Alaska Airlines anymore, that if he wanted to slow down and raise a family, he needed to be home more, because even one days worth of meetings meant he had to spend at least 2 days away from his home and family, and he really didn’t want to fly the PBY during the winter.

BA got with Ron, and they talked for hours about Allakaket Airlines, and what Ron wanted to do, and what Bill thought it should do, and they came to an understanding. Ron was impressed, with BA as his business manager, he would keep the costs low, the seats filled, and handle all his negotiations. Ron really hated the business side of the Airline, and preferred flying over negotiating any day. His favorite quote was he’d rather be flying blind through an Alaskan Blizzard than have to face a board of directors, or negotiate a contract with a vendor. BA made

sure that the recommended contracts with Allakaket Airlines were in effect, then contacted the board, and notified them he would be resigning effective April 1 to become the business manager of Allakaket Airlines. He felt he couldn't in good faith continue to run Alaska Airlines and only visit Anchorage 1 day a week, and Ron had offered him the position recently vacated by his retiring business manager.

Bill was floored when his Board Chairman told him they were thinking along similar lines, and were hoping that something like this would happen. He asked Bill to submit a short list of recommendations to replace him as CEO. The Chairman suggested they stay in touch, just in case Alaska Airlines needed him to rebuild it again. The board thought he did an excellent job rebuilding the company, but now the company needed a fiscally conservative CEO to keep things running, not a hard charger that could fix things. Bill asked the chairman if they had any problem with him divesting enough shares to still be a major shareholder, but not have a controlling interest in the airline. The Chairman said the board would buy any shares he was willing to sell at 20% above market since they felt the shares would increase in value by 20% in the next year, and that increase would be the results of his hard work. Bill was sad to go, but realized they were giving him one heck of a golden parachute. 20% over market, if he sold on an upswing to private buyers, wouldn't affect the market at all, and he'd net another couple of million on the markup. He figured he'd sell 6 million worth of stock and net out 7.2 million, plus a little over \$2 million he had in the bank, he'd have almost \$10 million in the bank. The interest alone on that would be between \$300 and \$600 thousand per year. If Ron kept paying him \$100 thousand per year, his house was paid for; his monthly expenses were between \$1 and \$2 thousand per month, and would be less if he stopped paying someone to cut his wood for him. Even at 2 grand per month, that was \$24 thousand in expenses vs. \$100 Thousand in income. He'd clear \$75 thousand per year that he needed to reinvest. He thought the stock market would be the best place for that kind of money. Since it was over and above his expenses, he could invest it in aggressive growth funds to make it earn even more.

BA called Ron, and they had a long talk, the gist of it was that Bill would accept Ron's offer to become his new business manager, effective April 1 at a salary of \$100 thousand per year. Since Allakaket Airlines was earning almost a million a year in profits, Ron could afford to pay his major employees well. Ron also took a salary of \$100 thousand per year, leaving over \$600 thousand per year of profit to reinvest into the business, or sit in the bank earning interest.

Bill and BA spent several days a week together getting BA up to speed on the business. Bill was sure the business was in good hands, since BA had years of experience running a big business, and his was all OJT. Bill would be glad to slow down and take it easy. The money he made over the years at Allakaket Airlines had been carefully invested, and he too was now worth over \$2 Million. He could literally stop working today and retire on the interest, but wanted to stay busy, since fishing all the time didn't appeal to him. On April 1st, Alaska Airlines and Allakaket Airlines issued a joint statement about Bill Ayer stepping down as the CEO of Alaska Airlines, and becoming the Business Manager of Allakaket Airlines. The next day Alaska Airlines announced the appointment of a new CEO, and it was Bill's first pick. He



was really smart, and had the right personality to manage the airline during this period of stability.

Bear had called Ron and suggested he fly up to the Survival School, they needed a face to face talk, and he should bring Nancy. When they got there, Bear gave him the bad news. The Special Forces were hearing rumblings within Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries that would be bad news for the rest of the World if they came to pass. He highly suggested buying guns and ammo now while they could, and storing them at the Survival School, since it would be a perfect cover for just about anything they wanted. Ron told Bear to make a list, and he'd approve it. Bear reached in his shirt pocket and pulled out the list and handed it to him. He basically wanted at least 50 cases each of .5.56 and .308 ammo, as well as a dozen AR-15's and M-1a's. He noted "Springfield National Match" next to the M-1a's, and also had enough Leupold scopes for them included. Ron joked "What no Grenade Launchers or TOW missiles?"

"Not from this supplier, but I'm working on acquiring some stuff you really don't want to know about."

"Well in that case, don't tell me. How much is all this going to cost?"

"Including the stuff you don't want to know about, I'd guess about \$300 thousand."

Ron wrote a check for \$500 thousand and made it payable to Alaskan Survival Inc. and coded it to operating expenses and equipment.

Bear said "Thanks Ron, we're going to need the backhoe for a week, and then you really should consider buying extra tanks for JP-5 and diesel, at least a couple hundred thousand gallons, because if my info is correct, it will either be really expensive or unavailable within a year. We're talking about a 10-100 times increase in fuel costs. Even if this doesn't totally happen, the instability could double or triple fuel costs."

"Ok Bear as soon as you're done with the chopper and the backhoe, I'll put the backhoe to work clearing land for the tanks, and digging holes."

"Boss, for the size of the holes you need, you'd be better off drilling and blasting, I've done enough to qualify for EOD" said Hunter, "and what you want is a bunch of ANFO, dynamite, and det cord to break the rocks and loosen the dirt. That's what we did for the basements. It's much faster and easier on the equipment then digging it out using backhoe power only."

"Hunter, if that's the case, I want you to order a sizeable quantity of explosives, at least 3-4 times what we need for this job, in case we need to blast some more holes later."

Bear spoke up "You know Slim had a mine up there, I've just barely gone inside, but we could

get a blasting permit for the mine and order as much explosive as we want.”

“Great Bear, find out how much that all would cost, and get back to me. By the way, if you’ve got time you might want to carefully check out that mine, and find out if it would be profitable to re-open.”

“I was planning on using it next season to practice caving, rappelling, and high-angle rescue techniques. While I’m in there, I’ll take some samples and look around.”

They hiked back to the compound, and Nancy had just finished her visit with Mary and April, so they said goodbye to everyone, and climbed aboard the TurboGoose and flew back to Allakaket. Ron met with BA and told him what Bear had told him.

“That’s funny, I’m getting the same scary messages from my contacts, seems there’s some bad Juju going on in Saudi Arabia. Word I’m getting is someone is setting themselves up to depose the royal family and install a radical Muslim theocracy like Iran there. If that happens, they’ve threatened to cut off all oil to the West, and that means the airlines are in a world of hurt. Even if the Royal Family isn’t deposed, the resulting civil war will greatly reduce oil imports and drive prices 2-3 times what they are now. Stocking up now is definitely a good idea. I’d get somewhere between 500 thousand and a million gallons of JP-5, maybe 500 thousand gallons of Avgas, and 500 thousand gallons of diesel, since the Inn is totally dependant on diesel fuel for their generator.”

“What would it take to re-roof the Major Buildings with those thin-film solar panels, buy some wind generators, a battery bank and an inverter capable to taking the load, and using the generator to charge the batteries if there’s no usable sun or wind. Also, if the price is right, we might want to do that to our houses as well, I mean after all it’s only money, and we’re rolling in it!”

“Right Ron, I’ll check into it, the money won’t do us any good in the bank if we’re sitting at home in the dark freezing and out of fuel! Also, we might want to stock up on food. I’ll talk to Bill and tell him what we know, and ask what needs to happen to make the town ready for this. We owe a lot to these townspeople, and we’ve got enough money to do certain things that will improve their chances of survival, or their quality of life if my information turns out bogus.”

“I highly doubt it’s bogus Bill, because I just got the same info almost word for word from Bear, and I know you didn’t get it from the same sources, since he’s ex-military.”

“Exactly, my sources are highly placed civilians in government, and I’m sure Bear got it through the Chief’s network, which in some ways puts the CIA and the DIA to shame. Their humint is rarely wrong since the USA has military bases all over the world, and the Chiefs have an ear to the ground all the time, and they talk to the locals.”

“Bill, I’m convinced, let’s go to the Mayor and tell him everything we know.”

They drove over to the Mayor’s office. Bill was looking much better now that his stress level was much lower. Ron broke the bad news “Bill, BA and I are both hearing the same thing from two completely different sources, and I think you need to know so we can prepare the townspeople.”

“If you’re talking about Saudi Arabia, I’ve heard that too from multiple sources, so what do you suggest?”

“Bill, between BA and myself, we’ve got over \$15 Million in the bank, and we’ll never spend all of it, so we wanted to do whatever it took to get the town through this crisis. We can’t be dependent on fuel for electricity or heating, since it either won’t be available shortly, or will be so expensive that we can’t afford it. What I’m suggesting is taking the entire town into the Alternative Energy setup. Let’s find out what the electric demand of the town would be, and the cheapest non-oil way to produce it, and we need to get started NOW. I’m going to install million gallon fuel tanks in the fuel farm and keep them full, and BA and I are installing whatever we have to that will make us energy independent. Since we can’t put solar shingles on every house, we need to come up with a community-based power system that will make year-round power.”

“Ron, you’ll never believe this, but the town is situated right over a deep geothermal pocket that can produce enough steam to drive huge turbogenerators, and still have energy left over to heat houses. The reason no one’s ever utilized it was they estimated it would cost \$5 million to exploit it, drill the holes, and install the hardware. The geologist who discovered it 30 years ago said it could generate at least 30 Megawatts for 100 years.”

“BA, he said \$5 million, you want to split the cost?”

“Ron, I’m in if you are - what do you want to call our new business?”

“How about Allakaket Power and Light?”

Ron turned to the Mayor, “Ok, Bill, let’s make this happen. You’ve got \$5 Million to do it, if you need more, just ask!” Ron and BA were happy because they were able to power the entire town, take a loss for tax purposes, and still have power to burn.

After they left, the Mayor found the feasibility study that the Geologist had done as a favor. This geothermal site was a hydrothermal or wet site, so they could use older technology, drill into the hot water, and recirculate it using 2 wells, a production well, and an injection well. Since the water from the wells was likely to have a higher mineral content than normal, he suggested a heat exchanger so the hot water could heat the working fluid, which would be much less damaging to the turbine blades than the hot mineral water. He also suggested opening a

huge indoor public pool/spa to utilize the excess hot water, and act as a reservoir for the wells. The hottest water would be pumped into a huge Jacuzzi/spa, and then into the pool as it cooled to below 80 degrees. The hot water would be between 100 and 120 degrees, with a safety system to prevent scalding, and a display indicating the current temperature of the water. The extra cost for this would only be around \$100 thousand, and the Mayor felt he could donate the money himself. Bill got busy getting quotes from the manufacturers of the equipment, and contractors that could install it.

## Chapter 8 - Allakaket Power & Light

Bill couldn't believe his luck. He located a 10MW Steam turbogenerator through a surplus dealer who said it had belonged to a small utility co-op that was forced into bankruptcy by deregulation, and the big power company that bought them out didn't want anything that small, so they stored it, and he bought it for a song. It had been running for just over a year, and had over 20 years left in it, and was rebuildable for 1/3 the cost of new. 10MW turbogenerators were going for \$500 Thousand new, and he would sell it for \$250 Thousand plus shipping to Alaska. The whole turbogenerator weighted 10,000 pounds, so the Chinook could easily carry it and enough extra fuel to make the trip. He located the drilling equipment, and it was cheaper to buy than rent it, so he got a quote for buying a conventional truck-mounted drilling rig capable of boring up to 5,000 feet, and up to a foot in diameter. Next he got a quote on the pipes and pipefitting necessary to connect the wells to the powerplant. Finally, he located a concrete batch plant to make enough concrete, gunite and other materials to make all the concrete they would need. An Alaskan Steel-building manufacturer gave him a quote on 2 of his largest insulated Steel buildings, with roofs designed to handle the snow load. Once he put together the quotes and added the numbers, he was right between \$3 and \$5 Million with plenty of room left over. He got separate quotes for digging and constructing the pool/Jacuzzi complex, with changing rooms and plenty of patio area between the walls and the pools. This figure was right around \$100 thousand, so he called Ron and BA, and they agreed to meet in his office.

"Ron, BA, you're not going to believe this, but I located a good used 10mw 10KV turbogenerator for \$250,000 and they are normally \$500,000 new. It's light enough that the Chinook can carry it and I'm pretty sure it will either fit inside, or he can safely sling load it from Anchorage to here. Here's the rest of the numbers I crunched, and it looks like the entire project would come in at around \$4 Million."

"Bill, what's this line-item at the bottom "mini-Olympic pool with Jacuzzi/sauna/spa"? We didn't order a pool?"

"BA, you're right - I had a feasibility study done years ago by a friend of my who's a State geologist. He suggested a community pool/sauna/Jacuzzi would be a good use for the waste heat, you can't exactly inject 100 degree water back into the ground. It has to be below 80 degrees for the hydrothermal system to work properly."

"Ok, there's still the cost of the building and the pool."

"I know - I was going to contribute \$200K to the cause, but it seems the costs were lower than I thought, and it will only cost \$100K."

"Bill, I had an idea - do you remember reading an article in Mother Earth News about

aquiculture and greenhouses. If I remember correctly, they said the ideal water temperature for Tilapia is around 80 degrees Fahrenheit, the waste water coming out of the pool would be just about right.”

“Ok, Ron, but one slight problem, the water in the pool will be chlorinated, or the Health Department will have a cow.”

“How about diverting some hot water before the pool/Jacuzzi and blending it with cold water until it’s 80 degrees? We could build a huge greenhouse and grow vegetables year round, including stuff we can’t grow now like corn. If the fuel prices are going sky-high, then commercial canned food and fresh meat will either be expensive or unavailable.”

“Yikes, I never thought about that - we better tell any mothers with babies to stock up, and we had better stock up on anything we need to bring in from outside like soap, paper products and everything else - guess we better make a list and start buying stuff. Ron, BA - we might need some more money to buy stuff and store it. Since you’re the only ones with that kind of money, you’re nominated. Power is kind of useless if you can’t eat, wash clothes or anything else.”

Ron turned to BA and said “Looks like we’re going into the General Store business.”

BA suggested to Bill that they call a town meeting to discuss the problem. Meanwhile he saw no reason not to put their plans into action.

Bill spread the word, and everyone in town gathered at the Moose Café. It was crowded but they all fit. Bill called the meeting to order.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, We’ve heard some disturbing news you need to know about. Several highly placed sources in the military and government have heard that there is a very good possibility of a coup in Saudi Arabia. If it is successful, they have threatened to cut off the oil to the west. Even if it is unsuccessful, it would mean doubling or tripling fuel costs due the unrest. Everyone’s livelihoods and very lives are dependant on cheap fuel up here. Even if you’re a primitive homesteader, you still have goods delivered by plane. What Bill Avery and Ron have proposed is to stockpile enough supplies to keep us living for 5 years, and they have offered to build, install, and run a geothermal generating station capable of producing 10 Megawatts of power cheaply. They are paying for it out of their own pockets, and all they are asking is those of you who can afford it, to pay monthly bills that would reimburse them for their expenses over 30 years, including their start up costs, and the cost of rebuilding the generator as needed. This would cut your existing power costs in half, and also provide several things, including a community 25-meter swimming pool, a 50x50 Jacuzzi and a sauna/steam room. The extra heat will also keep a huge community greenhouse working year round with a combination of vegetables and a Tilapia aquiculture setup. Anything you used to buy from Anchorage or elsewhere will shortly either have to be stockpiled or produced here, or do without. I’m passing around papers and pencils. You need to list what you’d need to live fairly

comfortably for a year, and we will tabulate and correlate the lists, then extrapolate them out to 5 years, and stockpile it. Ron and BA have something very important to add.”

Ron spoke up. “These items will not be free, we will charge fair market value for them, at the prices we paid when we bought them. Those of you with outside incomes that can afford to pay cash - we would appreciate it. Those of you who will be probably unemployed by then will be offered jobs at Allakaket Airlines to earn sufficient funds to afford supplies. Those too elderly or infirm to work, we will support you, and make sure you are safe and taken care of. Any questions?”

A lady in the back stood up, “How sure are you?”

“Ma’am, nothing is sure but death and taxes. In either event, we are proceeding with our plans. If we are wrong, you’ll still have jobs, and a local supply of goods to purchase at the same cost as before. We plan on hiring the storekeeper so she won’t be out of a job. We are ordering a huge supply of fuel to store in case. We feel strongly enough about this to be spending \$5 Million each on plans to get us through this crisis. With your help, we can make it.”

Bill spoke up again, “Friends, let’s not panic here, or start a panic by spreading word far and wide, that would start the very panic we are hoping to prevent. We have over a year according to our sources before this crisis could erupt, which gives us plenty of time to stockpile and prepare. Any other questions?”

“What about friends and relatives - what should we tell them?”

“Good question, Tell them to prepare and stockpile, but don’t panic. Treat it like any other Civil Emergency, it’s just this time we have some advance warning. Please don’t go spreading wild rumors, or you’ll only be making things worse.”

When the meeting broke up, Bill reminded BA and Ron that they would need a huge building to store all this stuff in. Bill thought he could contact that Steel Building manufacturer in Anchorage and ask him if he had a 3rd building in stock, since if they were building 2 they might as well build 3 the same size and get a better price. BA figured the building was twice as big as they needed, but better too much than too little.

Between flying passengers, freight and stuff they were stocking up on, Ron was busier than he had ever been in his life. Both his TG’s were flying non-stop 6 days a week. The Chinook pilot was working like a madman, but wasn’t complaining since he was getting major overtime, and the community needed what he was flying. It wasn’t like he was flying prime old-growth timber from the forests to the ports for export to Japan; he was flying essential materials into the town. As soon as Bear and Hunter were finished with the backhoe, Jim flew it to Allakaket and they got started earthmoving and blasting. Hunter was as good as he said, and never overshot or undershot by much. In 6 weeks, they had the holes for the tanks dug, and Jim flew to

Anchorage then flew back with a huge fuel tank slung under his chopper. He did that 6 times, then the fuel delivery company started flying non-stop fuel deliveries to fill those massive tanks. Jim flew components of a concrete batch plant that could make concrete and gunite to Allakaket, then flew huge pallets full of concrete mix and gunite mix., then a concrete truck, and a concrete pump, and a gunite sprayer. He carried the turbogenerator, the pipes and the controls in separate flights. By the time he had finished, they had erected 3 huge buildings and had assembled the geothermal power plant.

The pool had to wait for the first 2 buildings to get done, since they were taking the full capacity of the plant to make their floors, which had to be extra-thick and heavily reinforced to prevent heaving and cracking in the Alaskan winter. Once the power plant was up and running, Bill started filling the pool. There was enough hot water left over to heat all 3 buildings, the Inn, the hangars, and provide enough heat and hot water for a 40,000 square foot greenhouse with several Tilapia tanks that had hundreds of Tilapia fry. Once they were big enough, they'd sort them into Male and Female, and keep them in separate tanks, except for breeding purposes.

The idea was hot water entered the tank, kept the water at 80 degrees, then went into the hydroponic tanks where all kinds of produce was grown including exotic varieties that would never grow in Alaska. The natural sunlight was supplemented by banks of florescent lights. Bill had read that if you combined a 48-inch cool florescent tube with a 48-inch warm florescent tube in the same rack, you approximated normal sunlight for a tenth of the cost of incandescent grow lights, between buying and running them. The light fixtures were raised and lowered as the plants grew to keep them at the correct distance from the plants. They bought cases of bulbs, fixtures and ballasts, and cases of Non-hybrid seeds. Ron wished they would have shipped the liquid fish emulsion as a sling load under the Chinook, but it came with the rest of the stuff instead. It took a week to get the smell out of the plane. Finally, right before winter they were done, and Ron took a week off to relax and spend time with Nancy and Moose, who was getting huge. Moose had gained 30 pounds in his first year, and was definitely living up to his name. Ron loved playing with him, but Moose really got attached to Nancy.

Bear had a very busy season, and made Ron another half-million in profits not including the extra money spent flying. This offset the half-mil he gave Bear, so he was happy. Ron flew up to their compound, and Bear took him for a hike to show him something. 2 hours later he was looking inside the mine that Slim's family had started in the 1800's. Bear explained what he was looking at in the powerful lights, and took a sample. Ron flew it to Anchorage to an assayer, who told Ron he had located some high-grade gold ore, but it was very small particles. Ron did some checking and located used mining equipment, laid-off miners, and hired townspeople as their business shut down as word spread of the pending crisis. Ron was glad they had secured all the fuel they would need for several years, and were 100% energy independent, and had stockpiled 5 years worth of staples, fabric, paper products, and other necessities. The storekeeper had so much stuff she needed a computer to track all of it.

As the first of the year got closer, the crisis deepened. The Saudi Royal Family was losing control, and CNN speculated that they were looking for a country to bug out to. When



Germany agreed to take them, they left the kingdom, and took their wealth with them, leaving the once great nation destitute and at the mercy of its neighbors. Arabic memories make the Europeans seem like amnesiacs, and several of their neighbors used this opportunity to settle old scores, and reclaim territory. The entire region destabilized, and no one was capable of safely delivering the massive amounts of crude oil necessary to keep the rest of the world running. The UN attempted to arbitrarily settle the issue, as the European powers had done centuries before. The effort was doomed from the start, since the UN had no military, and the various European nations were fighting each other for control of the region. Finally the US Navy was forced to militarize and organize the Persian Gulf, since pirates and terrorists roamed the waters collecting tribute from the few oil tankers that were able to find sufficient quantities of crude oil to make the trip worth it. The Small Boat Navy was reinvented, since the best defense against a small fast lightly armed boat was a small, fast more heavily armed boat. Thousands of mothballed PT boats were pushed into service. Some were barely seaworthy, and after some disasters caused by obsolete equipment, the Secretary of the Navy was standing in the Oval Office threatening dire consequences unless George Bush got off his duff and signed the Executive Order militarizing the Coast Guard, and authorizing a crash program to build 100 copies of the Mark V boat the SEALs were using. It was perfect for coastal defensive operations, yet some Idiot at the Pentagon never authorized a large purchase, probably because JSOC had bypassed NAVSEA in the procurement process for the ones he did get. The Secretary had spoken to General Shepard, who told the Secretary that he bypassed NAVSEA because the last time they had an original idea a Cutter was a sailing ship, and they were a dumb plodding bureaucratic SNAFU waiting to take an original idea and FUBAR it. The Secretary agreed, but the only fast way around NAVSEA was an EO, but George was reticent to sign an EO for a huge order for a new ship, when an aide stepped into the office, turned on CNN and showed another bunch of pirates hijacking an oil tanker, and beheading a member of the crew. George ordered the TV turned off. He asked the Secretary how ordering 100 Mark V boats would stop this.

“Mr. President, our destroyers can escort a convoy of tankers, but they can’t be everywhere at once, and these pirates sneak up while the destroyers are off chasing someone else, and capture the tanker. Once they have the tanker, they rig it with explosives and threaten to blow it out of the water unless they are paid off. The Mark V has a top speed over 50 knots, and can accelerate to that speed in a matter of seconds. It has a 25mm autocannon in the bow, and a 7,62mm GE Minigun in the stern, plus it can carry several 6 man SEAL teams and their equipment. That’s a lot of firepower in a small boat. The destroyers we are using are WWII technology, top out at about 30 knots, and can’t keep up with the pirate’s boats. The plan is to let the destroyers escort the convoys while the Mark V’s roam the likely areas where the pirates hide, and damage or destroy their boats before they can attack the tankers.”

The Secretary knew that GW loved Special Forces, so he made sure to include that element in his argument. The President signed the EO, and the boat manufacturer received a rush order for 100 Mark V’s. They had 20 unsold units in stock, and they immediately delivered them to the US Navy for outfitting and arming. As soon as they were ready to go, they were packed aboard

C-5 Galaxies and flown to Diego Garcia. The huge guns on the 20 boats had a telling effect, and piracy slowed to a crawl, but didn't solve the basic problem of supplying the world's oil. Since the US was the only viable armed force in the vicinity, the UN authorized the Marines to secure the refineries and oil fields. Any funds for oil would be deposited in an UN administered trust fund. Slowly over a period of 2 years oil deliveries approached 80 % of normal, but there was still a huge shortfall. Finally the Environmentalists woke up to reality when they discovered their 50mpg econoboxes still needed oil to run, and allowed GW to re-open closed sections of the Alaskan oilfields. This meant an immediate need for cargo planes to fly men and equipment to the oil fields, and Jim was busy again choppering in equipment. Even BA got in the act with his Catalina, flying a long round trip once a week. For the money that the oil companies were offering, and the huge savings in fuel promised, it was worth it. Since they had an oil field contract, Allakaket Airlines had access to and pre-crisis pricing on any available fuel, and Ron took advantage of the situation, and refilled all their fuel tanks in case fuel supplies were disrupted again. Their contracts with the oil companies, and the gold they were mining quickly refilled the coffers of Allakaket Airlines, and he was soon back in the black. The geothermal power plant was making enough power for the entire town, and had to be throttled back to avoid overproduction. Several oil companies decided to locate offices in Allakaket due to the improved infrastructure, and soon the power plant was back up to 80% of capacity. The Greenhouse was a co-op, and people earned vegetables and meat by working at the co-op greenhouse or other projects. Inn guests were amazed that they could serve fresh corn on the cob in the middle of winter.

## Chapter 9 -Just getting by

Things did not bode well for Allakaket Airlines. GW was now a lame duck President, and the Republicans didn't have anyone decent to run. Kerry was still eager to become the next president, but he was afraid Hillary Clinton would throw her broom into the ring. The oil supply never really stabilized, and Congress did what it was best at, talking the problem to death. There were millions of people eager to point fingers, and very few with real solutions. We weren't out of oil; it's just that politics made it difficult to secure our oil sources. Most Right Wing Republicans said we should annex Saudi Arabia, kick the towel heads out, and pump it dry. Others blamed the oil companies and there was a mad scramble for any quick-fix, until some smart person pointed out that electric cars were powered by electricity generated by either coal or oil fired generators, and hydroelectric only provided a small percentage of our power. The Democrats were in a jam as well, since the only viable alternative to replace oil was Nuclear power, and they hated Nuclear power even more than Big Oil!

Allakaket Airlines was still in business, except now they were flying and training Survivalists who thought the end was near. Bear was just glad to have the clientele even if they reminded him of a cross between Rambo and Walter Mitty. The hunters couldn't afford flights that cost 3 times what they cost before, but for some reason everyone who could afford it, or even had to mortgage the house to afford it was signing up for Alaska Survival Inc.'s Survival school. Since foodstuffs and supplies were available, Ron and BA were plowing all their money back into keeping their store stocked. Their gold mine was profitable, and with some equipment borrowed from nearby oil fields, they were able to transport the ore down the hill to their smelting and processing facility. Gold was so valuable that they could afford to fly in several tankers a week full of diesel and fuel oil for their equipment and generators. They had a small hydroelectric system from damming a river, but the bulk of their power was generated by fuel oil powered steam generators. They would have killed for a geothermal hot spot, but the geologist said it was too deep to take advantage of. They were as energy efficient as possible, and took full advantage of the short summers to make photoelectric power, but it was ridiculously expensive compared to even the high price of diesel and fuel oil. They installed a huge heliostat, but it only ran 6 months out of the year, and had to be repaired each year due to winter damage. Even with their astronomical cost of doing business, with gold over \$2,000 per ounce, they were making money hand over fist, and had managed to employ most of the townspeople who were unemployed due to the energy crisis.

Finally, Nancy was pregnant. She announced the good news to Ron when he came home from work after fixing an extravagant dinner, and giving him a massage. Finally she sat down and told him. He didn't ask "How'd that happen?" since they had been trying for a while. Ron walked to this wife, gave her a big hug, and cried. She was wondering what he was crying for, when Ron told her he thought that he might be sterile. She told him that she saw the Doc, who switched her prescriptions for her asthma and gave her some different vitamins, and voila! 9 months from now, they would be parents. Nancy had sworn Anne to secrecy, but now she was

sure to get in some quality Girl Time with her mother-in-law. Nancy really liked Anne, and liked the way she gave advice. She never said “If I were you” or pontificated. They just talked like Nancy was her daughter.

Things were heating up in the Middle East, with various Radical Mullahs stirring up the people and claiming they weren’t getting the income from the oil production when in reality, they were getting 2-3 times more of the money than when the Royal Family was in power. GW had made some inquiries about seizing the assets of the Royal Family when he heard how much money they had absconded with. Problem was he didn’t have a legal leg to stand on. It seems that ripping off the citizens of your country and absconding with the loot wasn’t illegal, and they had no jurisdiction anyway. The UN refused to act, surprising no one. Ron took a rare break to fly up to check on Bear and their operation. Ron was getting worried about security, and Bear assured him that it was taken care of to a level he would never believe, or needed to know about. Ron and BA, and most of the people in the town who could afford to placed a huge group order for ammo. The load was so heavy the BA and Ron had to fly the Catalina to Anchorage to pick it up. The delivery driver decided to deliver it in a huge cube van with a lift tail instead of making 4 trips in his usual truck. BA’s Catalina had been highly modified from the original and thoroughly de-milled. The Waist Gunner’s compartment had been replaced by a huge door, and they were able to easily transfer the pallets from the truck to the plane. They located the pallets along the centerline of the plane for safety reasons, and tried to balance the load front and rear. Tying the pallets down was overkill, but you never knew when you might be forced to execute a negative-g maneuver to save the plane. BA performed a very gentle take-off, and didn’t try to climb much or climb fast. He set the PBY down on Allakaket Lake as if he had a load full of nitroglycerine and taxied to the ramp. Once they were stopped, the townspeople helped them unload case by case, forming a human chain to handle the heavy load. They loaded it into several pickups and delivered it that afternoon. Most of the townspeople had ordered a case of their favorite ammo. BA finally realized that guns had more uses than just hunting, and had bought several. With small kids in the house, they were either on his person, or in the safe. Ron had convinced him of the necessity of carrying at least a .45 everywhere he went, so he bought a Para Ordinance P-14 Limited like Ron’s and learned to shoot fairly well with it. He finally stopped wearing suits, and realized jeans and flannel shirts were much more comfortable. Ron bought him a Bladetech IWB holster and a double-mag carrier to match.

The next morning BA was watching the news on his Satellite TV when the feed was suddenly cut from CNN in New York. He tried the other channels, and all he got was an EBS out of Anchorage with no further info. He called Ron and gave him the news. He started searching the internet, and finally Reuters broke the news 2 hours later that several small nuclear explosions had gone off in the business districts of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. There were hundreds of thousands of fatalities, but the real damage appeared to be to the financial centers themselves. Al Quaeda took credit for the attacks, stating they had destroyed the Great Satan once and for all. What they didn’t know was the effects would be temporary due to what was known as real-time data back-ups. Millions of people in the United States

panicked, thinking the banking system was wiped out. The first thing GW did was get the networks back on line so he could tell the people that everything was OK, and their money was safe, it would just take a couple of weeks to restore all the backed up data.

The oil company executives weren't convinced, and demanded to be flown back to Anchorage later that day. Ron hoped they wouldn't come back, since they had been disruptive as soon as they moved in, and BA was tempted to resume his Socialite ways until Sally put her foot down, and that was that.

Two weeks later, the banks were open as GW had promised, and he had located a probable target for retaliation. This time he wanted Congress's backing, so he called an emergency closed door secret session of Congress, and barred cameras and reporters.

Later that day, he addressed Congress:

"Ladies and Gentlemen of Congress, we have been deliberately attacked by an old enemy who had attempted to destroy our financial systems. Luckily for us, they didn't really understand our systems were fully redundant, and they would have to destroy the back-ups, and the backups to the backups to cause the financial crisis they were attempting to foment. They did cause us some losses, including several million dead from the demolition of the buildings, radiation, and accidents caused by the panic attempting to flee. They caused at least 10 million injuries, some severe, and they caused us Billions of dollars in damage. I called this secret emergency session, because what I'm about to reveal may never leave this room, but I need your support for several retaliatory strikes.

First of all the Saudi Royal Family has supported Al Quaeda since before the first Desert Storm, and I'm passing out documents that prove that. All copies have been numbered, and must be returned before the doors are opened. The Saudi Royal Family has absconded to Germany with over half a Trillion dollars of stolen oil revenue. What I plan on doing is to seize all their assets by blocking transactions of the affected banks until they agree to return the ill gotten gain to its rightful owner, after we take 20% of it as payment for the damages caused by the attack they paid for. All of our percentage of the funds will be disbursed to actual victims with legitimate claims, and NO lawyer's fees will be paid out of these funds. I don't want 2/3 of the money going to a bunch of people who weren't victims of this attack, but still benefit financially. Our first priority will be to rebuild downtown New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Since the Insurance Companies have invoked their "Acts of War" clause, no one has been able to rebuild. Once the United States had paid for the losses and rebuilding expenses of big companies, I'll sign an Executive Order declaring this a Terrorist Attack, and basically order the insurance companies to make good on the smaller losses by rate payers who paid their money all these years, expecting the insurance company to actually pay for a loss, and not run and hide behind an obscure definition of an "Act of War".

Second of all, we have several locations that we're pretty sure belong to Al Quaeda or

sympathizers and major supporters based on intercepts in the days before and after the attacks. Any of you who breathe a word of this will face a National Security Act arrest.

Therefore, I've ordered all of our precision bombers to load up with JDAMs and fly to these targets. They are in the air now, but I want a voice vote of approval for these strikes because there might be repercussions. The United States cannot be attacked and then seen as weak by the world, or the sharks will close in, and the vultures will be there to pick off the scraps. My final act as President of the United States will not be to sign our surrender to terrorists. Every time the United States was attacked, like in Pearl Harbor, we counterattacked and defeated that enemy. There are those of you who want to appease all our enemies. I'm here to remind you that Neville handed Churchill a peace treaty signed by Adolf Hitler the same moment the Battle of Britain started. Appeasement never worked, and never will. Now I'm asking for a voice vote to approve the actions we as a nation are about to take. Our Nation has been attacked, and our response is measured and responsible, and aimed at those who attacked us, not innocent civilians."

Dick Cheney, as the President of the Senate, called for a voice vote. Except for a few Ultra-Liberal members of Congress, it was an overwhelming majority and almost unanimous in their approval of his actions. GW knew that offering to fix NYC and Chicago had silenced most of his critics, since they realized it was a package deal. George walked over to a desk, and signed the EO authorizing the missions, and a hundreds of bombers that were orbiting just outside of radar range of their targets were given the GO code, and all over the Middle East it was raining JDAMS. Some were laser drops due to the proximity of civilians, and some were GPS drops. An hour later, every known member or supporter of Al Qaeda, including all the pesky radical Mullahs had a suddenly unexpected encounter with God. All over the world, transactions were frozen for entire banks that the US suspected of harboring Saudi Royal Family loot. After a week, the presidents of the banks realized they could not operate at all with all their transactions blocked, and sent private notes to the US government asking why they were being blocked, and what they had to do to resume transactions. The US reply was an encrypted transmission listing all the deposits in their banks that must be surrendered to the US government as stolen property. Most European banks complied immediately, but some Bahamian banks needed more persuasion. The US government got its way when they threatened to send the US Marines in and seize the bank and the entire country if necessary. No Bahamian government could stand for a minute against even a small detachment of Marines, so they knuckled under.

The next day King Faud was rudely awakened by German GS-9 troops sent by the government to evict him from his villa, and seize every asset in his possession. His greatest indignation was when they seized all his Mercedes limousines, and he was forced to walk through the gates of his villa into the clutches of the media. Seems the Germans weren't too happy about having several German banks' transactions blocked, and decided to evict the cause of their grief. Since no other EU nation wanted him, and the Saudis were seeking extradition, the German Government took the easy way out and declared the King and his entire entourage Persona Non Grata and deported them back to Saudi Arabia. They even made him fly commercial. His

entire entourage was arrested upon landing in Saudi Arabia.

George Bush and the senior members of Congress held a joint news conference announcing the seizure of \$500 Billion is Saudi Royal Families assets, and the return of the bulk of those assets directly to the Saudi people to rebuild their infrastructure, open schools, rebuild mosques damaged in the recent Civil War, and generally make life better for the average Saudi citizen. 20% of the money was being withheld to rebuild damages to New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, since we had evidence the Saudi Royal Family had financially supported Al Qaeda for decades, and Al Qaeda had claimed responsibility for the bombs.

Overnight GW's popularity soared in the polls, and if he could have run for a 3rd term, he would have won by a landslide. Seeing the polls, the Democrats decided now was not a good time to attack GW, and a Republican, fiscally conservative Congress and a moderate Republican were elected in 2008. His first act as President was to strengthen border security, and erect a fence between Mexico and the US, and deport all Illegal Aliens, with liberal amnesty for any illegals who had lived here over 10 years, and could prove it, and could pass a NCIC background check. The amnesty clause kept most of the Mexican voters from rebelling, and the Wall was erected. Within months, hospitals in border states reported a huge drop in number of deliveries, and Emergency Room admittances.

King Faud spent his last days in a common prison cell near "Chop Square" in Riyadh. The irony of the situation was not lost on the king, since he could see his palace out of his prison window. His execution was a foregone conclusion. Theft on that scale warranted death according to Islamic Law. What the Supreme Council debated for months was how far the executions should spread. Several Imams wanted to execute the entire entourage, and some wanted to free anyone who wasn't a member of the Royal Family. A brilliant compromise was reached. Anyone in direct line for the throne would be executed to prevent retaliation if they should ascend the throne, the others would face a decision of execution or publicly denying their royalty and throwing their badges of royalty on a dung heap before the TV cameras. They knew this would result in forever destroying the monarchy, and frankly they were tired of the excesses and some embarrassingly public displays of behavior forbidden by the Koran from younger members of the Royal Family.

King Faud was delivered the news that he would be executed the next day and a note from Ex-President Bush at the same time. Since the King read English, it was left un-translated and unopened.

Dear King Faud:

If you hadn't been so greedy you would still be in Germany today living a life of luxury instead of facing execution. If you would have kept it under \$10 Billion, we could have looked the other way, but absconding with over \$500 Billion and taking all your country's liquid assets was too much, and we had to bring you to heel.

Enjoy Eternity!

George Bush

The next day at high noon, dozens of members of the Royal family were chained together as common criminals, and forced to walk to Chop Square in the blazing 100 degree plus heat. A cleric was provided, but none were willing to confess. The King was the first one in line, and before he was executed, he was publicly humiliated by being stripped of his throbe and regalia and was executed as a common thief. He nearly fainted when he saw the huge razor sharp scimitar wielded by the Executioner. He was tied to the block, and as the blade descended a roar erupted from the crowd "Allah Akbar" and the King's head rolled away from his body. That day was henceforth celebrated as Saudi Independence day.

The next day there was a big ceremony carried live on Saudi TV and broadcast to the world of the cousins of the royal family throwing their regalia and throbes onto a dung heap and publicly renouncing any ties to the Royal Family.

Over the weeks and months under pressure from the US and Britain, the Saudis adopted a British-modeled government, with the upper house dominated by the clergy, and the lower house dominated by the new middle class of entrepreneurs. It was an eclectic blend of Islamic Law and a Civil Government.

Ron and BA followed all this, and realized the US had just bought some time, that any remaining members of Al Qaeda would be back seeking revenge. They hoped that the measures President Hatch had taken would keep them out of the United States.



## Chapter 10 - Al Quaeda

Unfortunately GW didn't target all the Al Quaeda sympathizers in the Middle East. Most of the Iranian Republican Guard were staunch supporters of Al Quaeda, and when they received news of the JDAM strikes, they were furious, especially when several popular (to them) mullahs were killed along with their families. The Republican guards by themselves had no means of retaliation, but they began the process of rebuilding Al Quaeda, and planning their revenge.

After the strike, oil production in the Middle East and the rest of the world rose sharply. Several news sources attributed it to fears of attack by the United States, but what it was in reality was the re-activating of several thousand wells in Texas and California as the price soared high enough to make them profitable. The glut of oil drove the price of a barrel of crude back under \$50, and they began shutting down again. By now the entire Alaskan oil field was in full production, and the terminal in Valdez Alaska was operating around the clock, transferring oil to new double-hulled supertankers and mega-tankers for delivery to both coasts of the United States. Several US Senators had approached President Hatch with an idea to build a new set of locks next to the original Panama Canal that was 5 times the size of the original, and could take any oil tanker envisioned in the next 20 years. President Hatch looked at the costs of building a canal just for supertankers, the security risks and cost to defend the very valuable and highly vulnerable supertankers while in transit, and told them the bloody tankers could go around, he wasn't spending more than the national debt on a canal just to lower the cost of crude oil by \$2 per barrel. He had also seen secret CIA reports that Latin American Insurgents had plans to attack the existing canal and hold the ships hostage. If they held a supertanker hostage, they would have a real bargaining chip.

He thought about that idea, and decided to put a heavily armed Marine guard force aboard every tanker that left US waters in transit armed to repel boarders and equipped with Stinger Missiles to take out any attempt to board via helicopter. The Commandant of the Marines liked the idea, since the Marines' original job was to protect US ships from pirates, and in a way they would be doing that again. He pointed out to the President that it meant militarizing the vessels, since Posse Comitatus prohibited Military use for civilian law enforcement. President Hatch fixed that with a single EO, and for the duration of the emergency, the US flagged oil tankers would be considered US Military ships under civilian control and ownership. The practical matter was that a Naval Officer would be on the bridge 24/7, but since the Navy Captains weren't experienced with ships that big and unwieldy, the civilian captain made all navigation decisions, and the naval officer was in charge of security. Word soon spread of heavily armed Marines on the Oil tankers, and several Latin American Terrorist organizations decided to pick easier targets. The sight of Ma Deuces on pintle mounts port and starboard, and twin 40mm Bofors guns mounted on the bow and stern became a common sight. They also mounted a military radar system on every supertanker that could detect any object from 0-25 thousand feet within a 50-mile range from the ship that was bigger than a barrel.

With the drop in oil prices, hunters came back to Alaska with a vengeance, hoping that there would be some prime trophy caribou available, since they hadn't been heavily hunted for several years. That season several Boone & Crocket records were established. When word spread, every hunter who could afford it tried to get to Alaska. Alaska Airlines, Allakaket Airlines and the lodges were operating at max capacity. Even the Inn at Allakaket was booked for the entire season by hunters who wanted to hunt by themselves with a guide. Every house and cabin was rented for the season by pilots and guides, and business was booming. Knowing it couldn't last, Bill, BA and Ron socked away all their profits, kept the fuel tanks full, and did everything they could to make sure the entire town would be self-sufficient in case the boom went bust. Nancy delivered her son, named Jake, and Ron was a proud new father. Unlike his dad, he didn't have to deliver his son and good thing too, since he was flying back from Anchorage when he was born. Ron really wanted to be there, but knew he would probably be in the air between Anchorage and Allakaket when it happened. He said "That's OK, I was there for the important part!" and Nancy had to laugh. Since Anne was Doc Miller's nurse, Nancy did have a family member there in the delivery room. 9 months later, she was pregnant again. BA guessed they were in a hurry to get it over with. Actually Ron and Nancy couldn't keep their hands off each other, and the result was additional kids, which was OK with them, since they wanted at least 4. Nancy was a full-time Mom, and loved it. Having 2 kids in diapers would be interesting, but she knew she was up to the challenge. Ron spent as much time home as he could, but she realized that he had a seasonal business to run, and did most of the flying himself. They were now so busy that both TG's flew 2 round-trips between Anchorage and Allakaket each day full of passengers. Sometimes Steve flew a 3rd trip for cargo. BA was glad he switched to Ron's business manager, because he was sure he would be going out of his tree trying to manage Alaska Airlines since he was working between 40 and 60 hours each week just taking care of Allakaket Airlines and their subsidiaries. The gold mine was at full production during the warm season, and was making enough money that the airlines could have shut down and the entire company would still be in the black. Ron took advantage of the situation and ordered more fuel tanks installed at Allakaket and at the mine site. Jim was as busy as anyone else flying his CH-47. The mine would have a 6-month supply of fuel on hand when they finished, and the airport at Allakaket would have a year's supply for the airline and the town. Since the geothermal plant was producing between 4 and 5 megawatts each day, the demand for diesel generators was just about zero, but everyone had switched over to diesel vehicles at Ron's suggestion, since the diesel was easier to store long-term than the avgas. The snowmobiles and chainsaws still used avgas, as well as the bush planes, but in an emergency they could do without them. They had millions of gallons of JP-5 in storage, easily enough to last a year at their current rate of use, and if they cut back, it would last several years. The Survival school was still going like gangbusters between new Fed and LEO customers, and the occasional civilian with \$5K to spend learning survival for a week in the Alaskan wilderness. Bear and Hunter still ran the Survival Business, and Ron hired a full-time mine manager with seasonal crew for the warmer months, and a year-round maintenance crew that lived at the mine site to keep it up during the winter shut-down. The seasonal crew made so much money during the warm season that they didn't have to work the rest of the year, which suited them just fine. Several bought cabins in the area around Allakaket and moved their families to Alaska since

they knew that it was just matter of time before TSHTF again.

Al Quaeda and the Republican Guard were in the process of planning their attack on the oil pipeline. They realized infiltrating the US would be next to impossible via Mexico, so they checked Canada out, and it was wide open. Toronto would let anyone in, and there were no travel restrictions. Their only difficulty would be getting from the Yukon Territory to the oil pipeline. They would have to fly, and started training pilots and looking for planes. The area was snow-bound almost year-round, so they needed a ski plane, and winter survival training for the operatives. Several of them applied to Alaska Survival Inc, and Bear refused their applications, and forwarded the info to Homeland Security. He hoped the HSD was better run than when Bush was President, or they were in deep kimchee. The rejected applications and the requests for background clearances for new pilot training went to separate desks, so no one put 2 and 2 together until much later.

Luckily, applications for pilot training for anyone of Middle-eastern descent were automatically denied unless they were Israeli, setting their plans back over a year while they scrambled for another training site. Finally they located a French company that didn't give a rip what nationality their students were, just the color of their money. Many 3rd world pilots received their training there, as did many potential terrorists. The French didn't see terrorism as a French problem yet, since they were so busy appeasing the terrorists that they hadn't bothered to attack yet. 2 years later their pilots were given Commercial tickets with multi-engine ratings, and began searching for planes. They knew that C-130's flew around and near the Arctic Circle year-round, and could carry a bunch of gear, including the plastic explosive charges they would need to sever the oil pipeline. The easiest solution came from a mole in the RCAF who said they could just steal a winter-equipped RCAF C-130. By the time they missed it, the mission would be accomplished. They decided to skip the survival training since this would be a one-way mission anyway, and make up the time they lost trying to find pilot training facilities in the US or Canada.

Bear was hearing rumblings through the grapevine that Al Quaeda was up to no good, and it would involve an attack on the US. He e-mailed a friend of his at HSD and asked him if they ever investigated the applications for Survival Training. When he said they didn't, Bear gave them the names, and they came up on a hot sheet, which immediately got the HSD working on cold-environment attacks. They issued alerts to all cold-weather military bases, and just through dumb luck, a copy filtered down to the people responsible for the Trans-Alaska pipeline, and they immediately increased their security patrols, and changed their weapons from AR-15's to M-1a's. They increased the frequency of radio checks as well, and since the checks were for the benefit of the guards, they actually appreciated it. By the time Al Quaeda was ready to attack, the alert had expired, but being creatures of habit, the pipeline company never stood down the extra security along the pipeline.

Several weeks later Al Quaeda infiltrated Toronto International and breezed through the non-existent security with false passports. They drove west to the Yukon Territory to a base that

was close to the border with Alaska, scouted it for a few days to establish the guard's pattern, and snuck up to him and killed him, hiding the body where it would take weeks to be found. The mole had already ID'd the plane they needed to steal. It was already fully fueled and prepped for a mission that was mysteriously cancelled later that afternoon. They stole the plane, took off and flew below the radar until they reached the pipeline. The pilot didn't land the plane as smoothly as he had practiced, probably since he had been up for 18 hours, and snow viewed in the early morning light looks deceptively flat. No one was seriously injured, but they were forced to abandon their schedule. Unknown to the attackers, the schedule was set to ensure that no guards would be near the sections they were going to blow. Their delay meant that guards would be either nearby or right on top of the sections they were to blow up.

They made it to the sections OK, but while they were placing the explosives, the guards appeared, and realized there was no scheduled maintenance on this section of pipe, radioed in the Attack Alert, and jumped out of their trucks and sought cover. In their white coveralls, they blended right into the snow. Through their binoculars they could see the terrorists were fixing explosives, and they had no time to waste. They sighted on the terrorists with the scoped M-1a's and commenced fire. Hearing gunshots, the leaders pressed the detonators while they could. Since the charges weren't fully placed, the pipes were severely damaged enough to force a shut-down, but not ruptured as the terrorists had hoped. All up and down the line, the Security force went on high alert, and 6-man Strike teams were sent to the pipes while they checked the remainder. When the smoke cleared, it was apparent there were only 2 teams of terrorists, and they quickly backtracked and located their plane. They notified the RCAF that they were missing a C-130, and RCAF checked and thought the guard had deserted his post until they found the guard's body a week later. The news that the pipeline had been attacked made it up the chain of command, resulting in a Flash message being put in the hands of President Hatch. While he was grateful that the pipeline had survived and was intact, he was so mad that he could have nuked the entire Middle East right then and there.

President Hatch was given continuous updates. When they found and translated papers found at the crash site and several of the bodies were ID'd then ran through the system, and their nationality was known, President Hatch vowed to finish what President Bush started. Before he could do anything rash (Like nuke the entire Middle East) his Chief of Staff had a word with him, and suggested a much better solution. Like his predecessor, he would address Congress, and then drop a MOAB on Tehran. Several were based in Diego Garcia, and he authorized the loading and readying of the plane. He called an immediate closed joint session of Congress, and gave them the news. Most of the Ultra-Conservative Republicans and several conservative Democrats wanted to nuke Iran and get it over with. President Hatch agreed, that was his first solution, then told them his Chief of Staff suggested a much better solution that would do as much damage as a small nuke without the radioactive or political fallout.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the solution he came up with was to drop a MOAB on Tehran Iran. I have the appropriate plane being loaded as we speak, and I need a voice vote authorizing the attack." Since the Ultra-Liberal wing of the Democratic Party found themselves without a constituency, and out of office; the vote was unanimous, and President Hatch signed the order.

The C-130 with a heavy fighter escort and a fuel tanker took off, and later that afternoon, a single huge bomb rolled out of the C-130 and fell to earth. Just above ground, the detonator fired, and 18 Thousand pounds of TNT turned Tehran into a wasteland.

President Hatch went on National TV right after the attack to break the news to the American Public.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, it seemed Al Qaeda didn’t get the message the first time and tried unsuccessfully to attack our oil pipeline in Alaska resulting in minor damage. From what we know, the Terrorists received primary pilot training from a French company, stole a RCAF C-130, killed the guard, and flew below radar coverage to the pipeline, where they crash landed. The landing threw off their schedule, and they ran into the guard force, which prevented them from setting their charges and blowing the pipeline. Subsequent forensic testing and documents found at the crash site and on the bodies proved beyond a reasonable doubt that this branch of Al Qaeda had close ties to the Iranian Republican Guards. Between that and evidence the Iranian government is going forward with their illegal nuclear weapons program, I would have been justified to nuke the entire country. Instead I decided to show mercy and drop a 20,000 pound MOAB on Tehran. Right now the entire city of Tehran is as flat as a pancake. I have a message for the rest of the Moslems in the world. We can be the best of friends, or the worst of enemies. It’s your choice - Attack America again, or American interests or citizens again, and you will reap the whirlwind. Consider this your final warning.”

Ron and Nancy were watching the TV, and caught the President’s speech. They turned the TV off when the talking heads came on and babbled for an hour. Ron turned to Nancy and said “He’s definitely got a set of brass ones!”

“Ron, it also might invite other attacks!”

“I doubt it - I’m pretty sure the next attack if there is one, will generate a nuclear response. No government in their right minds would allow anyone to encourage the US to nuke their entire country. They’ll rein their terrorist organizations in fast. Some might even ask for US help, and I’m sure we’ll give it. That message wasn’t just for the Moslems - it was meant for every country in the world that wishes us ill, or covets what we have. As long as Hatch is President, even Russia and China will watch where they step.”

## Chapter 11 - Moose on the Loose

By now Moose had grown from a small puppy into a medium-sized Moose and decided to help Nancy baby-sit Jake, sometimes literally. More than once, Nancy walked into a room and found Moose sitting on Jake. Since he was still breathing she didn't freak out. Jake made up for it by using Moose as a Jungle Gym. The two of them got along great, and Moose kept Jake out of trouble more than once by woofing and ratting out Jake when he was doing stuff like trying to climb over the baby barricade. They played together, napped together, and Nancy even caught Jake trying to drink out of Moose's water bowl. She thought that was a little too much togetherness, and put the kibosh on that. Often during naptime, she'd find Jake curled up with Moose on Moose's bearskin rug on the floor. Ron was home one day and spotted them, and almost broke down in tears remembering when he used to do that with his old dog Sam. Nancy picked that moment to give Ron a hug, and she couldn't understand why he was crying so hard. When he finally stopped and explained, she joined him. A couple of months later, Nancy had their second son Josh. Jake was too busy with Moose to miss the intimate time with his mom, so there was little sibling rivalry between the two, at least for now. Nancy was confused, She was a blonde, and Ron had dark hair, yet Jake was a blond, and Josh definitely took after his father. She wondered what a girl would look like.

The next season was busy for Allakaket Airlines as well. BA's replacement had suggested to him that if Allakaket Airlines could pick up the slack, he'd appreciate if they would pick up the Fairbanks to Northern Alaska routes. BA realized that would involve building two new TurboGoose, and he didn't know if they had enough parts available. Ron called the Maintenance Chief at Elmendorf and asked if he could locate some more Allison Turboprops. He suggested Allakaket Airlines contact Allison direct, since if they still had the plans, they could build several of them at the same time, and they would be brand-new turbines, and more reliable than surplus turbines. Ron did just that, and found out that Rolls Royce had bought the company in 1995, and located the Rolls-Royce website for Allison turbines. The e-mail he sent made it quickly to the Director of the Allison Engines Division's desk, and he was incredulous - they thought those turbines had been destroyed long ago. A telephone call to Allakaket verified that not only did the turbines survive, but 4 of them were powering TurboGoose airplanes that had been flying for years. The Director called the head of the Engineering Department, and it took some convincing before his Head Engineer realized that the Director wasn't pulling his leg, and 4 of their old turbines were flying in commercial aircraft. He located the 70-yr old engine designer in a retirement home and the two of them convinced the designer of the turbine that it was installed and running in an aircraft. They immediately booked passage to Anchorage, and met Ron at the airport with one of his TurboGoose aircraft. It took hours for Ron to explain the parentage of the aircraft and turbines, and the designer practically cried when he saw that his beautiful babies were actually installed in a commercial aircraft. Ron invited them aboard, and offered the designer the right seat. The flight back to Allakaket was a very emotional experience all around. The engineer marveled that these 50-year old turbines were still good enough to fly in a commercial aircraft. He was impressed by their power and how

quiet they were. The landing at Allakaket was spectacular because Ron showed them the STOL capabilities of the aircraft. The designer saw the sister ship of the TurboGoose, and was speechless. Finally Ron asked him to build some more turbines. Ron thought the designer was going to cry when he asked him. The Director said they could build as many turbines as they needed, at which point Ron called the maintenance chief at the RCAF base and asked him how many flyable Grumman Goose airframes he had in the mothball fleet. He said about half of them could earn an airworthiness certificate with some work, and that was about 20 planes. Ron called the new CEO of Alaska Airlines and told him he had 20 more airframes available for conversion. How many did he want on the Fairbanks to Nome and points north route? He said he needed 4 aircraft because they were flying in and out of there all day long, and 8 flights per day would just about handle the volume. Ron asked "How about winter?"

"Ron with the new exploration and drilling going on up there, I can imagine you could work that route year round, maybe cut back to 2 planes in the winter. It's not like you can't find pilots."

The CEO was right, the Air Force hadn't recovered from the blow dealt to it by Congress and the ex-President, and was still a shadow of it's former self. Ron could have his pick of experienced Transport pilots. Ron asked the Director of Allison to make enough turbines for 4 additional aircraft, and enough spare parts to keep the fleet of 6 flying for 20 years. They went into BA's office and hammered out the details while the engineer and designer pored over the turbines and marveled at the installation job the RCAF 19 Wing AMS did. The WWII airframe, the 1950's turbine, and the 21st century avionics were blended seamlessly. The engineer got a few ideas from looking at the installation, talked it over with the designer, and they agreed. They walked into the meeting and gave Ron the good news. "Ron, we can design a turbine using 21st century technology that will fit inside the same space, accept the same mounts and everything, yet has 30% more horsepower, 50% better fuel economy, and is more reliable. The best news is it won't cost you any extra. Matter of fact, we'll make 4 additional turbines at no charge in exchange for the 4 in the planes now, since we'd love to tear them apart and find out why they're still running after all these years."

"Are they still safe to fly?"

"Don't see any reason why not - we'd just like to have them back for testing."

"Well, in that case, make the other 8 turbines first, we'll get those 4 planes in the air, then we'll work on the first 2 during our downtime this winter."

They agreed, and left with a signed contract for the 8 turbines, plus 4 additional at no charge in exchange for the old turbines. The engineer contacted the Maintenance chief at 19 Wing and they discussed some modifications they wanted to make to the planes to bring them up to 21st Century specs, including full computer engine control. The maintenance chief said he would have no problems with the new design, since they worked on the C-130 that uses the same

equipment all the time. The RCAF chief asked the Engineer if they would be interested in the other airframes to retrofit them for use in Canada. He told the Chief if they could find a buyer, that Allison could make enough turbines for the whole fleet.

Since Allison needed 3-4 months to make the turbines, the RCAF Chief had some time to pick out his 4 best airframes and get them ready for the new turbines and avionics. The mechanics stripped them back to the bare frames, replaced the old military fuel tanks with new FAA approved tanks that held 4 times as much fuel and put them back together. They located all the necessary running gear and parts. When the turbines and avionics came in they were very busy indeed. They got the planes finished, painted, and certified in time for the last month of the busy season. Ron took immediate delivery and the 4 new pilots he had hired were flown down to see their new planes. Ron noticed several differences and asked the Maintenance chief about them. "what happened to the pitch control?"

"The engineer called and said the new turbines required the modern prop design. The computer selects the prop pitch based on turbine RPM, airspeed, and a couple of other factors. You still have a fully reversible prop, all you have to do now is idle the turbines, and flip a switch while the turbines are idling, and you have full reverse available. It's much quicker and safer than the manual system."

Ron had to agree with their logic, but he liked having manual control of the plane, then he realized that just that one feature could improve fuel economy 10-20% since it would set the pitch to the most efficient setting automatically. All of the new pilots were ex C-130 pilots and didn't see what the big deal was; the C-130 was way more automated than the old Grumman Goose. Their tanks were filled, and they flew around the base to make sure everything worked, and landed to top off and report any deficiencies. There were a couple of gripes but they were minor, and after they were fixed, Ron signed for the planes, and they flew back to Allakaket. Ron missed Nancy on these long over-water flights, but she was at home with their sons and probably wasn't interested in joining the Mile High club again.

2 months later, they took the 2 older TurboGoose planes out of service for the winter, and flew them to Vancouver, where the mechanics installed the new turbines and controls. When Ron got his old plane back, he noticed the extra power, but still had to fight himself when he wanted to monkey with the pitch control and it wasn't there. The extra horsepower also meant more capacity for loads, and even with 8 passengers, they could safely carry over 1,000 pounds of baggage or cargo in the rear of the craft. Since it was a multi-use plane, it didn't have a bulkhead between the cargo area and the passengers, just a very strong net made of Kevlar and Spectra straps tightly woven together and attached to secure mounting points built into the frame of the aircraft. The new pilots loved the plane, and quickly took advantage of its unique characteristics. The Fairbanks to Nome route was one of their most popular routes, and Ron planned to base his 4 planes in Fairbanks next season, so he called Alaska Air and spoke to the new CEO, Bradley Whinton III.



“Brad, I was wondering about basing 4 of our TurboGoose planes in Fairbanks next year - we’re wasting huge quantities of fuel flying back and forth to Allakaket each day with a basically empty plane.”

“Ron, I agree, and we were just discussing it. I can let you have ramp space next to ours at our terminal, which will save us the cost of transporting luggage from one terminal to the other. I’ll get with BA to discuss costs.”

“Thanks, talk to you later.”

Ron called BA, “BA- Ron, Just talked to Bradley, he’s going to discuss basing our 4 TurboGoose planes in Fairbanks next year, he said something about discussing costs. Make sure you get the best deal possible for us, since we’re sending them a lot of business.”

“You mean he was going to charge us? Why that little Pipsqueak!”

“Easy BA, nothing’s written in stone yet!”

“Except his epitaph if he expects us to pay him to base our planes at Fairbanks next to his - which by the way it will save them Millions!”

“OK BA, be nice - I don’t want his blood all over our carpet!”

BA calmed down just in time for Brad to call.

“BA, it’s Brad, did Ron tell you about his idea to base Allakaket Airlines planes at Fairbanks next to ours?”

“Yeah he mentioned it.”

“We need to talk dollars and cents.”

“Brad, first of all, if you think Allakaket Airlines is going to pay money for ramp space when the agreement will save Alaska Airlines more than double the usual basing fees, you’re nuts!”

“Excuse me Bill, I never said that!”

“Ron said you were going to call to discuss Costs - that sounds to me like you were thinking of charging us. Before you go any further, you better discuss this with the board.”

“OK BA, I’ll do just that!”

Several hours later a very contrite Bradley Whinton III called BA back.

“BA, sorry about the misunderstanding. I talked to the Chairman of the Board, and his kindest comment was “Are You Nuts?” I guess I’ve got more to learn about this business.”

“Bradley, you were my pick as my successor, but don’t let it get to your head. I knew you were competent enough to run things, and I didn’t really want the job anymore. However, if you want my advice from time to time, as long as it isn’t a conflict of interest, feel free to ask me.”

“Thanks BA; Alaska Airlines would be more than happy to base 4 of Allakaket Airlines planes in the ramp spaces next to ours for no charge. You understand you’re still responsible for your own ramp services and fueling. We’ll handle baggage to and from the plane, and ticketing, but you need to hire someone to load, fuel, clean and maintain the aircraft.”

“Brad, what contractor is Alaska Airlines using in Fairbanks for ramp services?”

“The same one we always did - why?”

“I’m going to contact them and see if they’re interested in offering services to Allakaket Airlines, if that’s OK.”

“Sure, I was just about to recommend them.”

“OK Brad, please e-mail a copy of the basing contract to my attention ASAP.”

“OK, I’ll get them there in an hour, Bye BA.”

BA had to laugh, Brad was a predictable little pup - he would always try to pull a fast one, then act all nice-nice when you called him on it!

“Ron - BA, I had a very interesting conversation with Brad. We get the ramp space next to them for free, but we have to provide our own baggage handlers to load the plane, and someone to clean and fuel the planes. I was planning on getting a bid from the company Alaska Airlines uses in Fairbanks - OK, talk to you later.”

Ron was busy between running his business, spending time with his wife and two boys, and getting chores done around the house. He hired the guy who delivered his diesel to help cut wood. Since he was rolling in dough, he could easily afford to hire someone instead of doing it all himself. Between the two of them, they had all the wood cut, split and stacked within a week. Ron was glad for the help, because it would have taken him a month to cut and split 3 cords of wood with the time he had available, and it meant he could spend some more quality time with his family. BA met him several weeks later, and he showed Ron the figures for the 2 months the planes had flown between Fairbanks and Nome. At this rate, the Fairbanks/Nome route would make more money than the Anchorage Route. Ron asked BA if they should send

some more planes to Fairbanks, but BA suggested getting another TG based in Allakaket to act as an emergency relief plane, which would be able to fly unscheduled trips. Ron thought it was an excellent idea, and made arrangements to get a 7th TurboGoose. Ron had insisted that every one of his TurboGoose pilots become trained as an Alaskan Paramedic and it had paid off more than once. All his Bush Pilots were trained to EMT I or II, and the state paid for upgraded medical kits for everyone completing the First Responder or better course. The state was rolling in oil money, and put it to good use instead of squandering it with more luxurious state building and offices. One expense that Ron did agree with was for the entire state to get a brand new computer system so all the far-flung offices could talk to each other via e-mail or VOIP and remote videoconferencing for groups that had to meet face to face to discuss ideas instead of flying. While Ron could have used the business, he felt that the savings would reduce his taxes even further. Bear was slowing down and delegating more and more of the instructing to much younger men, and instead focused on managing the huge business. He didn't like it, but he couldn't keep up with the younger kids anymore. He still taught the parts of the course that didn't require hiking 100 miles a day over mountains and rappelling down cliffs. Mary was glad he did slow down, because their son needed a father, and Bear swore he was going to be around to see this one grow up instead of somewhere in a 3rd World country making the world safe for Democracy. Hunter was still young enough to do most of it, but April managed to keep him around the house more and more lately.

DELTA had sent a contingent to Alaska Survival Inc. for training, and they asked if Ron Williams was available, they had heard the legends as well. Bear called Ron and asked if he wanted to do a shooting demonstration. Ron asked him how long his shooting range was. Bear said they had managed to make it 600 yards long. Ron said that he would bring his Browning, since 600 yards was a chip-shot for the Barretts, and he didn't want to discourage the Delta shooters. The next day he showed up with his Browning in a really slick drag bag that combined a case and a shooting pad, which he had bought from Brigade Quartermaster. Several of the Delta operatives recognized the bag, and knew that either Ron was a well-informed wannabe, or they were in for a shooting demonstration. They walked to the range, and Ron set up while everyone else put on hearing protection. One of the youngest Delta operators was sent down to the targets to put a target up on the 600 yard line. When he got back, Ron was ready to go. He hadn't shot for quite a while, but still flew every couple of months to Elmendorf when he had time to keep in practice. He loaded the rifle, flipped off the covers, and got into a military prone position. Several operators couldn't believe their eyes, no one shot 600 yards military prone unless they were at Camp Perry. Ron doped out the wind, adjusted his scope, and turned to Bear, who gave him a thumbs-up. Ron cycled the action, steadied his breathing, and soon was so in the zone he didn't remember firing 5 times. When the rifle clicked on an empty chamber, he looked back and took off his ear protection then saw and heard an entire group of Delta operators yelling and cheering. Bear had broken out his 100 power spotting scope, and every operator that looked through it was amazed. His entire group was inside the 3" X-ring. The youngest operator was sent to fetch the target, and Bear took out his calipers, and the group measured 2.98" after subtracting the diameter of the bullet. Bear asked Ron to sign his target, and told Ron he would put it in the lodge if it were OK with him. "Sure Bear,

but that's not my best group - One of the Delta people could tell you the group I shot at MacDill when I was 14."

" So what, you shot a .5 MOA group almost 10 years later! And I know you haven't been able to practice as much as you'd liked lately."

Ron signed the target, and put his drag bag back together, then talked to Bear and walked back to his plane - the Delta people had some shooting practice to do, and he had to get back to work. Ron started the plane, and was in Allakaket an hour later. He drove home and spent the rest of the day with Nancy and his two sons. Moose made sure he was greeted properly, and Ron was glad that he wasn't any bigger. Later that evening Ron and Nancy made up for lost time during the busy season. She said "Dear, we still have 3 or 4 bedrooms empty" and he took the hint. The next morning, it started snowing heavily, so Ron decided to work from home, but didn't get much work done. As the weather permitted, he got his chores done, but nothing that couldn't wait until Spring. BA called him at home, and said the 7th TG would be ready in the Spring in time for next season. He thanked BA and went back to bed. The way Nancy was reacting to him, he thought he might have been neglecting his duties at home, and decided to take care of that problem.

Later that day, Nancy made brunch, fed Jake and Josh, then made sure Moose was fed. Ron took Moose out for a walk, and the poor dog had forgotten how to walk in snow, and got buried several times until he got the hang of it just in time, because he needed to water a tree real bad. Moose did much better loping back to the house. Ron dried him off, then they played tug-of-war, which Moose won. Ron sat down and petted Moose for a while, then they went inside because they were both cold.

Nancy had hot cocoa waiting for Ron, but Moose had to make do with dog food, but he didn't seem to mind. They went into the living room, lit the fire in the fireplace, turned on the stereo, and cuddled in the warmth of the fire. Jake and Moose sacked out on Moose's bearskin rug in front of the fire, and Josh took a nap too. Ron enjoyed his domestic bliss.

Back in North Carolina, Samantha had finished most of her medical school, and was now an Intern in the ER. She learned to live on caffeine and total sleep deprivation. She spent what little personal time she had at church functions at Doc's church. She was teaching Sunday School when she got a Sunday off, and attending the occasional bible study. She was amazed at her transformation in less than 10 years; it was like she was a new person. She didn't date, since she didn't have time, but had several doctors and interns she was friendly with. Doc was impressed with her since she graduated in the top 10% of her class, and was accepted into the University of North Carolina's Medical School on her own merit, without any help from Doc. He hoped she could complete her studies and become an MD with the specialty of Emergency Surgery she wanted. She definitely had the hands for it. When he showed her how to suture using a pig's foot, she got it right the first time, and he checked her scalpel cuts, and she was pretty good with a knife, only cutting the tissue she had to - she had real steady hands, which

was a surgeon's stock in trade. He wished she would follow him into Neurosurgery, but she didn't express any interest. She apologized, but said she could do much more good working in a big city ER saving lives while specialists like him tackled the very delicate specialty of Neurosurgery.

Truth be known, she liked the action and excitement of Emergency Surgery instead of the minute detail of neurosurgery where every single move was planned weeks or months in advance. She was hooked when she assisted a resident with a gunshot wound to the chest. He was in and out in 15 minutes, and repaired all the damage, and saved the patient's life. The resident explained later she should prepare herself for the eventuality of a patient dying on her, since Emergency Surgery was very risky, but the patient would die anyway without the surgery. She told him that her faith in God would get her through the ones that didn't make it, since God was the final arbitrator of who lived and died. He couldn't argue with that, since he knew of cases where the patient should have died, and somehow managed to live.

## Chapter 12 - Don't Bug me!

Washington DC, Later that Spring

“Mr. President, we have a crisis on our hands and we have to shut down all interstate travel until we get a handle on this outbreak.”

“Doctor Hughes, do you have any idea what this will do to the economy?”

“With all due respect Mr. President, do you know how many fatalities this outbreak can cause if we let it spread. Assuming 1 million infections, between 10 and 100 thousand people will die depending on age and health. The mortality rate for this strain of SARS is almost 100% for the aged and infirm. In healthy people, it kills 1 out of 1,000. It's airborne, so if it gets into the nursing homes, it could solve our Medicare funding problem in a month!”

“Doctor Hughes, That was NOT funny!”

“Sorry Mr. President. You need to act NOW, tomorrow might be too late. Congress will debate this to death like it always does, and if it runs its course with no intervention by the CDC, between 1 and 10 million Americans will be dead by summer.”

“OK you've made your point Doctor; I'll sign the EO grounding all US Airlines until further notice.”

Later that afternoon on National TV

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As President of the United States, my first responsibility is to the safety of our citizens. The Director of the CDC informed me today of an outbreak of a new strain of SARS. As of 0800 tomorrow, all US air travel and interstate non-commercial travel will be stopped for the duration. We know there are millions of people needing to get home, so immediately following this broadcast will be local information on where to purchase or obtain an N95 or N100 filter mask and pick one up. No one showing flu-like symptoms will be allowed to travel via common carrier until medically cleared. National Guard units will be putting up checkpoints to make sure everyone is wearing a mask, and isn't sick. Those showing symptoms will be detained for medical evaluation. I'm sorry I have to go to these extremes, but if we took no action, between 1 and 10 million Americans could die. This will run its course by Summer, so the Emergency will only last 90 days. All airlines not involved in returning passengers to their homes are grounded, as are all international flights. Foreign visitors will be allowed to return home only after a medical examination.

Please return to your homes in an orderly fashion. There is no reason not to work once you are wearing the proper filter mask. We have ample stocks, and will distribute them as quickly as possible. After this broadcast, your local CDC or Health Department representative will tell you where to go to pick up a mask, or where to go if you have flu-like symptoms.

Good Night and God Bless America

15 minutes after the address, BA's fax machine spat out several forms. The first one read:

**FAA NOTICE TO FLYERS**

All Domestic and international passenger flights are grounded as of 0800 tomorrow morning. Written permission is required for each flight returning people to their homes. NO non-essential passenger flights will be allowed. Aircraft flying returning passengers must be thoroughly decontaminated between flights using a CDC approved disinfectant.

The second notice read:

From: Alaska Airlines

To: All Carriers

Re: FAA Notice to Flyers

Alaska Airlines will fly a limited schedule to return passengers to their homes starting tomorrow. All passengers must be wearing an approved mask prior to boarding, and cannot remove it during the flight for any reason. We will have masks available starting tomorrow. Please do not use the telephone for further information. We will notify you of any updates as we receive them, including a schedule of flights.

Bradley Whinton III  
CEO, Alaska Airlines

BA called Ron, "Ron, we need to recall all our planes until they get this thing ironed out. I've cancelled all outbound flights from Anchorage and Fairbanks until we hear from the FAA. If we have Alaskan residents stranded at those airports, we'll have to fly them home. Also, I can imagine all the hunters would probably want to go home as well."

"BA, I've got a couple of N100 filters in my kit, and my plane is the easiest to decontaminate since it's got a simple multi-use cabin with removable seats. I'm not too keen on spraying bleach solution on the seats, so I hope the CDC has another disinfectant we can use that won't bleach the fabric out."

"Ron, I'll check and get back to you!"

“OK, BA - go ahead and recall all our planes, and we’re grounded until further notice except to fly people home, and those flights will be very limited.”

BA called Bill, because he had duties as the Mayor of Allakaket, and needed to know so he could tell the people of Allakaket. “Bill, its BA. Did you hear the speech? OK, here’s the skinny. Allakaket Airlines will be shut down for 90 days with the exception of flights to return people to their homes or emergency flights. You might want to tell the people so they can prepare. We’ve got over a year’s worth of food and supplies in stock at the General Store, and we will extend credit to anyone who is laid off due to the emergency. Our diesel and avgas tanks are full, so we have several million gallons of fuel. Unfortunately this will also mean that you’ll have an empty inn for 90 days. OK, don’t worry about the fuel and energy bill; we’ll work it out later. Take care Bill.”

All over the United States, the CDC sent a notice declaring a Medical Emergency which drafted all Doctors, Nurses, and health care professionals for the duration. Samantha was just coming off a 12-hour shift when the Hospital Administrator gave her the bad news. “Sam, you can’t go home. The CDC has issued a Health Emergency due to this SARS outbreak, and we’re recalling all doctors, nurses, and even interns. Here’s an N100 mask and the rest of your gear. Go in the changing room and get into it, then report to the resident. From here on out, treat all patients as if they were infected. This bug is airborne, and will either make you real sick or kill you, so don’t take any chances. Since you just came off a 12-hour shift, after you check in, go take a nap in the doctor’s lounge. If we get busy we’ll call you.”

In Anchorage, Dan was having a major Excedrin Headache. He had to ground all flights by 0800, and still get passengers home. His phone was ringing off the hook, and the entire office was in an uproar. He wished the CDC would have given the FAA a heads-up so they could have gotten ready for this. He was trying to rearrange flight schedules, recall essential personnel, and answer questions from the media and the airlines. It was times like these that he wished he would have stayed a Bush Pilot.

The next weeks were chaotic as people scrambled to get home. Fortunately there wasn’t much panic, and people proceeded homeward in an orderly fashion. The NG Checkpoints weren’t very intrusive, more like the Border Patrol checkpoints that allowed most of the vehicles through at a pace slow enough so the guardsmen could see everyone was wearing a mask, and wasn’t visibly ill. The main thrust of the containment was a complete lock-down at nursing homes and hospitals, where there were no visitors allowed, and all elective surgery was cancelled. Several cities with major international airports had reports of outbreaks that were quickly contained by the protocols in place.

The travel and airline industries were hardest hit, since they had just gotten over the fuel crisis a few years ago, and several smaller airlines went bankrupt when they couldn’t make their loan payments. They asked Congress for relief, but none came soon enough to matter. Most of the bigger airlines had enough capital to weather the storm, and survived. The net result was a



return to the pre-80's Big 3 airlines flying almost 95% of the routes. The conservative Congress decided to let market pressures determine the pricing of tickets, and refused to get involved. Ron breathed a big sigh of relief, since any extra regulations usually meant lost profits. He knew that if there was demand, someone would fill it, and eventually the cut-rate airlines would be back. By the time summer rolled around, the outbreak was controlled, and the virus was burning itself out. Slowly the public resumed flying again, but Ron knew that they were in for several lean years until the traveling public went back to their usual routine.

With the extended down time, they took care of maintenance and any other projects they had in the works. Ron decided to install a 5,000 gallon tank for JP-5 at the cabin and chop down just enough trees to allow the TG to taxi up closer to the house. Since the CH-47 was on down time as well, they were able to remove the old hangar, build a bigger pad, and install a larger hangar. Ron also had them dig a root cellar, even if he didn't have any root vegetables to put in it. He told Bear he wanted enough firepower in that root cellar to defend the cabin in the event that TSHTF. Bear said he would take care of it. Ron decided that while he was at it, he might just convert the root cellar to a storm shelter, and added a few extra things to it, and dug it 3 times the original size. Funny thing was, there never had been a tornado in that part of Alaska in recorded history, but no one pointed that out to him. When he got back home, Nancy told him she was pregnant with their third child. He realized that Nancy got pregnant every time he had a couple of weeks to kill. He hoped he'd be a little busier in the future, or they would be able to field their own Ice Hockey team. Jake and Josh were getting bigger, and Jake was to the toddler stage, and Moose wound up being his portable support, but he knocked him over as often as he helped. Nancy was glad that Jake had a well-padded bottom. He was now big enough to wrap his arms around Moose's neck and hang on for dear life when he was losing his balance.

Ron went back up to the cabin to check on the progress, and discovered Bear had gone a little overboard with the "root cellar" It was now bigger than the house, and almost as big as the hangar. The steel doors had a wood veneer that made everyone think it was just a root cellar until you opened it. The walls, floor, and roof were waterproofed and reinforced concrete 6 inches thick, and the roof was reinforced to the point that it could survive a near miss by a large bomb. The floor was almost 20 feet underground, and the roof had 6 feet of earth on top. In one corner was the largest gun safe he had ever seen, with several scoped National Match M-1a's, several M -16/M -203 combinations, his older Barrett rifle, and cases of ammo. He saw something he didn't even want to know about marked 40mm, so he closed the safe. There were cupboards full of canned food, medicine, water, seeds, and paper products. Ron estimated that a family of 6 could live on those supplies for almost a year. On his way out, Ron noticed the doors had 2 inch bolts to secure them once the door was closed, and a security lock on the outside to keep unauthorized personnel out. There was a caretaker that lived on a nearby lake who came by once every couple of months to check on the place. He flew a small Cessna Amphibian and remarked more than once that HelpmeJack lake was one of the smallest lakes he had ever landed on. When Ron told him he landed the DeHaviland and later the TurboGoose on that lake, he said "Either you're the biggest liar this side of the Mississippi, or you've got 3-pound brass ones."

One day he was tending the place and heard the roar of Ron flying overhead getting ready to land the TurboGoose. He dashed out to the lake to watch. When Ron landed, Earl shook his hand and wondered if he needed suspenders to keep his underwear up. Ron didn't bother to tell him that the TG landed a lot shorter than his Cessna thanks to the reversible pitch props. When he got ready to leave, Earl helped him tow the TG out of the hangar with the 4wd ATV that was still in the garage where he left it next to the snow blower. Once Earl was clear, he started the turbines, and taxied out to the lake. With the huge tires and high wing-mounted props, he was able to taxi faster, and soon was in the lake heading for the downwind end. Minutes later he took off, and Earl followed minutes later. Ron flew home to Allakaket. Nancy met him with the good news that they were having a daughter. Ron was just glad the baby was OK. He spent the rest of the afternoon playing with Jake, Josh, and Moose. After playtime came naptime, with Jake and Josh sacked out with Moose on his bearskin rug. Ron and Nancy crashed on the couch, glad for the break.

Finally, when the CDC declared the crisis was over, Samantha put in for vacation, and was granted 1 week of vacation as "comp time" in place of 30 hours of overtime. Since she had almost 100 hours of overtime due, she wasn't worried about the money. She asked Doc where she should go on vacation. She didn't feel like flying because it still was a royal pain, so Doc suggested she spend it at home and around town visiting friends. Samantha thought that was a good idea, and spent the next couple of days getting caught up on her sleep, then getting caught up with her friends. Soon the vacation was over and she reported for work in time to assist on the backlog of elective surgeries. She assisted a Surgical Resident with a routine hernia repair surgery. She was amazed at how fast he was. He told her later that speed was a premium for surgeons, but never to sacrifice accuracy and thoroughness for speed. Opening a patient twice was worse than taking more time and doing the job right the first time.

Slowly but surely, business picked up at Alaska Airlines and Allakaket Airlines. It took several years to get back to where they were before the virus, but both airlines were in position to ride out the turbulence with minimal upset, since BA had enacted an austerity program at Alaska Airlines when he was CEO, and got the bills paid down to the point that they could weather 3-6 months of little or no business and not go out of business like some other smaller carriers who were in debt up to their eyeballs, and had to keep flying to pay their enormous bills. Nancy had a baby girl they called Sarah, and now they had 3 children. Nancy was getting used to the Mommy routine, and with the airline business slow but steady, Ron had more time to spend at home with his wife and kids. Anne was working at the State Clinic in Allakaket as Dr. Miller's nurse part time, and spent the rest of the time as Grandma to her 3 grandkids.

## Chapter 13 - Closure

Samantha knew there was an upside to the medical emergency when she met all the other interns and residents in the course of the 90-day emergency, and decided she wanted to get to know a 1st year resident named Ralph. She didn't know his last name yet, but they met in the Doctor's lounge and between crises, they got to talking. He was from Louisiana and like her was a Southern Baptist, and had been home schooled. She thought she was from the Middle of Nowhere until he started telling her that he grew up in the middle of the bayou. She ran into him later, and he asked her if she'd join him for a cup of coffee at the diner a block away that served the hospital and businesses in the area. She checked with her Supervisor, who told her that she could take half an hour. Ralph checked with the Chief Resident. Since it was slow, he told him OK, but to make sure his pager was on. Ralph checked his pager, and turned it on, then found Samantha and asked if she were ready. They walked to the diner, and on the way found out Ralph's name was Raphael Lacombe, and was a Cajun who didn't speak more than a couple of words of the dialect, but his grandparents did while he was growing up. She let him do most of the talking, and on the way back, pulled him aside, and told him the truth about her background. "Look Ralph, I like you, so I'm going to level with you. I'm not related to Doc Richards. My real name is Samantha Stone, and I'm from Alaska."

"Ok, but why the big secret?"

"It's a long story Ralph." Seeing that they weren't going anywhere and she had the time she gave him the short version of the story.

"Sam, you're amazing - nothing's ever happened to me in my life. You've survived 2 horrible incidents, and now look at you; you're a sweet woman and a Christian to boot."

"Ralph, what do you mean?"

"Sam, sometimes people blame God for bad things that happen to them, and they stay mad at God, when really they're mad at the one person who can help them!"

"Ralph, at first I felt that way, but then Ron and Pastor Whitaker talked to me and straightened me out, and set me on the right path."

"I've heard of Pastor Whitaker, I'd like to meet Ron and thank him."

"Then you'd have to fly to Allakaket Alaska."

"Did you say Allakaket?"

"Oh, I forgot, Ron's a Bazillionaire and the owner of Allakaket Airlines. Doc met him when

Doc went hunting in Alaska. Ron's married with 3 kids."

"How old did you say he was?"

"If I remember correctly, he's in his early 20's and his wife's a couple years older."

"It's not like I'll have the time anytime soon, but I'd like to find Ron and thank him, for more reasons than 1."

"What's the other reasons?"

"Well for one thing, without him getting hold of Doc Richards, I would have never met you!"

Sam gave Ralph a friendly hug and a kiss. When he recovered, his first thought was "WOW". He took her hand, and they walked back to the hospital. Samantha had found a friend. It was too soon to call him a Boyfriend, and she realized she had all the time in the world to get to know him. When they got to the door, Ralph turned and said "Sam, I had fun, I'd like to do this again!"

"Me too Ralph, but we have to cool it, since we'll have to work together for the next 4 years at least."

"You got it Sam. I appreciated the kiss, but it was something special that we should definitely not try at work!"

"I agree - these people can gossip worse than a bunch of old women. See ya later Ralph." Sam walked through the door, and a minute later, he walked through and checked in.

The rest of the day was hectic, and she didn't see Ralph again for the rest of the day. She drove her Carmen Ghia home to Doc's place. "Doc, Bert I'm home!" Bert walked in to greet Sam "Doc had to fly to Atlanta to perform a risky brain surgery, he'll be back in a day or so." Sam dumped her stuff in her room and fired up her computer. 5 minutes later she screamed "Oh My God, It's HIM!"

Bert ran into the room, and Sam was pointing at the screen. Ron had sent her and Doc a clipping from the Anchorage newspaper. It was an article about a shooting death in Anchorage. An alumnus of the TKE house at University of Anchorage was shot attempting to rape a blonde jogger in a secluded park just outside Anchorage. She was carrying a .357 Magnum in her fanny pack and shot him once through the heart when he attempted to rape her. What got Samantha to scream was the file photo from the University of him wearing his TKE sweater. "Bert that's the guy who slipped me the Mickey, then raped me. The story says he tried to rape a blonde jogger in the park, and she shot him dead. I've managed to put it past me, but I always wanted justice, and now it seems his case has been appealed to a higher authority."

“So it seems dear. Let’s go out for dinner tonight, I’ll call Nelson to bring the car around.”

They drove to their favorite restaurant, and Bert did her best to keep Sam’s mind off the e-mail. Sam told her about her day, and when she told Bert about Ralph, Bert was smiling.

“Sam, I knew you’d find a nice young man here. Just take it slow and easy, you’re going to be at the Hospital as an Intern, then as a Resident before you could even think about relocating. He’s a first-year resident, so he’s going to be here a while too. I’m really happy for you. If you want to bring him by for Dinner sometime, I’m sure Doc would like to meet him too.”

“Bert, I told Ralph the truth, I think I can trust him.”

“I hope you’re right dear. Remember loose lips sink ships!”

“Speaking of which, he’s a pretty good kisser too!”

“Sam!”

“Relax Bert, it was just a friendly kiss, I’m not ever going back to what I was before! According to him, he’s Southern Baptist too!”

“Good for him! I can’t wait to meet this gentleman.”

“Bert, we’re just friends - maybe later.”

They made girl talk the rest of the night, and when they were ready to leave, the Matre de called Nelson on the car phone, and he was waiting out front with the limousine. They drove back home, and Sam told Bert she had a wonderful evening, but she was beat and needed to get right to bed.

She saw Ralph several times over the next couple of weeks, but never had enough time together to say anything more than “Hi” finally they had a rare day off together, and Sam asked Ralph if he wanted to go to church with them. When he said yes, she told him to meet her at Doc Richards’ house at 8:45 Sunday Morning and the 4 of them could ride over in the limousine. Ralph had that “deer in the headlights” look, Sam had neatly trapped him, and he knew it. Doc Richards was one of the most famous alumni of the University of North Carolina. He was one of its biggest contributors as well. Ralph was glad he had bought a suit and tie, because he was sure that Doc and his family would be dressed that way. Ron drove his Honda Accord up to the gate, and was admitted at 8:40. He parked off to one side, since the Limousine was already in front of the house. He walked up to the door, and Doc Richards answered. “Ralph, we’ve been expecting you. The women will be down in a minute, let’s have a seat in the parlor.” Once they were seated, Doc Richards started asking Ralph questions. “Ralph, Sam tells me you’re a first year resident in Emergency Medicine?”

“Yes Sir!”

“Ralph, please call me Doc when we’re alone like this, or just the 4 of us. At School or the hospital, either Sir or Doc Richards will be ok.”

“Yes Sir, I mean Doc!”

“Ralph, relax, this isn’t the Spanish Inquisition, just a friendly chat.”

“Doc, I beg your pardon, but you’re one of the most famous people at UNC, and I’m just a first-year resident.”

“I understand that Ralph, but I was once a first-year resident too. So relax and enjoy yourself today. I hope you don’t mind going to lunch with us, I’ve taken the liberty of making a reservation for 4.”

“Thanks Doc, I’d appreciate it. Sam’s said a lot about you, and I really think highly of you.”

“Ralph, you don’t need to butter me up, Sam’s not my daughter. If I remember correctly, she said she told you her story.”

“Frankly Doc, I’m amazed that Sam has turned out to be such a sweet loving woman.”

“She’s had a lot of help, plus she always had a good heart. She was a little naive and sheltered from growing up in Allakaket. I’m glad you and her are such good friends.”

“Doc, I’ve only been able to see her once since the virus scare, and that was for coffee at the diner. I’d like to get to know her better, and really be friends with her first before I even consider any serious dating.”

“I’m glad to hear that, between your attitude and the fact that you’re a Southern Baptist, I’m glad you met Sam.”

Bert and Sam decided to make an appearance, and Ralph thought to himself, “Saved by the Bell!” Except he mentally spelled it Belle when he got a look at Sam in a dress. She was wearing a long dress, and was stunningly beautiful. They made their way to the Limousine, and they were seated in the Limousine, Bert and Sam sat across from Ralph and Doc. Sam thought that Ralph looked pretty hot in his grey suit. They drove to the church, and when they were seated in the pew, Sam made sure that Ralph got to sit next to her. They shared a hymnal, and she found out he was a pretty good singer, she had learned how to read music from her time at the church. She had a good singing voice, but until the choir director showed her how, she couldn’t read a lick of music. Ralph was a natural Baritone, and she was technically a Contralto, but usually sang Soprano on the lower songs, since the melody line was easier to read

and sing. Most of their songs were performed on a beautiful modern reed and pipe organ that cost more than some people's houses. The choirmaster directed a 100-voice choir, which was about right for the size of the building. The Congregation sang as well, except for one song per Sunday the Choir did by themselves in 3-parts. Doc thought the choir sounded beautiful, and Sam wished she had the time to sing with them, since the choirmaster insisted that you had to practice with the choir to sing with them. With her hours at the hospital, she was lucky to be able to attend Church once or twice a month. When the service was over, Sam introduced Ralph to Pastor Whitaker, except she introduced Ralph using his full name, Raphael Lacombe.

"Lacombe did you say, I know a bunch of Lacombe's from Louisiana."

"Well Sir, that's where I'm from, like the CCR song, I was born on the Bayou.

Reverend Whitaker stunned them all when he started speaking in Cajun.

"Sorry Reverend, I only caught the first couple of words, but I'd love to learn if I ever have the time."

"Young man, there's no shame in being born poor, after all Jesus was born in a stable!"

"Amen, Reverend."

"I've got some tapes you can use to learn Cajun that I can loan you."

"Merci Beaucoup Révérend!"

"I thought you couldn't speak Cajun?"

"Sam that just sort of slipped out."

"Young man - your patois was perfect, you speak Cajun like a native, all you need to do is re-learn the language. I'm sure you heard it all the time growing up."

"Reverend, my grandparents mostly spoke Cajun, but understood English."

"There you go, you've still got the programming, you just have to recall the program."

Later, when they got back in the limousine, Sam turned to Ralph "That was amazing, it seems you do know how to speak Cajun, you just forgot that you know."

"Sam, I'd love to get those tapes from Reverend Whitaker, if I could speak and understand Cajun, imagine all the good I could do. There are thousands of square miles of bayou, and thousands of bayou people who can't speak English who desperately need medical care."

Doc spoke from the back of the Limousine, “Ralph, I thought you wanted to be an ER Doc?”

“I still do Doc, that doesn’t mean I can’t take a summer off and volunteer to serve in Louisiana with the people I grew up with. Just being able to speak the language as a native would put me way ahead of anyone coming in without it, since they don’t trust outsiders. Once I make contact and gain their trust, we could build clinics and have the state assign a permanent doc down there. Even if it took a year to set this up, imagine all the lives we could save, not to mention improving the quality of life in the bayou.”

Sam was so proud of Ralph that she would have kissed him if Doc weren’t there. Instead, she squeezed his hand and smiled.

“Ralph, if you’re serious about this, I’ve got the connections to set it up.”

“Doc, I’m dead serious. I lost a brother and sister to diseases that could easily have been cured with modern medicine, and I don’t want to see anyone else go through that heartache.”

“Ok, Ralph, you learn Cajun and complete your residency, and I’ll set it up with the state of Louisiana.”

“You got a deal Doc.”

They spent the rest of the day between the restaurant and their home making small talk. When Ralph announced he had to go, Sam volunteered to walk him to the car.

“Ralph, I’m so proud of you, and if you want to see me again, I’d look forward to it. Here’s my number here if you want to talk to me.” Sam leaned over, gave Ralph a hug and a quick kiss. Ralph reached into his pocket, and extracted a “calling card” with his contact info on it.

“Ralph, a Calling Card - kind of old-fashioned isn’t it?”

Ralph said in his best Ret Butler impersonation “Ma’am, that’s what us Southern Gentlemen do?”

Sam floored Ralph when she tried out Scarlet O’Hara “My Hero!”

They both laughed themselves silly. Ralph said goodbye to Sam, got in his car carefully so as not to get his suit dirty, and drove home. Sam walked back in giggling. Bert asked her what was so funny. “Ralph, he’s such a character. He handed me a calling card, talk about old-fashioned.”

Doc overheard the conversation. “Sam, actually Ralph is formally asking to “court” you. It means he’s serious.”



“Whoa Doc - what’s this.”

“Southern tradition. When a man wants to date a woman seriously, he meets the parents, and if they approve, which we do, and she expresses interest, he hands her a “calling card” if she accepts, they are officially courting. Kind of what you would call “going steady”. There are formal rules for courting, mostly to protect the woman. They can only be alone in a public place, or in her parlor. As long as you are courting, neither of you can date anyone else. But either of you can officially call it off and date someone else. The repercussions of that are serious, because calling it off means you no longer want to see Ralph again as a suitor.”

“Doc, I really like Ralph, but I don’t want to marry him yet.”

“That’s not the point Sam. He’s just being “courtly” and I approve. It’s how we do things here in the South. Just be glad he’s not going all out, he would have greeted you with a cutlass and pistol in case you had another suitor, and was challenged to a duel.”

“You’re kidding Right?”

“Sam through the 1800s, dueling for the affections of a prize Belle was still fairly common.”

Sam was going to say something, but bit her tongue. She might not understand the local customs, but she wasn’t raised here either, and she was a guest in their home. Besides, she thought it was kind of cute. She did an internet search for more information, so she would know what to expect.

## Chapter 14 - Vacation

After Sarah was weaned, Anne called Ron and Nancy, and suggested she could watch her grandkids for a week or two and give them a needed vacation together. Ron asked Nancy where she wanted to go, and since it was hunting season, she told Ron that she always wanted to hunt a Caribou. Ron told her that there was a huge herd of them on their land up near the HelpmeJack Lake. Nancy thought it would be fun to spend a week in a real log cabin. Ron called his mom back, and said they would take her up on it, that they wanted to spend a week or so up at their cabin by the lake. Anne thought that was a good idea, and volunteered to give Nancy her Browning A-bolt rifle since she was too old to hunt anymore, and she hadn't used it in years. Ron thought that was really sweet of his mom, and told her he would be over to pick it up in half an hour. Anne told him to pick it up when they dropped off the grandkids instead. Ron asked if tomorrow morning was too soon. Anne said that would be great. Ron spent the rest of the day getting ready, and Nancy packed 2 weeks worth of stuff for the 3 kids. With 2 of them in diapers, she wondered if Anne knew what she was up against. She remembered Moose, and had Ron call her back and remind her about the Moose. Anne told them she could handle it, she wasn't an old lady yet, and she knew that Jake and Josh would miss Moose terribly if he weren't with them. Ron remembered they usually took their naps with Moose, so he agreed and threw a bag of dog food into the stuff they were bringing to Anne's place.

Early in the morning the next day they drove to Anne's place, dropped the 3 kids and Moose off with a huge supply of baby food, diapers, dog food, and clothes. Anne told Nancy she must have packed enough stuff for a month, then laughed thinking she would have done exactly the same in her place. Anne handed Nancy her Browning A-bolt and the rest of her .308 Match ammo, then handed them another large package, and told them to open it when they got to the cabin. Ron kissed his Mom, then Nancy gave Anne a hug and kissed her cheek, then they were going out the door. Nancy bid a tearful goodbye to her kids, who were too busy with Grandma and Moose to notice. Ron wrapped his arm around Nancy and gently led her to the truck, telling her they were in good hands. Nancy put the gun case, ammo and the present in the bed of the truck, and drove to the TurboGoose. They loaded their suitcases and packages into the plane, and Nancy sat in the co-pilot's seat. Ron was glad to have his wife up front with him. "Just like old times!"

"Except this flight is too short to join the mile high club."

Ron had to laugh at that, then he said "I think we can wait until we get inside the cabin."

An hour later, they landed at the lake and taxied up to the hangar. Since the door was closed, Ron opened the hangar doors, then towed the plane inside using the 4x4 ATV as a tractor. Once the plane was secure in the hangar, Nancy got out and they unloaded the plane. The interior of the cabin was dusty, but not too bad. An hour later, they had the cabin swept and cleaned up. Nancy asked where the bathroom was, and Ron said that the bathroom was

outdoors. Nancy looked at him a little funny, and he said “We had an outhouse here ever since Mom and Dad built the cabin. It gets too cold in the winter to have running water since we used the lake as the water source, so they never installed indoor plumbing except for the sink.”

“Ron, Bear and Hunter have indoor plumbing, and if you want me to stay here more than a week at a time, I think we should too - it’s not like we can’t afford to dig a well.”

Ron had to agree with Nancy, and added it to his “to do” list. He figured while they were at it, they might as well install a full bathroom with a shower and a flush toilet. He walked outside and checked. If they moved the garage, he could add a “bathroom” to the cabin, but it would be small and cramped, since the far side wouldn’t have 6 feet of clearance due to the slope of the roof. He called Nancy outside and explained the problem to her. He’d either need to totally rebuild the cabin, or else have a small and cramped bathroom. She threw up her hands and walked back in. Ron let it drop.

The next morning, Nancy said she wanted to go hunting. They could easily ride double and still bring back 1 whole caribou or 2 tanned skins and the prime cuts of meat. He didn’t want to waste the meat, so before they went hunting, he made sure the canning supplies, and Anne’s canning book was still in the cabin. They were all sitting where they had left them. He easily had enough jars to can 2 caribou, and enough boxes with dividers to haul it all back to Allakaket. He found Nancy and explained to her that if they went hunting, they also had to skin, gut and butcher the caribou, and then can the meat when they got back to the cabin. It was smelly, hot and sweaty work. She said “OK, what are you waiting for?” He checked that there was plenty of wood for the stove, and the water was connected, then he said they were good to go. He strapped on his fanny pack, and turned it around front so Nancy could comfortably ride behind him, then put on his shoulder holster and picked up his daybag full of water, and they walked out to the ATV. He hitched the trailer to it, handed her a helmet, then lashed the rifles and backpack to the trailer. He checked the gas and oil, then started the ATV and climbed on, then told Nancy to climb on back and hold on tight. Nancy took him literally, and feeling her body crushed against his back made it hard to concentrate on his driving. He drove slower than usual since he had a passenger, but they still made it to the hunting grounds in a couple of hours.

They hiked over the hill, and there were literally hundreds of Caribou in the meadow below them. He showed Nancy where to set up, handed her a pair of earplugs, and set up his own rifle. Since they were going to take 2 large caribou, he wanted Nancy to get the first shot, and told her to shoot a big bull in the heart-lung region right below the shoulder. Her rifle had a bipod, so she was able to easily hold on the heart-lung region of a big bull. They quickly stuck their earplugs in their ears, since the caribou weren’t going anywhere, and when they were ready, Nancy shot first, and as soon as her bull was down, Ron fired, and his dropped too. He walked over to her and gave her a big hug and a kiss “Great Shooting Sweetie - now let’s go get the ATV and the trailer so we can skin, gut and butcher these big brutes.” They unloaded the SPBT ammo, and put the rifles back in their cases. 15 minutes later, they were riding the ATV

and when they entered the clearing, the herd spooked. Ron drove right up to the two downed bulls, and quickly skinned and gutted them. He cut the heads off the bulls, and cracked the skulls to brain tan them. Nancy got one whiff of the contents, and decided to stay upwind and start butchering the one bull. She wasn't the most skilled at butchering, but did it correctly while Ron washed the skins, and mashed the brains into the hide while mixing it with water to make a paste. When he was finished, he walked over to Nancy with Caribou Brain Matter dripping from his hands and said "How about a Hug?"

"Ron Williams you stay away from me - you STINK!"

Ron knew he shouldn't push his luck- she had his Bowie knife. He walked to the pond and washed off as thoroughly as possible. He helped her finish butchering the two carcasses, and loaded them into a large trash bag on the trailer, and did the same with the skins. When they were finished, they had just enough daylight to make it home, so he started the ATV, and they climbed on. They made it home right as it was growing dark. Ron backed the trailer into the smokehouse, and shut the door; then parked the ATV. Nancy had unloaded their stuff from the trailer, and went inside to make dinner. They had plenty of canned food, so they ate a simple dinner while Ron cleaned up as best as he could with a washcloth in the sink. It took several tries to get off all the stink, but finally Nancy let him get close enough to give him a hug. After dinner, they went to bed early. Ron felt weird sleeping in his parent's bed, but Roy was dead, and Anne lived in Allakaket now. Ron gave in when Nancy made it clear she was in the mood.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron showed Nancy how to can the Caribou. Once she had the hang of the canning operation, he switched to filling jars with caribou meat while she sterilized the lids and processed the filled jars. By the end of the day, they were done, and Nancy decided she wanted fresh fish for dinner. Ron remembered the fishing hole, so they went. Halfway there, he heard a wolf growl, and turned. It was a male wolf that looked just like Sam. "Easy boy, I'm a friend!"

Taking a big risk, since he thought the wolf was one of Oliver and Francine's descendants, he decided not to shoot it, and to try and make friends. He had Nancy slowly get behind him, and he crouched down and extended his hand in the classic "Sniff my hand and let's be friends" pose. Amazingly, the Wolf's aggressive behavior stopped, and he walked over to them. Ron's heart was beating a million miles a second, and finally the wolf got close enough to sniff his hand, and somehow didn't take a huge bite out of Ron's hand. Ron didn't know why, but the wolf seemed to trust him. They turned and walked to the lake, and cast a line. The first fish they caught went to the wolf, who devoured it. He was full by the second lake trout, so Ron started putting fish on the stringer. The wolf walked up to the lake, drank his fill, and walked back over to them and laid down next to Ron. Nancy was amazed, but Ron said nothing. Ron reached over and started to pet the wolf, and he appeared to enjoy it. When he had 4 fish on the stringer, he got up to go, and the wolf got up too, and trotted back to the woods. Ron remembered there was a wolf den nearby, but didn't dare push his luck. He wished the wolf well, and they walked back to their cabin. Once the door was closed, Nancy started in on him.

“Ron Williams, are you nuts - that wolf could have killed us!”

“Yes he could have, but I sensed something in the wolf, something familiar. It was weird, but I could have sworn that the wolf was Sam’s nephew. Anyway, the wolf had no intention of harming us, he just wanted to protect his pups in the den.”

“What pups, all I saw was a big scary wolf!”

“About 50 yards away there was an old wolf den, the same one Oliver and Francine used. I’m sure he had a mate and cubs at the den, and we were too close for comfort. As soon as he realized we were no threat, he settled right down, and feeding him definitely helped.”

“Yeah, and then you had to go and pet the wolf!”

“Nancy, you do realize the only difference between a Wolf - Canis Lupus, and a Dog - Canis Familiaris is less than 1 or 2 gene sequences. Moose is like 99.9% Wolf, and domestic dogs are just a case of arrested development and inbreeding for certain traits. Once he realized we were friendly and I fed him, I was in about as much danger as petting Moose.”

“OK, let’s make dinner, I’m just thanking God we’re still alive.”

Ron quickly skinned and cleaned the fish while Nancy lit the stove, and got a cast iron skillet good and hot, then added oil to it, and when Ron gave her the fillets, she dredged them in flour and fried them in the hot skillet. She made instant mashed potatoes and added Butter Buds. Ron cleaned and set the table for dinner, and lit a kerosene lamp. When the fish were ready, Nancy plated the fish and added a large portion of mashed potatoes and some mixed vegetables. Ron said grace, and they ate dinner. Nancy was grateful to be alive, and after dinner, Ron knew he was in for a long night. Oh well, they had 3 more to go for a hockey team.

The next morning they packed up the canned caribou meat, and Nancy told Ron she had enough of the “great outdoors” and wanted to go home. Ron realized she was more scared by the incident with the wolf than she let on. He agreed, and they packed up. Ron towed the plane out of the hangar, shut the doors, and they repacked the plane. 2 hours later they were back in Allakaket. They drove home and Ron felt obligated to tell his mom they were home. She said “I can keep the kids for a couple more days - they’ve been total angels, you guys have fun.” Ron told Nancy, and asked what she wanted to do for a couple of days - he got his answer in a couple of minutes, and almost wished the kids were back so he could get some rest. 2 days later, he was ready to beg for mercy, he wasn’t a kid anymore. Nancy relented and they went over to Anne’s to pick up the kids. As soon as they got home, Jake, Josh and Sarah sacked out with Moose on the bearskin rug in front of the fireplace. Ron and Nancy collapsed on the couch, and Ron finally got some rest.

The next day, Ron talked with his mom, and got her permission to renovate the cabin. She

agreed that it was way too small for his family, and they needed to build bigger. She had several suggestions, including a full basement underneath. It would double the construction costs, since all the materials except the wood had to be flown in, but since he had a limited footprint, he needed all the square feet he could get in a limited footprint, and going underground instead of up had it's advantages. All their food could be stored in the basement for long periods, since the temperature was very consistent, and part of it could be converted to a play room, since there was no way they could get out and get into trouble. That convinced Ron, because Jake and Josh were both into the exploring stage, and they needed a kid-proof room. He took his ideas to Bill, who recommended a contractor, who agreed to re-use as much of the original material as possible. He reduced his price when Ron suggested they use his loader/backhoe to dig the basement instead of renting. Since he owned the airline, all it would cost to fly everything in would be the pilot's salary, and they were paying that anyway. The fuel costs were high, but they were still getting the best rates from the fuel distributor. Renting a chopper to fly all the materials in would have cost 3-4 times Ron's costs to have his own planes/pilots fly materials and personnel into the site.

Before he signed the contract, Ron suggested flying the Contractor up to the site. When he got there, he said he could reduce their contract another 30% if he could use some mature trees about 2 miles from the cabin site. Since he owned several hundred acres of trees, Ron agreed in a heartbeat, and asked they save the usable scraps for firewood. It would be a lot cheaper to fly in a portable sawmill, log and mill their own lumber than to fly lumber in from Anchorage or Fairbanks. Ron's idea for 2 separate rooms downstairs actually saved him money, since the contractor could use the interior wall as a weight bearing wall to support the floor above instead of erecting posts and beams to support the floor. The basement would be poured reinforced and waterproofed concrete, and everything else would be made from lumber logged and milled on site. Since winter was approaching, they agreed to start construction as soon as the snow melted in spring. Ron also asked the contractor to install a deep well and a septic system that could handle at least 2 full bathrooms. Ron got quotes over the internet to ship solar shingles and a large ground-mounted solar panel, several Air-X wind turbines, and a solar water heater that was backed up by a wood-burning water heater. All the inverters and batteries would be on racks in the basement. He found the best bang for the buck was a company called Outback Power Systems.

He purchased the 10KW rack-mount setup that included 4 2500w inverters, the control panel, and a 24-hour battery back-up. He added a small diesel generator that was a dedicated battery charger, connected to the system with an auto-transfer/auto-start switch so it would start when the battery state of charge reached 60% and insufficient power was generated by the panels or turbines, or at 55% state of charge regardless. It also had a maintenance mode that would run the generator for half an hour once a month to exercise the generator, and equalize the charges on the batteries. The entire system was controlled by a little computer control panel in the house. He added a 2,000 gallon underground tank for diesel fuel to the design to make sure they had enough fuel since it had to be delivered twice as far, and by air all the way. With the Pri-D, the diesel would basically store forever in an underground tank. All the indoor lighting

would be hidden florescent fixtures using 2 or 4-tube fixtures with a mix of warm and cool tubes to simulate normal daylight colors. The contractor located a “kid proof” hidden fixture that was much more durable than the normal dropped ceiling type plastic panel, since it was rigid and fixed in place. It took a screwdriver to remove the panel to get access to the tubes, ballast, and the fixture itself. Since florescent fixtures used 20-30% of the power per lumen as an incandescent light - they would save a lot of energy right there. A massive masonry stove/cooktop/oven stone fireplace was the main source of heat in the winter, and occupied the center of the room. Ron wondered if the downstairs needed a heater in the winter, and the salesman from Outback told him their equipment threw off enough heat to keep the basement above 60 degrees, besides with the warm house above it, it should be fine down there. Ron remembered the wood-fired water heater was in the basement as well, and that would contribute to keeping the basement warm. He asked the contractor to modify the design to include vents between the two rooms, and smoke/carbon Monoxide detectors on both floors with battery back ups.

Ron showed the design to Nancy, who made a few slight modifications that were basically cosmetic, but he thought they were good ideas. She did however move a couple of windows to better spots to take advantage of views, and also to get maximum solar gain in the winter from the south-facing windows. Ron realized this house would be a bear to heat in the winter, but he wasn't planning on living there in the winter, at least for now. Ron was glad he was starting a construction project, because the airline was running itself, making money hand over fist, and he only needed to fly occasionally since there was a huge surplus of qualified pilots thanks to Congress. Ron was tempted to have another TurboGoose built for his personal plane, and hire another pilot to fly the routes. He'd ask BA about that when he saw him again.

## Chapter 15 - Construction Zone

The next morning Nancy found the box that Anne had given them, and called Ron over. “We forgot to open Anne’s gift!”

“No time like the present.”

They opened the box, and in it were 2 complete sets of Caribou Skin clothing including boots. Anne had pinned their names to their tops and bottoms. Knowing that Nancy didn’t wear a dress very often, she made shirt/pant combinations for both of them, and a pair of boots each with the vibram sole. They tried them on, and they fit perfectly. Ron wondered how Anne got their sizes, and figured Nancy had something to do with it. Ron called his mom up, and thanked her for the caribou clothes, then he called BA and had a talk with him.

“Hi BA, how’s things going?”

“Considering the rest of the travel industry is in the toilet, we’re doing great. Since most of our customers are hunters, fisherman, and oilfield or mine employees and have to fly to get where they want to be, business is back up to 80% of the previous level.”

“BA, could you run the numbers on hiring another pilot to take my route, and building me another TurboGoose as my personal plane. I’m getting tired of flying the friendly skies.”

“I know how you feel Ron, I got burned out running Alaska Airlines, and you’ve got so much cash that you could live off the interest for the rest of your life, never touch the principal, and not change your lifestyle 1 bit. As far as hiring another pilot and building another plane, I think it’s a good idea, that way he can be flying 40 hours a week instead of acting as the CEO 30 hours, then flying another 20. I’ll crunch the numbers and get back to you.”

“Thanks BA - talk to you later.”

Ron spent the rest of the winter with his family, and Nancy announced she was pregnant again. Ron looked at her, and she was just glowing. He gave her a big hug, and told her he was thinking of changing things a bit at Allakaket Airlines. He was getting tired of flying a route, and wanted to hire another pilot, and building another plane customized for them. Nancy was all for it, the long hours were showing and he was usually exhausted when he came home. “So what are you going to do with yourself?”

“I wanted to talk to the contractor about acting as a supervisor on the new lodge, even if I have to pay extra it’s going to be fun, and I’ll be home earlier and in a much better mood.”

Nancy thought that was a good idea, and told Ron to go ahead. He called the Contractor, who



told him they usually didn't want the homeowner acting as a Supervisor, but in his case he could make an exception. Ron said he would also have the cargo version of the TurboGoose available to fly stuff to the site as needed. He said they should use the CH-47 whenever possible because it had 3-5 times the lifting capacity of the TG, but if they needed light stuff that wasn't worth flying the chopper to get, he could pick it up. The contractor checked, and having Ron fly to Anchorage a couple of times a week with light loads would accelerate the project schedule, meaning more money for him. He agreed to Ron's idea, and told him that he would let him know the date they were going to start construction.

Ron called BA, and he said that Ron could use his TurboGoose until they built his new plane, and if they needed it, they could put the spare in service from Allakaket. Ron asked BA to contact Allison and the RCAF and see how long it would take to build another TG. BA admitted he already had the figures, and he could have another one built in 3-4 months depending on weather. Ron had to decide whether he wanted a Cargo variant or a VIP variant. The more he thought about it, the more sense it would make to build another plane like his original TurboGoose that was quickly convertible from passenger to cargo use by removing the seats. He could fly either by adding or removing seats. If he had to fly people and cargo, he just removed seats from the back to hold the cargo, and had the people fly in the forward seats in the cabin. He called BA, and they agreed the flexible cabin design was the best bet. Ron had a couple of ideas for the avionics suite for his aircraft, including commercial radar so he could fly day or night if he needed to. BA thought that was an excellent idea, since the planes that flew the Fairbanks/Nome route already had radar installed because bad weather could force them to land IFR even though they took off VFR. The FAA tended to look the other way, since the alternative would be to RTB, and that was bad for business, especially since President Hatch made it clear that the Alaskan oil fields were Militarily Essential Projects. That designation allowed the pilots to push the envelope a bit. They were military trained pilots, and were fully capable of landing in zero/zero conditions totally on instruments. During the winter, they went from 4 to 2 aircraft flying the Fairbanks/Nome route, so the other pilots just became co-pilots on the other planes, and kept flying, since they were more likely to fly in IFR conditions during the winter.

Ron was glad the winter was short and mild. Over the winter and during the start of spring, they dropped a storage building on the site, and moved everything from the cabin to the storage building behind the hangar. When the cabin was stripped bare, Ron called the contractor and said he was ready to start construction. With the good weather, they were able to start building in April instead of May or June. Jim flew the CH-47 non-stop for the first two weeks. Ron flew the crew in first, then their wall tents and equipment. They brought enough food and supplies to last a crew of 6 a month, and if it ran over that long, Ron would fly to Anchorage and pick up more supplies. Since Ron had an outhouse, they skipped the chemical toilets. Ron almost died laughing when he saw what they were using for a crane, then remembered his Dad used something even more primitive to build his "room addition. They built a fixed-length boom out of high-strength metal tubing, cut a slot in the end big enough to fit a 6" pulley, and used a 1" grade-8 bolt as an axle. The base of the unit was a 4-legged outrigger with 2 wheels.

They used an automotive 10K winch and a ¾” wire rope instead of the ½” wire rope normally used, since it only needed to lift 20 feet max. The height of the boom was adjustable by a 10-ton bottle jack that had been fitted with safety pins in case of hydraulic failure. The winch was electrically powered, and a small gas generator and 2 huge deep cycle batteries were mounted on the rear to double as ballast to counter-balance any load. The mount was free-swinging, and could be swung even with a load attached by 2 men. It wasn’t the most elegant crane he had ever seen, but the contractor said it had several things going for it. It was light, strong, portable, and didn’t take a heavy-lift helicopter to move to remote sites. 10,000 pounds of lift was more than enough for a construction crane for Alaska, since your average 1-foot diameter log weighed less than half that amount.

One of the first trips the CH-47 made was with a small fuel bladder full of avgas for the generator, and a large fuel bladder full of fuel for Ron’s diesel tractor. The Avgas bladder contained 500 gallons, and the diesel bladder contained 2,000 gallons, since the tractor would use a lot more fuel. The first day after they were set up, they started the demolition. Since the sod roof wouldn’t be re-used, they quickly demolished it. Ron was glad Anne wasn’t here, because she would probably be crying while they demolished her home. But like a phoenix, this would rise from the ashes greater than before. All the usable lumber and hardware was stacked off to a side. 2 days later, all that existed of the cabin was the bare dirt foundation. They flew in the loader/backhoe and started digging the basement while several other crewmen went to the location that the contractor told them about and started felling trees. Ron drove the ATV with the trailer so they didn’t have to carry their gear over a mile away from the lodge. Between the 4 of them they made short work of felling enough trees to build the new lodge if you included the recycled wood they could use from the old house. The exterior would be made from 12” logs that were over 40 feet long. They located a stand of pine trees that would be perfect, and dropped the entire stand. They hooked a choker chain to the logs, and Ron dragged them to a clearing where they could more easily limb the logs. They waited for the tractor to drag the logs to the building site, since it could pull a lot of logs using their logging trolley. Ron flew home every afternoon so he was home by dark, and the crew stayed in their tents. The contractor was pleased since Ron wasn’t acting as a “sidewalk supervisor” and was actually a big help. He decided that if they came in under budget he would refund most of the money he saved, at least what he could attribute to Ron’s help. Ron was still tired when he came home, but his mood was much better, and a hot shower and a massage usually perked him right up. Sometimes he got a much different massage, and they skipped dinner or ate quickly.

Over the spring, the basement went in, and the construction crew swung into high gear. Ron was flying twice a week to Anchorage to pick stuff up and spent the rest of the time helping out and supervising. Having the owner on-site for decisions also helped the contractor with change orders, which often halted construction for a day or so while they got things straightened out. The portable sawmill was making lumber at a rate fast enough to easily keep up with the construction team, and with the use of FRS/GMRS radios, they were able to communicate clearly without the contractor running back and forth all day. The AE equipment was delivered before the floor was installed, making installation as simple as lowering the racks into the

basement and bolting them in place, then running the wires to the fuse panel on the main floor and the power leads to the roof as soon as the solar power roofing shingles were installed. Ron bought all AGM type deep cycle batteries, and paid 10% extra to make sure they were manufactured in the last month, and were all the same batch which made a slight difference in durability and reliability, but not enough to concern the average homeowner. Ron wasn't your average homeowner, and had money to burn, so he went the extra step to get as much reliability and life span out of his system as possible.

One change order recommended by Bear confused the heck out of the contractor, but he knew better than to ask too many questions. Bear wanted 3/8" armor plate shutters for the windows with a thin wood veneer to make them look like wood. He located an armored door built the same way and ordered it as well. The only thing that gave them away was the heavier hinges and hardware to install them. Ron quickly realized that the lodge would stop anything less than a 50BMG with the shutters closed. He thought about building a tunnel to the "root cellar" then decided that would be overkill.

With the portable sawmill, Ron got a real wood floor without the usual gaps that resulted from rustic construction techniques. Once the wood floor was installed, it was sanded smooth and sealed. The interior dividing walls that weren't weight-bearing were made using conventional framing techniques, and were 2x6 construction - and actually 2x6 not 1 5/8 " x 5 3/4". They used 3/4-inch green board, which was more expensive than conventional wallboard, but waterproof and more durable. The 2 bathrooms were designed for efficiency, since they didn't have the space to waste with huge bathrooms, so the master bathroom had a regular shower stall, a sink, and a toilet without all the extras. The other bathroom had a shower/tub combo just in case they needed a bath tub. The main floor had all cathedral open joist ceilings using milled wood. Since there were solar panels on the southern exposure of the roof, Ron decided on a steeper pitch than normal to encourage snow to slide off uncovering the panels during the winter more often so they could produce power when the sun was out. The Solar shingles made power even on partly-cloudy to cloudy days, but not as much as on a sunny day. They drilled a well, and hit good water at 100 feet, but kept drilling to 500 feet to allow for seasonal fluctuations. The septic field was buried deep to keep it from freezing in the winter.

Ron kept the solar powered pumps and the pipe for emergencies, and had the lodge plumbed conventionally, with a tap and a valve installed outside just in case. Ron knew the solar powered DC RV pumps could pump lake water 8 months out of the year reliably, so if something happened, and the lodge lost power, they would still have wood heat, and hot and cold running water 8 months out of the year. When they filled in the storage room with cabinets and shelves, the contractor told Ron he had an unused 2x2x10 space in a corner. Ron checked the internet quickly, and found a captive air tank exactly that size, so he asked the contractor if they could plumb the tank into the cold water system. Ron knew the tank was small, but it would keep the well pump from running all the time. Ron got together with the contractor, and got a list of all the little things they needed to complete the project, and called Bill to order them for pick-up in Anchorage tomorrow.

Ron flew home, and asked Nancy what they would need for furniture, rugs, etc. to decorate the “lodge” as they were calling it - it was too big for a cabin, and they already had a house. Nancy suggested leaving the kids with Anne for a couple of hours, and they could walk through it and take notes. Ron thought that was a good idea and called his mom. Anne checked with Doc Miller, and he said he had no appointments tomorrow, so it was OK with him. Anne called them back and said “Bring them on over first thing tomorrow.”

Nancy said “Thanks Mom- we’re going to look at the lodge. We need to make a list of stuff we need to furnish it. Were there any of the old furnishings you wanted - I’ll make sure we bring them back.”

“No dear, I grabbed anything that was small and of sentimental value when I moved to Allakaket, it’s your house now, feel free to do what you want to with it - I love you dear!”

“Bye Mom, love you too!”

When she hung up the phone, she wondered why she called Anne Mom until she realized that she now had 2 moms: Her Mother that bore her; and the grandmother of her children and the mother of her husband. The title “Mother” was probably Biblically more correct than the modern “Mother-in law” because they were married in Spirit as well, and she had joined Ron’s family when she took his name. She talked to Ron, and he agreed, if she was comfortable with it, he was sure Anne would approve. She went to pack an overnight bag for each kid, even though she was going to be back later that afternoon. Ron shook his head and walked off. He dreaded the day that they’d go out camping or something, Nancy would probably pack enough stuff for a Himalayan Expedition, and he’d get stuck carrying all of it!

The next morning, they packed the kids in the truck, and Ron was muttering to himself when he finally packed the last bag in the truck, then threw a bag of dog food in the truck to boot.

“Nancy, this has to stop. You’re packing 10 times the stuff they would need for 1 day at my Mom’s. If we went camping, I’d need either to drag a trailer behind us for all the stuff, or get fitted for a truss! Jake won’t need 3 changes of clothes, he’s practically potty-trained. Josh is only using 3 pairs per day, and you’ve packed a 12-pack of diapers, Sarah only used 6 diapers yesterday and you’ve packed 2 12-packs. For crying out loud, it’s too much stuff!”

“Ron, you deal with the unknown by packing your fanny pack and shoulder holster, I plan for the unknown by making sure my kids have enough stuff in case we don’t come back.”

“OK Nancy, I promise no more wolf-petting!”

“How about if the plane crashes or something?”

“Nancy, we’ve got over a year’s worth of stuff in the house in storage, and Anne drives or

someone could pick up enough stuff to last over a year, and I've already filled out a will with trust funds to take care of the kids. Look, if something happens to us, it's God's will, and I'm sure he'd take care of them. Preparedness is nice, but I think you're letting your fears get the best of you. I lived up there for 17 years, and the only time I was attacked was when we surprised a bear and Sam, who was 100% wolf by the way, died protecting me. You've got absolutely nothing to fear from that wolf. All those stories you read in the nursery rhymes were based on the European experience, and the Siberian experience. Frankly Europeans were paranoid when it came to wolves! True, I wouldn't want to take on a hungry wolf pack, alone and unarmed, but I've got a .44 Magnum on me that can kill a Grizzly with 1 correctly placed shot. A wolf wouldn't stand a chance. We were never in any danger. If I really believed that wolf was a threat, I would have shot on sight, but something told me that wolf didn't want to attack, he was defending his family. Since he was probably either a son or grandson of Sam, or one of his siblings, it would be like killing Sam, so I had to give that wolf a chance to show he wasn't dangerous. Even when I stuck out my hand, my right hand was on the butt of my Colt Anaconda, and one growl would have finished him in a heartbeat."

"Why didn't you say so?"

"You never asked - I thought you saw that, you were right behind me."

"I was too busy being scared of the wolf to notice anything."

Ron took Nancy in his arms "Nancy - I'll never let anything or anyone hurt you or the kids, you have to believe me."

Nancy broke down and cried, and when she dried her eyes, she kissed Ron "Boy have I been an idiot! I'm out there with Jeremiah Johnson, acting like a little schoolgirl. Ron, I'm sorry."

"Nancy, you weren't raised in the bush, you have a few things to learn, but I'll teach you. You already know how to shoot, and how to kill skin and gut animals for food. Fishing is a no-brainer, and I can teach you all the survival stuff you'll ever need to know just like I showed Samantha while we were stranded."

Nancy gave Ron another big hug and got in the truck - she was ready to go. Ron checked his guns and his fanny pack, and jumped in the driver's seat. 15 minutes later, they were at Grandma's house. Moose knew where he was, and practically flattened Nancy to get in the house. Jake was able to walk on his own, so Nancy set him down and he tottered into the house. Anne picked him up and gave him a big hug and kiss. Ron and Nancy carried Josh and Sarah into the house and laid them on the bearskin rug with Moose. Ron unpacked the truck, and this time Nancy suggested leaving the dog food at Anne's house. "Mom, is it OK if we leave a bag of dog food here for Moose, and when we come back later today, if you have room, maybe I can leave a bag with spare diapers and stuff so we don't have to keep lugging all these bags."

“Nancy, I already bought a bag of diapers for each of them. If you noticed last time there were still diapers left in the bag.”

“I was wondering why that happened. It seems we think alike too.”

“Years of living in the bush make me want to plan in advance and store stuff just in case.”

“Mom, what was it like living with a wolf in the house.”

“Dear, Francine dropped off Sam on our doorstep while Ron was still an infant, and I was not happy to put it mildly, but over the years I realized Ron and Sam had bonded tighter than brothers or litter mates. They did everything together, kind of like Jake and Josh sleeping with Moose. Every nap time, Ron would sack out on the bearskin with Sam. If I wanted to find Ron, I looked for Sam.”

“Did Ron tell you about that wolf encounter the other week?”

“He mentioned something, but not really - what happened?”

“We were walking toward the lake when this big wolf came out of the woods growling at us. I wanted Ron to shoot it, but he seemed to be trying to make friends with it. He got me behind him and crouched down, and the darned wolf walked over just like a dog and sniffed his hand, and then he was fine. I thought I would lose a husband. They walked to the lake, and Ron caught it a couple of fish, and fed the wolf, then he drank out of the lake and laid down, and get this - Ron petted the wild wolf like a dog! I was about ready to jump out of my skin, but the wolf seemed to enjoy it. We caught 4 more fish, and when we turned to go, the wolf trotted back into the forest as if nothing had happened.”

“Did Ron tell you there was a den there? The Wolf was just protecting his mate and pups. If he were serious about attacking you, he would have never given you a warning growl; your first hint that something was wrong would have been when he jumped one of you. Dear, in all my years up there, I’ve learned you have absolutely nothing to fear from those wolves. They’re habituated to humans, and see us as friends instead of as enemies. If he didn’t have a den close by, I doubt if you would have even seen him.”

“Ok, guess this “City Girl” has a lot to learn!”

“Nancy, not any more than I had to learn, or re-learn when I moved in with Roy. I went from being raised north of here, to living for over 10 years in Dallas, to living in Allakaket, to spending almost 20 years in the bush in a log cabin.”

“Wow, I guess you have some stories to tell - why don’t you stop by more often and we can talk. With Ron at work, the only person I can talk to is too young to respond.” Ron chose that

minute to walk in. “Mom, if you want to, I know where there’s a used 4x4 diesel pickup for sale, I’ll buy it, and you can visit us whenever you want, I’m sure Nancy would love the company, and it would give you more time with the grandkids.”

“Ok Ron, it does get a little lonely around here!”

Ron hugged his Mom, and Nancy gave her a hug, and they left since the kids were still asleep. Nancy told Anne on the way out, “We should be back before dark, see ya later Mom!”

They got in the truck, drove to the plane, and were at the lodge within a little over an hour. Nancy marveled at how beautiful the Lodge was, and was writing furiously as they walked from room to room. Finally they checked out the storage, and she crossed several items off her list and made a note next to the item to indicate it was in the storage building. When they were finished, they flew back to Allakaket and went home. They stopped at Anne’s on the way home, picked up the kids, and took them home. Ron and Nancy got on the computer, made a list, checked prices, then made some phone calls to Anchorage and Fairbanks stores. A couple of days later, they received their replies. Instead of making 2 trips, they decided the stores in Fairbanks had the better deals, and ordered most of the stuff from them. Ron called his Mom again, and asked if she would like to take the kids. Since tomorrow was Saturday, and Doc didn’t see patients on Saturday, she agreed. Remembering his promise, Ron called BA and asked him if they still had that spare diesel truck. BA said it was sitting in the yard. Ron asked if BA could do him a favor, have one of the mechanics look it over, clean it up, and deliver it to his mom’s place with a full tank of diesel. BA said sure, and thought that they should be able to deliver it in an hour or two. Ron thanked him, hung up, and called his Mom.

“Mom, one of the mechanics is going to drop off a truck for you. I’d appreciate if you could give him a lift back to the airport, then instead of us having to pack the kids up, would you mind coming over here? I’ll give you a card for the fuel pumps so you can keep it filled.”

“Ron, I don’t have a license!”

“Mom, most people around here don’t - you’ve driven an automatic before, right?”

“Yes, but it’s been almost 20 years.”

“Well take it slow the first time, and you might let the guy drive back to the airport so you don’t give him a heart attack.”

“HIM, What about Me?”

“Mom, after everything Dad and I put you through, I thought you were immune!”

“No - I can definitely say where I got these grey hairs from.”

“Ok Mom, it’s an automatic. That means to go forward put it in drive, backwards reverse. Easy on the throttle, easy on the brake. You don’t have to set any speed records getting here, besides, it’s just 5 miles from your house to ours, and just one turn - the left at the end of Main Street. It’s the last road on the left, then we’re the last house on the road. Main Street dead-ends just after our turn, so you can’t miss it. See you bright an early tomorrow Mom!”

“Nancy, I gave Mom the spare truck we had at the shop, someone’s going to check it out and drive it over to her place this afternoon, so she’ll come over here tomorrow to baby sit.”

“Smart move Ron, that way she’ll have no excuse from now on for not coming by and visiting.”



## Chapter 16 - Shop till You Drop

Anne showed up at 7:00 the next morning, and once the kids were settled, Ron and Nancy got into their truck and drove to the airport. 2 hours later they were in Fairbanks. Ron hired a cab, and they drove to the Home Furnishing Store. They were greeted by the Assistant Manager, who was told to expect them. They got the red carpet treatment, so Ron thought that someone had tipped them off about whom he was. He didn't mind, but didn't let it go to his head either. A stock boy accompanied them to push the cart, get the merchandise down from the shelves, and Ron guessed, to polish their shoes if necessary. By the time they were finished, they had ordered almost 10 thousand dollars worth of furniture, furnishings, and stuff. The Assistant Manager offered them free delivery. Ron asked if the truck could meet them at the airport, and gave him their stall number where the TurboGoose was parked, and asked if they could include 2 people to load the plane. He didn't see any problem, and told them the delivery truck would be loaded and meet them at the plane in an hour. Ron used his Allakaket Airlines credit card to pay for the bill, and they took a taxi back to the airport.

Half an hour after they arrived at the plane, a huge cube van with a bobtail lift painted with the store logo pulled up next to them, and the driver handed Ron a packing list which he checked against the store receipt. Everything was on the list, so he just went by the packing list as they loaded the plane, checking off each item as it was loaded. Since they bought multiple items, and the items were in sealed boxes with the contents listed outside, he just had to check off the box, which didn't take as long. The boxes and furniture barely fit into the plane, so Ron was glad he had removed the seats the night before, or they would have had problems. Once the plane was loaded, and he signed for the delivery, he gave the driver and each of the loaders a \$10 tip, then taxied up to the fuel pumps and filled the tanks full of JP-5 with his fuel card. Once they were airborne, Ron called ahead and had one of their bush pilots fly 2 baggage handlers to their lodge. They arrived 10 minutes before Ron did, and they unloaded the plane, carried the furniture into the lodge, and arranged it with Nancy's direction. When they finished, Ron offered to fly them back, but they'd have to ride in jump seats instead of regular seats. Since they'd rather get home than wait for the bush pilot to fly back then fly them home, they agreed, and Ron mounted the webbed sling-style jump seats to the cabin walls. It wasn't the most comfortable way to fly, but it beat walking or waiting for another 2 hours. When they landed, Ron handed each of them a \$100 check and told them it was a bonus, and thanked them. They were happy since they had made their full day's salary for about 3 hours worth of work, plus a \$100 tax-free bonus. When they got back to the office, they punched out and went home, since it was quitting time.

Ron and Nancy arrived home, and Anne told them everything was OK, and the kids were asleep with Moose, then she took Ron aside and explained that she needed some help learning to drive, and asked if Ron could drive around with her for an hour. Nancy went into the house with the kids while Ron and Anne walked out to her truck.

“Mom, is there something I should know about?”

“I almost hit 3 mailboxes on my way up here, I’m not sure my vision is good enough to drive.”

“Mom, I hate to say this but maybe you need glasses.”

They walked back into the house, and he printed up an eye chart off the internet, then paced off 20 feet, turned around and had her read it. She could barely read the 20/60 line.

“Mom, that confirms it - you’re probably nearsighted from all that needlework. The nearest optometrist is in Anchorage. You should make an appointment, and I’ll fly you there. Let’s leave your truck here for now, and I’ll drive you home.”

Anne hugged her son “Thanks Ron, you’re an Angel.”

“You might want to confirm that with Nancy!”

They both had a good laugh, and Ron told Nancy he was driving his mom home. When he came back, he wasn’t home 10 minutes when the phone rang.

“Ron, I made an appointment for tomorrow at 10:00, is that OK?”

“Sure mom, I’ve got the seats out of the TurboGoose, you mind flying right seat?”

“You mean up front with you?”

“Sure, why not?”

“OK dear, see you at 7:00 tomorrow.”

“See ya then mom!”

“Nancy, I need to fly my mom to Anchorage tomorrow for an eye appointment, is there anything we need while I’m there?”

“Nope, we’re all set. If she can get them tomorrow, you might want to wait for her to get her glasses at a one-hour shop.”

“OK, we should be home before dark, and if not, I’ll call you.”

Ron went into the living room and was promptly attacked by 3 kids and a dog. Moose wanted to knock him over and lick him to death, Jake wanted to use him for a Jungle Gym; Josh and Sarah just wanted him to tickle them and hold them. 2 hours later Ron was ready for a nap.

Nancy said that dinner was ready, and he thought “Saved by the Bell!” Jake and Josh were put in high chairs, and Sarah got a bottle. Nancy fed the kids first, then Ron. Actually Ron fed Jake and Nancy fed Josh, but he didn’t see the point in feeding either of them, since the bulk of their food went on their face, in their hair, or on the floor. Ron said “Talk about messy eaters!”

Sarah was a perfect angel and lay next to Moose with her bottle. She might have been weaned, but still got a bottle at dinner since she was small for her age, and there were more nutrients in the bottle than in your average jar of baby food.

Once the kids were fed and the mess cleaned up, the adults ate while Moose baby sat. He had learned not to sit on the kids, and was a really good babysitter now. Roy said grace and they ate quickly while it was relatively quiet. Later that evening, after the kids were asleep, Ron and Nancy were talking in bed.

“Ron, that Lodge you built is really an overgrown bug-out shelter isn’t it?”

“Bear and I had talked about it, and yes, several features have been added or improved to make it a very defensible location, but still I wanted it to also be a summer lodge. That’s why we bothered furnishing it so we could spend summers there. I can run the airlines from there as well as here, and when the kids are older, the lodge by the lake will be a perfect summer and fall lodge.”

“What about the wolves?”

“My guess is we’ll never have to worry about them again, and might even get a runt deposited on our doorstep sometime. Those wolves still see us as family. The wolf last week didn’t recognize me because we had been gone so long, but I’m sure that my smell was familiar to him in a sense. Anyway, wolves are pretty harmless unless you do something stupid or they are starving. Bears on the other hand, or wolverines are something to watch out for. As soon as the kids are old enough, they need to learn how to shoot, and you need to be able to shoot a .44 Magnum. Your .45 is great for around town, but isn’t the best weapon against a big huge Grizzly Bear. I wonder what Mom did with Dad’s shoulder holster and guns. I’ll have to ask her tomorrow.”

“Goodnight dear.”

“Night Nancy!”

The next morning, Ron helped feed the kids, then they ate breakfast. He hurried out the door at 6:45, and was at his mom’s house at 0700. She grabbed her bags, locked the door and hurried out to the truck. They made small talk all the way out to the plane. He knew something was bothering his mom, so he asked her “Mom, is everything all right?”

“I’m a little nervous, I’ve never flown up front before, and I’m definitely scared of heights.”

“That’s OK mom, you’re in an enclosed cockpit, and the only way you have to worry about how high you are is if we crash, and if we do, it doesn’t matter if you’re 50 or 5,000 feet up, you’re just as dead.”

“Thanks for the reassuring thought!”

“Mom, if it’s your time to go, there’s not a whole lot you can do about it, and if it’s not, then you have nothing to worry about!”

“You’re pretty smart for a kid!”

“You’re not so bad for a Geezer-ette yourself.”

“Who you calling an Old Geezer?”

“If the shoe fits Mom!”

“Just because I’m blind as a bat and knit all day doesn’t make me old!”

“I guess this means you won’t be needing those cats then!”

They both started laughing, and they reached the plane. Ron helped his mom into the cockpit door, then closed it, and did a walk around. Everything checked out, so he got in and taxied to the pumps, topped off the tanks, and taxied to the lake. Anne was fascinated by all the dials, levers and switches Ron was manipulating. Finally he called on the radio for clearance.

“Allakaket One requesting clearance for take off.”

“Allakaket one, hold for inbound traffic, 5 minutes.”

“Roger, holding for inbound, please advise when clear to take off.”

“Roger, tower out.”

Ron had to wait for an inbound flight to land, a very rare occurrence in Allakaket. He could see a small Cessna Amphibian on final. 5 minutes later, it had landed, and taxied off the lake. The tower gave him clearance, and he took off. Ron decided to give his Mom a thrill, and did a Max Performance take-off. Once he was airborne, he looked at his Mom, and she was as white as a ghost and breathing hard. “Mom, you OK?”

“Son, you just scared 20 years out of me - good thing I went to the bathroom before I left, or

you might have needed to clean the seat.”

“Sorry Mom, I thought you’d like to see what the plane could do.”

“Ron, just take it easy from here on out - I’m not as young as I once was.”

“OK. Mom, I was going to ask you what happened to Dad’s Anaconda, 22/45, and the shoulder holster?”

“I’ve got it in a box at home - why?”

“I was talking to Nancy the other day about our lodge, and realized she didn’t have anything bigger than the .45 if we spent the summer up there.”

“Ron, she can have my set.”

“Thanks for offering, but I was thinking about wearing Dad’s set, and giving Nancy mine.”

“Ron, for now let’s give Nancy my set, and when Jake gets old enough, he can have Roy’s set.”

“Ok mom, if you’re sure.”

“It’s just your dad’s guns have a sentimental value to them, they saved my life more than once, and it’s the thing I associate most with your father.”

“Mom, if I weren’t flying the plane, I’d give you a big hug - I don’t know if I’ve told you lately how much I love you!”

“I know son, we’ve always been close, but thanks for telling me!”

They spent the rest of the flight catching up, and when he got close enough, Ron called for landing clearance. Since he was now a commercial airliner, he had to wait like everyone else, but made it in without too many delays. They took a taxi to the optometrists’ office, and Anne went in. Half an hour later, the doctor called Ron in. “Son, have a seat and look at this wall chart. I need to find out something. Ok, now read the 20 line, left eye only.”

Ron read the 20 line with both eyes, forwards and backwards, then the 19, 18 and 17 lines.

“Ron, your vision is amazing, and it explains why your 60-year old mother has excellent vision. All she needed to see the 20/20 line was a minor correction for astigmatism. She has virtually no myopia or other vision problems people her age have. When she mentioned that you were a pilot and sharpshooter, I just had to check my theory. For some reason excellent vision tends to run in your family. I highly doubt you’ll need glasses until you’re well into your

60's or 70's. You're slightly farsighted, but not excessively so. You would have made one heck of a fighter pilot."

"I know doc, I was bound for the Air Force Academy until Congress disbanded the Air Force. My uncle is Colonel Steve Fellows, and you might know my other uncle Ron Fellows."

"The name rings a bell, but I can't place them. Anyway the Air Force would have killed someone to get you behind the stick of a fighter plane with vision like that, and the fact that you're already a commercial pilot - oh well, their loss!"

Ron got up, shook the doctor's hand, and walked out to the lobby where Anne waited. The receptionist told her of an excellent 1-hour shop where they could get her prescription filled. She also had a prescription for reading glasses if she wanted them with a +2 diopter magnification. They took a cab to the lab, and 1 hour later, she had both prescriptions filled. When she put on her regular glasses, she almost cried. Her vision was like it was in her 30's, maybe she could go shooting again. She mentioned that to Ron, and he was on the phone to Elmendorf, and asked the Gunny if he had a Remington 700 or an M -24 laying around that they could use for an hour. Gunny said "sure come on over" and Ron asked his mom if she wanted to go shooting at Elmendorf. Her ear-to-ear grin answered his question for him. The cab dropped them off at the gate, and Gunny was waiting with his hummer on the other side.

"Gunny, I'd like you to meet my Mom. Mom, this is Gunny."

"Ma'am, it's a pleasure to finally meet you - Ron's kind of a legend around here."

"Gunny, I'm not as good of a shot as my son, but I finally got some glasses, and I can see like I used to when I was 30, and I wanted to check something out."

"Gunny, could you have a runner set some targets out at the 600 yard line for us?"

"Already taken care of Ron. When you mentioned the 700 or the M -24, I thought you'd want to shoot at 600 instead of 1,000 yards. I located 2 M-24's that have just gone through their arsenal rebuild and are the most accurate guns on the base. I've got a 50-cal ammo can full of M -118 Sniper Match ammo set aside as well."

"Thanks Gunny."

They drove out to the range, and Gunny already had everything set up, including tarps, shooting pads, ear and eye protection, and the rifles and ammo. Ron and Anne both walked up to their shooting lanes and got ready. Ron said "Ladies first", so Anne got ready to shoot while Gunny set up a spotting scope behind them. When Anne got behind the M -24, she was amazed at how sharp the image of the target was in her scope. The image was steady too, thanks to the Harris bipod fitted to the forend of the gun. She loaded a mag, cycled the action, cleared the safety,

then looked over at Ron, who gave her a thumbs up, and she got ready to shoot. She took 3 deep breaths, blew out half the 3rd one, and held her breath while she gently squeezed the trigger. Her first round went right through the X-ring at 600 yards, and she cycled the bolt, and concentrated on trying to put the other 4 rounds through the x-ring as well. Gunny could see through his scope that Ron's mom was almost as good of a shot as he was, and was an exceptionally good shot for a 60-year old woman too. She was very pretty, and if he weren't already married, he would have asked her out. When she locked the bolt open, Ron took over, and quickly shot 5 rounds, then the runner ran down to pull the targets. Gunny's chin hit his chest when the calculator showed that Anne had shot a 5 inch group, and Ron had shot a 4-inch group out of an unfamiliar gun. Now he knew where Ron got his shooting ability!

"Excuse me, Mrs. Williams, but I was wondering where you learned to shoot like that?"

"My Brother was Ron Fellows. He was a sniper in Vietnam."

"Can't say I heard his name, but if you were taught to shoot by a Vietnam sniper, you were taught right. I'm pretty sure some of both of your ability is genetic, because wonder-kid here has got the brass at the Pentagon scratching their heads, because only 1 in 10 of their best snipers can match his groups with the new suppressed Barrett rifle." Gunny hoped he didn't just reveal a Secret project, then remembered that if Ron did this when he was a kid, she would have known enough to sign the permission forms.

Ron spoke up "Gunny, Snipers are by and large good shots, but excellent in field craft. While I can shoot the left eye of a fly at 1,000 yards, I doubt I could become a sniper. I don't have the patience or the motivation to crawl through 1,000 yards of brambles to take out an enemy general with 1 shot, I'd rather drop a JDAM on him from 10,000 feet!"

Gunny laughed his head off at that one. He had heard Ron was going to go to the Academy before Congress destroyed the Air Force. That was a crying shame, because that kid would have been one heck of a fighter pilot. He had nerves of steel and practically x-ray vision. He wondered sometimes when the kid's cape was going to come back from the cleaners. They shot for a couple more hours, and finally Anne was tired and wanted to go home. She had shot over 100 rounds, and none of them strayed outside the 10-ring. Gunny walked up to her and said "Ma'am, May I shake your hand, that was an excellent demonstration of shooting."

"Thanks Gunny, I'm glad I got the chance."

Gunny looked at Ron and asked him "Do you have any kids?"

"Yeah, I've got 3 and another on the way, why?"

"If they can shoot half as well as you, you could start your own shooting team. I'd get them started as soon as possible."

“I was already planning on it Gunny. Thanks for the advice.”

Gunny drove them back to the gate, and they called a cab back to the airport. Anne was visibly tired, and Ron had to help her into the aircraft. He realized his mom wasn't young anymore, and that thought scared him, so he didn't dwell on it. He walked around the aircraft, then taxied to the pumps and filled up. Once he was at the end of the runway, he called the tower and requested clearance to take off. Since it was later in the day, he was given immediate clearance, so he took off and flew home to Allakaket. Anne slept most of the way home, and woke up when they descended to land. Ron took it easy and greased the landing, then taxied up to the airport, filled the tanks, and parked the plane, then helped her out.

“Mom, I'll take you home, then we'll drop your truck off tomorrow.”

“That sounds like a plan son, I just want to go to bed. All that excitement took a lot out of me.”

Ron dropped his mom off and drove home. Nancy met him at the door and gave him a hug and a kiss, then the kids and the dog mobbed him. “Welcome Home” he thought to himself.



## Chapter 17 - Sky Angel

Ron woke at 0300 to use the bathroom and check on the kids. Jake and Josh were sound asleep, but when he went to check in on Sarah, she was face down. Fearing the worst, he turned on the light, rolled her over, and she wasn't breathing. He yelled for Nancy, and checked her pulse. Sarah had a pulse, thank God, but she was cyanotic and not breathing. He immediately started Rescue Breathing on his infant daughter, praying she would wake up. After 2 minutes of Rescue Breathing and the most earnest prayers Ron had said in many years, he heard his daughter cry. Nancy came in with the paramedic bag and the cordless phone. He told her to dial Doc Miller, wake him up and tell him they were on the way in with an infant with breathing problems. Ron stayed with Sarah since he was a certified Paramedic, while a very panicked Nancy grabbed the kids and Moose and threw them into the truck. On the way in, Ron called Anne, and she somehow made it to the clinic minutes after them. Doc took Sarah out of Ron's hands, and rushed her into the examining room. Ron thought he had better call BA just in case, and BA apologized for his grumpy manner as soon as Ron told him Sarah was very sick. Doc Miller came out to the waiting room half an hour later.

"Ron, Nancy, I'm not going to sugar coat this, your daughter is very sick. Somehow I missed it last time, but she has a hole in her heart, and it requires surgery to fix."

"Doc, is this an emergency or can it wait?"

"Ron, the sooner your daughter has the surgery, the better. I've got her stable for now, but she's intubated and on O2. Anne's a qualified flight nurse, and Alaska Regional Hospital can take you right in, they have a runway right up to the ER doors. I've transferred her to a medical bassinet, and she's warm, breathing and comfortable. I'll call ahead, and they'll be waiting for you."

Ron called BA, who said "I'll come over to the clinic and take care of Jake, Josh, and Moose for you, just take care of Sarah." They quickly unloaded Josh, Jake and Moose, and left them with Doc Miller. They loaded Anne Sarah, and Anne's Paramedic kit into the truck, and Ron drove to the airport. BA had alerted them that he was coming to the airport, and needed to take off ASAP. One of the mechanics pre-flighted the plane, topped off the fluids, and parked it with the turbines running. They helped Ron, Nancy, Anne and Sarah into the plane, and helped Anne buckle Sarah's bassinet into the seat belt. Doc left Sarah wired for the EEG, and switched to the portable unit which included an auto-defibrillator. The medical bassinet contained a respirator, warming circuits, and everything else they needed to transport a critically ill infant. The State of Alaska had recently upgraded the equipment at the State Clinics, since they weren't equipped as ER's. Ron searched his database, and located all the information for Alaska Regional Hospital, and entered the coordinates into the navigation system. It was still dark out, so Nancy was flying right seat, and they configured the plane for take-off as they taxied to the lake. They called the tower, and received emergency clearance. The tower told them they

would notify Anchorage Control about the Medical Emergency flight, and they should be able to fly straight in. Ron turned to Nancy and said “OK, let’s see what these new turbines can do.”

Once he was at 500AGL, he reduced the rate of climb, but accelerated to max speed, trading altitude for airspeed. He never got much above 1,000 feet all the way, and ran the turbines as fast as they could go. He averaged just over 300 knots with the new turbines, and the gauges stayed in the green for the whole flight. Ron was glad Nancy had to concentrate on the instruments, so she didn’t have time to worry about her baby. When he was 20 minutes out, he called the Alaska Regional Hospital direct on the radio, explaining they were transporting a critically ill infant, and needed clearance to land. Doc had called ahead, and they were expecting him. The runway was long enough so he could do a high-speed approach, and land at 120 knots. He didn’t know what kind of shape his daughter was in, but wanted to get her on the ground as fast as possible, and into the hands of a pediatric cardiologist and a cardiac surgeon as fast as he could. 15 minutes later he called final, and followed the ILS glide slope down to a perfect high-speed landing. Once he was on the ground, he chopped the throttles and reversed the props to a stop next to the ambulance entrance, where a team was waiting for them. Once the props stopped turning, they opened the side door and bundled little Sarah onto the gurney and rushed her into the ER with Anne and Nancy following close behind. Ron was directed by a ground crewman to taxi away from the entrance and park the plane. Once he had shut down, the gravity of the situation took hold. His little girl’s life was in someone else’s hands. He had gotten her there alive, now it was up to the doctors and God. Ron said another fervent prayer, and climbed out of the TurboGoose and walked into the ER’s ambulance entrance. The head of Emergency Services was at his desk, and recognized Ron.

“Ron Williams - is that you?”

“Hi Doc, I just flew my little girl in, she’s got a bad heart. Any idea where they took her?”

The director turned to a nurse, then told Ron that she was in an examining room, and the staff cardiologist, a pediatric surgeon and an ER resident were working on her.

“Ron, I was amazed at that landing you did - even our planes don’t come in that fast and stop that short - what kind of plane was that?”

“It’s a custom turboprop plane called a TurboGoose. Can I tell you about it later - I really want to see my daughter.”

Anne walked up to Ron, and told him that Sarah was fine, they were scheduling her for surgery in the morning when the chief of cardiovascular surgery would be in. She was stable, and the cardiologist was keeping an eye on her. Two minutes later, Nancy showed up with the cardiologist in tow.

“Mr. Williams, I’m doctor Franks. Sarah is stable, and she’ll have surgery in the morning to

repair a small hole in her heart. Nancy told me you were a Paramedic, and started rescue breathing on her as soon as you realized she wasn't breathing."

"I woke up to use the bathroom around 3 and checked on the kids as I usually do. Jake and Josh were fine, but Sarah was face down in her crib. Thinking it might be SIDS, I turned on the light, rolled her over carefully. She had a nice strong pulse, but she wasn't breathing, and she was cyanotic. I started rescue breathing, and 2 minutes later, she started crying, which meant she was breathing. We rushed her to the clinic, and then we flew her here."

"Ron, you did everything right, now she's in our hands. She should come through the surgery OK, and after she recovers from the surgery, she'll lead a normal life. We do this surgery about a dozen times a year, and if the kid's alive when we get them, they usually live."

"Thanks Doc."

Ron gave Nancy and Anne a big hug, then called BA.

"BA, Sarah's in the hospital. They'll do the surgery this morning. Everyone's OK. I need you to activate the prayer chains, and get everyone praying for us. Can you ask Pastor Jones to meet us at the hospital chapel? Thanks - you too! God Bless!"

"Anne, Nancy, let's get a bite to eat at the cafeteria, and head over to the Chapel. BA said he would call Pastor Jones and have him meet us at the Hospital Chapel."

They walked into the cafeteria and even though they weren't hungry, they knew they would need their strength for the upcoming ordeal. After breakfast they got directions to the Hospital Chapel, where they sat and prayed together. A couple of hours later, Pastor Jones quietly joined them, announcing his presence by placing his hands on Ron and Nancy's shoulders, then he knelt with them and prayed. Since they were alone in the chapel, when they had finished, Pastor Jones gave them some good news.

"Ron, Nancy, I've activated prayer chains all over Anchorage. We have a Pastor's net that we communicate urgent prayer requests via e-mail, and by this morning every Christian Church in Anchorage is spreading the word via e-mail and phone."

"Thanks Reverend, I never imagined the word could spread so fast!"

"Ron, please call me Tom. Reverend or Pastor is OK in church, but otherwise it's too formal, and I'm uncomfortable with it."

"Ok Tom, any word?"

"I checked in with the surgical team on my way in, she's first into surgery this morning at 0800.

They've called for their best Pediatric Cardiovascular Surgeon. He's done hundreds of these surgeries. He already got a look at the Echo-Cardiogram, and this one should be a slam dunk. He said there was a small hole in the heart that allows blood to flow between chambers, making the heart work harder, and pump less efficiently. Once the hole is repaired, she should never have any more problems."

"Tom, I found her face-down and not breathing, I was assuming SIDS?"

"According to the docs, she shows no signs of SIDS, and they can't explain why she was on her face. Maybe she rolled over as she lost consciousness. Either way, I know the hand of God was on her, and you found her in the nick of time. You know that after 6 minutes, irreversible brain damage occurs. The EEG they ran shows normal brain activity, so she's fine."

Nancy started crying when she heard that, and threw herself into Ron's arms "Thanks for saving our baby!"

"Like Tom said, it was mostly God watching out for her, and allowing me to react according to my training instead of panicking."

"Still, you did everything right, you didn't panic, and you flew that plane here and made a perfect high-speed emergency landing on a fairly small runway. I love you now even more than before, and I know that if anything bad happens, you won't fold under pressure."

"Nancy, I'm still human, and I always worry that if enough pressure were applied, I'd fold. My worst nightmare is to lose you and the kids all at once. I don't know if I could deal with that!"

Tom spoke up "Ron, The Bible says "My Grace is Sufficient" and I totally believe it. I've dealt with major tragedies, and God has always given the victims enough grace to bounce back if they believe in Him."

Ron thought that called for a Group Hug, and then they were praying together and holding each other. They could each feel His presence, and they knew Sarah would be OK.

Just about then, Sarah was admitted to Surgery. Half an hour later, she was out and in the recovery room. A nurse walked into the Chapel to give them the good news, and found the four of them standing in a circle praising God. She couldn't understand why, most of the people she saw in here were weeping and wailing, asking God for a Miracle, and here these 4 were praising God like they already knew that Sarah was out of danger. She tapped the minister on the shoulder, and he said "Yes we know!"

"But Reverend - I just came out of Surgery, and no one else was sent."

"Ma'am, we already heard" and Tom pointed upward. She was amazed, and then she turned

and left, she had work to do. She talked about it the rest of the day, and several of her friends who were Christians explained it to her. She spent the rest of the week wondering why she never felt that way, then she picked up her Bible and started reading it for the first time in years.

Ron, Nancy, and Anne were admitted to the Pediatric ICU after putting on gloves, gowns, and masks. The risk of infection was too great to let her hold her child, so Nancy talked softly to her. The nurse told her that they should be taking her out of ICU within 24 hours, once they were sure she didn't contract a post-surgical infection. She told them to go home and get some sleep, they couldn't see her until tomorrow, and she was in good hands. Ron called the Inn and booked 2 rooms for the rest of the week. They said that if they needed to check out before the week was up, they would only bill him for the nights used. Ron called BA, who told him the boys were fine, and Moose wore him out playing Ball and tug-of-war. BA said to stay in Anchorage as long as they needed. He got the spare key from Bill, and grabbed a week's worth of clothing and dog food for Moose. He finally understood why Ron called him Moose, because Piglet was already taken. BA said they were going to get a dog soon, since the kids were big enough now to help. Ron thanked BA, and they walked out of the hospital. On the way out, he ran into the Director of Emergency Services. "Ron, I was glad to hear Sarah came through surgery OK. I take it you're staying in Anchorage for her recovery?"

"I booked 2 rooms at the Inn for a week just in case."

"OK, if you're planning on staying here a week, could you do me a favor and move your plane to the commercial Airport. We need every spot we have in case we get a Mass Trauma. Can I walk out with you and take a look at your plane? It seems to have the same performance as our Brasilia's, yet it's an Amphibian. That would come in very handy for some of the outlying areas we now serve with a helicopter. The chopper is a lot slower than the Brasilia, but we can land it on floats at a small lake." Ron remembered the Director's name was Steve. He used to be the Senior Paramedic for Anchorage, and when the old director retired, they gave him the job, since he was too old to be in the field, but had 30 years of experience in EMS. Ron explained the history of the planes on the way out. When he told Steve that with the new turbines, the planes had a top speed of 300 knots for 600 miles, and a 250 knot cruising speed for 1200 miles, and could land and take off on a lake that most Cessna Amphibians would have problems with, he was really interested. When he mentioned the payload capacity, Steve said "I want one!" Ron opened the passenger door and showed Steve all the cargo space, and told him it could easily be configured as an air ambulance, but the cabin wasn't pressurized, so they would have to install large capacity oxygen tanks for the patients, and not fly any higher than they had to. Ron said he rarely went over 2,000 feet AGL unless he was going to Vancouver, then he went up to 10,000 feet to gain extra range.

"You mean to tell me you get that speed and range at that low of an altitude?"

"Exactly, I never went much higher than 1,000 ft AGL when we flew Sarah here, and according to the nav computer, I averaged over 300 knots including landing and take-off. The engine

instruments remained in the green for the entire flight. I wouldn't recommend speeds in excess of 280 knots unless you're flying a Code 3 emergency, since it kills your range, and is hard on the turbines to run at almost 100% for that long. Allison is building a bunch of these new turbines for me, and the RCAF Wing 19 AMS at Vancouver BC has over a dozen airframes left that they can rebuild and retrofit to your specs for less than a half-million per copy, and usually a lot less."

"Great, can you put me in touch with this gentleman?"

"I'll send you his e-mail address when I get back, or if you're in a hurry, e-mail BA at Allakaket Airlines, and use my name, and he can give you the details."

"Thanks Ron, I'll get hold of BA today and get the info from him."

Nancy decided to ride in the back with Anne, so Ron jumped into the pilot's seat, and started the turbines, pre-flighted the plane, and called Anchorage Control for permission to transit from Alaska Regional Hospital to Anchorage International. They gave him a route to fly that would de-conflict with the pattern, and line him up for the runway. They highly suggested not flying above 500 AGL for the transit, since the pattern was pretty heavily stacked, and they wouldn't want to fly through the wake turbulence of a 747! The controller said if they could take off now, they would be able to fly right in. Ron shoved the throttles to full, and went screaming down the runway, took off in ground effect, cleaned up the plane, and told the control operator he was on final 2 minutes later. The operator said that they were clear to land, and he slowed to 80 knots, deployed the landing gear, and made a textbook landing. He taxied over to the fuel pumps, filled up the tanks, including the APU, and taxied to his assigned parking spot at Alaska Airlines since he wasn't picking up passengers. Ron was surprised when none other than Bradley Whinton III, the new CEO of Alaska Airlines was there to greet them. "Ron Williams, glad to finally meet you. BA told me about Sarah, and I'm glad she's OK. I understand you'll be staying in Anchorage for a week. I can loan you one of our vehicles for the duration of your stay. Here's the keys, it's parked right over there." Bradley shook hands all around, then had to get back to work. The vehicle he had pointed out was a brand-new F-450 turbodiesel that Alaska Airlines bought from their fleet dealer for the use of the airlines. It had been washed and vacuumed before they parked it with both tanks full. Ron was glad that BA had thought ahead, since it beat a taxi, and he really didn't want to ride around like a Potentate in a Limousine.

## Chapter 18 - Redemption

They drove to the Mall first, since none of them had been able to take any clothes or toiletries. They bought 3 duffle bags and enough clothes for several days without washing, and enough toiletries to last the week. By the time they got back to the Inn, it was time for dinner, so they dropped their bags at the hotel, and walked to the diner next door. After dinner, Ron told Anne they would meet her at 0700 for breakfast so they could be at the hospital at 0800 when visiting hours started. They got settled in their rooms, then Ron and Nancy fell asleep holding each other. After breakfast, they drove to the hospital, and Sarah's condition had been upgraded overnight from Critical to Serious, which meant she could be moved out of the ICU, and Nancy could finally touch her daughter. She still was wearing a mask, but Sarah responded almost immediately to the voice and touch of her mother. She was finally off the respirator and the IV, and looked almost normal except for the suture line where they had opened her chest. The Resident told Nancy that the scar would fade with time, and she would be a perfectly normal little girl in as little as a month. Nancy was grateful just to have her little daughter. The three of them stayed in her room all day, and when the nurses said they needed to leave so Sarah could get some sleep, they reluctantly left.

On the way out, the Resident caught up with them and said that he didn't want to get their hopes up, but if she kept healing at this rate, she could leave the hospital in a couple of days. Ron asked about removing the sutures, and he assured Ron that Doc Miller was more than competent to remove them in a week or two. They didn't like to keep healthy infants in the hospital any longer than they had to, since there were a bunch of bugs floating around, and their immune systems weren't totally up to speed. Nancy said she breast fed Sarah, and the Doc said that helps, but it usually takes a year or two for a kid's immune system to come up to full speed. He would give them a list of general precautions to follow as she recovered at home. Since she had open-heart surgery, there were more precautions than normal. They all had to wear at least an N -95 mask around her for the next couple of weeks, and they should buy an ionic filter for her nursery just to be on the safe side. Ron thought that was a good idea, and decided to buy 2: 1 for the whole house, and a smaller unit for Sarah's nursery. He called BA on his cell phone, and he checked the local Anchorage stores on the internet, and found the best value. Ron wasn't surprised when BA told him which store - they had a reputation for good merchandise at the best prices in town. He could have bought it over the Internet and saved \$50 per unit, but he needed them quicker than 2 weeks that most companies said it would take.

He called the store, and they had several units in stock. The manager recommended 1 for each bedroom, and one for the living room and kitchen, especially if they had a dog. It would only cost \$200 more for 4 smaller units than 1 big one and 1 small one. The manager said the unit was totally noiseless, since it didn't have or need a fan, and it only needed cleaning once every two weeks, and it cleaned with a sponge and water. Ron asked how late they were open, and he said they normally closed the same time as visiting hours ended, 8:00 at night, but if he knew they were on the way, he'd keep the store open for them. Ron guessed for a guaranteed

\$1500.00 sale, he'd keep the store open too. He told the manager they would be there before 8:30 that night. He said that he would set aside 4 units for them, and Ron thanked him. That evening when visiting hours were over, they drove over to his shop, and he had them all boxed up and ready to go. Ron handed him his AMEX card, and the manger helped them put the units in the bed of the truck. Ron unloaded the units at the inn with the help of a clerk onto a luggage cart. He asked Anne if she wanted to use a unit tonight, and she said "No thanks, I don't suffer from allergies anymore," so Ron set up a unit in their room to try it out, and left the other 3 in the boxes. Just like the manager said, you just plugged it in and turned it on. In the morning when they checked it, the filter was filthy. That sold him right then and there. He called the manager in the morning and asked him how many of those units he had in stock. He said he had 12 left, and Ron asked him how much for the lot of them. Since he had already bought 4, and they came 20 to a case, he gave him the case price, plus his 10% markup. Ron said he'd be over there again at 8:30 that evening to pick up the rest of them.

After breakfast, they drove over to the hospital and Sarah was up and awake. Nancy walked over to her, and she practically begged her mom to pick her up. Nancy looked to the nurse, who nodded her head. Nancy picked her up like a piece of delicate china, and Sarah wrapped her arms around her mom's neck and wouldn't let go. Nancy say down in a rocking chair, and the nurse brought a bottle of formula. Nancy fed her baby, and Sarah fell asleep soon after finishing the bottle. Seeing that everything was right with his family, Ron motioned to Anne, who met him in the hall. "Mom, I can't sit here all day - Sarah and Nancy are asleep. I need to get out and do something."

"Ron, I'll stay with her and tell her you'll be back soon when she wakes up."

"Mom, here's my cell number, and I'll have the phone on, call me if you need anything." Ron handed her his business card, then took another one, and wrote the room number on the back of it, so he could call Nancy later if he didn't hear from her, or he was going to be late.

On his way down he ran into Steve. "Ron, you got a minute?"

"Sure Steve, what can I do for you?"

"I got hold of BA, and made all the connections. I need you to talk with the head of Life Flight. They've been looking for alternatives for years, but no one had though of your turboprop modification of a Grumman Goose. His name's Roger and his office is right here."

They walked into Roger's office, and since Steve was there, he ended his call, and Steve introduced Ron Williams.

"Ron Williams, where have I heard that name before"

"Roger, Ron is the owner of Allakaket Airlines; they're the feeder airline for Alaska Airlines.



He's got like 7 or 8 turboprop conversions of the Grumman Goose he calls a TurboGoose. You two need to talk, I think his conversion might be what we were looking for."

"Thanks Steve, talk to you later."

Steve closed the door, leaving Ron and Roger alone. "Ron, tell me about the TurboGoose."

"It started as a WWII Surplus Grumman Goose with twin Wasp radial engines. Basically it was a miniature Catalina PBY, and they were used for costal patrol during WWII. Grumman made them until the 1950's or so, and most of the airframes the RCAF is rebuilding are 1950's vintage airframes. It's a remodel more than a restoration, since the airframe, skin, and landing gear are about the only components left off the Goose by the time they're finished with it. Allison made some turboprop engines for it in the 50's but never installed them. I located 4 engines, had them installed in the Goose airframe, and flew them for a year or so until I got hold of Allison since I needed more planes. They couldn't believe that the engines still worked - they were test-bench units, and had never been installed in a plane. They offered to build a modern turboprop that would mount up where the old turboprops were, and get better fuel mileage and more power. They were right, because when I flew my baby from Allakaket to here the other day, I averaged 300 knots for the trip, including landing and take off. The plane is STOL capable, and can land and take off from lakes that would give a Cessna 185 Amphibian fits! With the new FAA fuel tanks, it has almost a 1500 mile range at 250 knots, a 1200 mile range at 280, and I imagine around 800-1000 mile range at max speed, since I ran the turbines at 100% from Allakaket all the way here, and did a high-speed emergency landing at 120 knots to save time. According to the flight computer, the fastest I went was just over 300 knots for almost an hour."

"Ron, that's amazing, you're plane has the same range and speed as our Brasilia's, and it's amphibious."

"Not only that, but twice the payload and cargo space. Even if you converted to an Air ambulance, you could easily carry 4 or more stretcher cases plus FAA certified seats for 4 more. One problem is the plane isn't pressurized, so you would have to install a patient oxygen system."

"That's not an issue anymore since we can carry huge quantities of liquefied O2. 1 40-pound tank can carry enough liquid O2 for 6 people for a week. They use a double-wall insulated tank, and they can be built to fit into almost any space. We use them now on our Air Ambulances for long flights since the aircraft is only pressurized to 10 thousand feet, and we can fly up to 30,000 feet."

"Ok, Roger, how would you like a test-ride?"

"You're kidding?"

“My kid’s in the hospital here and it will be another day or two before she can leave. I’m going stir crazy waiting here, since I’ve got nothing to do but wait.”

“Well in that case, let’s go. I know a small lake around here that always gives us fits.”

“Ok, Roger before I try it, you need to show me on the map, and I need to know clearances and distances.”

Roger took out a small scale topo map of the lake in question. It was about the size of HelpmeJack Lake, and didn’t have near the clearance problems, only 200 feet within a mile of the lake. Ron said “That’s an easier approach than I fly into HelpmeJack Lake!”

Roger looked up HelpmeJack Lake in his database, and asked Ron if he had a set of 3lb Brass Cajones.

“Roger, it’s not that tough, with the flaps fully extended, I can land at 50 knots, and I have reversing props that act like I threw out an anchor. And you won’t believe my rate of climb unless you see it for yourself.”

“Ok, let’s go.”

Roger walked out with Ron, and told Steve they were going for a check-ride in Ron’s plane. Steve desperately wanted to go, but he wasn’t a pilot, so he couldn’t ride up front like Roger could. They walked out, and Roger said “Ok if we take my truck?”

Ron thought it was a good idea not to leave Anne and Nancy stranded without a vehicle, so he agreed. They drove over to the airport, and Ron gave Roger directions to the Alaska Airlines private aircraft parking area. Roger was impressed by the size of Ron’s plane as they drove up next to it; it was easily twice the size of their Brasiliass. Ron unlocked the aircraft, opened the passenger door so Roger could see how big the cargo space was - Ron wasn’t kidding, they could fly 4 or even 6 stretcher cases and still have room for 4 seats up front. He walked forward to the cockpit, and it was a fully modern FAA IFR cockpit, including a really good radar set. Ron talked Roger through the pre-flight check list, called the tower, and set the plane up to take off while they were taxiing. Once he got permission, he did a max-performance climb to 2,000 feet, and Roger was grinning and shaking his head at the same time, his planes didn’t climb near this fast! Ron had input the coordinates for the lake, and half an hour later, they were overhead and Ron set up to land. Ron floated in at 50 knots, made a textbook touchdown, and since the turbines were already at idle, he flipped the reverse switch, waited a second for the props to reverse, and throttled up the turbines to 30% power. The plane stopped in the middle of the lake just like someone had thrown out an anchor. Roger was grinning like a cat that had just eaten the canary. Ron taxied to the end of the lake, and turned to take off. Once he was set, he shoved the throttles to full, and with over half the lake left, hit 80 knots and was airborne. Ron did a max-performance take-off again, and turned to Anchorage while he climbed. Half an hour

later they landed back at Anchorage and Roger was practically jumping up and down in his seat he was so excited. He taxied to the Alaska Airlines private terminal, shut down, and Roger was still grinning from ear to ear.

“Ron, you convinced me! We’ll want at least 2 planes as soon as they can be built. With this plane, we could retire half of our helicopter fleet, and just keep the Jet Rangers.”

Curious, Ron asked what helicopters they were getting rid of.

“We’ve got the “hangar queen” a Sikorsky S-80 Super Stallion that is configured for Search and Rescue with a winch, extended fuel pods, and a bunch of other stuff. It can also do water drops since it can sling load around 30,000 pounds and travel 200 miles one way with it. Problem is its maximum speed is only 150 knots. We just had the engines rebuilt and we got an airworthiness cert good for another 5 years on the airframe.”

“Roger, would you consider a trade for a cargo configured TurboGoose?”

“You’re serious?”

“We’ve been utilizing a CH-47 for the last couple of years for everything, and he’s been carrying everything from Anchorage to Allakaket that we can’t fit inside the TurboGoose. He’s got about twice the lifting capacity of the Super Stallion, and it’s really costly to run. I wanted to buy another couple of TurboGoose planes anyway. I’m not going to give you a brand new plane, because obviously your Super Stallion has been around the block for a few. I’ve got a reserve plane in Allakaket that’s configured for cargo with a full avionics suite including radar that I’d consider trading for your Super Stallion. It’s only got a couple of hundred hours on the engines since it’s a reserve plane. I need to confirm this with BA before we agree, since he’s my business manager.”

“Who’s BA?”

“Sorry, that’s what I call Bill Avery; he used to be the CEO of Alaska Airlines, now he’s my business manager.”

“Ok sounds like a deal, if we can do it, I’d definitely be interested in a trade. Here’s my card.

“Roger, I need a lift back to the hospital - remember, my truck’s parked there.”

“Sorry Ron, I was getting so carried away, I forgot.”

They jumped into his pickup, and they were back at the hospital parking lot in a matter of minutes. Ron said he needed to check on his kid, and would talk to him later. Roger shook his hand, and Ron walked as quickly as he could back to Sarah’s room. Sarah was still asleep in

Nancy's arms, and Anne was sitting down reading a book. As he opened the door, Anne looked up, put her finger to her lips, got quietly up, and walked to the doorway; evidently she wanted to talk outside.

"Ron the doc was by, he said we could take her home tomorrow, but he gave me a long list of precautions and stuff we need. You'll have to get it this afternoon. Here's the list. Nancy and Sarah are sleeping, the nurse said to let them sleep like this, it's the best sleep Sarah's got since she's been here, and they stopped giving her sedatives in her IV to help her sleep."

"OK Mom, I'll get this stuff and I'll be back in a couple of hours. Bye!" Ron gave his mom a hug, and walked back down the corridor. Steve was in his office, so Ron had a brilliant idea. Ron knocked on his door, and Steve waved him in.

"Ron, I talked to Roger, and I think that idea of yours to trade a TurboGoose for the S-80 was a really good idea. We got the helicopter from the state over 10 years ago, and only used it twice. It's taking up hangar space, and costing us a lot of money to keep it maintained. I know it's worth way more than one of your planes, but we're not using it, and you would be doing us a big favor by taking it off our hands."

"Steve, that's great, but not why I'm here. They're releasing Sarah to come home tomorrow, but I have a huge list of medical supplies they want us to buy before we take her home, and I was hoping you could tell us where to get it."

Ron handed Steve the list "Ron, I've got all this right here - and I could give it all to you, it's all stuff a Paramedic would need anyway."

"Can't do that Steve - technically it's for personal use since Sarah's my daughter."

"She's also an Alaskan Native and entitled to free medical care at the clinic, and that includes all the supplies she would have used. Tell you what, I'll just charge you our cost on this list, and add it to your bill. If you were to buy this at a local medical supply company, they'd charge you 5-10 times our cost."

"Thanks Steve. I've got a couple of errands to run, so if you could have someone bag all this up, I'll pay you on my credit card when I get back this afternoon - I need to pick up some more Ionizing air filters."

"Where you buying them?"

Ron told him, and also how much he was charging him. Steve knew the hospital could get them for half that price, and told Ron, except they didn't have any in stock, it was an order item. Ron asked him what the price was for a dozen of them. Steve quoted half the price Ron would have paid if he bought them in town. He flipped open his cell phone, hit recall until the store number

came up, and dialed. He told the manager the bad news, and he asked where Ron was getting them so cheap “My friend is in the hospital Administration, and I’m an Alaska Paramedic, so he’s selling me some medical gear at cost, since it’s for patient use.”

The manager told Ron he couldn’t match that price, it was below his cost. Ron said he knew, and was calling to thank him, and tell him that he wasn’t going to be in so he wouldn’t wait up. The Manager thanked him, and they hung up.

“Steve, those units come in a case of 20 according to the store manager, so if you can order an entire case of them at that price, I’ll pick them up the next time I’m in Anchorage.”

“Hopefully you’ll be able to fly home in the Super Stallion.”

“Steve, I’m not rotary qualified. This deal will have to wait until I’ve got a qualified pilot. Speaking of which, can I use your phone, I just had an idea that might speed things up.”

“By all means, the sooner we get a TurboGoose the better.”

Ron dialed Bear’s number. He started saying “Chief Simmons, this is an unsecured line.” And Ron started laughing. Finally he realized why Ron was laughing and who was on the other end of the phone. “Real Funny Ron, I’ve had a long day. Mary’s pregnant again, and I’m babysitting. What can I do for you?”

“Bear, how would you like to be able to use a Sikorsky S-80 helicopter that’s configured for SAR and can lift 36,000 pounds on it’s cargo hook.”

“Ron, I couldn’t really use one in the survival school, but I do know where we could, and it would be busy 24/7 - the gold mine. We badly need a crane up there to lift and move stuff, and to carry fuel from Anchorage to here.”

“Would it be worth trading a TurboGoose for it?”

“Ron, if it’s in flying condition, it’s worth 10 times a TurboGoose.”

“That’s what I thought. Do you know any pilots that are current in the S-80?”

“What’s the military designator?”

“Steve, what’s the military designator of the S-80?”

“It’s called a Super Stallion in the Navy, and if I remember correctly, it still has the USN paint job with the ID numbers blacked out.”

“Bear, according to Steve, it’s a Super Stallion.”

“Ron that would be the CH-53E Super Stallion, it’s a huge workhorse that can lift over 36,000 pounds with a 480 mile range. It would be perfect for what we would need to compliment the CH-47. I know several Navy pilots that are current in the Super Stallion and about to retire with their 20.”

“Bear, check them out, and if they’re interested, offer them a job working for Allakaket Airlines, specifically for the mine, but we might need cargo flights. Negotiate a salary for him, but make sure it’s less than I’m paying you.”

“Aye, Aye Sir!”

Ron broke the connection, and turned to Steve. “Bear’s a Navy Chief and an Ex-Seal, he said he had someone in mind, and if he takes the offer, we could do the trade within 30 days. I need to have our mechanic look it over, and our pilot. I’ll extend the same courtesy to you.”

“Thanks Ron, I’ll have someone bag up the stuff and you can pick it up on your way down.

## Chapter 19 - Homecoming

The next day, they drove to the hospital, and Sarah was ready to come home. She was wearing an infant sized filter mask, since it was easier to put one on her instead of everyone within 6 feet of her. They bundled her in a warm blanket and a windproof cover, and handed her to Nancy. She decided Ron could fly the plane by himself, she was carrying Sarah home. Anne picked up the bags of stuff that Steve had packed for them, and they loaded everyone in the truck for the ride to the airport. Nancy was very happy to have her baby back and out of the hospital. They had given Anne a mountain of paperwork to read and follow. Ron flew much more sedately home than he had coming to the hospital, and made a very soft landing in Allakaket. BA was there to greet them and welcome them home. Sally had Josh and Jake with them, and Moose was on a leash. BA told Ron they would meet them at Ron's house, since he didn't want Sarah's brothers or Moose to disturb her. Ron thought that was an excellent idea, and he dropped his mom off first, drove home, put Sarah down in her crib, plugged in the Ionic filter, and closed the door. Sarah needed her sleep, and looking at Nancy, she could use a nap too. She looked drained by the experience. BA showed up 15 minutes later with his boys and the moose. Ron could have sworn Jake grew while he was gone, and was amazed how well Jake was walking. Even Josh was trying to imitate his older brother, but it would be almost a year before he was able to walk on his own, but man could he crawl!

They had just settled down when the phone rang. Ron answered it, and found out it was Bear with news about the Super Stallion.

"Ron, I was talking to the pilot for the Super Stallion about what we wanted to do with it, and he told me for precision lifts, he needed most of his crew, including the co-pilot and the crew chief. Luckily they are all ready to retire, and he said that they would basically follow him into Hell. He liked the idea, and said that he could work for \$75K per year, since that's what he could make as a civilian helicopter pilot flying the Civilian S-80. he's fully qualified including SAR and firefighting, as well as his co-pilot, who he said would work for \$75K as well. The Crew chief should get \$50K since he's an Enlisted man according to the pilot. He's got an entire maintenance crew lined up. All in all we'd be hiring 7 people to get the Sikorsky. For all the work they can do year round, it would be worth it. Also the Super Stallion uses JP-5 instead of JP-4, and I'll check on the difference and get back to you."

"Bear, how much will all this personnel cost us per year?"

"Right around \$400K per year."

"How much should we make per year using the chopper?"

"I'd say we could double our production if we used it as a sky crane."

“Ok, you’re bringing in \$1 Million per year, so that would mean \$2 million per year in income?”

“Minus expenses - it’s expensive to keep the Super Stallion flying.”

“Ok, what does that do to our bottom line?”

“We’re clearing about \$500K per year after all expenses just from the mine, I guess it could go between \$800K and \$1 Million, besides we can use the Super Stallion for any hauling job below 36K pounds, and it only costs half the amount of dollars per hour to run compared to the Chinook Ch-47. That alone could count for another \$200-300K.”

“Ok Bear, you make the call, but it sounds like a good deal, If we trade for a TurboGoose, we’ve only got \$200K into the TG, and that Super Stallion is worth how much?”

“If it’s flying and certified, \$10 Million easy!”

“Just based on that alone, I can tell you we should do it!”

“I agree Ron. I’ll call the pilot and give him the good news.”

“Bear, can they get to Anchorage to check out the chopper, and if it passes their inspection, we’ll hire them, and if not, we’ll pay his expenses, plus say \$10K for his trouble, and he can pay his maintenance chief and everyone else he brings with him out of that.”

“Sounds like a deal Ron, his expenses will be negligible since he’ll fly via MAC to Elmendorf, and take a taxi to where ever the chopper is.”

Ron called BA, and asked him about the JP-4 vs. JP-5 problem, and he said the fuel company always replaced JP-4 with JP-5 since they were so close in composition, and the JP-5 was safer and worked better in cold environments. Ron thought “Well, that answers that question!” BA told Ron that JP-4 was the old Air Force Fuel that was replaced by JP-8, and JP-5 was current US Navy fuel, so instead of delivering JP-4, they always delivered JP-5, which was more stable and able to tolerate cold better. Ron thought that was as clear as mud, but didn’t argue or question it. He thanked BA for the info, then called Bear. “Bear, never mind, BA said the fuel company has been delivering JP-5 for years instead of JP-4, so there is no problem.”

Ron called Steve at Alaska Regional Hospital and gave him the good news. Steve told Ron he ordered the ionic filters, and they would be in stock in a week. As soon as Steve hung up, Bear called, and the pilot’s entire crew decided to go with him, including his maintenance chief and 2 mechanics. The total was 7 additional personnel as he had told Ron. They could be in Elmendorf within a week, as soon as their paperwork was processed. Ron thanked Bear and called Steve back. He said that they could have the Super Stallion ready for inspection when



they got there - just make sure they called first so they could tow it out of the hangar. Ron told him that if they could work out the paperwork between now and then, he could fly a TurboGoose out and trade them right then and there if everyone was happy. Steve put Ron on hold for a second and told Roger the good news. Roger said that they'd get all the FAA paperwork together on the chopper, so all they would have to do is sign the bills of sale and they were done. Steve told Ron what Roger told him, and he said he would bring the paperwork including a set of manuals for the TurboGoose. Steve made a note to remind Roger to include all the manuals in the paperwork. He thanked Ron, and said he hoped to hear from him again soon.

A week later Ron got a call from someone named Hammer. Ron guessed he was the pilot of the Super Stallion, they were at Elmendorf, and needed directions to where the Super Stallion was hangared. Ron told them where it was, and he would be airborne in half an hour, and to call him on his Sat phone. Ron gave him the number, and they disconnected. He called Steve real quick, said his team was en-route from Elmendorf, and the pilot's name was Hammer. He would be airborne in half an hour, and to call him on the Sat phone if he had any questions. Ron called BA and gave him the good news, then called Bear and gave him the same message. Bear thought Ron would enjoy the sensation of swinging from a chandelier during an earthquake for 2 hours, but thought it would be worth it to see the look on his boss's face when he landed. They had plenty of JP-5 in stock to refill the tanks of the Super Stallion so they could give Ron a lift home. When he was done, he called Nancy and told her he was flying to Anchorage to swap a TurboGoose for a big helicopter. Nancy didn't understand what the big deal was, and told him, "Ok, see you later tonight!" On the flight over, his Sat phone rang, it was Hammer.

"Ron, the bird checks out, it's sweet and in great shape for a hangar queen. All the maintenance is current, and my crew chief said it's good to fly now."

"Hammer, what was your crew chief's estimate for annual maintenance costs?"

"Assuming we don't have a turbine go bad, maybe \$50-100K per year. If a Turbine goes bad, they cost a quarter-mill a piece."

"How often do you loose one?"

"Maybe once or twice in the lifespan of the airframe."

"How much longer on this chopper?"

"It's hard to say, but you should be good to go for the next 5-10 years since they just did a major rebuild."

"Ok, Hammer I'll be there in about half an hour. Is Steve there - I need to know where they

want me to put this bird down.”

“Steve Here! Ok, just fly to the same landing strip as last time you landed at the hospital, then the ground crewmen will direct you to the hangars and maintenance facility where we are.”

“Ok Steve, see you in about 20 minutes.”

When Ron landed, a ground crewman waving wands directed him to taxi to the right, and he saw the hangars and maintenance yard about a quarter-mile away. He pulled the plane up to a stall and shut down. He started removing his personal gear including his survival kits, and his paramedic bag, and left everything else including the radio and cellular repeaters since they were permanently installed.

Ron showed Steve and Roger everything in the aircraft, including the repeaters. Roger asked Steve if they could take the plane up for a test flight. Ron said they could fly to that lake and back like last time. Steve jumped into the passenger seat, buckled himself in, and said he was good to go. Ron got permission to take off, programmed the nav computer, and set up for take off. He asked Roger if he wanted to do another Max performance take-off, and he admitted that was why Steve was flying since he couldn't believe that any plane could take off faster than their Brasilia. Ron got an evil grin, and as soon as he had clearance, he maxed the throttle, and pulled up radically, and held it until he was at 2000 ft. Once he was over the lake, he pulled a wingover and dove for the water, bottoming out at 500 ft AGL, and cranked the flaps out as quickly as he could. He landed at 50 knots, and threw the props to reverse, and stopped just like he had thrown out an anchor. He taxied to the end of the lake, turned around, and did another max performance take-off. He flew back to the hospital's runway, and did a more sedate landing. They taxied back to the hangars, and Hammer's eyes were as big as saucers.

“Holy Cow Ron, you took off like you were being chased by a Stinger Missile - I didn't know that big plane could climb that fast!”

Roger spoke up “You haven't seen anything - It can land on a postage stamp lake too!”

“So what do you need the Super Stallion for?”

“The TurboGoose can't hover or lift 36,000 pounds.”

“There is that - hovering is a nice trick if you can manage it.”

Ron turned to Roger, “So do we have a deal?”

“You bet, let's go to my office and do the paperwork.”

An hour later, Ron was short 1 TurboGoose and plus one medium to heavy lift chopper. Roger drove him back out to the chopper, and they boarded it for the long flight home. By the time they landed in Allakaket, Ron decided that if he flew again in a chopper, it would be too soon.

He would stick with fixed wing. He talked to BA, and found out the 2 TurboGoose aircraft he had ordered were right on schedule, and would be done in a month.

The next day the Super Stallion got to work, and productivity at the mine almost tripled. Sarah slowly healed, and 2 weeks later Doc Miller removed her sutures. After the sutures were out, she slowly started acting like a normal infant, and started crawling. Nancy held her a lot, but Sarah wanted to explore like her big brothers. Jake and Josh somehow understood that Sarah wasn't 100 %, and played gently with her. Even Moose was gentle with her, which amazed Nancy.

Two days later, Ron got a very cryptic call from Steve to report to MacDill for a T&E session by himself, and to bring his P-14.

Once he was at MacDill, they drove him out to the range, and he saw a very strange looking Bradley. General Shepard was waiting for him. "Ron, this is a top-secret prototype. Sorry about all the secrecy, but the fewer people who know about this the better. Barretts got together with the manufacturer of the Bradley, and the result is this. They call it the Bradley X-1 for the lack of a better name, but the Sergeants have already dubbed it "Robo-Tank" We need you to take the next week or so and make sure it shoots as well as the previous prototype, and if it doesn't we need your help figuring out why not. Ron, this is one of our most important projects in the history of the Army. If this weapon works the way it's advertised, it would revolutionize land warfare. We really appreciate your service, and frankly right now you're doing your country more of a service than if you had been admitted to the Air Force. Pilots - we've got dozens of guys that can fly as good as you, and thanks to Congress, they're all grounded. But your unique skill set makes you the ideal T&E Engineer for these projects. The Pentagon is still scratching their heads over that 28mm group at 1,000 yards. We incorporated your ideas into this prototype, and added a few that the Army thought of like a locking suspension to further limit movement when the gun is shooting. We want you to test all the systems independently and together. We need to find out how well the gun shoots with just the suspension locks vs. the outriggers, since the best we can do is a 1.5 minute deployment. The Pentagon still thinks the outriggers are a great idea for static ambushes, but they also wanted the capability to get moving after quickly shooting a target within ½ mile."

General Shepard shook Ron's hand, and told him to report to him when the testing session was complete before he left. Ron said "Yes General" and he turned and left. Steve walked him over to the prototype and introduced him to the testing team. It was an alphabet soup of men with 5 or 6 letters after their names. Degrees didn't impress Ron; he only cared what these guys knew about the prototype and how it worked. After the walk around, an Army Staff Sergeant introduced himself as Sergeant Smithers. Ron stifled a laugh, and the Sergeant explained the new prototype. The turret was totally taken up with the gun and the hardware to fire it accurately. Basically what they did was armor plate the existing Robo-gun. It had the army's latest and greatest armor, since if the gun malfunctioned, they were out of the fight and as good as dead. This first series of tests was to ensure the gun still worked like it did before, then

they'd take it to the tank testing center and destructively test it.

"You're going to blow up the prototype?" yelled Ron.

"Only way to find out what it can take is to progressively hit it with a bigger and bigger weapons system."

"How do you compensate for cumulative damage?"

"We also have tested the armor by itself, so we know its proof against anything smaller than a 25mm Bushmaster round, so all they test it against is another bushmaster, and then various small missiles. We know a TOW or a Hellfire would kill it, because it kills the Abrams, and it's much more heavily armored. What we're really interested in is if this new gun can kill a tank."

"Sarge, I highly doubt it could kill an Abrams, but it might be able to disable it enough by hitting a vulnerable spot to make it combat ineffective. Even if the crew is unhurt, if the gun won't fire or the tank won't move, that's as good as a kill."

"Exactly Ron! If we can use the precision targeting system to pick a shot to a vulnerable spot, and blow a tread off, damage the engine, or even wreck the gun, that's as good as a kill in our book."

Sgt. Smithers opened the hull hatches and showed Ron the inside of the prototype. The interior was Spartan and packed with equipment. He commented about all the monitors.

"Ron, that's also the Army's latest and greatest. We don't need vision blocks or Night Vision goggles to see outside. The gunner has the big monitor in front, and two smaller ones to his sides. The Driver/Commander has 5 monitors. 4 to give him a 360 view around, and one HUD that gives him a "God's Eye" view of the battlefield mounted above the monitor in front. It shows where everything in the battlefield is, with symbology showing IFF codes for friend and foe. We can receive data from other Bradleys, tanks, and anyone else equipped with the Battlefield Awareness System. The datalink is so heavily encrypted that we're just about positive it can't be hacked. Putting IFF gear on every US military vehicle was the smartest move they ever did. It's smart technology, and doesn't broadcast the IFF codes unless interrogated by a transceiver with the correct codes, so the enemy can't locate our vehicles using IFF, since they don't know the codes. This should eliminate Friendly fire, or blue on blue incidents. Land Warrior is supposed to include this IFF technology, so until they upgrade, dismounted infantry are still going to be theoretically vulnerable to friendly fire. But if someone uses common sense, and sees an IFF equipped Bradley supporting them, they should assume the infantry is friendly. Anyway, back to the prototype. We both wear helmets with intercoms. You have total control of the gun, and I have a 30 caliber machine gun mounted on the hull right in front with a smaller T&E mechanism that isn't as accurate as your gun, but the

little gun is for shooting enemy infantry, so a short burst will take care of that problem. Here's a stack of manuals, tomorrow we start testing."

They climbed out of Robo-tank, and Steve drove him back to the VIP quarters. Ron was full of questions, but Steve told him flat-out he didn't know any more about the program than Ron did. Knowledge was purely on a need-to know basis. Ron probably knew more about the program right now than even General Shepard did. That got Ron's attention, and he was quiet for the rest of the trip. Steve told Ron there was a safe in the room, and he handed him the key. He told Ron that when he was asleep, out of the room for even a second, or even in the john, the documents were to be locked up, and he was to be armed from here on out, that was why he told him to bring his P-14. If anyone besides General Shepard, the Project Director or Steve tried to take the documents away from him, he was authorized to use lethal force to protect the documents. Also, from here on out, he was subject to the National Secrets protocol. He was to be armed 7/24, and the US Government would authorize Bear to buy any equipment necessary for his protection.

"Steve, what have you got me into?"

"Ron, you got yourself into this - I'm sure you saw this coming when you were testing Robo-gun?"

"I didn't think I would be a kidnap target!"

"Actually I highly doubt you're at any risk for kidnap. One of the SEALs got wind of what Bear was up to at the Alaska Survival School, and this is just CYA so the ATF can't bust him for all the Military Hardware he has. General Shepard is good friends with Bear, and didn't want to see him doing 20 at Leavenworth, especially since he's got 2 kids now!"

The next day, Ron finally got into Robo-Tank, and was playing with the switches, and noticed the "Target and Track" mode was no longer there. He told the Sarge the test was suspended until further notice, asked Where the Hell was the test program coordinator - and found out that the Pentagon deleted the Target and Track function. Ron yelled "But that was the main difference between Robo-Gun and the Bushmaster it replaced, without the T&T function, the gun is no better than the original Bushmaster." Ron found out the Army General in charge of the program was responsible for removing the T&T function as a "Cost Saving Measure".

"Cost Saving Measure My Ass - I smell a Rat!"

Meanwhile Steve had driven up, and Ron gave him the Reader's Digest version. Steve knew Program Sabotage when he saw it, and called General Shepard, who told them to get their butts into his office.

15 minutes later, they were explaining the situation to the General. When he heard which Army

General was involved he yelled, "That Corrupt SOB is involved - I knew it! There were rumors floating around the Pentagon when I was there that he was a little too tight with the contractor for the Bushmaster Gun. If he torpedoed this project to save their miserable contract, I'll shoot him personally. We need to do some research, and if it's true, I'll call the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs personally with my evidence. He'll fire the SOB in a heartbeat."

"Excuse me General, if I can have access to the internet, and some military documents, I should be able to prove it."

"Ron, you're a Civilian Contractor, but your clearance is high enough that you should have access to the database." He handed Ron a card with a magnetic strip on it, and his photograph. Ron stared at it for a minute. The lettering said he had a DOD Top-Secret clearance.

"General, when did I get this?"

"You had to have a TOP as soon as you were 18 to work on this project, so I put you in for the ID card in case you ever needed it. This ID says you're a civilian contractor on a project so classified that no one not specifically cleared for this project can even ask you about it. If you take the card outside into the conference room, there's a computer there. The card will open the door and also grant you access to the system. The first time you use it, you need to type a password you can remember. It has to be at least 10 characters long, but no more than 20. Now get going - I need results FAST!"

"Yes Sir General!"

Ron walked next door, inserted the card into the door, and it clicked, so he turned the knob. He was all alone in a conference room with a desk and a computer. He turned the computer on, inserted his ID card, and the welcome screen came on asking for his password. He typed it in, and the computer asked to verify it, so he typed it again. The next message said his ID was confirmed and he had access to anything with a Top-Secret clearance or less. He typed the general's name into the search function, and soon he had his entire file. It seemed this general had a much nicer house and car than he should have based on his salary, then he checked his duty stations, and then he looked up the projects he had managed over the last couple of years, and it turned out the same people kept coming up. Ron wrote up his suspicions, printed the relevant pages, and logged off the computer, then carried the folder back to the General. When he read the documents - he could follow the dotted lines as easily as anyone could. His response made Ron think that General Shepard might have been a Navy Chief instead of an Air Force General. He called up the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and gave him the lowdown. To say that the 4-star General was angry was like saying Ron was a pretty decent shot. He could tell by the way General Shepard was holding the phone away from his ear that the general was really PO'd. When he finally calmed down, General Shepard told him he would fax the evidence to his personal secure fax machine. 2 minutes later the Chairman was back on the phone. "Gene, I'll take care of this personally! By tomorrow, you'll have a change order

telling the contractor to re-install the Targeting and Tracking software, and that SOB will be looking for a new job!”

“Yes Sir General Sir!”

“Gene this project had better work, or that SOB might have a valid complaint - make sure you go over the system with a fine-tooth comb, and make sure they didn’t mess with anything else!”

“Understood General - I’ll make sure it happens.”

“Ron, go over that system with a fine-tooth comb, and find out if they changed anything else. This SOB might have done more damage than we think - the first thing to check is all the change orders. Anything remotely funky needs to be thoroughly investigated. If he did anything else, I’ll recommend to the Chairman that he be brought up on charges!”

“Yes Sir. I planned on suspending the rest of the testing session until we’re sure that everything was back to the way it was.”

“Thanks Ron, the country owes you a huge debt for your honesty. This weapons system will save soldier’s lives, and if that SOB torpedoed the project just to earn an extra million in kickbacks, he deserves to spend the rest of his life at Leavenworth! Good thing we caught it now, and can fix it. Just make sure he didn’t tamper with anything else.”

“Yes Sir. If I find anything major, I’ll make sure you know about it!”

“Thanks Ron, now back to work!”

Steve saluted and Ron shook the General’s hand, and they went back to the testing area. Ron sat everyone down, and told them they needed to pull all the change orders, and if anyone found one that would degrade the performance of the system, he needed to let Ron know. Ron saw a hummer drive up with an MP/Courier inside. “Ron Williams?”

“Right here!”

“Sign please!”

Ron showed the courier his ID card, and he handed Ron the package, a manila envelope with his name on it from General Shepard. When he opened it, it contained a change order from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs ordering the Targeting and Tracking software reloaded immediately, and a footnote to disregard any change orders without his signature on them. Ron showed the copy of the order to the software engineer, who had anticipated the General’s order since he didn’t agree with the “Cost Saving” BS to begin with, and quickly downloaded the T&T software into the system. After spending hours reading change orders, they couldn’t find

any more that would degrade the system. They found that by searching for the name of the general on the orders, they could eliminate 2/3 of them immediately, and the other 3rd weren't important. Ron kept all the change orders signed by the SOB separate just in case, including the one ordering the deletion of the T&T software. His signature on the change order would be enough to courts martial him if he tried anything else.

Once he was satisfied that the Robo-tank was back up to speed, Ron and Sgt Smithers climbed aboard, fired up the motor, and Ron ran the self-test. It ran perfectly, and the gun worked as advertised. With that ready, he decided to start the first sequence of the test, and pressed a button activating the range. They would check acquisition and accuracy with just the suspension locked then try it again with the outriggers down and locked. Since the tanks would pop up randomly, move, and drop back down, Ron was using the Target and Track mode where the gun made the decision when to fire, and all Ron had to do was place the crosshairs on the target using the joystick and press the trigger to designate the tank as a target. The gun then tracked the targets, and fired in sequence while Ron sought out new targets. The gun was never more than 3 targets behind Ron, and only missed 1 tank which was over ½ mile away. Ron suspected that ½ mile was the maximum range he could engage targets successfully without the outriggers. He stopped the test, and asked that a single target be placed ½ mile away, and the gun reloaded. He wanted to confirm his suspicions, and as soon as the target was up and the range clear, he placed the crosshairs on the X-ring and squeezed the trigger. Without re-aiming between shots he fired 5 more rounds, then turned the gun off, and asked that the target be pulled and measured. A half mile was only 880 yards, so any difference from a 1-hole group would be due to instability of the platform. When the runner came back with the target, it had 2 bullet holes in it, and they were over a foot apart. Ron showed everyone the target, and explained his theory, and they agreed. To prove his theory, he had another target ran out to 880 yards while he set the outriggers. When the range was clear, he performed the exact same test, and this time, all 5 rounds were in the center of the paper, and his widest spread was 1 foot, and that was mostly a flyer. The rest of the group was within 6 inches of each other. He showed that target to the group, and they drew the same conclusions he did.



## Chapter 20 - Robo-Tank

When he had finished the “short range testing” Ron switched target programs so that they got targets out past a mile. This is where it would get interesting, since Ron needed the zoom on the camera to ID targets out past 880 yards. Once the scenario started, he used the wheel to zoom in and out as fast as he could. He’d find targets at the 25-50X magnification setting, then zoom in to 80-100X to target a vulnerable spot on the tank, then back out to engage the next target. The gun barely lagged behind Ron in this mode, because it took longer for him to engage each new target. Still, when they tallied the score he was 30-30 with 10 kills and 20 major disables, and this against foreign Main Battle Tanks. Once they were finished with that scenario, Ron added another test - he wanted to see how far away he could engage and kill a tank, and also he wanted to set a target at 1 mile, 1.5 miles and 2 miles to check the accuracy of the system at extreme range. He left the outriggers out, and switched to sniper mode for the long-range shooting capability of the system in this mode. He fired 5 rounds at each target without re-aiming between each shot, and when he pulled the targets, he noticed something. His first shot went through the X-ring, and the rest of them were within a 6-inch circle at a mile, a 9-inch circle at 1.5 miles, and a 12-inch circle at 2 miles. None of the other testers could detect any pattern to the groups, but Ron knew there was a harmonic at work since he knew the order of the rounds he fired, and requested another set of targets at 1-mile range in a hemisphere from 9 o’clock to 3 o’clock every 45 degrees. Once the targets were set up and the range cleared, he engaged each target one at a time with 5 rounds each. He shut the gun down, and had the runner pull the targets, and mark them 1-4 with the #1 target at his 9 o’clock. When they examined this group of targets, it was obvious that the angle of the turret to the hull changed the shape of the group. It was up to the Army to decide if the variance was acceptable.

Ron wondered if the hull/turret interface was strong enough, and asked if there was anyone there that knew how the turret and the hull were mated. A Mechanical Engineer spoke up, and attempted to explain in polysyllabic words how the two systems interfaced. Ron asked him “Was that English you were speaking?” They all got a good laugh, and the Engineer explained that the weight of the turret held the turret into the hull, and it mated on a huge ring gear. Ron asked him if anyone checked to see if the turret was dynamically and statically balanced. “We’ve never done that before - it was never needed!” Ron explained to the engineer using words of the fewest syllables possible that it was needed now - since the gun was engaging targets up to 2 miles away, and the ballistic computer could only compensate for so much. The engineers were nodding their heads and taking notes like crazy. If they could harmonically and statically balance the turret, they might be able to increase the range of the weapons system past the 2-miles specified as the maximum design range. Ron explained that in the previous tests the gun was fixed to a huge block of concrete, not installed in a turret, and in the sniper mode the gun shot a 1-hole 28mm group at 1,000 yards. Several of the engineers dropped their clipboards when they heard that! One grabbed his slide rule calculator and extrapolated that accuracy out to 2 miles. Theoretically the gun could shoot a 3” group at 2 miles! The groups they were getting were 4 times that value, and they knew it was due to the gun being mounted

in a turret on a tank. They started trying to figure out ways to reduce that number without spending a lot of money. They knew when they got the prototype back to the shop, they had to lift that gun and turret out of the hull and at least statically balance it. Ron told them the outriggers were doing their job, and even a half-mile range with the ability to shoot and move seconds later was pretty good. Over the next week, Ron confirmed that the rest of the system worked perfectly, and if they could solve the balance issue the gun would have a static range of over 2 miles in static Sniper Mode, and over half a mile in shoot and scoot, and about a mile with the outriggers down. The rate of accurate aimed fire impressed the heck out of the engineers. They wrote glowing reports, and General Shepard got a copy of each.

Before he left, Ron walked into the General's office. General Shepard stood and shook Ron's hand. Then he handed him a certificate. It was an official commendation from the Joint Chiefs for a job well done. General Shepard handed him a check for \$100,000.00 from the prime contractor for the T&E session. The note attached to the check indicated that they hoped his recommendations would increase the range of the gun to almost 3 miles. Ron was glad for the money, but what General Shepard told him next floored him.

"Ron, I've been friends with Bear since he saved my butt in Vietnam when I got shot down in Indian Country, and he led the team that got me out. I heard what he was up to with his weapons procurement, and this letter makes it all legal. Give him my regards, and have him e-mail me a list of everything he needs, and if it's available, I'll get it to him. If it's surplus or obsolete, I can sell it to him for scrap prices, or if it's still current, he'll have to pay replacement costs. This letter authorizes Bear to protect you, your operation, and anyone involved by any means necessary, including lethal force using military weaponry. Son, you've just been declared a Strategic Military Asset. You're not in the military, but we feel your abilities are vital to the defense of the United States. Here's a Federal CCW for you, and one for your wife. You can now carry concealed anywhere in the USA including commercial aircraft even when you aren't the pilot in command. Bear and Hunter already have a Federal CCW. Please don't abuse the privilege. Ron, the United States Military owes you a huge debt of gratitude. If we can get Robo-tank into production quickly, anyone that messes with the US Army or Marines will be in a world of hurt."

"General, you said Marines - I can assume you're thinking of installing this gun in the LAV instead of their Bushmaster?"

"Exactly - this gun is 10 times better than the original Bushmaster, and it also simplifies the crew compartment, since the gunner is autonomous, and the commander could either be the gunner or the driver. It frees up a whole bunch of space too!"

Ron couldn't wait to tell Bear - he owed him for that chopper ride! Ron was driven directly from the General's office to the VIP quarters to pack, and then to the VIP terminal. He got to use his Federal CCW when the Air Police stopped him when he pinged the metal detector. He showed the AP officer his brand-new Federal CCW, and the officer waved him through. Ron

could get used to this - he hated flying commercial since they practically strip searched you. He boarded the aircraft and they were wheels-up 5 minutes later. Ron was glad the General kept the manuals for Robo-Tank, he didn't want to be responsible for them. Later that afternoon, they landed at Elmendorf, and he walked off the plane, and onto the TurboGoose. Once he got clearance he took off and flew home. Nancy hugged the stuffing out of him when he got home, and he was glad he slept on the plane because judging by the kiss she gave him, he wasn't going to get too much sleep tonight!

The next day, he showed up unannounced at Alaska Survival Inc. Bear was busy feeding his kids, so Ron waited, then he handed Bear the letter General Shepard gave him. He said "General Shepard gives his regards." Bear's eyes bugged out when the enormity of the letter settled. "Bear, General Shepard knew what you were up to, and decided to make it legal so you won't spend the next 20 years at Leavenworth, especially now that you have 2 kids."

"Ron this letter goes way beyond that - I'm authorized to use lethal force to defend you, the company and anyone associated with it against any threat, and to even use military weaponry. I guess he didn't mean nukes?"

"Probably not, but I know you could come up with some very creative defenses. The General said for you to e-mail him a list of anything you can use, and if it's surplus or obsolete, he would charge you scrap prices for it, and if it's current inventory, he'd charge you replacement cost." Ron could tell the wheels were spinning in Bear's mind. He stood up to go, and Bear gave him a Bear hug, and he walked back to the TurboGoose and flew home.

Bear and Hunter sat down and made a list of stuff they'd want to have, they didn't hope to get more than half of it:

- M -134 7.62mm Gatling Gun (12)
- 7.62mm linked ammo for M -134 (12M)
- M163 Vulcan VADS (4)
- 20mm ammo for M163 (4M)
- FIM-92A Stinger (48)
- M -72 LAW (200)
- M -18 Claymore (100)
- M -14 APM (100)
- M -16 APM (100)
- M -4/M -203 w/ SOPMOD kit (100)
- M -406 HE 40mm Grenade (1200)
- M -433 HEDP 40mm Grenade (1200)
- M583A140mm WS Para Illum (240)
- M -662 Red Star Cluster (240)
- M -680 White Smoke Canopy (120)
- M -918 Target Practice (1200)

M -1029 40mm Crowd Control (1200)  
AN/PVS-4 Night Vision Sight (10)  
M224 60mm Lightweight Mortar (3)  
M720 60mm HE Mortar Cartridge (300)  
M722 60mm Smoke Cartridge (90)  
M -61 Frag Grenade (120)  
M -67 Frag “Baseball” Grenade (120)  
M -84 Stun Grenade “Flash Bang” (120)  
M -69 Practice Grenade (120)  
TLAM-N (3)

Hunter was chuckling as he read the list “Bear - you really think you can get all that?”

“Hope so! Otherwise there’s no point in the list.”

“How about that last item - A Nuclear Cruise Missile?”

“It’s an Inside Joke between me and the General - I just included it to make sure he was paying attention!”

“Ok, great - let’s send it, I can’t wait to read the General’s reaction!”

They e-mailed the list to General Shepard’s private e-mail address. He read the list, got to the last item, and almost fell out of his chair laughing.

He replied:

Approved, all except the last Item - It’s not time to “Shoot the Bastards” yet!

Love and Kisses,  
General Shepard

Hunter didn’t get the reference to the General’s reply so he asked Bear

“Bear WTF - It’s Not time to shoot the Bastards yet?”

“Look it up Pea-brain - It’s a quote by Claire Wolfe - “America’s at that Awkward Stage, Too late to change from within, and too soon to Shoot the Bastards!” It’s one of my favorite quotes, especially since I keep asking the General if it’s time yet - The Nuclear Cruise Missile would have been my preferred weapon for that mission.”

“Sierra Hotel Bear - let me know when it’s time!”

General Shepard assigned the list to an aide, who located the merchandise at various armories, and then tried to find them as close to Alaska as possible. He was stunned when he located everything at Elmendorf - he never heard of the M -163 VADS. He looked it up, and realized it would work great for shooting down helicopters. Since there was nowhere a fixed wing that wasn't an amphibian could land, their primary weapon they needed to defend against was heliborne or air-assault troops; and unless they were coming in HALO, the M -163 would make mincemeat of them. He did some research on his own, and located 2 obsolete but very effective Military Search Radars with a 100 mile range. He added them to the list after getting the General's approval. He handed the list back to the General for his approval, and he forwarded a requisition to Elmendorf under his signature, and coded it to a SF Special Project, and authorized Chief Simmons and Ron Williams to pick it up and deliver it. The CO knew about Ron Williams, and had heard stories about Bear and the General, so he approved the Requisition. The Supply Sergeant was rolling in the isles, and told his personnel to remove the entire list from inventory, and notify him when it was all ready to ship. 2 days later, they had everything inventoried, and put on pallets. He called his CO, who called General Shepard, who e-mailed a copy of the requisition to Bear and told him the entire order was at Elmendorf, and it was No Charge - he had charged it to a Special Forces Project, so make sure to bring his military ID. Bear called Ron, and Ron asked him how the heck they were going to get all that loot home. Bear suggested taking the CH-47, the S-80, and a TurboGoose. Since it was still their slow season, Ron made the arrangements for them to fly to Elmendorf tomorrow. Bear replied to General Shepard telling him they would pick it up tomorrow.

The next morning the Choppers took off first because they were 50 knots slower than the TurboGoose. Ron took off half an hour after them, and they arrived within minutes of each other at Elmendorf. Once they landed, Bear climbed out of the TurboGoose - he preferred fixed wing too, especially at his age, wearing his BDU's. He presented his Military ID to the Supply Sergeant, who approved the shipment with a wink and a nod - he knew where he was going to retire! Ron looked at the mountain of gear, and was glad the supply people had fork lifts. The ammo and the lighter stuff went in the TurboGoose. Ron was glad he had his life insurance paid up when he got a look at what was stenciled on some of those boxes. They decided it would be quicker to sling-load the 4 Vulcan M163 VADS and make 2 trips. Ron flew very carefully to Bear's survival school - he didn't want to store any of this stuff in Allakaket unless he had to. 2 trips later everything was at Bear's survival school, and the Chopper pilots felt they were back in the military, especially when they saw the GE Mini Guns, and realized the Super Stallion could be quickly retrofitted as a gunship. The SA-80 pilot wondered if Bear was planning on installing a chin turret for the GE Minigun! Bear spent the next couple of weeks getting the gear ready to Repel Boarders. 2 of the M163's were flown to unused hangars at Allakaket, one of the military radars was flown there as well, set up, and installed. Bear sent an e-mail to Don at the FAA office indicating the radar was for defensive purposes, and mentioned General Shepard, and nothing more was ever heard about it. Bear installed another unit at his location, and figured that between the 2 of them, they would have 3-4 hours warning of an air attack. By comparing the FAA radar and the military radar, they could identify Friend of Foe because anyone up to no good would turn off their transponder, making them invisible to the

FAA radar at Allakaket, but they would be visible on the military radar. Bear was really happy when he found out the M163s were the newest variant with the millimeter-wave targeting radar and an optical backup. It would give the system the same accuracy as the CWIS and it was mobile. The big Military search radars could give the general bearing, and once the targeting radar locked it was “Hasta La Vista Baby!” Bear decided that these Civilians needed some training, so every week, he took volunteers up to the Survival School, swore them to secrecy, ran them through a familiarization course, then trained them on either the Springfield M-1a National Match on the 600-yard line or else the M -16/M -203 combo on the 300-yard line. Everyone in the Militia realized that all kinds of trouble would result if word got out that they had Military weapons, so they kept their mouths shut.

General Wilcox wasn't the brightest of crooks, and he wanted revenge on Ron Williams in the worst way when he found out that he was the whistle-blower that got him fired. He hired a team of mercenaries to kidnap and kill Ron. He demanded to fly in the chopper to make sure the job was done right. They got to a RCAF base and stole a Huey and flew to Allakaket. The Allakaket Radar operator noticed a return that wasn't on his FAA scope coming in from Canada, and called Don to see if any helicopters had filed a flight plan from Canada to the Alaskan interior. He said they didn't, he called Bear, and Bear called Elmendorf. They didn't have anything on the chopper either, and by the time they scrambled a pair of F-16's the chopper would be over Allakaket. That sealed it as far as Bear was concerned. He got on the phone, alerted the Allakaket Militia that they would be under air attack in 15 minutes. They drove over to the hangar where the M -163 VADS was parked, and he checked it over, started the motor, and left the doors open. They turned on an FRS radio that they could talk to the tower with, and the tower gave them range and bearing. When it was 5 minutes out, the operator called the helicopter. “Unidentified Aircraft, please ID and turn on your transponder, you're entering a congested area.” He repeated the message on GUARD, then radioed the team on the FRS “Negative contact - still on original course and heading.”

General Wilcox knew that they probably didn't have any defensive weapons worth a darn, and probably got a skin-paint off their FAA radar. By the time they got some help, Ron would be dead and they would be out of there.

Bear hadn't been sitting on his hands either. He called Ron, and told him to get in the shelter ASAP. Ron bundled Nancy and the kids into the basement shelter, and Moose made it in right before he closed and dogged the bolts. It would take a bunch of C-4 to get to him now. Ron turned on the emergency lights, and switched on the emergency radio to listen for the “All Clear” Code.

An observer on the ground picked up the black chopper with his Night Vision telescopic sight and saw that the occupants were heavily armed. He spoke into his FRS radio, “Vulcan, Target is HOSTILE and heavily armed - engage when ready.”

That was all the encouragement the driver needed, and accelerated out of the hangar. The

Chopper was still 50 feet in the air when the M -163 VADS Targeting radar locked on it, and the gunner pressed the trigger. A 2-second burst of 20mm HE, AP and tracer rounds destroyed the chopper in mid-air. 5 seconds later the radar operator said, "Sky is clear - no other targets."

Bear swore because the cat was now out of the bag. He called General Shepard, who got things rolling. The military told the FAA to stay out, since this wasn't an accident, and it was probably a terrorist attack, so they backed off. Subsequent investigation located ID numbers on the Huey and traced it back to a nearby RCAF base in Canada. The RCAF quietly checked, and they were missing a chopper. The military forensic experts found some interesting debris, including the remains of several H&K MP-5SDs, several M -16/M -203 receivers, and a couple of .30 caliber "Assault Rifles". They found a cluster of gold stars in the wreckage, so they tested all the DNA in the crash site near the stars, and got an exact match on one ex-general Wilcox. The Joint Chiefs were notified, and the Chairman talked to General Shepard, and they came to the obvious conclusion that Ex-General Wilcox was on some sort of vendetta, and had probably been attempting to kidnap or kill Ron Williams when the M -163 gun shot him out of the sky. The Joint Chiefs invoked a National Security cover over the entire event. Bear got a major Bravo Zulu from General Shepard, and an offer to get them anything else they needed. Ron was only told that someone was attempting to attack Allakaket in a chopper, and the Vulcan blew them out of the sky.

## Chapter 21 - Reload and Rearm

The attack on Allakaket got Bear's attention, and he sent an e-mail to General Shepard asking for help in setting up a serious defensive system for Allakaket. The problem was it couldn't be overt like they were defending a base so the civilians wouldn't freak out.

General Shepard forwarded the e-mail to all the commands at MacDill asking for suggestions/advice for a totally covert defensive system that could stop another attack cold.

Every command made suggestions, but Bear vetoed most of them for being either too high-profile or too dangerous to the civilians. Active minefields could kill an unwary hunter, and all the area needed was an accidental death of a visiting hunter to shut their operation down,

One idea he loved was the RPV surveillance system, except it would be a major pain to implement with so many aircraft flying around. He did some checking and found the Predator III did its best work above 5,000 feet AGL, and most of the air traffic around Allakaket was below 2,000 feet, so the only problems would be landing and take-off clearances. He'd need to hire a crew to service and fly the drones, and the drones only worked to spot ground targets. What he really needed was something that could detect and intercept air targets including high-speed jets.

He e-mailed General Shepard his idea, and got a very cryptic message back. The gist of it was they needed to talk face-to-face. Bear replied they could meet at Elmendorf. General Shepard remembered that Ron had a top-secret clearance, and contacted someone about adding Chief "Bear" Simmons and Ron Williams to a code-word list for a black project as consultants for a field-trial. He received a one-word reply "Approved". General Shepard checked and his VC-20 was fueled and ready to fly. He e-mailed Bear that he was flying to Elmendorf and wanted him and Ron Williams to meet him. They were to follow the Follow-Me truck to an undisclosed location on base. He'd be waiting for them.

Bear read the E-mail, called Ron and told him he needed to pick him up at the Survival School in an hour, and he should pack an overnight bag just in case. Ron called the maintenance hangar, asked them to prep his plane for flight. He needed to be wheels-up in 20 minutes. Ron grabbed an overnight bag, kissed Nancy, hugged the kids, petted Moose and was out the door and at the airfield in 15 minutes. The turbines were idling when he got there, so he climbed into the cockpit, programmed the navigation computer for the Survival School, called the tower, and received immediate clearance while taxiing out to the lake. As soon as he was at the end of the lake, he pushed the throttles to take-off, and flew an optimum cruise speed profile to the school. An hour later he was on the ground, and Bear was wearing his BDU's and carrying a black duffel. Ron told him to come forward to the cockpit and ride right seat so they could talk - he wanted to know WTF was so important. Once Bear was seated and had his headset on, Bear explained that General Shepard wanted to meet the two of them in Elmendorf in about 2 hours.



Ron reprogrammed the nav computer for Elmendorf and took off. 2 hours later they were on the ground at Elmendorf, and Bear told him to follow the Follow-Me truck when a Hummer with flashing yellow “Follow-me” lights pulled in front of their nose. It lead them to a part of the base that Ron had never been to before. When they deplaned, they saw a building in front of them surrounded by Air Force police with M-16’s in a 100-foot perimeter. General Shepard got out of the Hummer with the “follow-me” lights, and motioned for Bear and Ron to follow him. They all had to present ID’s, good thing Ron kept his TS ID card in his wallet. Once they were inside, General Shepard locked the door, and told them to take seats.

“Ron, Bear, sorry about all the cloak and dagger stuff, but the answer to Bear’s request involved a black project. Ron, that helicopter that the Vulcan shot down was flying Ex-General Wilcox and a team of mercs who were after your hide. This has now gone from an exercise to a real security issue. Bear has taken care of everything necessary to protect you, except the anti-air defense issue is tough to do covertly. What I’m about to tell you can’t leave this room, but the Military is working on a next-generation autonomous air interceptor, and I feel this would be an ideal field test. You’re in an isolated and relatively secure area, you have radar backup from Elmendorf, and I’m going to upgrade your radar to a more modern radar set that can detect slow-moving low-flying aircraft that would normally be lost in the ground clutter.”

General Shepard handed each of them a thin file with a code-word designator. Bear gulped, it had been years since he had seen Code Word stuff. He opened the folder, and was amazed at what the military had been up to. This was literally Buck Rodgers stuff. They had miniaturized a flying wing down to the size of an ROV, yet according to the paperwork, it was totally autonomous and extremely stealthy. Reading down further, he commented “Sierra Hotel General - I was hoping they would do something like this!”

Ron read further down - his reaction was “Holy Cow - it’s a flying missile!”

What the Air Force had come up with was a stealthy flying wing interceptor. Instead of pilots flying CAP over a base or other fixed asset, the Terminator, as they were calling it, could loiter for 18 hours at high altitude on a high-endurance turbofan above 20,000 feet, and up to a classified altitude until a separate ground-based or air-based search radar detected an incoming Bogie, at which point the Terminator could be activated by radio command to target the Bandit once it was identified as a hostile. It carried a single SRB in the tail that could accelerate the Terminator from it’s loiter speed to right around Mach 2 in seconds. It was designed to attack from above, dive into the threat and kamikaze itself into the threat, detonating a shaped charge and a payload of steel ball bearings into the target at close range for a guaranteed kill. Since the Terminator only had a short-range radar and an all-aspect IR seeker, the Bandit had no indication that it was under attack until it was too late, since it was basically invisible. It was coated with RAM to prevent radar reflections, and the skin had an adaptive coating that would change colors to match it’s surroundings. Each copy cost about 10 times the cost of the latest air-to-air missile, but the Pentagon number-crunchers thought it was the cat’s pajamas, since it cost millions of dollars to train each fighter pilot, and another couple of hundred million per

plane, plus the cost of the missiles. The prime contractor was working on a long-range attack version of the Terminator that could be controlled by an E-3 Sentry, but this system would be perfect for defending Allakaket. It could orbit out of the way above 20,000 feet, and take out any airborne Bandit before it became a threat.

“What if it attacks the wrong target, or goes goofy and heads toward Allakaket.”

“Ron, read page 3, it had a built-in self-destruct set to detonate at 500 feet AGL in case it goes goofy, and the operator has a manual override to self-destruct any Terminator that deviates from it’s assigned loiter altitude without a command. It’s got another backup to keep the bad guys from killing us with our own missiles. The datalink is heavily encrypted, and the codes are set every time it takes off. If it gets an attack order that doesn’t have the right code sequence, it allows 3 attempts then self-destructs.”

Bear said “Excuse me General, but you can’t base these Terminators out of Allakaket!”

“I never intended to Bear. I was going to base them near your Survival School. I was going to lease a couple of acres from you, build hangars, and a short runway to land the Terminator, since it uses the same rocket-boosted take-off system as the Predator, and housing for the operators and mechanics. Since you already have code-word clearance on several projects, I planned on making you a project manager for this long-term field trial. All the personnel will be Air Force with code-word clearance for this project. I’m also assigning 2 Avenger systems to the area: 1 to protect the testing site, and the other to protect Allakaket itself. It’s a perfect compliment to Terminator, since it can engage the low and slow targets, and can take slew to cue data directly from the radar system. You can keep all the Stingers in case TSHTF, and the Chinese invade, you might need to engage more targets than the Avenger crew can handle.”

“General, I thought that’s what the M -163 VADS was for?”

“Keep the Vulcan - it also works great on ground targets. By the way, I’m adding a whole truckload of ammo for the Vulcan to that order. I wish we had a C-130 that was an Amphibian to deliver all this stuff, it would sure make things much easier.”

“General, if you could detail a couple of CH-47’s to deliver them; they could deliver the stuff in 1 trip.”

“Good idea Ron - since it’s an official Military Project now, I can do that - can you give me a lift back and forth to Allakaket, I want to talk to your pilots.”

“Sure General - when did you want to leave?”

“How about now - we can finish this briefing in the air.”

“General - I don’t have a jump seat for the cockpit.”

“That’s OK, I’ll sit in one of the passenger seats for landing and take-off, and we can talk in the air if you leave the cabin door open, heck, I’ll sit on the floor if I have to.”

“General, if we’re going to talk in the air, we’ll need another headset for you.”

General Shepard decided he needed to remedy that situation, called the Maintenance Chief and told him he needed a headset multiplexer and a removable jump seat installed in an aircraft ASAP! 5 minutes later the maintenance chief and an mechanic showed up in another Hummer. The general pointed out the aircraft, and 30 minutes later, the multiplexer and the removable jump seat were installed. The Maintenance Chief saluted the General, who returned the salute and thanked the Maintenance chief for a job well done, and they climbed aboard the TurboGoose for the flight home. Ron got on his Sat phone, and called BA, and told him they needed to have an “All Pilots” meeting in Allakaket in 2 hours. Ron was thankful they were in their down phase, so only 2 pilots where not going to be able to attend since they were in the air from Fairbanks to Nome with paying passengers. When they landed 2 hours later, the pilots had to fight their urge to salute since most of them were ex-Air Force Pilots. General Shepard did shake hands, and finally the group sat down.

“Gentlemen, what I’m about to tell you may not leave this room. You are to ignore any small flying objects that are safely above your flight level. The Air Force is going to conduct field testing for a new ROV. That is all you need to know for now, except for the promise that if anyone talks about this they will spend the rest of their lives breaking big rocks into little rocks at Leavenworth. Is that understood?”

The assembled pilots said “Yes Sir, General!”

“That is all, Dismissed.”

After shaking hands, General Shepard told Ron he needed to get back to Elmendorf so he could get back to MacDill. Not one to keep a General waiting, they hurried out to the TurboGoose, which had been refueled and prepped for take-off. Evidently his Chief Mechanic was ex-military as well, and knew enough to have the TG prepped and ready to go. They were airborne 5 minutes later, and they landed at Elmendorf 2 hours later. Ron shook the General’s hand, but Bear wound up giving the General a bear hug. “Still living up to your Team name I see Bear?”

“Yes Sir, General Sir. Have a good flight!”

General Shepard marched from the TG to the VC-20 parked next to it. Ron let the General’s plane taxi away first, then they unbolted the jump seat and stowed it - it made the cockpit even more crowded than it was before. Ron flew Bear back home, then landed at Allakaket.

When General Shepard got back to MacDill, he issued orders transferring 2 Avenger batteries to Allakaket, and requisitioned the materials that he had told Bear about. He modified his orders to include the request that one of the batteries should have personnel capable of acting as aircraft mechanics as a cover. He contacted his contact in the Terminator program, and suggested they set up a field test program at Alaskan Survival Inc. and that Chief Simmons USN (ret.) would act as the Project Supervisor in the field.

General Shepard's contact ran Chief Simmons through his database, and when it came back that Chief Simmons was actually Master Chief Simmons, and a retired SEAL with enough medals in his file to sink a battleship, he felt better. He told his US Military test team that they were TAD to Elmendorf for a long-term field test program at Alaskan Survival Inc. They quickly packed up their test gear, and all the operational gear for the 6 prototypes, loaded it aboard a C-141 and flew to Elmendorf. Bear received an E-mail that the Terminator was TAD to Elmendorf with an ETA of tomorrow morning. He thought it was really nice to have low friends in high places. Only a 3-star general could get people moving that quickly. The fact that he was the JSOC helped too. 2 weeks later the Avenger batteries were relocated from somewhere in the Midwest in storage, and someone had located 6 soldiers who were qualified on the Avenger, and were also aircraft mechanics. They quickly found themselves "volunteered" for an assignment in Alaska. They met up with their Avenger batteries at Elmendorf, and they had one last surprise. They weren't to be stationed at Elmendorf, it was just the closest military base. They rode the same CH-47s that were transporting their Avengers as sling loads to Allakaket and Alaskan Survival. The ones at Allakaket were co-located with the Vulcan gun, and didn't have much to do. The ones who landed at Alaskan Survival soon found themselves pressed into work clearing the site for the Terminators. Since they needed to heat their quarters, not only did they cut the trees down, they had to saw them to length and split the wood. Chief Simmons showed up, and amazed them with his strength by splitting logs with one swing of his sledge. When they finished, Chief Simmons got the entire team together for a briefing. The Avenger crews were told that they were there in support of a code-word test program, and one word of what they saw to anyone outside of that room would result in a lifetime breaking rocks.

The Avenger crews were briefed by the Vulcan crew in Allakaket, and realized that this was a No-Shit defensive detail, and took their duties very seriously. The Avenger had to be 100% mission capable as much as possible. The onus would be on the maintenance personnel, but they would expect help from the operating crews as well. They rotated through the aircraft maintenance shops frequently enough to be believable. They were glad for the rotation, because several of them learned a lot while they were there about aircraft maintenance, enough that they would later add "aircraft mechanic" to their list of qualifications.

General Shepard felt like he had closed the barn door after the horses got out, but he knew that it would take a small army to take Allakaket now. The CO at Elmendorf learned about the new powerful air search radars at Allakaket and Alaskan Survival. Instead of complaining, he decided to take advantage of the situation, and established data links between the three sites to share data. Connecting the 3 sites tripled the square area under surveillance and increased the

warning time for attacks in that area. Elmendorf had links to the Cobra Dane radar sites as well, so between all those sites, it would take a miracle for an attacker to get anywhere near Allakaket and attack by air again.

Ron went home that day and saw that Sarah was up and crawling around with her brothers. Nancy was very happy since Sarah was again a normal healthy little girl. Sarah was starting to gain weight like she was supposed to, and had grown almost 3 inches in 6 months. In another couple of months, Sarah would celebrate her second birthday, Jake was 4 going on 5, and Josh was 3 going on 4. Jake ran his mom ragged, but Moose still was a capable play buddy and baby sitter. Since the scare with the helicopter Ron, Nancy, BA and Sally all wore their ParaOrd P-14's full-time. They weren't really comfortable being armed all the time, but got used to it. Nancy and Sally especially got serious about their guns and shooting skills, since they were all that stood between danger and their kids. Ron had given the 3 of them the Reader's Digest version of what General Shepard told him. The only person he told most of the story to was BA, who said they really needed to build an indoor shooting range. Since the two of them were rolling in money, they were able to buy another steel building and install a 100-yard range with 10 lanes and automatic target retrievers. It could be configured for day or night shooting by switching from white to dim red lights. Practice ammo was provided for free to anyone who wanted to use it, and some guns were even available for rent. Ron wrote all the expenses off as employee benefits for Allakaket Airlines, since almost everyone in Allakaket was now an employee of the company in some capacity or another.

Both Nancy and Sally soon became expert shots with their .45's and their AR-15's. Ron remembered something about a mother bear and her cubs, and that accurately described Nancy and Sally's mentality. Even Anne got into the shooting practice again, since she could see again like she used to. Nancy and Anne were neck and neck for top female pistol shooter, but Anne made her daughter-in law look like a blind man with rifles. She routinely shot x-ring groups at 100 yards with open sights on the AR-15. She still thought it was a Poodle Shooter, but realized that a MZB didn't care if he was shot in the 10-ring with a .223 or a .308 unless he was wearing armor since he was dead either way. She liked the light recoil and the high rate of fire of the AR-15 compared to her Browning A-bolt. Later that year, Nancy and Anne went to Alaska Survival Inc. to take advantage of their 600-yard range. Anne decided to have mercy on Nancy, and taught her how to shoot really long distance. By the end of the day, Nancy was doing pretty good on the 600 yard target, and was shooting x-ring on the 300 and 100 yard targets prone with the bipod. Anne thought the bipod was cheating, but she was starting to get shaky in her old age, and the bipod helped.

Bear heard that the civilians were getting restless, and decided to add training in hand to hand combat at the community center once a week. The building they purchased for the shooting range wound up being almost twice as big as they needed for a 100-yard range, since the distributor didn't have any buildings that were 75x300 feet. The closest size he had was 80x500 feet, so they used the rest of the space as a community center and as a nursery for the women who wanted to go shooting. They bought thin wrestling mats for the kids, and they also

worked well for hand to hand training, especially the throws and tosses included in Aikido and Judo. Bear didn't teach them SCARS, but a system that was almost as good, but un-classified. The women in the class acted like momma bears, and some of them scared Bear when he wore his Aggressor padded suit. They were vicious fighters, and several times he took a direct hit to his groin. He was really glad he was wearing a cup when that happened. These women fought dirty! When he taught knife fighting, he was glad they were using rubber knives when he saw some of them in action. He actually felt sorry for any MZB who might make the mistake of attacking any of these women. When they completed his class, there was a run on Bowie knives and Kydex sheaths at the sporting goods store in Anchorage. Nancy decided she'd rather shoot someone, since it was less messy, yet she still carried a Spyderco Native in her blouse pocket with the false edge sharpened, and a Civilian in her pants pocket. She said they were just in case she shot all 43 rounds of Cor-bon JHP ammo she had on her!

## Chapter 22 - 2/3 of a Basketball team

Ron and Nancy spent some “quality time” together after the scare, and just as Ron predicted, Nancy was pregnant with Kid #4, they were now 2/3 the way to fielding their own basketball team. Ron decided that now would be a good time to put in the Room Addition. It was way more than just a room addition, but he thought it was funny. They built a 2-story addition to the East wall of the house, changing the design from a classic A-frame to an A-frame with a huge 30-foot wide 20 foot deep and 30 foot high addition with a full basement that was attached to the other basement. The addition gave him another 1800 cubic feet, which gave him another 3 10x20 bedrooms, and storage above and below the bedrooms. The contractor that built the other 2 homes did the room addition as well, and over the summer it was totally in place. The contractor had fun digging the extra basement space, cutting a door in the existing basement wall then re-grading and compacting the site. He hoped Ron wouldn't need another room addition, because the other side of the house was taken up with the huge garage and outbuildings.

Bear and General Shepard decided to put the Predators in a hangar at Alaskan Survival Inc. instead of flying them, since their airborne defense systems could take out any plane or helicopter that got within 100 miles of Allakaket. The only way someone was going to get near Allakaket was to HAHO out of a commercial jet, since the commercial track was just to the south, but barely within HAHO range of Allakaket. Only US Special Forces practiced HAHO and HALO techniques, so it wasn't much of a threat. Conventional armies used static line drops, or what the SEALs called “dope on a rope” which meant that everyone hopefully landed in the same area, but meant the drop craft had to overfly the drop zone at a fairly low altitude well within range of the AVENGER system. That meant a cargo craft full of paratroopers became a coffin full of crispy critters.

Sam and Ralph spent as much time together as possible in the next couple of years; when he wasn't seeing Sam, Ralph was using the Reverend's Cajun language tapes to re-learn Cajun. Doc Richards definitely approved of Ralph. He was a gentleman in every meaning of the word, and Sam was a lady. He had a surprise for the two of them; the biggest gala of the year was coming up, the annual Southern Plantation Ball at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. It was the annual fundraiser for the Alumni Association, and tickets were always a premium. As a major contributor, Doc got 4 tickets and was going to give Ralph and Sam 2 of them, so the 4 of them would take the limousine and arrive in style. Ralph's grey suit would fit in perfectly, since no one wore tuxedos at the ball; they wore Confederate Army uniforms minus the saber, or grey suits. The women always went for the “Southern Belle” look except for the Matrons who wore more conservative, but definitely pre-Civil war era style dresses. Sam was now well into her second year of Internship and was given more duties and responsibilities as she learned the techniques of Emergency Surgery. Ralph and Sam spent a lot of time talking shop, since their specialties had so much in common. Over the last year, they were seen together often enough that everyone in the ER knew they were dating, but they behaved themselves. They

were falling in love with each other, but they had some decisions to make. Sam wasn't about to give up practicing Emergency Surgery to get married, so they had to decide what were they going to do if they got married. They had that discussion several times, and finally decided that they would move for Ralph's career, but only if that move would also allow Sam to work at the same hospital as an Emergency Surgeon. Sam sat down and talked to Doc. He told her that both their specialties were in high demand nationwide, and any major city they chose to live in would be more than happy to hire both of them. Sam said they were considering Atlanta or some other big Southern city, since he was from Louisiana, and she was born in Tennessee, and lived there as an infant, but didn't remember much of it. Still in her heart she was a Southern girl.

BA and Ron had become so close that they could finish each other's sentences, and BA took the time to teach Ron about the ins and outs of Big business since he wasn't flying much anymore. He said the hardest thing to do was to stick to his Christian Principles and still make a profit. They had done great so far, but what if there was an extended economic downturn and the airline was in danger of bankruptcy and he was forced to cut costs?

Ron thought about that, and came up with an answer, it wasn't the best answer, but it beat laying off thousands of workers who were depending on him for an income.

"BA if the Air Transport industry went in the tank for over a year, I'd diversify into other areas like light manufacturing. All we would need to do is add additional turbogenerators to our geothermal steam power plant. I was always wondering why you bought a building 3 times the size we needed, now I understand it was so we could add 3 more 10MW turbogenerators if we needed to. Too bad it's prohibitively expensive to run high tension lines, or we could export power to other parts of Alaska."

"If fuel costs go much higher, we'll have to extend power lines to Alaskan Survival Inc. The upside of that would be a huge reduction in operating costs having to fly in fuel and pay for millions of gallons of diesel each year."

"BA, did you run the numbers on installing a high-tension line between here and there?"

Bill opened a spreadsheet on his computer and said, "Here's my best estimate of the costs and benefits. To run a 100KV line from here to Alaska Survival and the gold mine will cost approximately 2 million dollars, including installing 3 10MW turbogenerators, the piping, etc. Luckily we own the Chinook and the Super Stallion, both of which can fly in high-tension towers that we would assemble here. It would mean plotting a route, clearing the sites for the towers, buying the cable, and all the labor to assemble the towers and install them. The good news is according to this spreadsheet we reach break-even in 10 years, and these towers are good for 100 years with annual maintenance."

"How much does Allakaket Airlines have in the bank?"



“Last year was a really good year profit-wise, and we’re sitting on nearly \$15 Million.”

“Ok BA, I’m going to authorize this project right now, with a budget not to exceed \$5 Million. Hire anyone in town who wants to work on this project, and any required sub-contractors, we’ll act as our own General Contractor.”

“Way ahead of you Ron, here’s a company that specializes in High Tension Tower installation, they do all the surveying, clearing and installing. They’re our best bet, since they normally lease the helicopters on a per-project basis, which is expensive. Providing our own helicopters, fuel, and crews will reduce their price by at least 50%. Everyone in town that wants to already works for the airline, so this would be our best bet.”

“Ok BA, go ahead and get it started, I’ve got to give Bear the good news.”

Ron walked into his office and called Bear, “Bear, I’ve got good news; within a year you won’t have to fly in diesel fuel!”

“What - we’re shutting down the Mine? That’s not good news!”

“Bear, relax - We’re going to install a High Tension line between Allakaket and the mine. BA and I crunched the numbers, and we’re sitting on \$15 Million in the bank, and according to BA, it will only cost \$2 million or so to install 3 new 10MW turbogenerators in our building, install the transformers and the high-tension towers between here and there. The best news is we break-even in 10 years or less, and after that, the power is basically free except for the maintenance on the system!”

“Ron, that’s great except for 1 slight problem, that military project near here.”

“We’ll just have to shut them down while the construction company is working in the vicinity, I’m sure the contractors would like some time off. With all those choppers in the air, I really don’t want those things in the air anyway. The Vulcans and Avengers can take care of any threats when they get in range anyway.”

“Ok Ron, I’ll take care of that on my end.”

Bear sent an e-mail to General Shepard advising him of the construction project, and suggesting that they temporarily shut the project down while the construction project was on-going, since there will be helicopters in the air all the time, and the Avengers or Vulcans could take care of any immediate local threats. When they were finished installing the high-tension lines, they would welcome them back. General Shepard agreed, since the contractors were supposed to be on a TAD, and it had been 6 months. If they sent them home for 6 months to a year, they would improve the morale of the troops and contractors. He sent an e-mail to his contact on the Terminator project, advising them of the pending construction project, and the suspension of the

Testing session for 6 months to a year. His contact agreed that a 6-month shut-down was exactly what the doctor ordered, since the contractors were grumbling about being stuck out in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do - there were no threats in the area in over 6 months. He suggested terminating, and possibly re-opening the testing session if the situation changed and there was a credible threat to the area. General Shepard reluctantly agreed, and authorized the shut down of the program. 2 days later, the operators were packing up, and everyone was doing their best to make the site look normal including removing the fencing and other signs of occupation.

Nancy needed Ron at home more and more as her pregnancy progressed, since she didn't have the energy to corral and contain 3 rambunctious toddlers any more. Maybe they should stop at 4 and forget about the basketball team, Nancy thought. She hoped Ron wouldn't mind getting snipped, so they could keep making love without the risk of additional pregnancies, she wasn't a spring chicken anymore, she was pushing 30!

The contractor overflowed the route where they wanted the high-tension line to go, and noted where the towers needed to go. He was glad that Allakaket Airlines had two helicopters that were capable of heavy precision lifts, since the terrain they had to cross was the most rugged they had ever installed high tension lines over. He located several good sites to drop towers, and they would only need minimal logging to clear the sites. He turned on his laptop, crunched the numbers in his spreadsheet, and presented BA with a quote for \$2.5 Million, not including the step-up and step-down transformers on each end. Ron was glad he had approved up to \$5 Million, because it looked like it was going to cost between 3 and 4 Million to complete. BA found 3 more 10MW steam turbines cheap. It seemed the Big power companies were consolidating and selling off the smaller power producers, since it was cheaper for them to run a 100MW steam turbine than buy power from the smaller producers who were using 10MW turbogenerators. They simply bought out the smaller producers, and added another 100MW turbine as needed. Since they were using geothermal heat to make steam instead of burning oil and coal, it was cost-efficient to run the 10MW turbines. With a total of 4 10MW turbogenerators, they were producing excess power, but had nowhere to send it. What they would do instead is run 4 during peak demand, and shut the 4th turbogenerator down when it wasn't needed. Since they weren't using boilers, shutting down and restarting turbogenerators weren't as big of a deal as it was for coal or oil fired generators.

Bear did a little number crunching himself. They had over a million gallons of stabilized diesel on hand for the diesel powered generators. He still had trucks, loaders and other equipment that used diesel, but the million gallons would last almost a year without having to run the generators. Instead of 1 flight a week to keep the diesel tanks topped off, they could reduce it to two or three flights per year. With the reduction in diesel fuel and flight operations costs, if gold remained stable, they would just about double their income. Since they had power to burn, he had an ingenious idea to get the ore out of the mine, and down the hill. He would use a bucket conveyor to lift it out of the mine, and use an aerial tramway to move it downhill. The tram cars moving down a 20% slope almost a mile long would spin a huge generator, which

would provide power to run the conveyor. It was almost like perpetual motion, except for the transmission and generation losses. What he was doing is called electromotive braking or regenerative braking. With all this extra power, he could expand the mine as well, generating even more income. He e-mailed that spreadsheet to BA, who revised his numbers based on Bear's revised estimates, and concluded that even at \$5 Million, the High-tension transmission line project would pay for itself in 5 years if the price of gold remained stable. Since his operation wasn't as dependent on diesel fuel, even if the fuel price went up temporarily, they had a year's supply on hand and could ride out a price increase. If the price of gold increased, they would hit their break-even point even quicker.

Two weeks after the contract was signed, men and materials started arriving in Allakaket. The helicopters were busy all day for weeks. When they had enough materials in place to start work, they cleared the sites, bored and blasted footings for the immense towers, assembled the towers, and lifted them into place using the choppers. The strangest operation was laying the cable, since a big reel of cable was suspended from the Chinook, and all it did was fly from tower to tower slowly as the cable unreeled. It was connected to the stand-off insulators by some very brave men on the towers. They spliced the wire together as needed, and soon they had all 3 lines strung from all the towers. They flew in the transformers, and erected the fences to protect the step-up and step-down transformers. A separate crew installed the 3 turbogenerators and the piping into the wells. To make things easier, the one turbogenerator was dedicated for power in town, and the other 3 were connected to the step-up transformer which boosted the voltage to 100KV. On the other end was a step-down transformer to step the power down to a more usable voltage. Once the turbines were brought up to speed and tested, they threw the switches, and Bear shut down the generators. Everyone at the mine cheered as the lights blinked signifying the switch-over.

Nancy delivered her 4th child David, on April 1st. Ron thought it was hysterically funny until Nancy informed him if he wanted to fool around any more he needed to make an appointment with the doctor and get fixed. Her meaning was clear, and Moose looked at Ron like "Better you than me Buddy!" Ron made an appointment in Anchorage, and flew there the next day, and flew home with an ice bag between his legs. BA wasn't sympathetic at all, and kidded Ron until he hinted that he might suggest to Sally that BA needed to get fixed too! BA shut up so fast that his jaws snapped.

## Chapter 23 - Broken Arrow

Several weeks later, the Allakaket Controller was in the tower when he heard over the radio on GUARD “Mayday...Mayday!” Then complete silence. He knew somewhere fairly close by, an Aircraft had gone down. Half an hour later, Bear was awakened out of a great dream by his cell phone. It was General Shepard. “Bear, we have a Broken Arrow. I need you and Hunter to retrieve and disarm the weapons. An F-15 Strike Eagle on an Arctic Training flight went down near you. We located the beacon, and it’s in a wooded remote lake, and our nearest NEST team is TAD to DC for training. I hate to do this to you, but you and Hunter are the only qualified personnel nearby to affect a recovery. The bombs have a 12-hour failsafe, so you have about 11 hours to get over to Elmendorf, pick up your gear, fly back to the lake and retrieve the two B-61-11’s. Don’t worry about the pilot or the aircraft. If necessary, you will be involuntarily recalled.”

“General, I’ll volunteer, and I’m sure Hunter will too. We’ll need Ron to fly us to Elmendorf, and land us on the lake. A helicopter from Elmendorf would be too slow, and I’m pretty sure their bigger helicopters aren’t amphibians.”

“OK Bear, Ron’s cleared for Top Secret.”

Bear remembered that Ron was a qualified diver. He hated risking Ron’s life like this, but he wouldn’t be any safer in the plane on the lake if anything happened, and if he used Ron as a safety diver, he and Hunter could both work on securing the bombs.

“General, Ron Williams is a qualified diver, I know - I trained him. If we use him as a Safety Diver, Hunter and I can both work on retrieving the bombs.”

“Bear, I can’t endanger a civilian like that!”

“He’s no safer in his plane on the lake if anything happens, and if he can help underwater, it would speed things up, and might make the difference between success and a major disaster.”

“Agreed Bear, OK, I’ll call Elmendorf and have 3 sets of cold water diving gear ready to go.”

“Make sure they include a bunch of high-power underwater lights - it could be darn near zero visibility down there without lights.”

“OK, I’ll have 3 sets of cold water diving gear ready, the lights, and the recovery gear ready and waiting at Elmendorf. Good Luck and Godspeed!”

“See you later General, I hope!”

Bear called Ron and woke him up. “Ron, it’s Bear, We’ve got a National Emergency, and I need you to fly to Alaskan Survival ASAP and pick Hunter and me up! Oh, and make sure you’re wearing all the wool and poly pro clothing you own.”

“Bear What the Hell is going on?”

“Sorry Ron, not over an unsecured phone - you’ll have to trust me. Make sure you say bye to Nancy and the kids, just in case. Now get your butt up here as fast as you can.”

Ron went into panic mode, grabbed a wool sweater and pants, put on his polypro underwear and his woollies, then his jeans and a tee shirt. He grabbed his go-bag, kissed Nancy, hugged the kids, and was out the door so fast that the door didn’t close until he was in the driveway. He called the airport and told them to fire up his plane. 10 minutes later, he was in the plane with the turbines idling, and quickly preflighted the plane as he taxied toward the lake. He called for take-off clearance, and as soon as he got clearance, he was airborne flying as fast as he could to Alaskan Survival. Bear and Hunter were waiting with huge duffle bags at the water’s edge, and climbed aboard as soon as he had stopped, carefully maneuvering around the spinning props. They opened the passenger door, and as soon as it was closed, they told Ron to back up and get the heck out of there. He threw the props into full reverse, backed off the ramp into the lake, and hustled to the downwind end of the lake while Bear strapped himself into the co-pilot’s seat and put on the headset while Hunter secured their gear and strapped himself in. Ron did a max performance take-off, and Bear said “You need to fly to Elmendorf as fast as possible. An F-15E from the Alaskan Air Command in Fairbanks was flying a training route armed with two B-61-11’s. The controllers heard a Mayday on GUARD, and then nothing. The beacons went off an hour ago, and they located the source in a lake about 20 miles north of our survival school. The two bombs have a 12-hour failsafe to keep them from falling into enemy hands. The clock is ticking, and Hunter and I are the only people close enough to defuse it in time. You get to fly the plane and act as a safety diver while Hunter and I recover and defuse the bombs. Once they’re defused, they’re very safe.”

“You mean that in 12 hours Allakaket’s gonna get nuked?”

“No, the failsafe detonates the charges in such a way that the nuclear material can’t go critical, and scatters the material over a wide area, so it can’t be reused. The down side to that is it acts as a big radiological bomb, contaminating the area up to 1,000 years. Obviously, we’d rather find the bombs before the failsafes activate. Sorry about shanghaiing you, but 1) you’re a pilot with the fastest Amphibian around, 2) you’re a qualified diver, and 3) you’ve got a Top Secret Clearance.”

“Remind me to thank you later!”

A little over an hour later, Ron made a fast landing at Elmendorf, and was directed to an out-of-the-way part of the base by a follow-me truck. Several airmen quickly loaded the plane, and

refueled it, then they turned around and flew back to the lake. They landed on the lake, deployed the RHIB loaded with the dive gear next to the door on a short rope while they changed into their dry suits. Once they were good to go, Bear stepped out first, then Hunter, then Ron. Hunter started the outboard, and Bear was holding a locator to find the beacon. Once they were over the site, Bear turned to Ron with his Dead Serious face and said “Ron, things could go bad down there real fast. If I flip you the bird with both hands, you’re to get the heck out of here as fast as possible, without regard to us. Get aboard your plane, and get away from here as fast as possible. Stay low just in case, and head toward Allakaket. If this thing goes critical, you’ll have just enough time to evacuate your family and fly South to Fairbanks before the fallout reaches Allakaket. Your job here is to keep an eye on us, and watch our backs. If this weren’t a National Emergency, I’d never risk your life like this, but we have no choice, and I know you would never order one of your pilots to do something you wouldn’t do yourself.”

They quickly donned their tanks, and grabbed lights and buddy lines, and dove over the side. They followed the anchor line down to the bottom of the lake, 50 feet below, and attached the buddy line to the anchor line. Bear and Hunter then attached Ron to the other end of the rope, and attached themselves to Ron with additional buddy lines. Bear took the lead, and the 3 of them swam as gently as possible toward the wreck, their lights only illuminating 6 feet in front of them. The beacon locator led them directly to the plane, and then they had to search for the weapons. Ron remained with the plane, so Bear and Hunter spread out and started a grid search after they checked the wing pylons. An hour later, Bear located one bomb, and stuck a pinger on it and tied a float marker to it, so they could locate it again, and he helped Hunter locate the other one. Once they had pingers and floats on both bombs, Bear gave Ron the surface sign, so they reversed their steps and followed the anchor rope back up to the boat, and did a safety stop at 15 feet. Their tanks were low, so they all switched tanks, and then Bear grabbed a couple of lift bags, straps and shackles, and they dove back down to the wreck. Bear decided to disarm the failsafes above water instead of below since it was too murky to see. They quickly located the pingers, and attached the straps to the fins of the bombs, and inflated the lift bags using the attached CO2 canisters. They followed the bombs up, and when they reached the surface, Bear attached a floating collar around the nosecone so the bombs were high and dry with the correct access port facing up. Using the included tool kit, he took the panel off, then opened a sealed package containing the disarming procedure. An hour later, 1 bomb done, one to go. The second one went faster, and when they both were disarmed, Bear towed the bombs to shore, and told Ron “Get in your plane, and take your sat phone and call this number to request an extraction chopper for 2 repaired arrows and the repairmen. Whoever answers the line would know what to do, then fly home to Allakaket and tell no one, not even Nancy about this. Like they said in Men in Black - “It never happened” so make sure it stays that way.” Ron decided that now was as good a time as any to be a smart-alec, so he saluted and said “Aye, Aye Sir!” Bear would have tossed him into the lake if he weren’t baby sitting 2 nuclear bombs. Instead he growled “Get out of here!” Ron got back in his plane, and flew out of there.

Ron flew home, got changed, and didn’t tell anyone what happened.

2 weeks later, 2 big helicopters showed up painted in Allakaket Airlines colors and General Shepard stepped out with Bear in tow. Ron was tipped off by the tower and was there to meet him. “Ron, I came here to thank you in person. I was wondering what the Air Force could do to thank you for recovering those broken arrows. I knew you didn’t need the money, and I can’t award you any medals, since it never happened, so instead I decided to give Allakaket Airlines 2 brand new Sikorsky Helicopters. They’re an interesting prototype built by Sikorsky Aircraft but never adopted by the military. If you notice, they closely resemble the S-76 Commercial VIP helicopter with 1 major difference.” The General nodded to the pilot, and 2 pods motored out of the body into the slipstream. “One contains 2.75 inch rockets, and the other carries 4 Stinger missiles - They call it the “007” because no one knows it’s an armed chopper until it’s too late. I’ve permanently assigned these crews and aircraft to you, you’re free to use them, but you can’t sell them. The US Air Force will pay all the maintenance costs and fuel used on these choppers, just send us a bill.” Ron walked over to the aircraft and noticed 8 very plush VIP seats. Then the General asked Ron if he wanted a ride. He didn’t like riding in helicopters, but it wasn’t a good idea to get in the habit of telling a General no. He called Nancy, said he’d be back in about 4 hours, then climbed aboard. The crew chief made sure everyone was safely fastened in, and they took off. The second chopper remained on the ground, and they flew back to Elmendorf. Ron was amazed at the ride; it was so much smoother than the other helicopter. In just under 3 hours, they were at Elmendorf. The pilot kept the rotors turning, and the General got out and boarded his VC-20 to fly back to MacDill. The pilot flew back to Allakaket after dropping Bear off at his place.

## Chapter 24 - Belle of the Ball

The next time Ralph came over to Samantha's house, Doc and Bert were home. Doc took Ralph aside and told him that Doc had purchased 4 tickets to the annual Southern Plantation Ball at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and told Ralph that he hoped Ralph would ask Samantha to accompany him. Ralph was stunned, those tickets were hard to get and expensive. "Doc Richards, thank you very much sir."

"Ralph, if you two keep going the way you're going, I'm going to have a semi-son-in-law. I want to do whatever I can to encourage the two of you, since I'm sure you two are perfect for each other."

"Doc, it's going to be a while before there are any wedding bells in our future. Sam has to finish medical school, then her residency before we should get married."

"Why - even if she was married to you, I have an agreement with Sam to pay for her Medical School, and even if she's married, I'll still pay for it. I know how badly they underpay residents, and I'm sure you have huge student loan debts to pay off."

"That's very kind of you sir, but I don't know if I can accept."

"You still planning on doing a year in Louisiana?"

"Yes Sir!"

"I talked to the State of Louisiana, and if you do a year and set up the medical program there, they'll pay off your Student Loan debts."

"Doc, that's over 100 thousand dollars!"

"I know, I checked. I was going to pay it myself as a wedding present to you two, but since the state has volunteered to pay it, I can do something else for you two."

"Doc, I don't know what to say. No one has ever been this kind to me."

"Ralph, you make Sam happier than I've ever seen her. She is very thoroughly in love with you. If you can afford an apartment close to the hospital that is big enough for the two of you, I see no reason for you not to get married before she completes her internship."

"If I didn't have my student loan payments, I could easily afford a nice apartment close to the hospital."



“Now that we’ve got that settled, let’s meet the ladies. You and Sam will need to learn how to waltz, it’s a formal Ball, and the only dance they do is the waltz because of our Baptist roots. Luckily for you, Bert and I are old pros at the waltz, and we’d love to teach you two.”

“Merci Beaucoup Doc.”

They retired to the parlor, where Sam and Bert had cleared away the furniture, and had a CD playing waltz music. Ralph remembered hearing this music when he was a little kid, and it triggered some very happy memories. He was smiling when he walked up to Sam. She said “Hi Rafe, how you doing?” (Samantha was the only person he knew besides his mom that called him Rafe.) He smiled, and Sam gave him a big hug and a kiss. “I guess Doc told you we’re going to the ball.”

“Feriez-vous l'honneur de m'accompagner à la boule?”

“Je serais monsieur honoré!”

Doc interrupted “Sam, I’m glad you’re helping Ralph with his Cajun, but Bert and I don't parlent français.”

“Doc. Désolé.”

“I’m guessing you’re saying you’re sorry - so Ralph did you ask her yet?”

Ralph was laughing his head off, and decided to try it again in English.

Once they were finished, the dancing lessons started. 2 hours later, they were both good waltz dancers, and were gliding across the floor with no stepped toes or accidental collisions. Sam liked the idea of Ralph holding her close, but not too close. She just hoped she would be this graceful with a formal Southern gown on. Bert explained all the layers of fabric involved with a Southern Belle’s formal dress; she hoped the air conditioning worked in the ball room.

Two weeks later, it was the day of the Southern Plantation Ball. Doc Richards must have some serious pull, because he got both Ralph and Sam 3 days off with pay. Ralph showed up 3 hours before the start of the ball, like they had planned, and got dressed at Doc and Bert’s house. Doc showed him a spare bedroom which was bigger than his entire apartment with a bathroom that was bigger than his bedroom. His suit was hanging in the closet still in the dry cleaner’s packaging. He got undressed and took a shower, then got into his suit. His shoes were recently polished, and gleamed like crystal. An hour before the ball, Sam then Bert walked down the grand staircase, but all Ralph saw was Sam, she was radiantly beautiful, just as he imagined she’d look on their wedding day.

“Vous semblez enchanteur!”

Sam was thinking he didn't look too bad himself. She'd seen him in the Grey suit before, but something looked different. Maybe it was the look of love on his face. Sam knew right then and there that if Ralph asked her, she'd marry him in a heartbeat.

He offered his arm, and she took his elbow with her white gloved hands. Doc offered his arm to Bert as she reached the bottom of the staircase, and Nelson held the limousine door open. Sam couldn't figure out why, but Ralph appeared nervous to her. "Rafe, what's the matter?"

"Sorry Sam, I'm just looking forward to the Ball."

They talked on the trip in, and when they arrived at the ballroom, two liveried footmen opened the door of the limousine and helped everyone out. A doorman held the door, and the couples gave their tickets to another gentleman, who announced them as they entered the Grand Ballroom. They were escorted to their table then Doc and Ralph held the seats for Bert and Sam. Once everyone was seated, they started talking. Soon the music started, and the Master of Ceremonies announced that the Dance had started. Doc turned to Bert, and helped her out of her seat.

Ralph turned to Samantha, and asked her in his best Ret Butler imitation "Miss Stone, would you do me the honor of this dance?"

Playing Scarlet O'Hara to the hilt, Samantha fluttered her fan, then said "Why Mr. Lacombe, I would be delighted."

They giggled hysterically as he helped her out of her seat and escorted her to the dance floor. He carefully placed his right hand just below Sam's left shoulder blade with his elbow bent, Sam placed her left arm gently on top of his, and Ralph extended his left hand, and she placed her gloved hand in his, then they started dancing a box step in the Classic Waltz or Closed position. They danced through several songs this way. Finally Samantha indicated she needed to sit down. After he helped Samantha to her seat, he surreptitiously removed a box from his right pocket, knelt on his left knee, and held her hand in his.

"Samantha Dear, will you marry me?"

"Raphael Lacombe, I thought you'd never ask - Of course I will!"

Ralph opened the box, and she extended her left hand, and he slipped the ring on her finger. He must have had some help, because the ring fit perfectly. Right as he got up off his knee, Samantha came up off her chair and planted a lip-lock on him. Bert coughed discretely behind them, and there stood Doc and Bert. "Doc, Bert, Raphael just asked me to marry him!"

Doc said "We heard dear. Any idea when the wedding will be?"

Samantha looked to Ralph, who said “The Bride picks the date.”

Sam had less than 2 years to go, and Ralph still had his year in Louisiana to do. “How about 18 months from now, that will mean a June wedding, and Raphael should be back from Louisiana by then.”

“Works for me Samantha. I can come home once or twice a month on weekends to see you when I’m in Louisiana.”

“Rafe, you better get a cellular phone with a whole bunch of evening and weekend minutes that works were you’re going so you can call me at night!”

Doc and Bert were overjoyed, Samantha had finally found her man. Doc told them “Sam, Ralph, you two need to see Reverend Whitaker to reserve the date, and make appointments for marriage counseling.”

Since they had the next two days off, they could see Reverend Whitaker after Church Sunday. They spent the rest of the dance in each other’s arms. The rest of the evening was a blur to Ralph, since the only thing he remembered was looking into Sam’s face all night. She was glad Ralph was a good dancer, since she could tell his mind wasn’t on dancing. He just wanted to hold his fiancée

“Je t'aime tellement Samantha !”

“Merci vraiment monsieur!”

When the dance ended past midnight, Doc offered Raphael the spare bedroom for the night, since he was sure that they would want to spend Saturday together. Ralph thanked Doc, and was amazed when they got home to find a set of PJs that were his size sitting on the bed when he went to bed.

The next morning, Bert made breakfast for the 4 of them, and they were having an interesting conversation. “Rafe, what are we going to do about the wedding - I’ve got no family to speak of except Doc and Bert. I don’t even have someone to be my bridesmaid.”

“I’m in the same boat Sam, All my relatives are dead, and my Mother is in a nursing home with advanced Alzheimer’s, she doesn’t even recognize me any more. The nursing home doesn’t want me to visit her anymore, all it does is upset her, since she doesn’t know who that strange man is in her room.”

“I’m sorry Rafe. Do you know anyone at work?”

“Never got close to anyone. How about your friend Ron Williams?”

“We’d have to ask him. Doc, what do you think?”

“It would be poetic and romantic - after all if Ron hadn’t been a Christian Gentleman, Samantha would never had made it here.”

Samantha told Ralph the rest of the story from the beginning to the end. He really wanted to meet Ron - he didn’t know if he could spend a couple of weeks stranded with a beautiful woman like Samantha and keep his hands off her. Ralph understood why Ron was able to, because he believed it was wrong to have sex before marriage, and he agreed. He had a lot to thank Ron for. He saved her life at least twice, and then he sent her off the North Carolina instead of doing the selfish thing and keeping her there for himself. He knew that Ron was married with 4 kids, and he had an idea. “Sam, how about if Ron’s wife was your Matron of Honor?” Sam looked to Bert, who said “Don’t look at me - I’m the Mother of the Bride!” Sam had never met Nancy, but she was sure it would be OK, because she knew Ron would only marry someone who was as good as he was. Doc had their number in Allakaket, so Sam asked Doc to call Ron, and put the call on speaker phone. They retired to Doc’s library where the speaker phone was located.

“Ron, this is Doc.”

“Doc, how are you doing, everything OK?”

“Ron, I’ve got great news for you - Sam’s getting married in 18 months. They’re here in the office on speaker phone, and they have a favor to ask you. By the way, Sam’s fiancée’s name is Raphael Lacombe, he’s from Louisiana, and an ER Resident at the hospital here at Chapel Hill North Carolina.”

“Ron, it’s Ralph, I’ve never met you before, but we don’t have any close friends or family, so I wanted to ask if you and Nancy would be our Best Man and Matron of Honor.”

“Raphael, don’t take this the way it sounds, but why us?”

“Ok, here’s our thinking. You saved Sam’s life at least twice, and if it weren’t for you, she wouldn’t be here, so who better to stand in as a witness to our wedding. Sam has no relatives or close friends either, and since you would be flying here anyway to be in the wedding, we thought we could kill 2 birds with one stone and ask Nancy to be Sam’s Matron of Honor.”

“OK, I’ll have to ask Nancy - the wedding is in 18 months, so you don’t need an answer right now, right?”

Sam spoke up “Ron, we really want you there.”

“If it were up to me, I’d say yes, but I can’t speak for Nancy. What if we call you this

evening?”

“OK, Ron - if we’re not here please leave a message. Bye!”

“Sam, Ralph - before you say anything you might regret, remember Ron hasn’t seen you in almost 8 years, and Nancy has never met either of you. Give them some time.”

“Thanks Doc, that was good advice.”

“That’s what us old folks specialize in - giving advice.”

Ron talked to Nancy, and she surprised him by saying, “Ron, of course I’d be honored to be Samantha’s Matron of honor. Let’s leave the kids with Mom, they’ll be fine, and we’ll have a mini-vacation.” Ron called his Mom, and she agreed to take the 4 kids for a week. Ron called Doc, and told Sam and Ralph they would love to stand up for their wedding. Ralph wasn’t used to the Midwestern term, and asked “Did you mean you will be our Best Man and Matron of Honor?”

Ron replied “That’s what I said”, then started laughing when he realized exactly what he said. “Sorry Ralph, that’s a Midwestern colloquialism. Yes, we’d be honored. As soon as you set the date, let us know.”

## Chapter 25 - Business is Booming

Ron talked to BA later that fall, and they were amazed at how much money Allakaket Airlines made. According to BA's spreadsheets, they were in the black to the tune of \$5 Million per year, and would pay off the new turbines and towers in under 5 years if everything remained stable. All their flights were booked all season, the Survival School's classes were booked solid, and the mine doubled their production using the geothermal electrical power instead of helicopters. The Oil and timber companies needed heavy lift, and the mines weren't using them as much, so Ron arranged a lease agreement that he thought was exorbitant, but the oil companies assured him was standard industry practice. He talked to Jim, the CH-47 pilot, who was reluctant to do it until Ron offered to double his salary for the duration of the lease agreement. Since his original salary was double what he made as a private contractor, Jim agreed. It meant being away from his family for a week at a time, but if the contract went as long as Ron expected it to, he could retire in 5 years or less, and just fly when he wanted to. The Super Stallion was leased to another company, and they offered to pay what Ron thought was an outlandish sum. Ron passed the increase on to the Super Stallion's pilots and crew. Ron needed the money like he needed another head. Even with the increased salaries, he was making 2-3 times what he made before by using the helicopters at the mine. Once a month, the Ch-47 flew diesel fuel to the mine, but other than that, the two heavy-lift helicopters were busy full time with the oil and timber companies. Since the S-76 helicopters were armed, and could carry 3300 pounds each, they took over the monthly gold transport run to Anchorage. The S-76's were much faster than the big heavy lift choppers, more maneuverable, armed, and had defensive flare and chaff pods installed. Ron was pleasantly surprised when he found out that the 2 Sikorsky helicopters could carry the whole load of gold between them, and were not only faster, but also used 1/3 of the fuel that the CH-47 used.

The 2 Sikorsky pilots liked flying the Gold Runs as they called them, since they got to practice their High Threat flying tactics. Normally flying what amounted to a civilian executive chopper was about as exciting as watching concrete harden, but the Gold Run was valuable enough that they treated it like a mission inside Indian Country, and flew a staggered formation, and never flew the same route twice. They flew high enough to give them time to react to a missile launch, and out of the range of most AA guns. Normally they flew nap of the earth down in the weeds in a high-threat area, but in this case, the ground was where the threat was, and the higher they flew, the safer they were.

Business in Allakaket itself was booming too, with 100% employment. Ron and BA kept the huge general store fully stocked, and charged far less than merchants in Anchorage did for the same goods, because they bought in huge quantities, and had a 10-year supply of non-perishable goods in stock in the huge warehouse. They had a multi-year supply of common OTC meds, and kept well stocked on perishables. While everyone else in the United States was practicing Just In Time inventory, their suppliers were scratching their heads with Allakaket General Store's ordering practices. They made a ton of money, so they kept filling their orders, and

gave them the best discount pricing available. BA realized that with as much ammo as they were going through for the range, they really needed an FFL to get the best prices for the quantities of ammo they were going through. So BA put in for the paperwork, and Allakaket General Store, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Allakaket Airlines, had an FFL, and bought ammo and firearms direct from the distributors. Ron almost fainted when he realized what the mark-up on firearms and ammo was. He told BA to sell the guns and ammo at just enough mark-up to cover their costs, including the storekeeper and warehouseman's salary, and any other miscellaneous costs. Within a week, word spread through Allakaket that you could buy ammo and guns at the General Store for 50% of what everyone else charged. Ron restricted the pricing to employees and families only by requiring an Employee ID to shop at the General Store. For the few people in Allakaket who didn't work for Allakaket Airlines or one of their subsidiaries, he issued a Residence card with the same privileges.

BA pointed out the lodges ordered huge quantities of supplies each year, and if he charged them a membership fee to cover costs, plus shipping via Allakaket Airlines, they could easily grab all the supply business for the surrounding lodges by offering much lower prices. BA suggested an annual membership fee of \$50.00, and reasonable shipping fees. The more Ron thought about it, the more he was interested in the idea. With the extra volume of the lodges, their buying volume would go up, and their cost per unit would go down. Also the delivery flights would add extra income even if it meant hiring 1 or 2 more pilots, and purchasing 2 more TurboGoose. He decided to call the 3 biggest lodges, and talk to the lodge managers. They had heard about the prices that the General Store was charging, and were definitely interested. They volunteered to pay \$100 per year plus shipping for the kind of pricing they could get for the quantities of supplies they could get. BA got back with their suppliers, and asked them point blank how much they would increase their discount if their volume went up 30%. Most said they would get an additional 10% discount in addition to their existing discount. BA asked them to put it in writing, and e-mail it to them. BA showed the quotes to Ron, and a spreadsheet showing what an additional 10% discount would do to their bottom line if they maintained their pricing, or dropped their pricing 5%. Realizing their pricing was already ridiculously low, he told BA to keep the 10% discount in reserve in case the lodges demanded an additional discount based on their volume. It turned out to be a smart move, since several of the larger lodges wanted a volume discount, so Ron offered all the lodges a sliding 5% discount based on volume. Ron got signed contracts from all the lodges in the area, and would start deliveries the start of next season. Ron told BA to go ahead and order the non-perishables with his next order, and the perishables just in time to have them in stock when the lodges ordered. BA realized that he needed to have the orders in hand before he ordered the perishables, since they had a shelf-life of maybe a week or two, and reminded Ron about that fact. Ron agreed, and told BA to do whatever he thought best.

BA crunched the numbers, then called Alaska Airlines to ask Brad if they wanted any more service from Fairbanks or Anchorage. Brad said if they could add 1 or 2 flights per week during peak, it would help immensely. BA told Brad he was planning on ordering another TurboGoose, and it would be used to deliver goods to the lodges, and when it wasn't making

deliveries, it would be available to Alaska Airlines as a fill-in plane. Brad said he'd e-mail BA a tentative schedule, and BA thanked Brad then hung up. BA called Ron, gave him the good news, then Ron called the Maintenance Chief at Vancouver BC, and had him check and see if they had another suitable Grumman Goose. He said he had 5 left, the RCAF had seen how well the TurboGoose worked, and recalled some of them, and installed the Allison turboprops in them. He said the Director of Allison Engines wanted to talk to him real bad, so Ron called him next.

"Gene, it's Ron Williams at Allakaket Airlines."

"Ron, just the person I wanted to talk to - the RCAF is ordering the turboprop we built for you in huge quantities, and might even get Grumman to build new airframes. We owe Allakaket Airlines a 10% finder's fee."

"Gene, I need two more turboprop engines - I'm having another TurboGoose built at Wing 19 of the RCAF base on Vancouver Island."

"Ron, that's great, your finder's fee just about equals our cost on 2 of those turboprops. How about I give you the engines instead of the fee?"

"Works for me. I'll have the Maintenance Chief get with you to coordinate the delivery schedule. I probably won't need any more TurboGoose for the near future, so if there are any more finder's fees due, a quarterly disbursement to Allakaket Airlines would be fine by us!"

"OK Ron, nice doing business with you."

Ron called the maintenance chief, and asked him to prep an airframe for him, and to expect a call from the director of Allison Engines. Ron told him that this plane would be configured in the flexible cargo/passenger configuration.

"Ron, you won't believe this, but the RCAF contacted Grumman and asked them to build a slightly larger version of the Goose with a tail ramp. They want to use it for SAR or Special Forces. They're talking about a fleet of 50-100 aircraft stationed across Canada. They're talking about promoting me, so this is the last plane I'll be able to build for you. Just as well, since we could only locate one airframe in the boneyard that was worth rebuilding. If you want the rest of the airframes for parts, let us know quick before they get shipped to the chop shop."

"How long do I have?"

"Maybe a week or two, they need the space for more aircraft."

"What kind of pricing can you give me?"



“If you can take them all off our hands, I’ll give them to you!”

“How much would you charge to strip all the useable parts off the airframes If I bought the lot. I could dispose of the airframes by dumping them in the ocean to form artificial reefs.”

“If you could get the permit to dump the frames, we’d charge you \$5,000 for the labor to strip the parts off the frames.”

“Deal - I’ll get back to you in a week if I can work the details.”

Ron contacted several people in the Governor’s office, and found out that if they could strip all military hardware including fuel tanks and hydraulics, they could dump the frames for free, the state would pay the transport costs. Ron told him the frames were in Vancouver BC. He said he’d have to get back to Ron, that added a complication. 2 days later, he called back and the guy said that they could do it, since the frames were scheduled for demolition anyway, and the Canadian Government didn’t want them. If he could get the frames to the port in Vancouver, they’d load them aboard a ship, and drop them in Alaskan waters where they’d do the most good. Ron called the maintenance chief back, and told him Alaska would take the stripped frames off them if they could deliver them to the dock. The chief said that they would have to transport them to the dock anyway, so they wouldn’t charge Ron for any transportation costs. Ron said if they could box up or palletize the parts to fit inside the TG, he’d pay them \$5k for the parts when he picked up the TG. He gave the maintenance chief the phone number of Ron’s contact at the Governor’s office, and told him to use his name.

A month later, Ron got a call from the RCAF maintenance chief, his TurboGoose was ready. Since his other pilots were busy, he said he’d pick it up personally tomorrow, and give them a check for the aircraft plus \$5K for the parts they pulled. He asked Nancy if she wanted to fly to Vancouver tomorrow, and she said she needed to stay with the kids, besides it was the wrong time of the month to try and join the Mile High Club. Ron thought Nancy was a mind reader, then realized the last 2 times they had flown that route they had joined the Mile High Club, and discovered that Nancy just had a good memory. Ron would bring a good book to read, and he had some paperwork to catch up on. The next day he flew down to Vancouver, and took his relief pilot with him so Ron could fly the new plane back. The long flight was tedious and boring without Nancy with him, even if they didn’t join the Mile High Club, he still loved to have her around. She was definitely much nicer to look at than his scruffy-looking relief pilot. Ron thought he should have a word with BA about grooming standards. Once they landed at Vancouver, Ron handed the maintenance Chief a check, and they distributed the load of parts between the 2 TG’s. Ron was glad they brought a spare plane, because that quantity of parts would be almost too much for 1 TG, not by weight, but volume. He read a mystery novel on his way back, and landed back in Allakaket just before dark, and asked the Maintenance crew to unload his plane, and store the parts. The other TG arrived 15 minutes later, and the crew was busy unloading parts. To free up the planes, they off-loaded the planes, and would inventory and stock the parts later.

Ron went home, gave Nancy a hug, and played with the kids. Jake and Josh were getting big, and Sarah was trying to walk. David was almost weaned, and Moose had his paws full trying to babysit the highly rambunctious toddlers. Once the kids were in bed, Ron and Nancy settled into bed for some “Quality Time”.

## Chapter 26 - RCAF

A week later, Ron got a phone call. When he answered the phone, a Colonel Sandberg from the RCAF was asking for him. When he came on the line, the Colonel introduced himself.

“Ron Williams, Colonel Sandberg RCAF. May I have a minute of your time?”

“Yes Sir Colonel.”

“I’ve been talking to Maintenance Chief Nichols of the RCAF 19 Wing AMS, who told me you own the 8 Grumman Goose upgrades that are being flown by Allakaket Airlines.”

“Yes Sir, is there a problem?”

No Ron, nothing of the sort. It seems that you’ve stumbled onto an excellent idea, and the RCAF is looking into having Grumman build a modern version of the Goose with a ramp tail and Allison Turboprops. We’d like your expertise working as a consultant to the design team, since you’ve been flying them for the last couple of years, and could probably suggest a couple of improvements. Also, we wanted to borrow a TurboGoose if I remember correctly, that’s what you call the upgraded Goose, so we can study it. We would need a week or so in Vancouver. If you like, we’ll pay for a really nice hotel in Vancouver for you and your wife, and you can make a holiday of it. On top of your expenses, and let’s say a \$100,000 dollar consulting fee.”

“Colonel, I’ve got a couple of questions. I’m not familiar with Canadian firearms laws, but my wife and I have a Federal CCW issued by General Shepard at MacDill, and I wanted to be able to carry concealed in Canada during our stay.”

“Not a problem, I’ll call the head of the RCMP in Vancouver, and he’ll issue the appropriate licenses. Just use your Federal CCW for ID if anyone stops you, and the computer will show the appropriate Canadian clearances.”

“Great, also will my American Express card work OK in Canada?”

Colonel Sandberg was laughing his head off “Sorry about that Ron, yes, your American Express works perfectly. Prices might be in Canadian Dollars, but most shopkeepers are used to dealing with tourists, and will let you know what the price in US Dollars is.”

“Thanks Colonel, when do you need us?”

“Today’s Friday, how about Monday morning?”

“Would you mind if we flew in early, say Sunday Morning, could you put us up for another night?”

“Not a problem, being able to examine your TurboGoose and talk to you will save the Government Millions of dollars in R&D costs writing the specifications.”

“Ok, Colonel. We’ll be arriving Sunday afternoon at Wing 19, could you have a car waiting to transport us to the Hotel, and e-mail me a reservation for a nice hotel starting Sunday for as long as you think you’ll need us.”

Ron gave the RCAF Colonel his e-mail address, and 15 minutes later, a reservation for the Wedgewood Hotel in downtown Vancouver BC appeared in his e-mail. The payee was listed as Col. Sandberg RCAF, and was good for 9 days starting Sunday. Ron looked up the Wedgewood suite listed on the reservation, and it listed for over \$300 USD per night, not too shabby! He found Nancy and told her, then called his Mom, and asked her if she could come over early Sunday morning and babysit the kids for a week or so. Anne asked him what they were up to this time, so Ron told her the RCAF was thinking of buying an upgraded and modernized Goose from Grumman Aircraft, and they wanted him and Nancy in Vancouver for a week with a TurboGoose so they could check it out. They had already e-mailed a reservation at the Wedgewood Hotel in downtown Vancouver BC. Anne said she’d call Doc Miller, but she didn’t see any problem, since most of the time they sat there and waited for patients that never came. She could be there at 7:00am Sunday Morning. Ron said “See you then Mom, Love you!”

“Love you too son, bye!”

“Nancy, everything’s set, Mom will watch the kids for a week. We need to pack, and make sure you pack my suit and a nice dress for you - they dress up for dinner at this hotel!”

Nancy was glad that money wasn’t a problem, since she always wanted to shop in Vancouver. She hoped Ron would have a couple of extra days for sight-seeing, since the city was a sight-seeing extravaganza. She logged onto the internet and made a list of the things she wanted to see, and places she wanted to shop. She was hoping that they could make this a kind of second honeymoon, and this time actually make it out of the bedroom. Ron told her to pack her P-14 and make sure she had her CCW. She packed her DeSantis leather handbag with the gun holster built into a secret compartment. She knew the Canadian Government was fairly anti-gun, and wondered how Ron had arranged permits for them to go armed in Canada. “Must be nice to have connections”, she thought. She packed lightly for her, and only brought 3 suitcases. Ron had 1 suitcase and his garment bag containing his suit, ties, and shoes. Ron wondered why women always packed too many clothes. They spent the next couple of days spending as much time with the kids as possible, and Sunday morning came sooner than they expected. They made breakfast, fed the kids and the dog, and right as they finished, the doorbell rang. Ron noted approvingly that Anne only had 1 small suitcase. He decided that

mentioning that fact to Nancy wouldn't get him any brownie points, so he helped his mom get settled in her room. With the new room addition, and the 4 kids, they had enough room to give Anne her own room to stay in when she visited, and they left it arranged the way she liked it. Anne knew the kids' routine cold, so there was no need for long-winded instructions. They kissed the kids goodbye, gave Anne a hug and a kiss, loaded the truck, and drove to the airport.

His personal TurboGoose was already prepped and the turbines were idling when they pulled up. Ron thought he could get used to this, and climbed aboard. He was glad that Nancy was flying right seat again. He really missed her on his last couple of trips to Vancouver. He didn't bring up the subject of the Mile High Club, but secretly hoped she would. Between the two of them, they got the plane pre-flighted in record time, and Nancy entered the coordinates for the 19 Wing airfield in Vancouver BC into the Navigation computer while Ron got take-off clearance and set the plane up for take-off. By the time they reached the end of the lake, they were ready to fly, and Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to take-off. Her ear-to-ear grin told him everything, and he said "Copilot's plane". She shoved the throttles to the stops, and performed her first max-performance take-off. Once they were at 500 ft AGL, she pushed the nose slightly forward, and reduced the throttle settings to a more sedate climb, since they had a long way to go. She turned toward Vancouver; made sure the nav computer had the right coordinates, and activated the auto-pilot. She turned to Ron and said two words "Race You!" She was glad Ron had thought ahead and removed the seats. Ron understood why she had so many suitcases when she opened one and produced a Bear skin rug, then got undressed. A couple of hours later, Ron got up to check that they were still on course. The Nav computer said they still had 2 more hours to go, so he went back and joined Nancy on the bearskin rug.

"Nancy, I'm glad I didn't tease you about the extra suitcases."

Nancy decided that now would be a good time for a tickle fight. When they were finished, Ron looked at his watch, and realized they needed to get dressed; he needed to check in with Vancouver ATC in 15 minutes. He got dressed as quickly as he could, staggered into the pilot's seat, and put on his headset. "Allakaket Airlines calling Vancouver Control."

"Control, go ahead Allakaket."

"Entering outer boundary en route to Wing 19. Request vector and landing instructions."

"Roger Allakaket Airlines, wait one."

2 minutes later the controller came back on. "Allakaket Airlines, maintain heading and altitude until within 10 miles, then turn left to heading 85E and descend to 2,000 ft. At 1 mile descend to 500AGL and call approach."

"Roger Control, turn to 85E at 10 miles and descend to 2,000 ft. Descend to 500 at 1 mile and call approach."

“Confirmed Allakaket. Transferring to Wing 19 Controller, have a nice day.”

“Thanks Vancouver Control.”

It took Nancy a little longer to get dressed, and she sat in her seat right after Ron got off the air. Since the autopilot was still engaged, he leaned over and gave her a very passionate kiss. Nancy returned the favor, and 5 minutes later, Ron realized he had a plane to fly. He checked the nav computer, and they were still 20 minutes out. 10 minutes later, he turned off the autopilot, turned to 85 degrees east, and descended to 2,000 feet. He had 9 miles to loose 8,000 feet, so he pushed the nose over until he was satisfied with the rate of descent. At the 1-mile marker, he was at 500AGL, and called the tower as soon as he spotted the runway. “Wing 19, this is Allakaket Airlines on Final.”

“Roger, pattern is clear, come straight in. Follow the follow-me truck to parking spot when you reach the end of the runway.”

“Roger control”

Ron landed the plane, and taxied to the end of the runway where he was met by a “follow-me” truck. He followed it to a parking space near the 19 Wing AMS hangar. Chief Nichols was waiting for them, and there was a government sedan next to him with a driver. They unloaded the aircraft, and Chief Nichols shook both their hands, and told Ron to be back at the base at 0900 Monday, and handed him a pass to get back on the base. “The driver knows where the hotel is, and will meet you out front at 0830 sharp Monday morning.”

“Thanks Chief Nichols.”

They got into the sedan and drove to the hotel. It was even more elegant in person than the internet images. A bellhop took their bags, and they showed their reservation to the desk clerk, and they were treated like royalty. Another bell hop carried their bags up to the room, and turned around and left without waiting for a tip. Ron thought that was strange, but didn’t comment. Nancy said she needed a shower, and when she saw how big it was, she asked Ron if he wanted to join her. After taking the longest and most enjoyable shower in his life. Ron got dressed, and asked Nancy what she wanted to do with the rest of the afternoon, hopefully outside the bedroom. Nancy had a list, and picked the thing that she wanted to do the most, and thankfully it was open on Sunday. Stanley Park would be a great place to spend a Sunday afternoon. They called the front desk, and one of the Hotel vans would drop them off at Stanley Park, and could pick them up later that evening. For a nominal fee, they could take the Stanley park shuttle around the park, and get off at the various points of interest and back on all day.

They spent the day at the park, checking out the gardens, the miniature railroad, totem park, and the Variety Kids Farmland. Ron was in awe of what he saw at the park, since he had never seen most of these animals and plants up close and personal. Nancy realized they hadn’t bought a

camera, and they bought a disposable camera to get stuff on film. Ron decided after using the disposable that he'd rather have a full-featured camera with some serious capabilities. Ron had never seen a peacock before, and when it spread its tail feathers, Ron was stunned by its beauty, and took several pictures. Ron's stomach reminded him that it was time to eat, and someone suggested The Teahouse Restaurant, saying it was the most romantic restaurant in Stanley Park. It was also one of the more expensive, but Ron had his American Express Card. They ordered the mushrooms stuffed with crab, and skipped the entree since they were going to eat dinner at the Bacchus, which was the famous restaurant downstairs at the Wedgewood Hotel. They had dinner reservations for 6:00 and didn't want to ruin their appetite.

They spent the rest of the afternoon wandering around Stanley Park, and called it a day at 4:30 so they would have time to get back to the hotel, shower and change, and be downstairs for their 6:00 dinner reservation. The Stanley Park Shuttle dropped them off at the same point where the van picked them up, and it was sitting there waiting. The driver explained he drove a route all day back and forth, but it beat driving a cab. They got back to the hotel in plenty of time, and got a quick shower and got dressed for dinner. Ron wore a suit and tie, and Nancy wore a conservative dress. As soon as they came off the elevator, they walked maybe 10 steps to the door of the Bacchus. The Matre de asked for their name, and seated them a minute later at one of their choice tables. Nancy leaned over and told Ron "Nice table, trying to earn brownie points?"

Ron swore he had nothing to do with the seating assignment or the first class treatment they got at the hotel. Ron looked at the menu, and hoped the food was worth it. He'd never spent that much on a meal in his life! Ron ordered the Applewood Smoked Wild British Columbia Salmon appetizer, and Nancy ordered the Bacchus Tasting of Seafood appetizer, they both ordered the Wild Mushroom soup, Since Salmon and other fish were nothing new to Ron, they both ordered the Bacchus Duo of Lamb entrée which consisted of oven roasted rack of lamb with olive crust, peppered sirloin of lamb, boulangère potatoes, and garlic mint jus. The waiter recommended the house wine with dinner. Since neither of them were big drinkers, they ordered one glass of wine each. With all the different foods they were eating, the waiter suggested a mildly sweet Rose'. 5 minutes after their order was taken, the appetizers arrived. The service was nothing but fast. People must dine later around Vancouver, because they had the restaurant practically to themselves, which was OK with them. Ron thought the smoked Salmon was excellent, and took a sip of wine, which blended nicely with the fish, Nancy's Seafood wasn't what she expected, then she realized that it was a French Restaurant, which explained the sauce on the fish. She hoped the Lamb would be better.

Once they were finished, the waiter brought out the next course, and Ron really liked the wild mushroom soup. Nancy liked it too, but thought it was too bland for her taste, and when the waiter turned his back, she sprinkled some salt and pepper on it. Later when they finished the soup, the Lamb was ready. It was everything they expected, the rack was a prefect medium rare, the sirloin was tender, and the potatoes were crisp yet spicy. The Garlic Mint sauce was perfect on the lamb. Overall, they were pleased with dinner. The waiter gave them another

glass of wine with the check, on the house, and Ron pulled out his American Express, looked at the bill, added 20% to the bill for excellent service, and signed the receipt. The waiter was back in a minute with his card and his receipt. Ron thought he might be able to deduct this meal after all, since they were on a business trip, and Nancy was an officer in the company. Ron helped Nancy out of her chair, and they walked to the elevator, and up to their room. Ron discovered they had a balcony view, and Nancy joined him out there to enjoy the city lights.

“Ron thanks for everything. I had a wonderful day, just spending it with you. I know you’re going to be busy the rest of the week, and I have some shopping to do, but I’ll try and locate some nice places for dinner. Try and call me in the afternoon, and if I’m not in, please leave a message. I’ll try to be back to the hotel before 5:00 each day, so we can go to dinner somewhere.” Nancy gave Ron a big hug and a kiss, then said “Race You!”

Ron got up the next morning, and they ate breakfast in the restaurant. Ron almost choked at the prices, and thought “I wonder if there’s a Denny’s around here?” Since he was hungry, he ordered the Corned Beef, Mushroom and Potato hash for \$12.25. Nancy ordered the two-egg and ham omelette with hash browns and toast for \$12.50 - Ron thought that shopping must be hard work! He paid the bill when they were done eating, and kissed Nancy goodbye. The car and driver was waiting to take him to the base. Nancy got in a cab, and told the driver the shopping mall she wanted to go to first.

Ron talked to the driver on the way in, and there was a Denny’s just a block or two away from the hotel. He gave Ron directions to it in case they wanted to eat breakfast there from now on. Ron showed his pass at the gate, and was waved in. They drove right up to the AMS hangar, and Ron hadn’t seen that much brass in a long time. Chief Nichols introduced Ron around, and the Tech-reps from Northrop Grumman and Allison were both there, as well as several Aviation Design Engineers from NG, and an Engine Design Engineer from Allison. Colonel Sandberg was standing next to a 3-star General named Glasgow, who was in charge of the RCAF. With the introductions done, Colonel Sandberg walked Ron away from the crowd for a second. “Ron how do you like the hotel?”

“I love it, but I hope the Government can afford it?”

“It’s not costing the government a cent, my Grandparents own the hotel, and I comp senior RCAF officers there all the time. They write it off as donation to the government. What do you think of the Bacchus?”

“I love their dinners, but breakfast is a tad pricey.”

“Sorry Ron, I forgot to tell you, when we comp someone, not only is the room free, but food and a limited selection of wine. You can order anything on the menu for free.”

“I don’t want to take advantage of your hospitality.”



“You’re not, like I said the hotel writes the expenses off their taxes, just like you write your meals off your corporate taxes. All you need to do is write your room number on your receipt from now on. We include a gratuity in all bills, but if you feel the service was exceptional, you can authorize up to an additional 10%.”

“You do that on all your bills?”

Yes, why?”

“That waiter will be real glad to see us tonight; I tipped an extra 20% without knowing you’d already included the tip in the bill.”

“I wonder how many other Americans that has happened to, maybe we should include a note on the bill form that a 15% gratuity is already included.”

“Might not be a bad idea. Thanks for letting me know.”

Chief Nichols walked up to Ron. “Ron, I forgot to tell you, as part of the process of showing the engineers everything, we’ll have to remove a bunch of panels and replace them.”

“Chief, as long as your mechanics do the work in such a way so the aircraft is as good as new when she goes back together - go for it!”

Chief Nichols walked everyone over to Ron’s TurboGoose, and explained the history of the aircraft, and what they had done to it. He was constantly interrupted by the engineers with technical questions, some of which he deferred until later when they had the aircraft open and could show them. Once they were inside the aircraft, and the Grumman reps realized that the only things this aircraft had in common with a NG Goose was the airframe and the skin, they started paying attention and asking lots of questions. The thing that really amazed them were the engine mounts that allowed a larger turboprop engine to be mated to an aircraft designed for smaller radial Wasp engines. They were talking vectors, thrust, loads, etc. Finally Ron explained it in English. “Gentlemen, the way I see it, the original designers overbuilt the aircraft since they knew it could see combat. Civilian flying is much more sedate, so the plane never sees the loads on the airframe that it was designed for; Turboprops aren’t nearly as torquey as a radial piston engine, so the mounts don’t have to stand the huge torque values. Therefore it could handle a much bigger motor, and the mounts fit. The only torques on the system come from the propeller, and the same forces were present with the Wasp engines.”

General Glasgow was glad Ron was here, and was sure he would earn his fee; he could translate what the eggheads were saying into simple English sentences. Ron could tell the NG Engineers' favorite phrase must have been “What the Hell?”, because every time they showed them something new, they repeated it like a mantra.

After a long day of show and tell, NG said they could build the new plane for \$1.5 million a copy. Ron pointed out that his plane only cost \$250K each using a surplus frame, and it didn't cost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million dollars to design and install a tail ramp. They huddled and came back with another idea. "If we can use off the shelf parts, and most of the existing NG frame section design, we could do it for \$750,000.00 per copy."

Ron spoke up, "Gentlemen, with all due respect, that's BS! Why not charge a fixed R&D cost for what it costs to design the new aircraft using as much of the original design as possible, then a per-plane cost to build them. If anyone else buys some of these planes, charge them a percentage of the R&D costs, and rebate it back to the RCAF."

The senior Tech Rep said "Mr. Williams, that's not the way it's done!"

"Sir, I've already bought 8 airframes and had them retrofitted. I'm sure there are a bunch of Goose airframes out there that could be remodeled and have the Allison engines installed. NG could lose this entire contract by being greedy - it's not worth half a mill per plane to get a loading ramp!"

The tech-reps said they would have to talk to their superiors, and they would get back to them tomorrow. With that the meeting adjourned early. General Glasgow took Ron aside, and said "Son, I like the way you negotiate - if you pull this off, you definitely earned your fee, and if not, you still earned it if we can locate all those airframes before Grumman does and scraps them so we can't rebuild them. I've got a few phone calls to make to make sure the US planes don't get scrapped. I've got it, I'll put a bid on them, which will pressure Grumman to play ball or lose the entire contract, because Allison doesn't care whom they sell engines to."

Once the General was finished, Col. Sandberg and Chief Nichols approached him. "Looks like we've got the rest of the day off. By the way, thanks - those guys have been ripping off the RCAF for decades."

"I just don't agree with the way they do business. Designing planes is a cost of doing business. They shouldn't be allowed to get away with highway robbery just because they're the only game in town. I'm halfway tempted to hire their engineers away from them and start my own company."

"Wouldn't work - they own all the politicians who make all the decisions."

Ron shook his head, he'd heard about the level of corruption in Military procurement, and now he had first hand knowledge of it. Those tech reps quoted \$1.5 Million per plane as if they expected to get it!

The General came back 5 minutes later with a huge grin on his face. "Ron, we did it! I called the bone yard in Arizona and locked up all the Grumman Goose Airframes they had for salvage

prices. When Grumman gets wind of this, they'll have to play ball, because like you pointed out, it's not worth \$500 thousand just to get a loading ramp!" Ron saw the General had a cell phone and asked to borrow it. He called the Hotel, and left a message since Nancy was out. He handed the cell phone back to the General, and told Chief Nichols "The wife's out shopping, so I've got the rest of the afternoon free until 4:00pm, any suggestions?"

Chief Nichols suggested they retire to the Base Pub. He said they had a bunch of dartboards, and he could teach Ron to throw darts. Their favorite game was Cricket. Ron said "After you!" and they all piled into the General's vehicle. Within an hour, Chief Nichols was swearing that Ron was sandbagging them when he said he never played before. He could put all 3 darts in the triple ring regularly enough to beat the club champion half the time. Finally the General got curious and asked Ron what his vision was.

"The last time it was tested it was 20/17."

The General knew that his best pilots were also excellent dart throwers, but the best dart throwers were his sharpshooters.

"Ron, you done any real long-distance shooting?"

"Sorry General, but I can't talk about that. But I can tell you if you want to know, you need to ask General Shepard."

Everyone with the exception of Chief Nichols either knew or knew of General Shepard at JSOC. They realized that Ron was involved in a Classified Project, and couldn't talk about it. Since he didn't mention whether he shot long-distance, it probably involved long-distance shooting. Col. Sandberg knew that Ron had a Federal CCW, and they were very difficult to get, so whatever he was doing was classified enough that the Air Force thought he needed to be armed at all times.

Ron used the club phone to call at 4:00 and Nancy was back from shopping. Ron asked her if she could make another reservation at Bacchus for 6:00 that night, and he'd explain later. He asked Chief Nichols if the car and driver were handy, since he needed to go home. General Glasgow volunteered to drive Ron home since he was staying at the Wedgewood Hotel as well. He could drive him back as well in the morning. Ron accepted, since he decided that he liked the General, and he was one of the good guys. The only thing the general drank all afternoon in the Club was either Soda or Coffee, so he was sober as a judge. Ron shook hands with Chief Nichols and Col. Sandberg, and left with the General. Once they were in his car, the General told Ron that he and General Shepard went way back.

"Ok General, then you know I can't talk about the project without prior clearance."

"Understood, if I need to ask you anything classified, I'll get General Shepard's permission via

e-mail.”

“I’m glad you understand General.”

They drove quietly to the hotel parking lot, and the General said that he’d see Ron at 0830 tomorrow unless he called first. Ron gave him his room number so he could call, then they said goodbye. Ron took the elevator to the 15th floor, and knocked on the door, then inserted his card into the electronic lock. There was a pile of stuff in the corner that wasn’t there before, and Nancy was lying dressed on the bed, taking a quick nap. Ron joined her, and gave her a quick kiss. Around 5:00 they got up took showers and got dressed for dinner. Ron felt better about dinner tonight since he wasn’t paying for it. On the way down, Ron explained to Nancy that the room, meals, and drinks were comped by the hotel, since Col. Sandberg’s grandparents owned the hotel, and wrote the bill off as donations to the government. She felt much better ordering the food she wanted, and ordered the Spice Roasted Atlantic Lobster Tail appetizer. Ron ordered the lobster tail too. They both ordered the mushroom soup, and the lamb. Ron had never eaten lamb before and was pretty sure he wouldn’t get the opportunity again. 10 minutes after they ordered, the lobster tail was brought out, along with a half-carafe of the house Rose’. Ron didn’t order the wine, but remembered he wasn’t paying for it anyway, so he poured Nancy a glass, then himself. When they finished the lobster tail, the plates were cleared, and the soup brought out. This time Nancy thought the soup was much better, and didn’t need to season it. Finally their rack of lamb was brought out. Good thing they didn’t eat lunch, or they wouldn’t have been able to eat the lamb. After dinner, Ron signed his receipt exactly as Col. Sandberg had told him to, by writing his room number on the bill. 2 minutes later, the waiter and the Matre de were at their table. The Matre de’s manner bordered on groveling. “Excuse me, Mr. Williams. Last night we didn’t know you were guests of the hotel, and your bill was comped by Colonel Sandberg. If you wish, we can issue a credit card refund.”

“I wasn’t going to say anything about it because I didn’t know until today the entire bill was comped. If you wish to issue a refund, I’ll accept it, but let me give the waiter a \$20 tip for his excellent service last night, and his honesty for pointing it out to you.”

“Sir, there is already a 15% gratuity built into the bill.”

“Yes, I know, but honesty like that should be rewarded. Could you issue a refund less the \$20 tip instead of trying to exchange US dollars for Canadian dollars?”

“Yes sir, I can do that if you wish.”

“Thank you.”

2 minutes later, a credit receipt for last night’s bill, less the \$20 tip Ron had authorized was presented to them. Ron stood, helped Nancy out of her seat, and walked out of the restaurant door. The Matre de held the door, still bowing and scraping. When they got up to their room,

they couldn't stand it any longer, and laughed themselves silly. The "Royal Treatment" they were getting was a bit over the top.

They ate breakfast in the hotel restaurant the next morning, and Ron met General Glasgow at his car at 0830. He handed Ron a faxed copy of a letter authorizing Ron to discuss the details of the project with General Glasgow RCAF. Ron handed the copy back to the general, since the note in of itself was classified, and he had no means to dispose of it properly. He explained the Barretts project and the Robo-Gun project to the general on the drive in. The general was really impressed. He also understood why Ron kicked everyone's butts at darts. His vision and eye-hand coordination was on par with his best pilots and sharpshooters. He was intrigued by the Bradley project, since the Canadian Military used the Bradley as well. Ron told him that he'd have to ask General Shepard about the details, since he was only involved in the T&E project. When he told the General how accurate the new gun was, he knew that the Canadian Military would want to order a bunch as well, if the Americans made it available to them. Canada had a sweet deal with American military suppliers that allowed them to buy the same equipment as the US Military instead of the export version like Mexico had to. He hoped that they would extend the agreement to include the new and improved Bradley. He was having difficulty imagining a vehicle that could take out lightly armored vehicles at over 2 miles that was mobile and capable of rapidly engaging targets out to a mile, or out to ½ a mile while moving. As soon as they were finished, he had to get hold of General Shepard and get the details. This was even more important than the Goose project.

When they got to the AMS hangar, Chief Nichols was waiting for them. "General, good news - Northrop Grumman Aircraft agreed to our terms. They said it would cost between 1 and 2 million in R&D costs, and each plane would cost \$500,000.00 including a tail ramp and the Allison engines." The general thought this was a good idea, since they were only going to order 100 planes. Their original quote of \$1.5 Million per copy would mean a cost of \$150 Million for 100 copies. Their revised quote of \$750 thousand per copy meant a cost of \$75 million for 100 copies. Their latest quote of \$500,000.00 each plus \$2 Million in R&D costs dropped the price for 100 planes to \$52 million or less than 2/3 the cost of their previous quote. Word of their purchase of the airframes must have made them re-think their position. The best part was it only cost the Canadian Government \$100,000.00 to purchase over 200 Grumman Goose airframes at scrap prices. That was the best \$100,000.00 he had ever spent, since it saved the Government over \$23 million. The engineers wanted to take a closer look at Ron's TurboGoose, and take measurements. They would need the plane for the rest of the week, but wouldn't need Ron after today. Ron suggested the RCAF contact hospitals in Alaska and Canada that used Life Flight, and advise them of the new aircraft. He personally knew of a hospital in Anchorage would buy 2 of them at that price. The General's aide was taking notes like crazy, if even half the hospitals in Canada and Alaska ordered the new Goose, the RCAF could recoup most of their R&D costs with rebates from other purchasers. The General thought Ron was a gold mine of information. He had already saved the Canadian Government 30 some odd million dollars, now his advice was going to save them even more, and make NG happy with a larger order. Also his information about the new Bradley would be worth its weight in

gold if it panned out. Later that afternoon, the engineers had asked Ron all the questions they needed answered, mostly about flight performance, landing and take-off speeds, and other technical stuff. They almost had puppies when Ron explained how good the plane's STOL capability was with the new reversible-pitch turboprops. His reported minimum waterborne landing length was  $\frac{1}{4}$  of what the listed minimum landing length of the original Goose, and his minimum take-off was half of the minimum listed take-off. His rate of climb figures had to be exaggerated, but Chief Nichols vouched for the rate of climb, since he was flying right seat during the original tests they flew before Ron took possession of the rebuild TurboGoose. They actually got even better rates of climb in testing, but they were very lightly loaded, with a quarter tank of JP-5. The Allison engineer said "Wait a minute; we designed that engine for JP-4!"

Chief Nichols explained that JP-4 was rarely available, and JP-5 was practically identical and safer since it had a higher flashpoint in storage due to additives the Navy added to the fuel. The engineer agreed that JP-5 would work just fine when he checked his laptop computer. Once they were finished with Ron, he called the hotel, and Nancy had just gotten back from shopping "Nancy, I've got the rest of the week off. They need the plane for the rest of the week, so we can go sightseeing. Can you book a reservation at the restaurant tonight, and we'll go sightseeing tomorrow." Colonel Sandberg overheard him, and asked him if they wanted to use the hotel limousine for the rest of the week. The hotel owned a fleet of limousines for driving VIP's around, and he knew that only half of them were busy since it wasn't the peak of the tourist season. Ron thought the limousine was too much, but it sure beat cabs, so he agreed. General Glasgow drove him back to the hotel, since he was finished as well, and was going to fly home tomorrow.

## Chapter 27 - The Goose is Loose

They spent the rest of the week in Vancouver shopping and sightseeing. One of Ron's first purchases was a very good digital camera. He liked the idea of not having to develop film, since he was a 4-hour plane ride from the nearest photo shop. Nancy found a Ritz Camera shop at the first mall she stopped at the other day, and spent an hour with the owner comparing cameras. When he learned they lived in Rural Alaska, and were computer savvy, he suggested a fully digital camera. Even though they were more expensive, he recommended the Minolta Dimage Z1 or Z2. The Z1 was older, and about \$100 cheaper, but the Z2 had a better lens, and higher resolution. She brought Ron back the next day when he was finished working, and he decided that the Z2 was worth the extra money. He got the 512MB memory card, 2 sets of NiMh batteries, and a speed charger. The camera included the case, cable to connect to his computer, and in case the 512MB memory card ever went bad, the store owner included the 64MB memory card instead of retaining it like he normally did. He had a set of 4 NiMh AA batteries fully charged just in case they came back, and installed the 1st set in the camera, and packaged the second set with the charger. He told Ron that even in Fine mode; the 512MB chip would hold as many images as he could shoot over a week easily. Ron debated buying a tripod, since it was just something else to carry. The owner showed him a lightweight aluminum tripod with a fluid head and pistol grip that was the same price as some of his other tripods. He explained the benefits of a fluid head and the pistol grip, then showed Ron how he could hang the camera case from the yoke of the tripod to make it act like a much heavier tripod. Then he threw in the kicker - he'd include a \$30.00 cable release with the tripod that would totally eliminate camera shake on long exposures, and with a 25 foot cable, would allow him to get in the shot without using the self-timer. That sold Ron, so he bought the whole shooting match. The owner told him his total was \$700.00 USD. Ron handed him his American Express card, and was the proud owner of a camera that was smarter than he was, at least that's what he told Nancy on the way home.

He spent the rest of the afternoon reading the owner's manual, and charging the other set of batteries. The next day, Ron suggested they re-visit the Stanley Park, since he wanted to get pictures of some stuff there with his digital camera. Ron was amazed at how light the camera and case was, and Nancy volunteered to carry the tripod. When they got back to the hotel that night, she swore that Ron took a picture of every flower in the garden. Ron laughed and said he thought he might have missed a few of them. After dinner, they relaxed and planned what they wanted to do the next day. Nancy mentioned a Planetarium and a few other sights she wanted to see. Ron asked Nancy if she was interested in walking on a famous suspension bridge that was 150 feet in the air. Nancy said she would take a pass, since she was afraid of heights. Ron looked at her funny, and she explained that it was different inside an airplane, since you were enclosed instead of out in the open. It wasn't the height that scared her, it was a fear of falling.

That evening when they came back from sightseeing there was a note from General Glasgow that the RCAF signed a contract for 100 of the new upgraded NG Goose they were calling The

SuperGoose to differentiate it from Ron's creation, the TurboGoose. Ron called the number on the message card, and General Glasgow was effusive in his praise. Not only did NG Aircraft sign the contract for 100 SuperGoose aircraft at \$500,000.00 each, they reduced the R&D cost to \$1 Million when they received orders for an additional 100 SuperGoose from Life Flight companies across Alaska and Canada, and the lower 48. Some of the northern tier states had spots that only a STOL Amphibian could get into, and they wanted the SuperGoose for SAR and Medevac. He told Ron that the Canadian Government would offer him a choice of the first SuperGoose produced, or a check for \$500,000.00. Knowing that the first SuperGoose produced would be a collector's item some day, he took the SuperGoose. General Glasgow said that it would take 6 months to a year to start producing production SuperGoose planes, and that NG might be interested in him doing a T&E on the aircraft. Ron was tempted to say no, he wasn't a test pilot, and told the General so. He reassured Ron that the plane would be thoroughly tested before they let a civilian behind the controls, and they just wanted to make sure that Ron was happy with the flight characteristics, and that it measured up to his TurboGoose. Ron thought that would be fun, so he told the General if NG needed or wanted him to do a T&E on the final prototype, he'd do it for them.

Finally, they were finished with Ron's TurboGoose, and the RCAF not only put the TurboGoose back together better than they found it, they also performed the scheduled maintenance on the plane's airframe and turbines while they had it apart, saving Ron at least \$10,000.00 that the FAA inspection cost. It wasn't due for another 90 days, but since they had it apart already, it was no extra labor to inspect it while it was apart. What they found surprised them. The airframe was in as good a shape as when it was rebuilt several years ago, and the turbines looked practically brand new. Chief Nichols thought that whoever was doing the routine maintenance on that airplane knew what they were doing, and was a stickler for details. Chief Nichols told Ron the plane was ready, and they checked out of the hotel the next morning, and received a limousine ride to the RCAF airbase, and a ride in Chief Nichols' Hummer to the TurboGoose. Ron did a walk around, and there wasn't a spot of oil or dirt visible anywhere on the fuselage. The fuel tanks were full, including the APO unit. Ron thanked Chief Nichols, and they boarded the aircraft, started the turbines, and preflighted the plane. Once everything was good to go, they called the tower, received permission to take off, and taxied to the runway. Ron took the controls this time, and they were winging home to Allakaket. They skipped the Mile High Club this time, and just talked for the whole flight home. Nancy was amazed that the RCAF would put them up in a swanky hotel for a week and pay them \$600,000.00 on top of if for a few days work. Ron told her the joke about the guy that hit the machine with a hammer and billed the company \$5,000 dollars as an explanation. "This company had a generator that wouldn't work, and everyone told them to call this guy who really knew his stuff. Finally in desperation, they called him. He drove out, took out a hammer, and tapped the generator, which started running like a top. They were very upset when he sent them a bill for \$5,000 for the repair, after all he had only been there a minute. They told him they wanted an itemized bill, so he sent one that read "Hitting generator with hammer - \$1.00. Knowing where to hit generator with hammer - \$4,999.00" They paid the bill."



Nancy got it; they weren't paying Ron for his time but his knowledge.

When they got home and unpacked it was late enough that Anne decided to stay over. She didn't like driving, and hated driving at night. Ron was too tired to drive her home. After saying hi to the kids, Ron went into his office, and hooked the camera up to the USB port of the computer. He was glad this computer had a front USB port. He downloaded the images into his photo editor and sorted through them, then cropped, tweaked and edited them; finally he had a folder on his computer he wanted to show Anne and Nancy. He converted the file to a slideshow, and called everyone into the room. Once everyone was seated and quiet, he said "This is where Mom and Dad have been all week" for the benefit of Josh and Jake. Sarah may or may not have understood, and David was still an infant. Anne smiled at Ron's "Daddy" comment. Ron clicked the "Start" icon and the slide show started. He had set them up for a 30-second interval, so it took 10 minutes for all the images to go through. Josh and Jake wanted to see it again, but Sarah was bored, so Nancy took Sarah and David into the play room downstairs to entertain themselves with Moose. After 2 more loops through, Josh and Jake had seen enough too, and joined their siblings and Moose. Ron had installed a hidden video camera in the play room, so the adults could monitor things, and act as referee if necessary without interfering unnecessarily. The whole house was wired with video monitors, including the driveway and the back yard, which both had day/night cameras. There was a video monitor in the kitchen which switched from camera to camera every 10 seconds unless you typed in a code to freeze it on one camera, or told it to ignore a camera. Ron didn't bother with the VCR option since he wasn't using the system for security, but to keep an eye on the kids, and have some warning if guests were arriving. Later Anne and Nancy both told Ron the pictures were excellent, and he should make prints from them, so he searched the internet for a printer designed to print digital images up to 8x10.

Meanwhile, back in North Carolina, Ralph had completed his residency, and was fluent in Cajun again. He had received permission from the Director of the Residency program to take a year and set up a medical clinic for the Cajun families in the bayou. The State of Louisiana loaned him a 4x4 Jeep and a large flat-bottom john boat with a 100 horsepower motor. Both vehicles had radios sufficiently powerful to reach the local Emergency Hospital in case he had a Medical Emergency while he was out in the bayou. They leased a small office with a one-room studio apartment above it right on the border of the bayou. The Office said Medical Clinic in English and Cajun with Cadeusas. He had office hours in the morning from 7:00 to noon, then made house calls from 12:00 to 5:00. He expanded further and further into the bayou, and met relatives he didn't know he had, and they improved his vocabulary of Cajun phrases which he entered into his English-Cajun dictionary he kept in his PDA. Doc Richards made sure he got a good cell phone with free long distance to talk to Samantha at night when he got back from his house calls. His first couple of visits to a new family were interesting to say the least. Most had never even seen a doctor in their lives, and it took a while to gain their trust. He started small, bandaging cuts and scrapes, and finally when he gained their trust, started administering childhood vaccines, and giving antibiotics to patients with infections, after explaining that they had to take the entire prescription, since it wouldn't work if they stopped taking the medicine

when they felt better. With his family background and expertise in Cajun, the people of the bayou trusted him, and soon he spent all his time in the field, and the State moved other French-speaking doctors into the region. He set up a crash course in Cajun dialect, so they could understand and be understood by the local bayou people. Within a year, he had a successful program running, and it was time to return to North Carolina and Samantha. His greatest reward besides being able to help all his relatives in the bayou was a letter from the State of Louisiana telling him his entire Guaranteed Student Loan debt had been retired. He made 3 copies of the letter, and sent 1 to Doc, 1 to Bert, and 1 to Sam, all Certified to make sure that there was a copy besides his just in case.

When Ralph got back, there was only 6 months left before their wedding, so he checked with the Residency program director about working at the hospital. Since they desperately needed trained ER docs, they hired him through a temporary service at almost twice what the hospital paid, but he got no benefits. He stuck the extra money in his savings account since he was going to need the money for a honeymoon, and moving expenses. While he was in Louisiana, both he and Samantha had applied to several hospitals in the Atlanta area. They had both been accepted at Grady Memorial Hospital, which was a Level-1 Trauma Center. Ralph had been hired as the assistant Chief Resident, since the hospital operated 24/7 they had to have 2 Chief Residents so one was always at the hospital. They also accepted Samantha into their Emergency Surgery Residency program as a brand-new Emergency Surgeon. While Ralph was gone, she accelerated her schedule to complete her training, and got everything signed off in 12 months that normally took 18. Ralph made it back in time to see her graduate Medical School. She was now Doctor Stone, soon to be Doctor Lacombe. Doc Richards thought that would drive the Admin people at Grady Memorial nuts. Since their first initials were different, the hospital decided to use their first initial and their last names on hospital documents, since they were moving to Atlanta after the wedding. Sam and Ralph scheduled their Marriage Counseling sessions with Reverend Whitaker on Ralph's off days. Sam was working at the hospital as well through the same temporary agency that they hired Ralph through. One funny result of all the time Ralph spent in Louisiana was most of the marriage counseling session was conducted in Cajun. Anyone walking by Reverend Whitaker's office would have thought he'd been kidnapped by French Terrorists, since very few words in English were spoken. Reverend Whitaker was eager to use his native dialect again, so every time they came over to his office, they only spoke Cajun.

6 months after they first flew to Vancouver, Ron got an e-mail asking him to fly to LAX, where he'd be met by a Northrop/Grumman representative, and choppered to an undisclosed location where he would do a week-long T&E session with the new plane. Round-trip tickets would be waiting for him at the Alaska Airlines counter in Anchorage tomorrow. His flight was at 0900. Ron told Nancy that Northrop Grumman wanted him in California tomorrow to test their new SuperGoose, he thought he would be gone a week. He'd ask the relief pilot to fly him to Anchorage since he needed to be there earlier than their scheduled flight. Ron made a few phone calls, and found out that the relief pilot was flying to Anchorage tomorrow to pick up cargo. He called the relief pilot, whose name was Steve, and told him he needed to be in

Anchorage at 0800 tomorrow, so he'd either have to reschedule the delivery driver or cool his heels in Anchorage for a couple of hours, since he couldn't justify taking a TG out of service for a week just to fly him to Anchorage. Steve said he'd take care of it, and asked Ron if he could be at the airport at 0600. Ron asked him if he minded flying as pilot in command, since he wasn't sure if he'd be awake enough at 0630 to fly the left seat. Steve laughed and said that he used to love "Dawn Patrol" when he flew C-130's in the Air Force, so Ron could rest easy. Ron packed his bags, making sure he had his P-14 and 2 spare mags, his Federal CCW, and a week's worth of clothes. He set an alarm for 0500 and went to bed early. Nancy made muffins before she went to bed, loaded and programmed the coffee maker for 0500, and left a large thermos next to the coffeemaker.

Ron got up, took a quick shower got dressed, grabbed a bag of bran muffins, filled his thermos full of coffee, grabbed his suitcase, and was out the door by 0545. He made the airport by 0558, and climbed in the co-pilot's seat, stowed his bags, and they were airborne by 0600. They were on the ground in Anchorage at 0745. Steve thanked Ron for the coffee and the muffins, and dropped him off as close to the terminal as he could. Ron had his Federal CCW out when he approached Security, and showed it to the TSA goon, and was waved around the metal detectors with his baggage in hand. He picked up his ticket at the Alaska Airlines counter, saw the ticket was first class to LAX with 1 brief stop in SeaTac to take on passengers. He surrendered his checked luggage, walked back through security with his carry on, and headed to the gate. At 0845, they started pre-boarding first class, so he took the opportunity to pre-board. The Alaska Airlines employee recognized his name, and put a gold star on his boarding pass, indicating he was a VIP in case the stewards didn't recognize his name. The first class seats were more comfortable than his lounge at home, so he took a novel out of his carry-on he had wanted to read for a long time. He was a big fan of Tom Clancy, but rarely had time to read, so he brought *Bear and the Dragon* since it was almost a 6-hour flight including the stop in Seattle. Right at 0900, they pushed away from the gate, and the plane was only half-full. Once they were airborne, the steward asked him what he wanted, and Ron asked for Orange juice and a muffin. He came back with a platter of muffins and croissants, and a pitcher of Orange juice. Ron selected 2 muffins from the tray, and got a glass of orange juice that was better quality than what he drank at home. A couple of hours later, they landed at SeaTac. The pilot was pretty good, and they landed with barely a bump, and he held his attitude all the way in. "Probably military trained" Ron thought. 45 minutes later, they were airborne again, headed to LAX. The Steward asked Ron if he wanted anything. He still had a muffin left, so he got a refill of the orange juice, and a headset to listen to the radio programming. He found a good fusion jazz program, so he decided to listen to it. Several hours later, they turned on final for LAX. Ron took off his headset, put up his book, and got ready for landing. He hoped whoever was going to meet him would be right outside baggage claim. After landing, he was one of the first people off the plane, and headed toward baggage claim, retrieved his suitcase, then saw a liveried Chauffeur with a sign held chest high that said "Ron Williams." He cleared the claim check area, and walked over to the driver. "I'm Ron Williams."

"This way sir."

He took Ron's baggage, led Ron outside, opened the door of his limousine, put the baggage in the trunk, and then got in and drove to a nearby heliport. They were headed to a big SA-80 with NOTHROP GRUMMAN stenciled on the side. The driver parked the limousine a safe distance away from the helicopter, and when Ron got out, the driver reminded Ron to keep his head down between there and the chopper door. Ron walked carefully to the helicopter, which had its rotors turning. The driver was right behind him with his luggage. The crew chief showed him to a VIP seat in the front of the passenger area, and helped him secure the belts, then stowed his luggage. He pulled the door closed, locked it, and took his jump seat right behind the pilots, and tapped the pilot on the shoulder, who took off like an express elevator. Moments later, they landed at a rooftop heliport, and the door opened, and another gentleman in a suit got on board. He was buckled into the seat next to Ron's. Once the door was secured the noise level dropped to the point that they could have a normal conversation without shouting. The chopper took off and headed east. The guy next to Ron stuck out his hand and said, "Ron Williams, I'm Jack Snyder, the program director for the SuperGoose project. Let me tell you, I don't know how you came up with it, but the TurboGoose was one heck of a good idea. Allison has built some slightly more powerful turboprops than the ones they sold you, and we stretched the frame 6 feet, added a rear ramp, and converted it to a twin boom tail to make room for the wide ramp door. The modifications added almost 100 cubic feet of cargo space, added 30 knots to its top speed, and from what we can tell by our preliminary flight testing, reduced the landing and take-off lengths slightly. You're going to love this plane when you see it. It's stashed at Edwards right now, but we wanted you and the test pilot to fly it back to El Segundo, then use Sepulveda Reservoir for smooth water landing and take-off tests. We already did the rough water landing and take-off tests, and we were amazed that it could safely land in 6-foot swells. Of course, it was at a nose-up attitude of almost 20 degrees, but it worked. I wouldn't recommend landing in anything greater than 3-4 foot swells unless it's an emergency."

Several hours later, they landed in a remote corner of Edwards AFB, far away from the highly classified areas. Ron was stunned when he saw the SuperGoose. It was significantly bigger than the TurboGoose, but not enough to look like a totally different plane. From the nose to the cargo door, it looked exactly like his TurboGoose. From the Cargo door back, it looked like a miniature C-130. The Test pilot was standing there, so Ron walked up and introduced himself. "Hi, I'm Ron Williams."

"Mr. Williams, I've heard a lot about you - this was a good idea you had, this is one sweet flying turboprop. Sorry, my name is Keith Northrop. I'm Jack's great-grandson, but don't let that intimidate you, I'm just a test pilot here. Let me show you the SuperGoose."

An hour later, they were ready to fly. Ron's baggage was put aboard the SuperGoose, since their final destination was the El Segundo plant, and a limousine would take him to the hotel when they were finished. Keith talked Ron through the pre-flight. For this series Ron elected to fly right seat since he was the student on the new plane, and Keith was doing a full plane-familiarization check-ride before Ron would fly left seat. Ron noticed the plane's avionics were identical to the ones in his plane, except newer but cheaper models. He decided then and there

if they were going to build him a SuperGoose, he was going to request a bunch of avionics upgrades even if he had to pay for them. Ron commented on the avionics, and Keith told him that was their standard avionics and instrumentation package. Ron asked how much an upgraded avionics package would cost, and rattled off several upgrades he'd like to see. Keith stopped him, took out his microcassette recorder, and asked Ron to repeat himself, this was stuff the home office definitely wanted to know about. Ron repeated himself, and Keith nodded and agreed. When they were finished, Keith slipped the cassette recorder back in his pocket, but Ron noticed he didn't hear a click that would indicate he turned it off. Ron would be careful about what he said from here on out. They got the plane ready to fly, and soon they were airborne and westbound. 5 minutes later, Keith started asking leading questions about the negotiating process. Ron was vague and non-committal. Finally he asked Keith to turn off the recorder. Once it was off, and Ron was sure it was off, he said "Ok, what's up? You've been asking me leading questions about the negotiation process. I'm not going to get entrapped by a simple recorder, and I wouldn't put it past you to have the plane bugged as well. If you're not here to test the plane, let's go home, and I'm going back to Alaska."

Keith reached over, and flipped a switch under the dash. "Sorry, Legal put me up to it, they were pissed that we lost 35 million dollars in revenue when you opened your mouth." Once Keith started talking, Ron surreptitiously started his microcassette recorder, two could play that game! Keith kept talking "Normally, we charge a 100% markup over our costs, then tack on a lot of fees. By the time we're through, we've made a 300-400 percent profit margin."

"And the Government lets you get away with it?"

"Sort of, the politicians get half of it back in kickbacks, campaign contributions, and stuff like that. It makes me sick, and I'm just about to chuck it all, and go back to being a private pilot."

They kept talking for the rest of the flight, and finally they were over the reservoir. Keith made the first two approaches, but he was too conservative. When Ron got a feel for the aircraft, he asked Keith if he could take the next one. He cranked the flaps and slats all the way out, slowed to 50 knots, and floated down to the lake like he was on a parachute. He touched down with a slight splash, then reversed the props and stopped on a dime. Ron looked over, and Keith's eyes were as big as saucers. "How'd you do that?"

"I've been a bush pilot in Alaska since I was 14. You have to land like that to land on the smaller lakes. I've made hundreds of approaches that had a 200 foot obstruction within a mile of the landing zone."

"You floated in like you were on a parachute."

"That's basically what you're doing, at the last second, you push the nose forward and land conventionally. You've got to be really aware of your height above the lake, because if you flatten out too soon, you crash, too late you crash."

“Ron you must have 5-pound brass ones!”

“Not really Keith, anyone that wants to fly bush in Alaska has to be able to do it, because some of the lakes we land on are more like ponds. Also we do that at near maximum load too.”

“I hate to say it, but you guys are nuts - give me a big long concrete runway any day!”

“Keith, this plane was designed to do exactly what I just did - there’s not much point in having an amphibian in Alaska or Canada if it can’t land on a postage stamp. This plane had great STOL characteristics. Now with the tail ramp and high mounted tail and rudder surfaces, it will be even better. Check this out!”

Ron turned into the wind, shoved the throttles to full, and did a max-performance take-off. Keith looked at the altimeter and his watch, they were climbing at over 2500 feet per minute!

“Ron, you realize you’ve exceeded the design spec for rate of climb by 500 feet per minute?”

“That wasn’t even the fastest the plane will climb. In an emergency, I can trade airspeed for altitude and manage almost 3,000 feet per minute for a short duration.”

“Yeah, and if you keep it up too long, you stall and crash.”

“Beats flying into a mountain or a grove of trees near the lake.”

“You’ve got a point there. OK, let’s head for home.”

Ron relinquished the controls, and Keith flew a perfect concrete runway approach to the Northrop Grumman private airstrip at El Segundo. He taxied next to a limousine and shut down. “Ron, the driver will take you to the hotel, and pick you up at 0800 tomorrow. The room and your meals have already been paid for by Northrop Grumman. All you have to do is write your room number on your bill for dinner tonight and breakfast tomorrow. See you at 0900 tomorrow, I want someone else to witness your short-field water landing, because they’ll never believe me if I tell them.”

Ron climbed out of the co-pilot’s seat, went back to retrieve his bags, and when he was out of sight for a minute, pocketed the microcassette recorder in his pants pocket after turning it off. The driver drove him to a nearby Sheraton hotel that was OK, but not in the same league as the Wedgewood in Vancouver. He asked the desk clerk if he could send something FedEx overnight to Alaska. The clerk explained they couldn’t guarantee the overnight delivery, but Ron knew that all overnight packages received special handling, and didn’t sit in depots waiting for a truck. It was worth the extra security with the tape he was FedExing to BA. The information on the tape was enough to indict several high-ranking Northrop Grumman executives for various federal crimes. It was his ace in the hole in case he ever needed it.

## Chapter 28 - Testing...

The next day Ron was driven back to the El Segundo facility at 0800. He had a fresh tape in the microcassette recorder, and the switch was set on VOX. It was a super-long, super-slow tape recorder that could record 6 hours per side. In VOX mode, it would last even longer. He listened to the tape last night before he shipped it FedEx to BA, and Keith's voice came through loud and clear. He was very grateful that BA had told him about the microcassette recorder trick. They were ubiquitous since everyone used them to record notes or meetings. The long-play VOX machines also had a major benefit called CYA. If someone tried to set you up and you had them on tape attempting to entrap you - they went to jail - not you. Ron routinely recorded both sides of all calls on Allakaket Airlines phones for CYA reasons as well. Ron would never use them for blackmail purposes, but they could help the company out of a jam if someone promised something over the phone then reneged on it, if you had them promising to do what they were supposed to on tape, it was very hard to refute. When he got to the El Segundo Northrop Grumman facility, Keith was there as well as Jack Snyder. Keith explained that they were going to do the waterborne short-field landing and take-off again. The mechanics had installed a removable crew chief seat in the cabin doorway so Jack could see the instruments on approach and verify Ron's airspeed on landing, and how much runway he needed to stop on water. Ron explained to Jack that landing like this could be scary, and if Jack had a weak heart, he shouldn't go up. Jack told Ron that he was a roller coaster fan and made several trips to Magic Mountain each year.

Ron and Keith both did a careful walk-around, and then preflighted the plane. Jack climbed into the crew chief's seat, and Keith radioed for take-off clearance. He handled the takeoff, and it was a textbook runway takeoff, long and boring. Once they were over the lake, Keith and Jack double checked their seat belts, and Ron checked his, then Ron took control of the plane, dropped down to 500 feet AGL and slowed to 50 knots while he cranked the flaps and slats all the way out. Once he was at 50 knots, he floated over the edge of the lake with the turbines idling, and maintaining a 15-20 degree nose-up attitude, he floated right down to the lake, and right before touchdown, flattened out his flare by pushing the nose forward. They landed with no more of a jar than an express elevator stopping, and as soon as they were down, Ron flipped the reverse switch, and set both throttles at 30% power, and they stopped like someone had thrown out an anchor. Jack was shaking his head. There was no way that this plane could land like that - it was just too big. The sat bobbing on the lake while Ron and Keith explained it to Jack. The conversation got really technical, then Ron said "It's just like landing with a parachute. If you give a big high-wing plane just enough airspeed to keep from stalling, and you maintain a nose-up attitude for a high angle of attack, with the flaps and slats increasing lift and drag, you can land much slower. The slower you land, the less runway you need to land. When we touched down, I used the reversible pitch props to stop us by reversing the pitch and setting the throttles at 30%. The C-130 has reversible pitch props, and can generate enough thrust to taxi backward at 30 mph with the props reversed. The SuperGoose doesn't have that much power, but it greatly decreases the Short landing length if used properly." Ron taxied to

the end of the lake and asked Jack if he would like to see a short-field max performance take-off. When he nodded his head, Ron threw both throttles to the max, and when the airspeed indicator read 80 knots, he pulled back sharply on the yoke, and held a 20-degree angle of attack until they were at 2,000 feet, just under a minute later. Jack was impressed! When he stabilized the plane at 2,000 feet, he turned to Jack and said “Any Questions?” and Jack started laughing since Ron had nailed the line perfectly. “Ron, I’m glad Keith asked me along for this run, because if I hadn’t seen it myself, I’d never believe it, and I’m still not sure about what happened. Obviously in the hands of a skilled bush pilot, this plane has a tremendous STOL capability.”

“Jack, most of my pilots at Allakaket Airlines are ex-military C-130 pilots, and they only needed a couple of trial runs to get the hang of the STOL techniques, since they’re more aggressive than the approaches a regular C-130 can fly. But this plane is 1/3 the size of a C-130 with almost half the horsepower. With a better power to weight ratio, it can do amazing things. Fully loaded, it can fly a pretty good approach, but I wouldn’t try a take-off like the one I just did fully loaded, so the pilot has a lot to think about. He might be able to land on a postage stamp full loaded, but probably won’t be able to take off again. In that case you have 1 or 2 options, off-load before you take off again, or don’t land so heavy in the first place. I can remember landing an overloaded DeHaviland Otter on a postage stamp, grateful that I didn’t have to take off again with that load.”

Ron turned to Keith and asked him if there was any other tests that needed doing. Jack answered the question for him. “Frankly Ron, we were allowing a week for the STOL testing, we weren’t expecting you to go out and do it the first day flying, or this aggressively. This is still a prototype plane.”

“I guessed that if Jack Northrop’s great grandson was flying the plane, it would be safe, since the owners of the company wouldn’t unnecessarily risk his life.”

“You’ve got a point there. Anyway, you definitely earned your fee, and I’ll have the airline change your booking so you can fly home today.”

Ron asked Jack “While we’re up here, is there any tests we need to do in the testing protocol?”

“We need to do angle of attack and stall tests, but we’re not set up for them, they need to wire the plane for instrumentation. The best thing is to set it back down at El Segundo so they can wire the plane, and I’ll fly the rest of the test program.”

Ron called “Pilot’s plane” and Keith said “I’ve got it.” Then they turned to land at El Segundo. Once on the ground, Jack told Ron that the driver would drive him to the hotel to retrieve his bags. If they hurried they could get him on the afternoon flight to Anchorage. He handed Ron a check for \$100,000 dollars, and shook Ron’s hand saying “thanks, you earned it!” Ron said “You’re welcome, if you have any questions, feel free to e-mail or call me” and he handed Jack



his Allakaket Airlines card with all his contact information. Ron practically ran to the limousine, he was in a hurry. He told the driver to get him to the hotel and step on it, then keep the motor running, he'd be down in 5 minutes. The driver said that Northrop had already taken care of everything, all he had to do was drop off his key in the drop box on his way out. 5 minutes later, they arrived at the Sheraton. Ron walked quickly through the lobby, took the elevator up to his floor, grabbed his bags, looked around to make sure he didn't leave anything, and hurried back down to the limo, dropping his card in the drop box on the way by. The Clerk grabbed him, handed him a message from BA which read "Watch your back" and it was signed BA. Ron was glad that he had the microcassette recorder running in his pocket, and his P-14 still in his IWB holster with 2 spares. Since he was in a hurry, he kept his baggage with him, and got into the limo. It took a while to get to LAX due to the traffic, and Ron thought "I'm being paranoid, but am I paranoid enough?" and started rummaging through his stuff to see if anyone planted anything on him. Luckily there weren't any little bags full of white powder, so if they were going to try anything, it wasn't going to be as simple as planting drugs on him. He started praying, because the way his mind was roaming was freaking him out. Finally he started reciting the 23rd Psalm to himself, and he calmed right down.

Half an hour later they arrived at LAX, and the Chauffeur must have done this before, because he pulled right into a reserved VIP unloading area, and opened the doors, Ron climbed out without help, grabbed his bags, and told the Chauffeur, "Thanks, but I'm in a hurry, I'll take it from here." The skycap took his baggage, and gave him a claim ticket. Ron told him that they had a changed reservation waiting for him at the ticket counter, so the skycap gave him back his bag, and offered a cart to take it to the ticket counter. Ron went through the VIP line, and was served a minute later. They did have a first-class return ticket waiting for him, so he switched his old return ticket for a new one, and they took his checked luggage right there. He had less than an hour before the plane left, so he had them issue a boarding pass instead, and he walked through security. He showed his Federal CCW to the TSA goon, who escorted him around the security gate, and told him "have a nice day" and he was in. Ron's level of anxiety dropped significantly now that he was on this side of the security gate, and probably the only armed person around except for Federal Agents. 10 minutes after he reached the gate, they announced pre-boarding for first class, so he took advantage of it. This time Alaska Airlines had a VIP code already on his boarding pass, and they didn't need the gold star. He boarded the aircraft and was seated in the plush first class section. He was glad to be aboard the aircraft, but would feel better after the plane took off. 15 minutes later, they closed the cabin door, and the tractor pushed the plane back. It taxied and was airborne a minute later. Ron could feel his spirit soaring with the plane. Whatever BA was worried about wasn't going to happen in LA. Next time he flew commercial, he vowed to pack more survival gear in his carry-on, since the Federal CCW seemed to be a talisman to the TSA goons, and they didn't even check his carry-on.

Ron decided to put together a mini-kit that wouldn't take up a lot of space in his carry on, and could be carried in an oversized shaving kit bag so it looked harmless if anyone checked. Since he wasn't using his GPS anymore, he'd load the entire US topo and road map into it as well as 2 spare sets of batteries, a small first aid kit, a SAK, or better yet a Gerber Multiplier. He liked

the 800 series with the replaceable jigsaw blades the best. He had a Nite Eyez kit that could carry the Gerber Multiplier, a Mini-mag AAA Solitaire, an Eze-lap sharpener, a ferrochromium rod and striker, fishing line and hooks on a piece of cardboard, and a ranger compass. When it wasn't in his kit, the Nite-eyeز could be carried on his belt. A couple of contractor bags, a Mylar blanket, Ziploc gallon bags, and a bottle of Polar Pure would complete the kit. Ron knew that most people who flew commercial couldn't ever carry nail clippers on them, but since he seemed to have a free pass aboard the plane, he might as well take advantage of it. Just because he felt badly for his fellow passengers didn't mean he wanted to be in the same boat as them if something happened while he was away from home. While he was at it, he thought he should add several 1oz. Canadian Maple Leafs to the kit. 5 or 6 should be plenty. He always had at least \$100 dollars in small bills on him, as well as the American Express and a rarely-used Visa card for those that didn't accept American Express. Both cards had basically unlimited lines of credit available.

Ron never wanted to fly commercial again, but he knew he might not have a choice in the matter. He was so preoccupied with his mental checklist, that before he knew it, the pilot announced they were landing in Seattle. Since he was staying aboard, he didn't need to do anything, just wait for the passengers to tromp in and out of the plane. He was grateful he didn't take an isle seat, because several tall men in isle seats were getting whacked in the back of the head by women's purses and bags. Ron wondered why no one was seated next to him, because there were several coach passengers they could have upgraded. Ron didn't understand that with a VIP tag on his boarding pass, the only way they'd seat someone next to him was if they had paid full price for the First Class seat. The plane quickly emptied and filled up again, then the door closed and the plane was pushed back to the taxiway. A couple of minutes later, they were airborne. Ron realized he was coming home several days early, so he used his Amex card to use the Skyphone and call home. He told BA his flight number and the ETA to Anchorage. BA said that they'd make sure he got a ride home, and to meet the plane at the Allakaket Airlines gate since a scheduled flight from Anchorage to Allakaket would be leaving within an hour after his ETA. BA said he would hold the plane, and if it was full, he could fly right seat.

The flight arrived right on time, and Ron walked out to the boarding desk, told the Agent he was taking Allakaket Airlines flight number 14 to Allakaket in less than an hour, and asked her to intercept his bags, and re-route them to Allakaket Airlines. The Agent said "Who do you think you are, Ron Williams?"

"Read the Boarding pass Tammy."

"Oh my God!"

"Not exactly, now could you please get my bags intercepted, here's the claim ticket. They're holding the plane for me, so please expedite the request."

“Yes Mr. Williams!”

Ron got the gate number from Tammy to Allakaket Flight number 14, and hurried to the gate. As he was walking down the ramp to the tarmac, he saw a baggage handling truck with it's lights flashing charge up to the plane, stop with the brakes smoking, and transfer 2 bags that Ron was sure were his, because they were both monogrammed R.W., and had the Allakaket Airlines logo embroidered on them. Ron remembered a line from a Mel Brooks movie, and started laughing, thinking “It's good to be the King!” The ground agent directed Ron to the co-pilot's hatch. Steve was flying this flight too - so Ron said “Long time no see Steve!”

“Good to have you back Boss. The plane's already prepped and we're good to go.”

“Steve, I'm just taking the seat, I'm too tired to fly as co-pilot.”

“Good thing I ate my Wheaties this morning!”

“Just get me home in one piece Steve, or Nancy might get mad!”

Steve's mental image of Nancy hunting him down and killing him made him swallow reflexively, then he realized Ron was teasing him back. Steve called for clearance while the tug pushed him away from his parking spot, then he taxied to the runway. By the time he arrived at the runway, he was clear to take off. He made a nice sedate take-off, and was soon cruising at 2,000 feet. They landed uneventfully in Allakaket 2 hours later. Ron drove home, opened the door, and said “Hi honey I'm home!”

“Good thing I sent the cable guy packing over an hour ago!”

Nancy gave Ron a big hug, and a bigger kiss. Ron hoped the kids could take care of themselves for a couple of hours, because he couldn't wait either.

## Chapter 29 - A Wedding to Remember

The 6 months between Ralph's return from Louisiana and their wedding passed faster than Sam and Ralph had thought, maybe because they were too busy to realize it. Samantha got the invitations out in time, and remembered to call Ron. "Ron, its Samantha. The wedding is June 16th at 12 noon at the First Baptist church of Chapel Hill. You'll want to fly to Charlotte North Carolina. Let us know your flight number and we'll have Nelson meet you with the limousine. Doc and Bert said you could stay with us while you're here, so there's no need to book a hotel, besides all the good ones are booked anyways that weekend. OK, e-mail me the flight number and the time it's supposed to arrive in Charlotte. Can't wait to see you too - bye!"

Ron called Alaska Airlines, booked 2 first class tickets to Charlotte North Carolina for Friday June 15th. They had a 1-stop flight with a change of planes and airlines in Seattle that would arrive at 3:00 pm Friday afternoon. It left Anchorage at 0800. Ron checked with Nancy and booked the flight. Since he had a agreement with Alaska Airlines, the Anchorage to Seattle leg of the flight was free for both of them, and they charged Ron the Exchange rate for the Delta flight to Charlotte. Ron was glad he owned Allakaket Airlines, since First Class tickets for that long of a flight were now running over \$1500 each at the discount rate that they sold to travel agents. The tickets only cost him \$400 total. He e-mailed Samantha the flight number and the scheduled arrival time of 3:00pm local on Friday the 15th. He checked, and his tuxedo was sitting in the bag in the closet. Since he hadn't gained any weight since he bought it 3 years ago, it should still fit. Nancy had a beautiful but conservative formal dress she bought for the same event that he was pretty sure would fit. He very diplomatically asked Nancy if she made sure that dress still fit. Nancy told him that if anything she had lost 20 pounds since she bought it when she was 3 months pregnant with Sarah. Ron was glad that was settled. In a little less than a week, they would fly to North Carolina, and see a woman he hadn't seen for almost 10 years, and meet her fiancé for the first time.

He called Anne and she answered the phone "Anne's Babysitting Service" Ron loved his mom's sense of humor. Then he remembered she had free Caller ID, just like the rest of town. "Real Funny Mom - but you're right, Nancy and I are flying on Friday to North Carolina for Samantha's wedding. I'm going to be the best man, and Nancy is the Matron of honor. You don't mind, thanks Mom. Can you make it Thursday afternoon, we've got to be out of here by 5:30 to make an 8 o'clock flight. OK, you'll be here by 5 - Thanks, and I love you too Mom!"

Thursday evening, Anne arrived right at 5:00 pm, just in time to help out with Feeding Time. Jake and Josh were such chow hounds that Nancy felt like a lion keeper at the zoo, just throw them a T-bone, and they'll take care of the rest. Sarah was a picky eater, and needed a cheering section sometimes. David was perfectly happy with a bottle or a jar of baby food. He took after his brothers, and would eat anything you placed before him. Once the kids and Moose were fed, they went in the playroom while the adults ate. Nancy set up her seat at the table so she could view the monitor in the kid room. Ron said grace, and they ate. Nancy and Ron went to

bed around 8:00, since they had to be up early the next morning. Anne went to bed early, it would be a long week dealing with 3 kids and an infant. Ron and Nancy had their bags packed and sitting by the door. Nancy set the coffee machine and had a bag of muffins and a thermos with 2 cups ready to go next to it. The maintenance crew knew they were flying early tomorrow, and would have the SA-76 007 prepped and ready to go at 0600. Their alarms went off at 0500, and they were dressed and out the door at 0530 before anyone could wake up and slow them down. Moose gave Ron a nuzzle, and he petted Moose briefly and told him to take care of the house. They drove to the airport, and the chopper was prepped and the turbines idling when they got there. They climbed quickly aboard, and Ron asked Nancy “You brought your P-14 and your CCW, right?”

“Duh! Of course silly, it’s like my American Express Card.”

2 hours later they were landing in Anchorage. They landed at the Alaska Airlines private heliport, and got a ride over to the gate they were flying out of, bypassing security. The driver made sure their luggage got aboard the aircraft as well. They walked up to the boarding area, and someone was on the ball, because their boarding passes and transfers had already been taken care of. Ron guessed correctly that the guy who gave them a lift called ahead to make sure they got the VIP treatment. They were immediately boarded, and 15 minutes later, the plane took off for Seattle. 2 hours later, they were landing in Seattle, and they were driven to their connecting flight with their luggage, to make sure it made the plane. 15 minutes after they boarded, they were bound for Charlotte. Ron and Nancy napped on the flight, and landed in Charlotte right after they woke up. Nelson met them at the baggage claim, and had a cart already for their luggage. He walked with them to the Silver Lincoln Continental Stretch limousine, and held the door open, then put their baggage in the trunk. An hour later, they were pulling up the driveway to this huge Southern Mansion. Ron thought their house was huge, but this mansion was easily 3 times the size of their house.

Doc and Bert greeted them on the porch. Ron introduced Nancy, then Samantha made her appearance. She was even more beautiful than Ron remembered. She squealed like a little girl, ran up to Ron, and squeezed the stuffing out of him. She didn’t kiss him even though she wanted to, since she realized that wouldn’t be appropriate. She let go of Ron, and said “This must be Nancy, you’re even more beautiful in person” then gave Nancy a very strong hug as well. She asked them to come on in, they had a lot of catching up to do. Nancy thought that Sam really did like her, and she was glad, since she had thought of Samantha as the “competition” for years. Raphael was waiting in the drawing room, and stood as soon as they entered. Sam said “Ron and Nancy Williams, may I present my fiancé Raphael Lacombe.”

Ron amazed them all when he walked up to Ralph and said “Heureux de vous rencontrer Raphaël !

Le sentiment est Ron mutuel !

“Sorry Ralph, that just about exhausts my French!”

“I appreciate the effort Ron. I just spent a year in Louisiana setting up clinics for Cajun speakers in the Bayou. Most of them don’t speak much English. Funny, you speak French with a Canadian accent.”

“Probably because the only person who spoke French in Allakaket was Canadian!”

“That explains it! Let’s go sit down and get comfortable.”

They all sat in the huge living room and got caught up. Soon it was time for dinner, and their black housekeeper and cook told them that dinner was served. They all got up and walked into the formal dining room. When they were all seated, Doc said Grace “Father, we’re here for a joyous occasion, the joining of two lives as one as you ordained. Bless this assembly and this union, and thank you for the food, Amen.” 5 voices echoed his Amen, and the plates were passed. Ron thought the food was excellent, even though he hadn’t eaten foods like this before. There was Virginia Baked Ham, sweet potatoes, okra, rustic style mashed potatoes with pan gravy, and corn bread. For dessert there was Peach Cobbler. They ate their fill, and then retired to the drawing room to socialize some more. Around 10:00, Doc noticed Ron and Nancy were getting visibly tired, then remembered they had a long flight and were probably ready for bed. “Ron and Nancy, Nelson put your bags in your room. It’s down that hallway and the 3rd door on the right. Breakfast is at 8:00, and we’re leaving for the church at 10:00 to get dressed at the church.”

Ron and Nancy said goodnight, and went to bed after taking showers since they were too exhausted to do anything else. They got up at 7:30 the next morning, and got dressed. Breakfast was a huge expanse of food, and Doc said grace again. They talked for a while after breakfast, and Doc told Ron and Nancy they would be riding with them, since they reserved another limousine for Raphael and Samantha. At 9:45, a big white stretch limousine drove up the driveway, then Ralph and Sam went to get their stuff and put it in the limo for the ride to the church. Ron took his garment bag with his tuxedo, and Nancy took her garment bag with her dress and shoes out to the limo. 5 minutes later, Doc and Bert joined them. They drove to the church, and were shown to the dressing rooms. Once he was dressed, Ron helped Raphael since he had never worn a tuxedo before. He was wearing a dazzling white long-tailed tuxedo, and Ron was wearing a more conservative short-tailed black one. At 10 to 12, they walked out to the altar and waited for the procession. At 12:00, Reverend Whitaker took his place, then the music started, and Nancy was the first down the isle, then Samantha. She was radiant in her long white dress with a 6-foot train and a long white veil and finger-tip white lace gloves.

The wedding had started, and Reverend Whitaker was reading in Corinthians when a strange man burst into the church and yelled “No one’s gonna take my little girl from me!” then pulled out an M -4 Carbine.

Reverend Whitaker dove toward Samantha to protect her with his body; at the same time Ron, who was wearing his P-14 in an IWB holster under his tuxedo, straight-armed Ralph out of the line of fire, drew his gun, and double-tapped the assailant in the chest. Hearing a 3rd shot, he looked to his left, and Nancy's gun was smoking too, and then Ron noticed the back of assailant's head was blown off. Raphael recovered from being knocked over, and told Reverend Whitaker that it was OK, and to get Sam up and take her to his office, so she didn't have to see the body.

Ron checked on Nancy, who was looking pale, so he found her a seat before she fainted. He whispered in her ear. "Nancy, you saved Sam's life. Remember that regardless of what happens." Nancy nodded. Meanwhile Doc checked out the assailant, and one look told him he was beyond help.

Ron finally got a good look at the assailant, and he said "Oh my God, That's Steve Stone - he was supposed to be in prison for life for murdering Samantha's mother."

Doc called 911 with his cell phone, while they covered the body with a sheet. The police were there in minutes, Ron and Nancy both surrendered their firearms, and the Detective quickly confirmed their story, including the information that Steve Stone had killed a guard and broken out of the Alaska State Penitentiary 2 weeks ago. They took Steve's prints, and as soon as they came back as a match, and Ron presented his Federal CCW, they handed Ron and Nancy back their guns. The Coroner took the body away, and Ron told Raphael whom the assailant was. He left it up to Ralph what to tell his wife. Thinking quickly, Reverend Whitaker told everyone that there was a beautiful garden gazebo out back, and he could marry them there if they wanted.

Samantha took the news of her father's death fairly well. Her only comment was "Too bad I didn't have a gun, I would have loved to get a shot in."

Samantha and Raphael met with Ron and Nancy. Samantha hugged Nancy and thanked her for saving her life, then she hugged Ron again. "Well, I guess this makes 3 times you saved my life! So has your red cape ever come back from the cleaners?"

"Don't need one - I don't have any super powers, none that I'm aware of anyway!"

Raphael gave Ron a big hug and said "Now I know why Samantha likes you so much. You're going to have to teach me to shoot sometime."

"Ralph, I thought doctors were supposed to save lives, not take them?"

"Well in that case, I'd be able to fix the damage too! Thanks for saving both of our lives. Are you guys OK if we get married out back in half an hour?"

Ron looked at Nancy, whose color was returning. "Nancy, you up to this?"

“Ron, if they don’t get married, he wins, at least a little - let’s get them hitched!”

Half an hour later in the beautiful garden gazebo, Reverend Whitaker picked up right where he left off. “Raphael, do you take Samantha as your wife today and for the rest of your life. Do you promise before God and this assembly to love, honor and protect her the rest of your life, forsaking all others, to be with her the rest of your life.”

“I Do!”

“Samantha, do you take Raphael as your husband, do you promise to love, honor, and respect him the rest of your life, forsaking all others, to be one with him the rest of your life.”

“I Do!”

With the exchange of Rings and Vows, I declare you Raphael and Samantha to be husband and wife before God. By the power vested in me as a Baptist Minister, I hereby declare you married according to the laws of God and the state of North Carolina. What God has joined, let no man put asunder. Raphael, you may kiss your bride!”

“Ladies and Gentlemen, may I present to you Raphael and Samantha Lacombe!”

The small congregation stood and applauded wildly. Ron and Nancy were the first to congratulate the bride and groom, then Doc and Bert. The entire wedding party got into limousines for the ride back to Doc and Bert’s house for the reception.

During the ride home, Doc Richards looked disapprovingly at Ron and said “I hope you don’t plan on taking your guns into my home!”

Before Ron could say anything, Bert looked at Doc and said “Eugene, if Ron had done what you wish he had, and left that gun at home, we’d all be dead right now, including Samantha and Raphael. What happened at that wedding was Wicked and Evil, but the Wicked and Evil was because of Steve Stone, not Ron. Steve brought his death upon himself when he threatened to kill innocent people. If a police officer had shot Steve, you wouldn’t think twice about it. Well, the cops weren’t there, and I’m Damn Glad Ron brought his gun, and Nancy too, otherwise Samantha would be dead, and most if not all of us - now you apologize to Ron!”

Doc turned to Ron and said “Young Man, I’m sorry! I’ve spent my whole life trying to save lives, and I always thought guns were evil - just for killing. It took my wife to point out to me that guns in private hands can also protect innocent life. How can I ever repay you?”

“Doc, if you’ll never vote to restrict the rights of law-abiding citizens to own and carry guns, I’ll call it even. You can’t undue the damage done to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, but you can stop any further erosion of those rights. Also, you can use this incident as an



example of why law-abiding citizens should be allowed to carry concealed if you're ever asked."

"Ron, you're asking a lot of me!"

"Doc, you asked - I gave you an honest answer. You realize that if I didn't have a Federal CCW, I would probably be in jail right now, and trying to explain to a judge why I was carrying concealed in North Carolina! They won't recognize an Alaskan CCW."

"You're kidding - Right Ron?"

"Unfortunately no, Doc. The Liberals who hate guns, or more accurately hate armed citizens, have had a long time to erode the right to keep and bear arms. They've got armed bodyguards, fenced enclosures around their million dollar mansions, and armored limousines to protect them from the same people their constituents face every day, yet these same elitists want to disarm them to control them more easily. I know you've probably read Animal Farm, and the Pigs' famous line "We're all equal, just some are more equal than others." Well, that's the Liberal world view in a nutshell. We're all equal - equally poor, with them in charge and wealthy. You have earned every dime you own, so you know all about paying taxes. If they had their way, they would ratchet up the tax brackets to confiscatory levels, and have a social program for every lazy bum that didn't want to work, or felt the jobs they could do were beneath them. We're already seeing it now, with multiple generations of inner city families on welfare, and babies having babies. And you know the drug addiction statistics. They're all symptoms of the same problem. Large parts of the population are being bought off with the taxes taken from the rest of the population, so they will vote for the people who keep the welfare checks coming. Look at England. They have some of the highest taxes in Europe, and the highest unemployment rates, because businesses that were once profitable have been taxed to death, and employers can't afford to hire anyone. Do you want the US to become like that?"

"Of course not Ron."

"Well it's happening right in front of your eyes - take a good look around if you dare!"

They arrived at Doc and Bert's house just in time to end the conversation while it was still civil. When Nelson stopped the car, he walked back to the passenger compartment, opened the door, and helped everyone out of the limousine. Doc turned to Ron and said "Ron, you've given me a lot to think about, now let's go in and enjoy the rest of the reception, shall we!"

"Thanks Doc. If you want to talk about this later, call or e-mail me."

With that they walked into the house which had been gaily decorated for the reception.

Moments later, the bridal limousine pulled up, and the driver helped Raphael out, who then

gave Samantha his arm, and they walked up the stairs arm in arm. The reception was more like a small intimate party than a big soirée. Since there were only around 50 wedding guests, they fit easily on the bottom floor of Doc's house. They had a buffet table for lunch, a 3-tier wedding cake, and a large non-alcoholic punch bowl. There were fancy seats set against the wall for people who wanted to eat or talk sitting down, but most of the people stood and mingled. Finally Reverend Whitaker made an appearance, and after congratulating the bride and groom, took Ron and Nancy aside. "Ron, I normally frown on guns in church, but in your case, I'd definitely make an exception. You two literally saved our lives. I found out from the detective that Steve's finger was on the trigger, and the selector was set to full auto. Nancy, that 3rd shot to his forehead guaranteed he couldn't pull the trigger, so you probably did save a lot of lives with that 3rd shot. Ron, I've been around a lot of policemen and was even a Chaplain in the Marines, but I've never seen someone move as fast as you, and shoot so accurately. The coroner said both rounds would have been fatal and were right through the heart-lung region. Where'd you learn to shoot like that?"

"Reverend Whitaker, One of my friends and an officer in Allakaket Airlines is an Ex-Seal diving instructor. He not only taught me, but everyone in our town that wanted to how to shoot. I was a pretty good pistol shot before then because our cabin was in the middle of bear country, so I grew up with a pistol in my hand. I used a Ruger 22/45 for taking squirrels and other small game, and a Colt Anaconda .44 Magnum as my Bear gun. Last time I counted, I've shot 6 bears that were attacking, or too close to let go safely. Nancy here is the reigning Champion woman's pistol shot for the Town of Allakaket. Bill Ayer and I built a 10-lane 100-yard indoor shooting range in town after several terrorist attacks in the vicinity. I found out that if I made membership in the range an employee benefit, I could write off all the expenses including practice ammo as employee benefit expenses. We have weekly shooting contests, and during the winter, the citizens of Allakaket are either at the range, or using the indoor pool we built for the community,"

"Wow, if I didn't have a congregation here, I'd be tempted to move to Allakaket."

"You know Reverend, any major corporation in the United States could do the same thing if they wanted to."

"Anyway, I just wanted to thank the two of you for saving everyone's lives today, and give you that extra information I had."

"You're welcome Reverend, and God Bless!"

Nancy turned to Ron with a big smile of relief on her face. "Ron, I'm glad the Reverend told me about that, or I would always wonder if that 3rd shot was gratuitous. Since the gun was set to full auto, and his finger was on the trigger, that third shot was necessary to make sure he couldn't pull the trigger."

“Not only that, but I never thought he might be wearing a vest. If he was, and I stopped shooting, we’d all be dead. Looks like I need to work on my Failure to Stop Drills again. By the way, where were you hiding that gun?”

“Ever see Miss Congeniality with Sandra Bullock?”

Ron laughed out loud “You were wearing a thigh holster under that dress - I never would have known! I guess you really do treat your P-14 like your American Express Card!”

“Right, it doesn’t do me a lot of good home on the nightstand.” Ron held Nancy for a while, and gave her a big kiss, then he said, “Let’s go rejoin the party!”

They laughed and joked a while, when Doc told them he needed to talk.

“Ron, I found out from Reverend Whitaker that if you two wouldn’t have shot when you did, especially Nancy, we could all be dead! Again, just wanted to say thanks, and I’m sorry for what I said on the way over.”

“Don’t worry Doc, you have strongly held beliefs, and I understand.”

Doc shook Ron and Nancy’s hands, then said he had to get back to his other guests. The three of them walked back into the reception and picked up where they left off.

Later that evening, it was time to open the gifts. Among all the other gifts, there was a single envelope there with “Ralph and Sam” on the cover in Doc’s writing. Sam opened it, and there was a note and a passbook. The note said the passbook was for a Trust Fund, which had \$500,000.00 in it. Any disbursements would require both their signatures, and would be limited to major purchases, like a new house or car. Sam and Ralph both gave Doc and Bert big tearful hugs.

“Ralph, now that the state has forgiven your Guaranteed Student loan debts, I felt that a trust fund was in order to help you buy a really nice house to raise your children in. I’d highly suggest renting until you get established, since if you sell a house within the first 3 years of buying it, your costs usually are more than any increase in market value, and you loose money.”

Ralph said “Thanks Doc. We’ve already decided to live in Atlanta. The main hospital there has already accepted my application for ER Assistant Chief Resident, and Sam’s completed her internship in Emergency Surgery, so they’ve accepted her as well into their residency program. We’ll be working the same shift, so we’ll get to spend a lot of time together. We planned on renting for the first 2 years until we were comfortable in Atlanta, and knew the market better.”

Sam said “Thanks Mom and Dad - you two have been like parents to me, so if it’s OK with you, when we have children, we’d like both of you to be their grandparents.”

Bert hugged the stuffing out of Sam. They never were able to have kids of their own, and now they were going to be grandparents!

“Sam, I don’t know how to thank you!”

“You two have been the parents I’ve always dreamed about, and who you see standing before you today is mostly because of your love and caring. God had a lot to do with it, but you took me in, helped me get my life back together, gave me an education, and you love me like your own daughter, so I hope you don’t mind if I call you Mom and Dad!”

Bert thought that deserved another hug, and Samantha was wondering if Bert was part python.

Later that evening, when things broke up, Ron and Nancy went to say their Goodbyes to the newlyweds. Sam hugged the stuffing out of Ron, saying “Thanks for everything Ron, You two will always be special friends to us.”

Ralph gave Ron a hug too, and said “Thanks again for being there for us, and saving our lives. I was serious about learning to shoot, but I realize it might be inconvenient for you to fly from Alaska to Atlanta, so maybe you could recommend someone. When we’re qualified, both of us want to get CCW’s if we can.”

“Ralph, when I get home, I’ll talk to Bear and see if he knows anyone in the Atlanta area who can train you. As far as the CCWs, I might be able to help, since you’ve both been the victims of violent crimes. I have some low friends in high places that might be able to help.”

“Merci vraiment monsieur!”

“You’re Welcome Raphaël. Bon Jour, and Au Revoir.”

Ralph laughed “you’re French is not bad, but you still speak it like a French Canadian.”

“Probably because the person who taught me enough French to get in trouble was Canadian.”

Meanwhile Samantha and Nancy were getting some quality “girl time”, they were laughing and giggling by the time Ron was ready to leave. Ralph and Sam were staying there that night, and flying to Aruba the next morning for their honeymoon. They had a month before they reported to Atlanta, which would give them 2 weeks in Aruba, and enough time to move their few possessions to Atlanta. Ralph wanted to buy a SUV and rent a trailer, since they needed another vehicle anyway. Ralph and Sam decided to sell his 10-year old Honda, and return the Carmen Gia to Doc, since they were working the same shift they could drive to work together.

## Chapter 30 - Mini-Vacation

Ron and Nancy stayed in a Charlotte hotel that night, and called Anne the next morning. She said she was doing fine, and had the rest of the week off, she suggested they take a vacation. Ron thought that was a good idea and Nancy reminded him they were less than a couple of hours north of Florida, and they could do diving in the Florida Keys. The desk clerk was extremely helpful, and allowed Ron to use the Internet for a couple of minutes. He found a listing of diving sites, and a company that did diving tours for experienced divers. They provided the boat, crew, and gear. By now Nancy had found a more conservative swimsuit since they used the pool several times a month, so she wouldn't give anyone a heart attack. He contacted the company, and they had a boat and crew available. They'd charge \$500 for a 3-day diving trip in the Keys. Ron asked them to hold the boat for them; they were driving down from North Carolina. The owner said they shouldn't try to dive today, so they would reserve it for tomorrow. Ron thanked him, and asked the Hotel Clerk if they did rental vehicles. He was looking for a nice luxury SUV, She said they had an arrangement with Hertz Rentals, and checking her computer, they had a 2004 Oldsmobile Bravada that was fully loaded for \$200/week with unlimited mileage, deductible waiver, and a full tank of gas. Ron told her they were going diving, and asked if she could pull up the location. She said she could do 1 better, and gave him the GPS coordinates to the location, and a nearby hotel in their chain that they could stay overnight. She handed Ron the printout, and asked if he wanted the vehicle. It could be at the hotel's front door in half an hour. Ron told her to make the arrangements, and handed her his AMEX to charge the vehicle rental on.

She reserved a night at the chain hotel, and 20 minutes later, the vehicle drove up. She had already checked them out, and Nancy got their bags out of the room while Ron was taking care of the paperwork. They signed the rental agreement, and loaded the SUV. Ron entered the coordinates for the hotel and the dive shop. He selected the hotel, and the car's GPS navigation system gave him turn-by turn directions to the front door of the hotel. They arrived at the hotel later that evening, and spent the night, and drove to the dive shop early the next morning. After presenting his AMEX card and their PADI diving certificates, and signing their lives away, they checked out the boat and the crew. Ron felt OK, and Nancy felt that they were pretty safe with this crew, so they hired them for a 3-day diving cruise. The captain showed them several diving sites, and they selected 6 they wanted to dive since they were all within recreational dive limits. He checked the air tanks, hoses, and regulators and they looked brand-new. Even the masks, fins, and snorkels looked new. He asked the captain, and he told them they replace their dive gear every couple of years, since it was cheaper than getting sued, and they had just bought new gear before the start of this season. Ron and Nancy locked up the SUV, and took their stuff aboard the boat.

They shoved off 5 minutes later, and 2 hours later were at the first site. Ron and Nancy had already suited up, and the first mate helped them into their gear and helped them check it. Then he handed them each an underwater camera. It was an unexpected bonus, and Ron thanked

them. The first site was an old 1800's era wreck, and it was full of fish. Ron and Nancy shot a bunch of pictures, then they surfaced, moved to the next site, and did it all over again. Their stateroom was pretty luxurious for a dive boat, and the food was good. Overnight, they relocated to the next dive site, so they would be ready to go first thing in the morning. When the 3-day diving holiday was over, Nancy told Ron that this was the most fun she had had outside of their bedroom since they were married.

They drove back to Charlotte, and called Delta to see when they could book 2 first class seats to Seattle with a transfer to Alaska Airlines and Anchorage. The Delta operator spotted the VIP code, and amazingly found 2 first-class seats on their 0800 flight to Seattle the next morning. That worked for Ron, who didn't want to fly too soon after all that diving. They checked into the hotel, got a good night's sleep, and drove the rental to the rental drop-off at the airport the next morning. The rental courtesy van drove them to the main entrance, and after Ron and Nancy presented their Federal CCWs, they were escorted around security and walked to the gate right as they were announcing pre-boarding. The airline agent exchanged the return half of their round-trip tickets for boarding passes for the rest of the trip, and told them to have a nice day. They walked aboard the aircraft, and were shown 2 seats together in First Class. Once they were settled, the Steward asked if they wanted anything, and took their meal order. They both ordered the steak and vegetable omelet. 5 minutes later, the plane started filling up, and as soon as the door closed, they started backing up to the taxiway, then they took off for Seattle. They reversed the process when they transferred back to Alaska Airlines, and soon were on their way home. The 007 was waiting for them at the Alaska Airlines private heliport, and someone from Alaska Airlines was waiting for them at the gate. They would collect their bags, and drive them over to the private heliport. Half an hour later they were flying home to Allakaket. Ron was glad he got some sleep on the flight home, because Nancy was exhausted, and fell asleep on the flight from Anchorage to Allakaket. Anne greeted them at the door, and they were promptly mobbed by 2 boys and a dog. Sarah was hanging back, and David was in Anne's arms asleep. Nancy picked up Sarah and gave her a big hug and a kiss, and Sarah gave her mom a big smile in return. Anne kept an eye on the kids the rest of the afternoon so Ron and Nancy could get some sleep.

The next morning Bear called and needed to see Ron face to face, since all the TG's were busy, Ron called and had them prep a 007 for a quick hop to Alaska Survival Inc. He kissed Nancy, gave his mom a hug, and said he'd see them later, then drove to the airport where one of the S-76 helicopters was idling, waiting for him. He parked the truck, climbed aboard, belted in, and the crew chief closed and locked the door, then tapped the pilot on the shoulder once he was securely belted in too, and the pilot increased the throttle, and lifted into the air, and adopted a nose-down attitude, then slowly rose into the air. 1 hour later, he landed in the main compound, and the pilot shut down. Once the rotor stopped spinning, the crew chief opened the door and Ron got out and practically walked into Bear. "Bear what's up?"

"General Shepard just delivered a bunch of stuff, and I'm running out of room to store it. I wanted your permission to re-distribute some of it to your lodge, and we need to build an

armory for Allakaket itself.”

“You could have called me for that, what’s up?”

“I wanted you to see what General Shepard sent, we’re now getting front-line small arms.” They walked inside the Main building they used for the survival school, which was temporarily empty because the students were out in the field. There was a Pelican case on the center table. Bear opened it, and Ron’s chin almost hit the floor. It looked like an M -4 carbine with all the accessories. “Bear, what the heck is this?”

“General Shepard is sending us Special Forces equipment for some reason, this is the SOPMOD M4.”

“I recognize the M -4 carbine, but what’s the rest of this stuff?”

Bear started taking stuff out of the case and attaching it to the carbine. The first piece was an ACOG 4x scope that he said was good out to 600 meters, then pulled out an M -203 grenade launcher with a QD mount, and attached that as well, finally he pulled a suppressor out of the case and locked it to the barrel with a twist and a click. “This is the basic configuration for the SOPMOD M4, it takes other optics and gear to enhance NVG targeting. The suppressor reduces the firing noise by 30db, and as you can see, just clicks on and off. There are 99 more of these on a pallet next door in the shelter. It’s so full of weapons that we can’t use it - so we need to redistribute it. Hunter said he saw a spot that would work great for a shelter/armory for the town, since it’s stuck between the two main hangars, and you really can’t build anything else there. He volunteered to help you blast the dirt loose, since you could damage nearby buildings if you overshoot. I’ve got a plan for a shelter that can shelter a couple of hundred people in an emergency, with an Armory above it. We need to get going because we need to store this stuff elsewhere because my shelter is too full for us to use. Now that we’ve got General Shepard’s letter, we can be a little more overt about our military hardware.”

“OK, Bear, make it happen. So what else were you planning on storing in Allakaket?”

“I was going to leave 10 of these SOPMOD weapons systems and 120 40mm grenades at your lodge, since your shelter is huge, and leave 10 of them here, leaving 80 units to store in Allakaket. We’ve got over 1200 40mm grenades in cases of 12, half of them are HE grenades, and the other half are the HEDP type. If we each keep 120 grenades, that leaves 960 grenades for 80 SOPMOD M4 plus the M-16A2/M203s we already own. We’re expecting another shipment of grenades, plus 5.56, 7.62, and 20mm ammo later this week. Gen. Shepard isn’t telling me why, but he wouldn’t be shipping us all this if he didn’t think we needed it, so we need to review our preparedness and training. First we need to get going on that building. You need to talk to Bill and BA, because this shelter/armory isn’t going to be cheap. You and BA have excellent shelters under your houses, but no one else in Allakaket has got squat. I found out there are around 200 women and children in Allakaket, and my plan can handle 300 people

easily, and it will hold up to anything besides a direct hit with a nuke or a bunker buster. With the armory on top, no one will suspect that there's a huge bomb shelter underneath. This will protect the non-combatants in case we get attacked, and will improve the morale of the militia members to know their wives and children are safe."

"Great Bear, give us a cost estimate, and we'll get going on it."

"Ron, I've got it right here, a shelter capable of supporting 300 people for 90 days would cost \$3.5 million dollars, but 2/3 of that is supplies and equipment."

Ron realized he was worth about \$30 million right now, as was BA, and they owed the townspeople a lot. The militia shot General Wilcox down, and almost all of the townspeople now worked for him in one capacity or another. Between the two of them that would be 1.75 Million a piece. OK, he thought that BA would go for it too, and told Bear that he had a tentative approval to spend up to \$5 Million on the project. Bear gave Ron a bear hug, and walked him back to the helicopter. Bear handed Ron a disk that he said contained the design and a spreadsheet for the costs, then told him to get aboard the helicopter. They flew back to Allakaket, and Ron had a meeting with BA and Bill. They thought it was an excellent idea, since Bear needed an armory in town anyway, and approved it. They were reviewing the project design, and agreed that it would hold up to anything short of a bunker buster or a nuke. The shelter was over 50 feet deep, 200 feet wide and 300 feet long. The opening between the buildings was 250x350, so it would just fit, and they could make it look like another hangar if they made it a steel building. The only problem would be getting the dirt out of the hole, but Ron thought that Hunter might have an idea. He did, and it involved using several pickup trucks as dump trucks, and filling them with dirt then driving them up a ramp and dumping the dirt next to the aircraft ramp to extend and widen the ramp in case they needed a wider ramp in the future. Besides, it would be the best way to hide the excavated dirt.

They contracted for a concrete batch plant, and enough rebar for the "basement". The floor/roof was supported by huge steel girders and posts. The CH-47 was busy flying the heavy loads to Allakaket, and the Super Stallion took care of all the light stuff. Hunter supervised drilling and blasting 75 feet of earth and rock, then they brought in a huge front-end loader that could fill a 2-ton pickup bed with 1 load. Luckily, Allakaket Airlines had invested in diesel 4x4 F-450s years ago, and it was a simple matter to convert the beds to dump beds. They used all 6 trucks, and flew in several dump trucks from the mine to keep up with the volume. They dug down 75 feet, then filled and compacted gravel in the bottom until they had a firm level bed for the concrete. They were using the pour and erect method for pouring the walls, so they reinforced the floor, made molds for the walls, and then poured and erected the concrete to finish curing in place. The outside of the walls was sprayed with an industrial concrete sealer, since it was neater and faster than applying tar.

Once they got the lower half of the wall in, they stopped and installed all the utilities including a million gallons worth of fresh water tanks, a 5,000 gallon grey-water tank with a settling filter



and a recirculating pump and 1.5 million gallons worth of black water tanks that could be pumped later when necessary. They included one of the diesel generators from the mine, and a 10,000 gallon diesel tank that should last 6 months. Lighting was a mix of warm and cool fluorescent fixtures that simulated normal daylight so plants could grow. They installed enough liquid oxygen tanks and CO2 scrubbers to last 300 people 6 months as part of a computerized air handling system that constantly monitored the humidity, CO2 and O2 levels in the shelter. They included an air filtration system to let in fresh air if the sensors didn't detect radiation or any biological or chemical contaminants. Ron was glad that General Shepard approved and assisted with building the shelter, so they got stuff only the government and military normally had.

Once all the utilities were in, they built the second floor by welding and bolting steel girders, decking and flooring to the steel girder posts. There was still room on the bottom floor to store food and supplies, so they installed a used freight elevator so they could use pallet jacks to move pallets of supplies from the storage/utilities floor to the main floors. Once that was built, they added a 3rd floor 15 feet above the main floor. With the construction of the 3rd floor, they resumed building the side walls, and soon the entire "basement" was fully enclosed on all 4 sides. All it needed was a roof. They erected another steel deck and had the concrete sections all ready to lift into place by the time they were ready for them, and set them on the decking, and connected the sections. They left 1 section open to act as a doorway, which would later be secured by a vault door built into the roof and opened hydraulically. Since the roof was 6 feet below grade, they used some of the native excavated dirt to fill it back in to grade, leaving an opening for the door. The door opening was just bigger than the largest pallet that supplies came in on, so the freight elevator could move them from the top to the bottom of the shelter. The extra orders from their General Store suppliers would barely be noticed with the volume they were buying. By the time they were all said and done, the shelter cost closer to \$10 Million than the \$5 Million estimate, but Allakaket Airlines had an excellent year, so it didn't hurt their bottom line. The townspeople pitched in and volunteered their spare time, which reduced costs by 1/3.

Finally, they erected a steel building on top of the shelter that stored the armory, the M -163 Vulcan, and the Rapier anti-air systems. They were going to store explosives in the armory, so they build a room inside the steel building made out of Concrete Masonry Units reinforced with concrete and rebar, and a reinforced concrete roof with blast vents so if there was an accidental explosion, the blast would be diverted out the roof instead of taking out the Vulcan and the Rapier, or damaging the rest of the armory. Cases of ammo were stored on shelves by caliber and type. Explosive ammo and missiles were stored in the concrete block room with the rest of the explosives. There were racks of rifles along a wall, along with Alice gear and bullet-proof vests. The Supply Sergeant at Elmendorf chose to retire from the Air Force, and was hired by Allakaket Airlines to maintain the Armory and the shelter. He still kept his connections at Elmendorf, which saved Allakaket Airlines millions of dollars by acquiring surplus equipment instead of new. His first day on the job was an eye-opener to say the least, he thought that Allakaket Airlines was better armed than the security force at Elmendorf, and in

certain areas, they were. They didn't have any Bradleys or Armor, but they weren't done yet!

General Shepard decided to pay a visit when Bear told him the shelter and Armory was done. He was getting ready to retire, and knew he wouldn't get promoted again, so he was thinking about re-locating to Allakaket since they were almost as well prepared as an Air Force base to withstand attack, or survive any SHTF scenario. When he got there, he was impressed, and made a few suggestions, and offered some more equipment they were missing - no, they didn't get any nuclear cruise missiles - it wasn't time yet!

Ron got called up by the General while he was in Allakaket. They were ready for him to test the improved Bradley and the improved LAV. If he could fly back with the General, they could talk in the plane on the way over to MacDill. Ron packed a bag with enough clothes for a week, and made sure that his emergency kit was in his bag, checked his P-14, spare mags, Federal CCW and his TS ID badge were still on him. He kissed Nancy goodbye, hugged the kids, and was out the door in half an hour - he didn't want to keep the General waiting. They flew back to Elmendorf in 007, Ron's S-76 super-copter, and then got on board the general's VC-20 for the flight to MacDill. Once they were airborne, General Shepard leveled with him.

"Ron, I'm all ready to retire. I deliberately sent you enough stuff to fight WWII since I wanted to retire to Allakaket if you'll have me. I'm tired of the BS, and just want to relax. With the new security measures I've installed, Allakaket is almost as secure as MacDill, except you don't have USMC guards. I've requested retirement, and my last project will be to see the Robo-tank and the Robo-LAV completed and produced. The engineers claim they got all the bugs out, and think you might be able to hit a small target at 3 miles now that they got the turret balanced and isolated the vibrations. Both prototypes are under wraps at MacDill, waiting for you to test them. If you say they're good to go, the Pentagon will cancel all existing contracts for the Bushmaster equipped Bradley and the LAV series, and replace them with Robo-guns. The good news is they can use existing hulls with several modifications, so they might even retrofit existing Bradleys and LAV's, saving even more money. This is the culmination of a long project, so I need your honest opinion."

"General, I've never given you anything but my honest opinion, and I'm not about to stop now. I've got a problem with Northrop Grumman. Seems I've pissed them off by costing them 35 million in excess charges on the SuperGoose project. One of their test pilots tried to entrap me by pumping me for information about the RCAF procurement of the SuperGoose. I turned the tables on him and tape-recorded his admission that Northrop Grumman has been charging a 700% markup on projects, and giving half of it back to Politicians in the form of kick-backs and political contributions. I've got the tape in a safe spot. Could you give me some help and get Northrop Grumman off my back. I can handle threats to myself, but I'm afraid they might go after my wife and kids."

"Ron, what did you say the name of that test pilot was?"

“It was the weirdest thing - he said his name was Keith Northrop, and I thought it was a little funny to have a grandson of the owners doing something as dangerous as a test pilot.”

“You were right, All of Jack Northrop’s relatives wouldn’t be let anywhere near a prototype aircraft. What else happened?

“Jack Snyder met me at the helicopter pad on the roof of the El Segundo facility, he introduced himself as the program director, and we flew to Edwards to meet Keith and fly the SuperGoose.”

“You said Jack Snyder - he’s not a program director, he’s their head of Internal Security and a total snake. I think this whole T&E thing was set up to set you up and get you to say something incriminating.”

“That’s my gut feeling, the plane wasn’t even wired for sensors like they’d normally do in a test series.”

“I’ll bet they tried to pump you, and when you wouldn’t spill your guts, they gave up for now. You might have an expert check your clothes for bugs. If you stayed at their hotel, they would have had ample time to plant a bug on you.”

Ron thought back to what he was wearing when he was in California, called BA on his cell phone, and told him to grab Bear and tell him to go to his house with testing equipment, and go through a list of clothes searching for bugs. Ron was royally pissed now, what if he said something while wearing their bugs. “General, a bug’s a transmitter, right - what’s the range of one of those bugs?”

“I see what you’re getting at, usually no more than a mile. If they wanted to bug you, they either had to plant a recorder within a mile, or else have an operator in the area. Since the tapes need to be switched, they needed an operator on the inside.”

Ron called BA back. “Have we hired anyone since the snafu with the RCAF?”

“Just a couple.”

“Run a deep background check on them, then let Bear talk to them, we might have an industrial spy on our hands, or a hit man!”

“In that case, I’ll incarcerate them right now until Bear clears them.”

A couple of hours later, BA called back “Ron, they checked out, and Bear didn’t find anything. Maybe we dodged a bullet.”

Ron told the general what BA had told him. The general wasn't satisfied, he knew these kind of operatives had legends that could stand up under close scrutiny. He asked Ron for the phone, and told BA to have Bear put someone reliable on them 24/7. BA agreed, then hung up. They talked for the rest of the flight, mostly strategy on how to defeat any attempt by Northrop Grumman to cause Ron grief. General Shepard hoped he was being paranoid, then remembered a famous quote "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you!" He used his "shoe phone" to make a contact with an Ex-Seal that worked for several alphabet agencies as a free-lancer. He left a cryptic message on his answering machine, and hung up. If anyone could dissuade Northrop Grumman from causing Ron problems, this gentleman could, and he owed the General a few favors.

## Chapter 31 - Robo-Gun II

They landed at MacDill later that day, and the general told Ron to get some sleep, he had a busy week ahead, then dropped him off at the VIP quarters. He went up to his room, took a shower, and went straight to bed. At 0700 the next morning, he was up, dressed, and headed for breakfast. Steve met him there at 0800, and gave him a ride to the firing range. They had the Robo-Tank (Bradley) set up for the short-range moving target test. They wanted to do the entire test series over again to make sure their fixes didn't mess anything up. Ron read the manual, realized there were no significant changes to the gun or the software, and set the RT up for target and track mode, then made sure the range was clear, and activated the range. The gun behaved identically as the last time, but Ron's score improved since more of the shots were in the kill zone, and he was acquiring them faster now that he was familiar with the system. They shut down the RT, checked the targets, and Ron had a perfect score. Everything out to a ½ mile was dead. They reset the range, and Ron re-configured the RT for long-range T&T mode with the outriggers down. When he was finished, he had a perfect score again, with all targets within a mile dead. Next he asked for static targets at 1,2,and 3 miles at his 6, 9 and 12o'clock. When these targets were set up, he activated Sniper Mode, and engaged the targets from left to right starting at his 6 o'clock. He put 5 rounds into each target without re-aiming after the first shot on the target. Just as he guessed, the groups opened up as the range increased but the groups were circular, indicating no major harmonics were interfering with the gun's accuracy. The 1-mile targets averaged a 3-inch group, the 2-mile targets averaged a 6-inch group, and the 3-mile targets averaged a 9-inch group for 5 shots per target without re-aiming. The first shot of each group was in the bulls-eye, and the 1-mile targets had X-ring groups. Any Enemy General within a mile would be dead as a doornail. Anyone within 2 miles would probably be dead, and anyone within 3 miles would be wishing they were dead. The only thing Ron needed to do with the Bradley RT was conduct the tests at night. Since they had the time and the ammo, he asked if the Sergeant would mind driving the tank while he shot, just to see how far they could engage and hit targets while moving. For the rest of the afternoon, they drove back and forth, and engaged targets from 100 yards to 1 mile. Everything within half a mile had a better than 80% chance of getting hit with the first shot at up to 30mph, and everything within a quarter-mile had a 100% hit ratio at full speed, the same as the existing Bradley. His hit ratio at targets outside ½ mile was a miserable 30%, but until now, the Bushmaster-equipped Bradley wouldn't even think about engaging targets more than a quarter-mile away while moving. Ron jumped out, and was typing like mad while his impressions were still fresh.

They drove him back to the VIP quarters, where he ate a late lunch/early dinner and took a nap. He got up at 2030, and Steve picked him up at 2100 hours and drove to the range. They did the whole procedure with the night settings, with comparable results. Just like last time, there was no difference between day and night with the new camera and software. The only problem they had was the Sergeant wasn't familiar enough with the displays to feel comfortable driving at speed at night using just the monitors, so the testing speed was limited to 20 mph. Ron finished

at 0100, and went to bed. It would take them until 1000 to set up the range and move the RT LAV into position. Ron was glad he could sleep in to 0900.

The next morning, Ron ate a big breakfast, because yesterday by the time he got fed again, he was really hungry. Steve showed up at 0950 to drive him to the range. Ron was impressed by the LAV-25, which was 30% bigger in all dimensions than the Bradley and fully amphibious. Installing the Robo-Gun actually increased room inside the cramped hull, which would make the Jarheads happy. He was given a familiarization briefing on the idiosyncrasies of the LAV-25. With its wheeled chassis, it had a higher ground clearance, and was less stable than the Bradley, so he shouldn't expect the same accuracy from the LAV-25 until the outriggers were deployed. The designers of the LAV decided to go with much heavier outriggers that fully supported the weight of the LAV, which meant that once the outriggers were deployed, the gun should be accurate out to 3 miles, which they hoped would make up for the lack of accuracy without the outriggers deployed. They hoped it would still be better than the original Bushmaster, and Ron had to agree that it should, based on his experience with the Bradley. The accuracy using only the suspension locks was disappointing, and anything outside of a ½ mile had a fairly good chance of surviving, since they could only manage a 50% kill rate. It could hit targets all day long out to a mile, but the suspension system had too much flexibility in it to guarantee a kill outside of ½ a mile.

With the outriggers down, however, the Robo-gun performed like it was attached to a block of concrete. The T&T session with the outriggers down was amazing. He was killing moving targets at 2-mile range like the Bradley was killing targets at a mile. Anything inside a mile was a guaranteed kill. Next he set up the 6, 9, and 12 pattern but extended it out to 5 miles just for giggles. They reloaded the ammo trays, and Ron fired 5 shots at each target without re-aiming once he fired the first shot at each target. The average group size was smaller for the whole series, and there was no distortion of the groups due to any perceived harmonics. The 1-mile targets averaged just under 2 inches, the 2-mile just under 4, and the 3-mile just under 6, The 4 and 5 mile targets were 8 and 10 inches respectively, but with some vertical stringing., probably due to the extreme range. It was still good to know that the gun could shoot a 10-inch group at 5 miles, and the first round from each group was in the bullseye. He hopped out of the LAV and quickly dictated his thoughts, then had the range set up for moving target/moving vehicle tests. The LAV performed dismally in Ron's opinion, but could still get a first-shot kill out to a ¼ mile below 30 mph. At half a mile, they were still getting disabling shots, and were lucky to hit targets past a half-mile while moving. He didn't blame the gun, since the Bradley did much better. He realized that a wheeled vehicle would have much more freedom of movement due to the suspension and the tires. He wrote his other report up, and was told to hit the sack so they could do the night-time tests at 2100 that evening. He ate a quick meal and went right to bed. He set an alarm for 2030, and met Steve at 2035 still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. The night test was a no-brainer, and again they had problems driving faster than 20mph at night due to the sergeant's unfamiliarity with the vehicle. Again they had problems without the outriggers, but with them the gun was amazingly accurate. They called it a night at 0100, and he went to sleep for 12 hours before they would get back together at 1500 the next day to write

the report.

On his way back to the VIP quarters, Ron thought of something, and asked Steve. “If the LAV with the outriggers is capable of engaging targets out to 5 miles, wouldn’t it benefit more from a higher magnification scope than the Bradley, which can only engage targets out to maybe 3 miles with it’s lighter outriggers.”

Steve stopped the Hummer, grabbed his tape recorder, and asked Ron to repeat what he just said, then handed him the tape, and told him to give it to the T&E team tomorrow. Steve dropped Ron off at the VIP quarters, where he ate a bologna and cheese sandwich and went to bed. He got up around noon, and they were still serving lunch, so Ron hurried down to the cafeteria and piled a plate full of food, then went back upstairs to his room when he finished eating, and took a shower and a quick nap. He woke up at 1400, got dressed, remembered the tape, and pocketed it. Steve was waiting downstairs, and drove him to the Gunny’s office. The team was assembled, and Ron handed Gunny the tape, and had him play it. The engineers felt like smacking their foreheads it was so obvious. The head of the design team said that increasing the maximum magnification could be done fairly easily using electronics, since the lens was way bigger than it needed to be for daylight imaging. The nighttime system might not be able to use the full magnification without washing out the image, but it would be worth having during the day. They wrote up their report with their recommendations, including increasing the magnification digitally, especially for the LAV version. When they were finished, Steve drove up and told Ron that General Shepard wanted to see him and to bring a copy of the T&E report. Steve dropped Ron off, and walked back to his office. Ron knocked on General Shepard’s door, and he said “Enter” so Ron opened the door. “General Shepard, you asked to see me?”

“Ron, sit down and close the door.” After he closed the door and sat down the General continued. “Ron, I’ve got good news and great news. First of all, thanks for a job well done. Steve told me about your idea to increase the magnification on the LAV. I was thinking, can you imagine what a threat a LAV-25 could be to a lightly armored force if it was dug into a revetment with only the turret exposed and it’s outriggers extended. The only visible target is the gun and the small turret, they can’t acoustically or visually locate the gun because of the suppressor, and it’s killing APCs at a 5-mile range. Even a medium tank would be vulnerable. A Main Battle Tank could be damaged at least. All armored troops would have to be buttoned up, restricting their view and their situational awareness. No senior officer would dare make himself a target on the battlefield in case there was a Robo-Tank hiding somewhere. That by itself would demoralize enemy troops that love to see their generals up front. Just that 1 observation could be the most important thing you did all week. We thoroughly expected the Bradley to be more accurate with the outriggers up, but didn’t realize that the LAV with the outriggers down would be so accurate. Thanks for doing the moving vehicle/moving target test. It’s not part of the program, but the data is still valuable. Based on your report, I’m going to recommend to the Pentagon that the Robo-tank go into full production for the Bradley as it exists, and suggest a change order for the optics for the LAV series to increase the

magnification to take advantage of it's stability with the outriggers down."

"I've got some better news for you. You never were targeted for any espionage by Northrop Grumman upper Management. This was a solo operation run out of Jack Snyder's office. Evidently one of the tech-reps at NG got a little mouthy about what they thought of you, and Jack thought that if he could freelance an operation and get you to spill the beans, he'd get promoted. Since the operation failed, they've taken no further action against you, and you never were bugged or tailed. My guess is you're in the clear, so you've nothing to worry about."

"Thanks General, that makes me feel better."

"I've put in for my retirement, and as a retirement present, the Air Force wanted to give me a Robo-tank as either a Bradley or the LAV. Since I'm moving to Allakaket, I wanted to know which one you thought I should get, since you know which one would work best up there."

"General, I'd highly suggest you get the Bradley, since there aren't many 5-mile clearings in Alaska, at least around Allakaket. Also the tracks would be easier to adapt to working in deep snow than the wheeled version."

"That's what I thought too. I'm shipping one last shipment of ammo, weapons and anything else I think you might need up there before I retire. Was there anything you wanted that you don't have yet?"

"General, we don't have any heavy anti-tank missiles like the AT-4, TOW, or Dragon. If you could spare a couple of ballistic Hummers, say 2 TOW armed Hummers, and 2 Ma Deuce armed Hummers with a full set of reloads, that would cover it."

"I think we can handle that - anything else?"

"Bear wanted to ask me to ask you if we could have any nuclear cruise missiles!"

General Shepard roared with laughter, and told Ron "You tell that overgrown aquatic freak that it still isn't time yet - OK!"

"Yes Sir General Sir!"

"Better yet, I'll tell him myself!" The General opened his shoe phone, and dialed Bear's number.

Bear must have been tired because he answered "Chief Simmons, this is an unsecured line"

"Bear, I've got a friend of yours here, and I decided to give you my answer personally; No, you



hairy overgrown aquatic freak, it isn't time yet!"

Bear and General Shepard were both laughing their heads off when Bear answered "Aye, Aye Sir!"

"Bear, how's things in Allakaket?"

"Quiet as a church on Wednesday morning."

The General and Bear had set up a code for use over unsecured phone lines. Bear's reply indicated that things really were quiet, and everything was OK. If he had mentioned Thursday, something was wrong, and if he said Friday, TSHTF, or it was about to. Saturday meant something was really wrong - like he might be a hostage. The General was glad that Bear was still using the code after all these years. OPSEC didn't stop when you hung up the uniform. He told Bear he would talk to him later and hung up.

"Ok Ron, You can either stay in VIP quarters and catch an early morning flight back to Alaska, or we can fly you out tonight and you'll probably have to stay overnight in Anchorage."

"General, if it's all the same to you, I'd like to stay here, the food's better, and I might get to spend some time with Steve. It might be a while before I see him again."

"Ron, keep this under your hat, but Steve's put in for his retirement as well. We both want to retire to Allakaket. I've taken some measures to ensure that the military hardware and the 007 helicopters stay in Allakaket when I retire, so Steve decided to join me. It will take a couple of months for the paperwork to process, then we're Hasta la Vista Baby! We're both bachelors, but Bear told us there are some really nice Inuit women in Allakaket that aren't too picky about their husbands, and they actually have all their teeth!"

Ron remembered his conversation with Bear, and started laughing. "General, that was Bear's first question, about their teeth."

General, maybe I should make some phone calls and let BA know so we can prepare some houses for you."

"Ron, like I said, keep it under your hat means don't tell even BA. Whatever you have available will be perfect. We're used to BOQ, so even a trailer in town will be an improvement. If word of our retirement got out prematurely before its official, it might undo all the stuff I've been doing for the last couple of months."

"Ok General, any thing else?"

"I'm sure you'll see something extra in your Christmas stocking this year - now beat it, I've got

work to do!”

Ron shook the General’s hand, and closed the door on his way out. He walked down the hall to Steve’s office, and plopped down in his spare chair to wait for him to get un-busy. “What brings you here?”

“The General sends his regards, and I’m staying overnight so I can fly out early tomorrow.”

“Ok Ron, I’ve got a mountain of paperwork, but I’ll catch you later this evening.” Steve called for a driver to take Ron wherever he wanted to go. “Steve, can you call Gunny at the range, I wanted to get in some pistol practice.”

“Sure Ron.”

2 minutes later “Gunny Smith, this is an unsecured line.”

“Gunny, Col. Fellows, Ron Williams would like to know if you were OK for some pistol practice?”

“Sure, have him meet me at the armory.”

“Thanks Gunny.”

“Gunny will meet you at the armory - see you later.”

Ron walked outside and a driver was waiting for him in a Hummer. Ron told him to drive to the Armory. When he pulled up, Gunny was sitting there with a big grin on his face. “Col. Fellows said you want some pistol practice, care to try our pop-up range again?”

“I was hoping you had that available. Do you have any .45 acp FMJ practice ammo?”

“I’ve got about 10 cases; it’s the Special Forces favorite caliber.”

Gunny grabbed a partial case, and said “Follow Me” and walked out to his Hummer. They drove over to “Hogan’s Alley” and Ron took his P-14 out of the holster, unloaded all 3 mags, and reloaded with the 230gr. FMJ ammo, then stuck the gun back in it’s holster, and the spare mags back in the mag carrier. The Gunny set up the system for an expert semi-auto pistol shooter, since he remembered Ron almost cleaned house on him the last time he shot the MP-5 on the course. Gunny handed Ron a noise-reducing headset that would also allow him to hear everything around him. Ron nodded that he was ready, and Gunny gave him a thumbs up, and pressed a hidden button. A buzzer went off, and targets started popping up all over the place. Ron went into overdrive, putting a round into each target as it appeared. He shot the gun dry, thumbbed the magazine release while he reached for his first spare, and did a perfect combat

reload. It cost him over a second, so now he was behind the curve, and had to hurry up. He was reaching for his 3rd magazine when the “You're dead” buzzer sounded. A mover had slid behind cover while he was reloading. Gunny was pretty impressed, he'd killed 28 targets before he ran out of ammo, and a slow reload cost him the race. Ron safed the gun and they sat down and talked. Ron told Gunny about his experience at the wedding, having to draw from concealment while shoving the groom out of the line of fire.

“Ron, we have people assigned as bodyguards for military VIPs coming through here all the time, and they practice that exact scenario. The only thing you didn't do right, and Nancy covered for you, was you didn't do a Failure to Stop drill. Whenever someone is armed with a full-auto weapon, you automatically shoot them in the forehead just to make sure, because if they squeeze that trigger before they are dead, they can kill a whole bunch of people. If you're seriously into using a pistol for self-defense, you really need to practice your FTS drill more. I can configure the range for that. It won't be as many targets, but they won't go down until you have 2 in the 10-ring center chest, and 1 in the forehead. OK, while you reload, I'll configure the system.” Gunny knew that Ron had a 14-round magazine, so he configured the system to give him 4 FTS targets, a 2 second pause, then 4 more. If he was still in the game, it would give him a 3rd set after a 2 second pause. Gunny looked up, and Ron was finished reloading, and was in the process of putting his hearing protection on. This time Ron took his time to catch his breath, and calm his nerves. Finally he looked at Gunny, nodded, and got a thumbs-up. Ron's head swivelled forward, and a buzzer sounded. Ron drew and fired Bang-Bang..Bang. 1 target down. As soon as he was finished, another popped up on the opposite side of the “street” since the Hogan's alley was configured for the SF nightmare, house to house in a built-up city. Ron's front sight locked on the center of the chest of the second target, and Bang-Bang...Bang, two down. He made it through the first group of four, realized he was short, dropped his magazine and stuffed a fresh mag in the magazine well, and kept shooting just as the next target popped up. He got 2 more when the buzzer sounded. He'd missed the forehead of the guy who popped out of the second story window. Gunny consoled him, saying that most people shoot high when aiming much higher than themselves with a pistol. "Someone has taught you tactics and strategy since the last time you were here, I noticed you just didn't take them out left to right, which is the quickest way, but you eliminated them in threat order. We have a feature in the program to assign targets a threat level, and modify the exposure time accordingly. Would you like to take a run through that way? It will take a while to set up, because I need to change the targets so they show different weapons.”

“Go ahead Gunny, I need to reload and catch my breath, I'm not as young as I used to be.”

Half an hour later, Gunny said he was ready. Ron had reloaded his magazines, and put on his Wolf Ears (he found out that was the brand name of his hearing protectors - he wanted to buy a bunch of them so they could use them at their range in Allakaket.) When he was all set, he told Gunny he was ready. Gunny said “Wait for the beep, then draw.” 3 seconds later, the beeper sounded, and Ron drew and engaged the closest target, armed with a 12 gauge shotgun. He put 3 quick rounds into it, then swivelled and engaged a pop-up that had a carbine with 3 quick

rounds. He heard the actuator to his left, but it was a knife-wielding thug, who was 20 yards away. The next target appeared right after it, it was a kid holding an AK-47. Ron triple-tapped that target, then swung back to engage the knife. Gunny nodded his approval behind Ron's back. Right as he finished off the knife-wielder, a rifleman appeared at a window almost 50 yards away. Ron didn't have time to be pretty, but managed somehow to hit the target in the forehead because that was all of the rifleman that was exposed. He ducked behind "cover" and quickly reloaded, and then resumed his scan before coming all the way out from behind the cover. Good thing, because he was in the crosshairs of another rifleman across the street, and if he came out during his reload, he was dead. Instead, Ron fired 3 quick rounds at the rifleman, and managed to get a kill shot to the chest. By now his heart was pumping and his pulse was racing, this felt like real life. He had 11 rounds left, and he didn't know how many bad guys. Before he cleared the cover, he took his remaining mag and moved it to his left-front pants pocket. Gunny thought that was smart, because the last time he had trouble getting that last mag out of the concealed mag carrier. He'd make sure to recommend a different mag carrier to him when this was through.

Ron looked around, didn't hear or see anything, so he quickly ran to the next "cover" instead of standing out in the street. Gunny thought "Now he's learning". He heard a pop-up to his right, and it was another kid with an AK-47. The rule on the range was if it was visibly armed it was a target, since this was a military range. On a civilian Politically correct Range, some armed kids would be "no shoots". Ron thought that was stupid. He wasn't paid to arrest anyone, and if they were armed, they were a potential lethal threat. As soon as he waxed the kid, another target popped up, a woman wearing a skimpy bikini carrying a shotgun. Gunny found that sometimes men didn't know what to do with this target. Ron had no problem shooting her, and he realized he had 5 rounds left, so after engaging his next target, he could fire 2 quick shots, then he had to reload. He looked around, and there was some more "cover" 10 feet to his right, but close to a door. He looked to his left, and there was better cover to his left, but it was 20 feet away. As he started running to his left, he saw the doorway open, and a MZB holding a shotgun appeared out the door. If he had gone right, the shotgun would have gotten him. He pumped 3 quick rounds into the MZB, then dove for cover. Since no targets were active, he did a tactical reload and kept the magazine with the 2 rounds he might need later. Suddenly 3 targets popped up in front of him, all carrying shotguns within 15 feet. He put 1 round into each, and 2 were still standing so he shot them both in the head, and they went down. He had 10 rounds left, plus 2 in the spare mag. He looked around, and he was almost to the "safe zone" at the end of the street. There was 1 more piece of cover between there and where he was, so since no targets were up, he ran to the cover. While he ran, 2 targets popped up, and he engaged them "en passant" and took them out each with a point-blank head shot. Gunny thought "Dang, this kid's good!" Finally he slid to a stop behind the last cover to catch his breath. 10 seconds later, he heard the dreaded sound of actuators, and looked up. There were 3 more targets, all armed and 15 feet away. He put 1 round into each, and 1 was still standing, so he shot it again, and it fell. Since he was behind cover, he decided to take the 2 rounds out of his magazine, and top off the other magazine. It took almost a minute, but he didn't hear any actuators, so he wasn't in any danger. He had 4 rounds left, he hoped Gunny was out of targets! As he looked

around the corner, he heard an actuator, and spotted a distant target covering the goal line, with a carbine. He had 4 rounds, and if he didn't kill it, he lost. He took a braced kneeling position behind the barrier, lined up the sights and fired. He knew he hit it, but it didn't go down. Remembering the FTS drill, he aimed for the head, held his breath, blew half of it out and squeezed the trigger as the front sight steadied on the MZB's head. The target dropped right after he fired, and he ran for the goal line, since he only had 2 rounds left. He crossed the goal line before he heard any actuators, so he knew he had won. He unloaded and safed the weapon, and stuck it back in his holster. Gunny walked up to him with a big grin on his face. "Ron, that was the best I'd seen ever from a civilian. I've got to know who taught you."

"Gunny, it was Bear, I mean Chief Simmons."

"I thought you had been trained by a SEAL, because they teach you 'Nothing fancy, just kill the SOB!'" Ron laughed his head off, because that was exactly what Bear had said, practically word for word.

Ron and Gunny examined the targets and talked strategy. Gunny agreed with most of Ron's decisions, but not all of them, but in the end he had to admit that they passed the final test- they worked in combat, or as close as they could simulate it. Ron reloaded his P-14 and his mags with his Cor-Bon 200gr JHP "Flying Ashcan" carry ammo, loaded the P-14, topped off the magazine, then stuck the other 2 in his concealed carry double mag carrier. Gunny remembered he was going to mention that.

"Uh Ron - I forgot, remember how many problems you had with your second reload?"

Ron vaguely remembered having a problem getting the second mag out of the double carrier a couple of times, and nodded sheepishly to Gunny.

"Just a suggestion, but you should switch to 2 or 3 single mag carriers carried next to each other. Seems the Kydex doubles let one mag out easy, but twist and torque too much when you try to remove the second mag. Besides, if you get single mag carriers, you can almost carry 3 mags in the space it took to carry 2, but much more comfortably."

"How so Gunny?"

"Think about it, 2 mags with no flexibility, or 3 mags that can flex between them - which is going to be more comfortable?"

"OK Gunny, when I get home I'll order some."

"I can do better than that, I'll trade you 5 single mag carriers and 2 spare mags for your P-14 for your double carrier, and I even have some more Flying Ashcan ammo in stock to reload them. As big as you are, you might be able to carry 5 singles strategically located."

They walked into the armory, and Gunny pulled 5 brand new double-stack Kydex mag carriers still in their plastic wrap, 2 P-14 Magazines still in their wrappers, and 2 boxes of Flying Ashcan ammo out of stock. Ron loosened his belt, unclipped the double mag carrier, and Gunny told him where to hide the 4 mags. He suggested 3 behind his left kidney since he was right-handed and 1 right in front of his holster, and to keep the other one for a spare until he got used to carrying 4, and then stick it in front on the left side. He said it wouldn't be as comfortable when he sat down, but if TS ever HTF, he'd be glad to have the extra mags of ammo so he wouldn't have to waste time topping off mags from a partial, because the bad guys rarely waited while you said "Wait a minute, I'm reloading!" Ron got to laugh his head off again, Gunny was funny. Maybe when he retired he should become a stand-up comedian.

Ron thought 5 mags was a bit excessive, then remembered what Bear had told him "When you run out of ammo, that expensive gun becomes a very expensive club or hammer. Make sure you carry enough." Gunny just proved that point with the scenario, he almost ran out of ammo, and had to resort to topping off his mag, which is a tactical no-no because it takes too long. It turned out he didn't need those last 2 rounds, but he didn't know that at the time. When they were finished, Gunny drove Ron to the VIP quarters, then said he had to get back to work. Ron was still getting used to the 4 single mags when he went to dinner, but people carrying guns was nothing new around there, so no one said anything. Steve came up to his room after dinner, and Ron showed him what Gunny had done. Steve started laughing and making cracks about "Rambo" until Ron told him about the shoot-out at the wedding, and the results of that afternoon's pistol practice. He had almost run out of ammo, and had to resort to topping off a mag from a partial to complete the course. Steve studied Ron carefully, and he really couldn't see the mags or the holster with Ron's shirt down over it. Ron had filled out since the last time Steve had seen him, and he was built like an NFL linebacker, big and powerful. Steve knew Ron didn't lift weights, but knew from cutting and splitting wood last time he was there that making firewood was a good substitute. He remembered his brother Ron was fairly big and rangy, so he must have gotten his physique from their side of the family, or else Roy was the runt of his family. Ron told Steve they'd have to cut it short, he needed to get some sleep. Steve sat Ron down and told him he put in for his retirement, and wanted to join General Shepard in Allakaket. Ron admitted that General Shepard had already told him, but not to tell anyone, since it might jeopardize some stuff he was working on. Steve agreed, he was just giving Ron a head's up. Steve gave Ron a big hug, and said he would see him tomorrow.

## Chapter 32 - Homecoming

The next morning Ron got up early, showered and dressed, and ate breakfast all before 0800, since his flight was at 0900. Steve showed up at 0830 to drive him to the VIP terminal. Ron showed his Federal CCW to the Air Police, and they waved him around the metal detector, and pointed him to the correct VC-20. His ID was checked by the crew chief before boarding, and the chief carried his luggage aboard. 4 hours later, he was in Anchorage, and when they landed at Elmendorf, Bear was there to greet him with 007. “Your carriage awaits, sir!”

“Well, what’s it a-waiting for, let’s go!”

Once they were airborne back to Allakaket, Bear said “Santa Claus came early” and handed Ron a list of all the stuff General Shepard shipped. It was basically a couple of boxcar loads of ammo, rockets, grenades, missiles, and a bunch of other stuff. The piece de resistance was the 2 additional M -163 Vulcan Guns, and a boxcar load of 20mm ammo he sent. Also the 4 Hummers showed up, 2 with BMG Ma Deuces, and 2 with TOW launchers. They were even the ballistically armored Hummers, and there were several dozen TOW missiles for the Hummers.

Ron read the note:

Ho - Ho- Ho... Guess Who!

Hope you enjoy the toys!

GS

Ron was glad all this stuff came while he was gone, it might have been fun to unload all those heavy lift choppers. The S-76 dropped Bear off at his place, then flew Ron to Allakaket. He checked the armory, and if they had any more room for stuff, he couldn’t find it. He guessed they had more ammo than most bases did. He found out later he was right.

Ron drove home and was jumped by Josh and Jake, then Moose finished the dog pile. Sarah was just starting to walk, and toddled on over to Daddy. They played together for a while on the wood floor, then Nancy said that dinner was ready. Ron thought “Saved by the Bell” and went in to face feeding time at the zoo. Josh and Jake took care of themselves, except Ron felt like if he would have just hosed the two of them off after dinner, it would have taken less time. Sarah was starting to take after her brothers, but still needed help. David was easy, and ate whatever Mom decided to feed him. Moose ate a bowl of dog food while he still had time. When they finished, Moose Jake, Josh and Sarah went into the playroom, and David took a nap while Mom and Dad ate in the few minutes of peace they would have.

“So I hope you’re home for a while?”

“I just finished my last T&E session, so unless they come up with something else for me to do, it’s back to being a full-time husband, and part-time businessman, unless BA needs me to fly, and I doubt it since we still have that reserve plane and pilot available.”

“Good, because I have a long list of honey-do’s for you!”

Ron groaned, he wasn’t even 30 years old, and he dreaded the “honey-do” list. Ron was glad for 1 thing, he could put the list off until tomorrow. He and Nancy caught up on everything going on with their family, and things in Allakaket. Finally it was time to put the kids to bed, and catch up on quality time.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron decided to tackle the “honey-do” list. He saw the first item was to chop and split wood, so he called his friendly handyman for help. Half an hour later, they were out sawing down enough trees to re-fill his wood pile, then they used the tractor to drag the logs over to his sawhorse to saw them into lengths. Finally the wedge and sledge split the wood to the right size, and they stacked it up. So much for Day #1! When Ron went inside at the end of the day, he was sore, so Nancy told him to take a hot shower. Minutes later she joined him, and gave him a massage in the shower, except it did anything but relax him. They took care of that little problem a few minutes later. Once they got dressed again, Ron played with the kids while Nancy finished dinner. When she announced dinner was ready, he helped her feed the kids, then they sat down to eat. Later, they were snuggling on the couch when Jake, Josh, and Sarah decided to join them. Moose wanted to get into the act, but Ron wasn’t having anything to do with it. Moose laid on his bearskin rug, which immediately filled up with 3 kids. Ron and Nancy had the couch to themselves again.

Later, Nancy said it was bath time, and she recommended that Ron get into a swimsuit and put on goggles, since the 3 Amigos splashed a lot. Nancy filled a tub full of warm water and bubble bath, then the 2 of them supervised “Bath Time” and wound up almost as wet as the kids. Ron grabbed Josh to dry him off, and almost got peed on. Luckily, he had anticipated the Fountain of Youth, and quickly got him situated over the toilet. He hoped Jake and Sarah had better manners. Once they were all dried and in their PJs it was time for bed. Ron took the rare opportunity to read them a bedtime story. Nancy stood in the doorway taking in the scene of the 3 of them seated on the bed listening intently to their dad. When he finished, Nancy picked up Sarah to return her to her own bedroom, and Ron picked up Jake and moved him to his bed then tucked them in. He said a quick prayer over each of his sons, then walked into Sarah’s room and prayed over her too. Mom and Dad finally got to bed, and Ron just held Nancy while they talked and prayed about their day.

The next morning after breakfast, Ron resumed his chores when Nancy said he had a phone call. He walked in from the garden, and it was the General Glasgow of the RCAF.



“Ron, your SuperGoose is done, and waiting at Wing 19 in Vancouver for you.”

“Did they do the avionics upgrade?”

“Far as I know Ron, we ordered it, so they should have done it.”

General, I need to ask a favor, and this has to stay confidential. Can they sweep the plane for any bugs or unauthorized transmitters?”

“Sure, why?”

“General, I’m sure you remember that project I’m involved in, and if the plane were bugged, it would be a major security breach, and I don’t trust Northrop Grumman as far as I can throw them!”

“I can understand that - they’re probably still steaming from when you called them on that financial shenanigans. I’ll have a couple of security experts go over the plane with a fine tooth comb. It will take a while, because there are a bunch of authorized transmitters on the aircraft.”

“General, if I could make a suggestion, you’re probably looking for a voice activated bug, or a device spliced into the headsets.”

“Thanks for the tip Ron, you’re probably right. I’ll call you when it’s done.”

Ron went back to work, and General Glasgow called in a couple of favors to get a couple of experts to search the entire plane for bugs or transmitters. He made the suggestion to look for VOX or splices into the headset line. 2 days later, they called back, and said they found a VOX connected to a digital recorder that wasn’t in the other units. Instead of removing it, they deactivated it, and stuck a tracker on it, so if the unit was removed from the plane, it could be located. The General asked them to check the other SuperGoose airplanes delivered to the Canadian Government. Only the ones going to potentially sensitive government agencies had the device, so the General was highly suspicious. Instead of calling Northrop/Grumman and canceling the entire order, he authorized a sting operation, and had the operatives do the same thing to the recorders in the bugged planes, so if the disk or the recorder was removed for any reason, they’d be able to track it and bust whoever was behind it for Espionage.

He sent an E-mail to General Shepard detailing his findings. General Shepard ordered a search of all VIP aircraft in the fleet for this device, and found some more. He called General Glasgow back on his shoe phone, and told him what he had found. Evidently someone in the aircraft industry wanted to branch out into the espionage business. General Shepard had a short list of suspects, and Jack Snyder was at the top of his list! This was a major espionage case, which involved both governments, so General Shepard suggested to General Glasgow that he contact a friend of his in the FBI Counterintelligence bureau, who could check into this without warning

the suspect, because Jack Snyder was Ex-CIA, and had connections there and the NSA to warn him about any sting. General Shepard wanted to get Jack Snyder for more reasons than one. One of the reasons he was Ex-CIA was that they suspected he leaked critical information to the Chinese for money, but they didn't have enough evidence to convict. So instead of airing their dirty laundry and maybe not getting a conviction, they unceremoniously kicked his scrawny butt out of the CIA without a pension. General Shepard called his buddy at the FBI and got the ball rolling. General Glasgow called Ron and told him that they found and deactivated a digital recorder, and put a tracer on it in case someone was to take it out of the plane. Ron thanked him, and asked if the plane were ready to pick up. General Glasgow said it would be ready to pick up first thing tomorrow. Ron thanked him, and hung up. He called Steve, his relief pilot, and told him to get ready for a dawn patrol flight to Vancouver BC to pick up a SuperGoose, then he told Nancy the good news, leaving out the details about the bug.

The next morning, they flew to Vancouver, and Steve dropped Ron off and flew back to Allakaket, since he wanted to make a pickup that afternoon that was pretty urgent - his wife was flying back home from visiting relatives, and he wanted to fly her home from Anchorage. Chief Nichols met Ron and told him the SuperGoose was ready to go. They'd already done all the check flights, and the mechanics told him that this plane had at least 30% more horsepower than the TurboGoose, and the extended fuselage and the new tail actually made it handle better. They even tried extending the floor ramp during flight, and it didn't disturb the flight characteristics, although it was noisy as heck. They didn't test the flotation of the ramp, since it was designed to deploy while the plane was on the water. They thought the hydraulics that deployed the ramp were a neat feature, with a sensor that detected feedback pressure and stopped the deployment when it met resistance. Chief Nichols pointed out the Liquid Oxygen tanks that Northrop/Grumman had installed in this model, so it could be used for SAR or Medevac, and told Ron that they were shipped empty, but could be easily filled. Grumman had installed 2 conformal 20 pound LO2 tanks in the fuselage with standard LO2 connections. All he had to purchase was the flex connector, and a regulator/gassifier that would convert the LO2 to oxygen gas, and reduce the pressure to 32lbs/in<sup>2</sup>, and regulate the flow from 1-6 liters per minute. Each tank could feed 2 patients at 6 liters/min for over 12 hours. He explained that the Medevac planes used to use Oxygen gas until the technology evolved to the point that it was safe to store liquid oxygen aboard an aircraft, and they built liquid tanks that could be made to fit inside the fuselage, saving critical cabin space. The liquid was actually safer to store than the gas, since it had to depressurize, warm up, and not dissipate to be a fire hazard. Since they banned smoking on all flights, the risks to aircraft were reduced to fire or crash damage, and if they had a fire or crash bad enough to jeopardize the LO2 tanks, they had a bigger problem than the tank to deal with. There was a freeze danger, but that only affected the people who filled the tanks, and they were trained to avoid getting frostbite from the supercold liquid.

Ron did a walk-around, and the plane looked like it had just rolled off the factory floor. Chief Nichols had the plane washed and waxed and painted before Ron took delivery of it. When he got around to the other side, he noticed the Allakaket Airlines logo above the stripe, and the commemorative tail number the FAA gave to the first production unit of the new aircraft line:

SG-00001. Ron shook Chief Nichols hand, thanked him, and they climbed aboard the plane. Chief Nichols belted himself into the right seat, and told Ron that they had to take a quick check ride before he could release the plane. Ron used the APU to start the turbines, and then completed the pre-flight checklist. Once the engine instruments were in the green, and the rest of the pre-flight checks done, he called the tower and requested permission to take off and circle the field. "Allakaket Airlines SG-00001 calling Wing-19 tower, request permission to take-off and circle field for familiarization flight."

"Roger Allakaket, pattern is clear, you're free to circle the field. Call when ready to land."

"Roger, Allakaket Rolling."

Ron had reached the end of the taxiway, and was waiting for clearance when the last transmission was made, so he pushed both throttles to their take-off positions. He already had the flaps and trim tabs set, so when the plane accelerated to 80 knots, he pulled back gently on the yoke, and cruised around the field about 10 miles out. Ron checked the controls and the equipment, and everything was satisfactory. He noticed that the pilot's seats were nicer than the ones in his TurboGoose, and a lot more comfortable. He guessed that for a half-mil per copy, they should include some creature comforts. He'd have to check and see how much these seats cost, and get them installed in the rest of his fleet. "Chief, can you find out about these seats, they're so much more comfortable than the ones in our planes. I'd like to know how much it would cost to retrofit our aircraft to these seats."

"Ron, I've got all the paperwork for the plane in a box behind you. It should include all the info on anything installed in the aircraft, including the seats. You'd be better off ordering from the manufacturer and installing them yourselves."

"Thanks Chief. I'm satisfied with the aircraft; can I take you home so I can fly this bird home?"

Chief Nichols nodded, so Ron called the tower "Wing-19 Tower, Allakaket requesting permission to land."

"Roger Allakaket, runway is clear. Come on in."

Ron turned toward the runway while he extended the flaps, and made a nice soft landing. Chief Nichols told him to taxi up to the fuel pumps, he'd top off the tanks and the Canadian Government would pick up the tab. When they got to the fuel depot an airman was waiting to fill all the tanks with JP-5 including the APU. He shut down the turbines for safety, and 5 minutes later he was full. Chief Nichols signed the receipt, then they shook hands again, and he walked out of the cockpit, secured the door, and waved when he was clear. Ron started the turbines, and taxied to the runway while calling for take-off clearance. The tower cleared him, and told him to climb to 10,000 feet for the flight back to Allakaket. Ron decided to get the LO2 tanks filled later once he had his paramedic gear aboard. He remembered that he also

needed to get another SU-16 and an emergency kit as well. On the long flight home, he used his sat phone to call BA and get things arranged. Allakaket Airlines had a FFL, so getting the SU-16 and the mags was easy, and they stocked several of them. He had BA check about getting the liquid oxygen tanks filled. He said he'd have an answer for him when he landed. Once he was landed, he taxied to the pumps, filled the tanks full of JP-5, and taxied to the hangar, where someone would park the plane for him. He got out and got into his truck and drove to the offices of Allakaket Airlines.

"I did some checking, and for as little O2 as you'd use, Alaska Regional Hospital would be willing to fill your tanks for free, and they said they'd like a look at your SuperGoose, since they ordered a couple. Steve asked if tomorrow would be OK. He said that they have a mountable case for your Paramedic kit as well that they could mount for you while you're there, and they have Paramedic kits in stock too."

"Ok BA, but I need a couple of thousand dollar gassifier/regulator units for the tanks to work in the first place."

BA got back on the phone to Steve, who told him the hospital had figured that out too, and got them from the State department of Emergency Services for free, so they could give him 2 units including the flex hose and the oxygen delivery equipment. When Ron heard that, he was glad the state was rolling in Oil Revenue, and could afford to do that. He told BA to tell Steve he'd be there at 10:00 tomorrow morning. He wanted to sleep in. He drove home, and was mobbed by a bunch of kids and a big dog. Nancy waited until he got out from underneath the dog pile to give him a hug and a kiss. Since it was late in the afternoon, Ron got out of doing any more of his "honey-dos" that day and spent the time with his family until Nancy got up to make dinner. He told her he would have to fly to Anchorage tomorrow morning at 0800 to get some stuff taken care of for the new plane. Ron was telling her all about it, and she said she couldn't wait to try flying it. Ron asked her if she wanted to fly to Anchorage with him, they'd be gone most of the day between flying back and forth, and getting the stuff installed in the aircraft. She told Ron to call Anne and ask if she wanted to babysit.

"Mom, it's Ron, can you babysit tomorrow? We need to fly the new SuperGoose to Anchorage to get the Paramedic kit installed, and get the liquid oxygen tanks filled. You will, great, see you around 7:30; I love you too - bye."

He gave Nancy the good news, and then they fed the tribe. After feeding time, they ate dinner themselves while Moose chaperoned the 3 Amigos. David zonked out after dinner, so Nancy put him back in his crib before they ate dinner. After dinner, Ron started a tickle fight, and Nancy's reaction told him the kids were going to go to bed early tonight.

The next morning, Anne was there right at 0730, so they traded spots as Ron and Nancy went out the door as Anne came in. They drove to the airport, and someone already had the SuperGoose out of the hangar, and the turbines idling. Ron made a note to himself to find out

who was prepping the planes for him, and give him a bonus or a raise. Even after owning the airline all these years, he wasn't used to all the perks, and felt like he should reward people for going out of their way to make things easier for him. They climbed aboard, and were taxiing out on lake when Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to take off. She shrugged and started lifting off her shirt.

“No the plane silly!”

“I know, just thought I'd get back at you for the last time you said that, and you meant it the other way.”

She pulled her shirt back down and set the plane up for take-off. Ron called for permission, and they reached the end of the lake right when they got approval to take-off. Nancy heard the call, and turned to Ron and said “Co-pilot's plane” then Ron took his hands off the yoke, and his feet off the pedals. Nancy took the controls, and then reached over to push the twin throttles to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator said 80 knots, she pulled back on the yoke, and when she was at 500 feet AGL, she eased up on the rate of climb, and turned toward Anchorage. A little over an hour later, they were landing at the hospital's airstrip. Ron and Nancy got out, and were met by Steve and Roger. They told Ron they needed to taxi the plane over to the Maintenance hangars, and they'd meet them over there. Ron and Nancy climbed back aboard, started the turbines, and taxied over to the maintenance hangar. Steve and Roger drove a pickup in front of them with a bed full of stuff that was going into the plane. They parked in front of the maintenance hangar, and Ron stopped in a marked stall, and left the turbines idling. Once the propellers stopped spinning, he opened the cabin doors and rear ramp so Steve and Roger could get a good look at the interior as well. They were pleasantly surprised. Grumman had lengthened the cabin by 6 feet, and installed a rear ramp door, just about doubling the useful cabin space. Now instead of 4 stretcher cases, it could carry 6 without resorting to a stacking arrangement, and still have room for a couple of seats.

The 3 of them started unloading the cases and kits that needed to be installed, and a mechanic came forward with an air powered drill to mount the brackets to the airframe on the cabin side of the bulkhead. He mounted steel locking cases for the Paramedic kit, the O2 delivery system, and a first aid kit for minor injuries. Once the brackets were affixed, they locked the kits to the brackets and handed Ron the keys. The Mechanic asked Ron to completely shut the aircraft off, leave all doors open, and turn off the battery switch, and he would fill the liquid oxygen tanks. Roger explained that whenever Allakaket Airlines operated as a Medevac, they were to fill their liquid oxygen supply from their tank, since the State of Alaska was responsible for keeping the tank full. Roger handed Steve a stack of forms that they were to use to bill the State for the use of Allakaket Airlines planes for SAR or Medevac services. He said that the State had authorized a reimbursement of \$1,000 per hour of flight time, plus \$500 per hour for ground time if the pilot was involved in a Medevac or SAR mission. Ron thought that was really generous of the State, and didn't say anything. The mechanic reeled out a big thick hose with a male plug that matched the female connector for the oxygen system attached to a big heavy duty

valve. Roger explained that the O2 delivery system was fairly complicated and redundant to prevent accidents. Once the mechanic had the connection made, he took a tool out of his pocket, and opened the vent valve next to the female connector, and connected a diverter hose so the liquid couldn't splash directly on him. The diverter was attached to a vented heavy glass jar that would show whether or not liquid oxygen was coming out of the vent. Finally he opened the delivery valve, and 5 minutes later, 1 tank was full, so he repeated the process on the other side of the aircraft. With both tanks full, he put the removable covers back on the oxygen ports and took the hose back to the huge oxygen tank with him, then shut off the main valve, and opened the delivery valve to depressurize the hose.

With the system fully pressurized, Steve showed Ron how to work the oxygen delivery system. It was as simple as plugging into the oxygen port, and setting the liter per minute flow. He explained that the connectors were special connectors that shut off the flow if there was a break in the line, or other malfunction. The delivery system offered a choice of cannula or mask to deliver oxygen. The only thing it couldn't do was act as an automatic respirator. That was a much more expensive system, so they had a manual system that the flight nurse had to push a button every time to deliver a metered dose of pure O2. Ron thought it looked awfully like the old manual respirators, and Steve said that was exactly what it was, and they had been retrofitted to work with the new liquid system. Steve put the unit back in its case and locked it. Ron thanked both of them, and said they had to get back to Allakaket, so Steve and Roger reluctantly got out of the aircraft, and said their goodbyes. Ron and Nancy got back aboard, and Ron reset everything, then closed the ramp door and started the turbines. He received immediate take-off clearance, and they flew back to Allakaket. When he got there, the mechanic had the pelican case with his SU-16 and the other with his emergency gear, and started installing them against the bulkhead on the cockpit side. Ron was glad that his emergency gear was aboard now, since he really felt vulnerable without it.

## Chapter 33 - Summer at the Cottage

Several years later, Ron and Nancy decided to spend the summer at the lodge since the kids Jake(10), Josh (9), Sarah(8), and David(7) were old enough to enjoy it. Nancy kept them either within sight of the lodge, or under positive control with a 4-way leash system. Ron didn't say anything, but felt like Nancy was a musher trying to control an unruly sled dog team. Funny thing was Nancy felt the same way, but didn't think Ron would find the image too amusing either. They both carried a shoulder holster with a 22/45 and a .44 Magnum Colt Anaconda. Anne gave Nancy her handguns and shoulder holster years ago, although she still carried her P-14 wherever she went in Allakaket. Doc Miller asked her one day why she was armed, and she pointed out that Allakaket was in the middle of no where, with no real police force, and either 2-legged or 4-legged varmints could be a real problem. Anne took Doc Miller to the range one day during some down time, and within a couple of trips he was hooked. He remembered qualifying with his 1911 in the Army, because even docs in the Army, if they were Officers still have to qualify with a sidearm. He felt the P-14 was much easier to shoot, but the grip was a bit on the large side, but manageable. He agreed that the 14 rounds of .45acp on tap made it worth the extra width. Finally he broke down and bought one when they had a break-in attempt. He was pretty sure someone was after the drug cabinet and the narcotics kept there. Anne suggested an IWB holster so he could be armed without anyone knowing it, so he didn't freak out patients.

So they wouldn't take a SuperGoose out of service for the summer, Ron had 007 fly the family up to the cabin, and later that day, a Goose flew up there with 6 months worth of supplies. Nancy had to get used to cooking on wood, since the propane delivery plane wouldn't attempt to land at HelpmeJack Lake. The Catalina the propane company flew was a nice big cargo plane, but didn't have the STOL capability of the SuperGoose or even the TurboGoose. Ron hired his handyman to help him cut wood, and within a week they had enough wood laid up for a year. The kids adjusted to the lack of TV, and Ron was actually glad they didn't have TV because he considered it a distraction. Ron bought a couple of .22 single shot youth rifles for the kids to learn how to shoot. Ron sat them down and explained the safety rules to them. They were all eager to shoot, since they had watched Mom and Dad shoot years before when they went to the cabin, but they were too young to join in. The chipmunk youth models were perfect for the kids, and Ron made sure they wore eye and ear protection all the time. Ron started them on empty tin cans, and soon they had the hang of it, and were hitting a small soup can regularly at 20 yards. The single-shot rifle made them slow down, concentrate, and make each shot count. Ron was surprised when Sarah turned out to be the best shot of all of them, then he realized that little boys had a real problem settling down and concentrating. Most of them had an attention span measured in minutes at best, and if they hadn't been so excited at the prospect of doing something Mommy and Daddy did, they would have quickly lost interest. Ron wanted to teach them to shoot pistols, but Nancy thought that might be too dangerous for them. Ron decided to wait a while for that; so every day, they spent about half an hour plinking at tin cans from the front porch. Sarah was now hitting tin cans at 100 yards, while her brothers were

managing 50 yards at the best. Ron told them that once they settled down and concentrated, they could shoot like their sister. Sarah stuck her tongue out at her brothers behind her dad's back. She might have been turning into Annie Oakley, but she was still a little girl underneath, and enjoyed tormenting her brothers.

During the last 5 years, General Shepard and Col. Steve Fellows both retired, and the Special Forces Joint Command made a present of 2 Robo-Tank Bradleys, now called the Shepard Anti-tank system. They delivered 1 to Allakaket, and another to their mine site to protect the valuable resource. Gold by now was up over \$\$600 per ounce and climbing, but since President Hatch had opened the North Shore Oil Reserve to exploration and drilling, the price of oil had stabilized at \$36.00 per barrel. The permanent basing of 2 Divisions of Marines in Saudi Arabia helped as well, since no one in their right mind wanted to mess with the USMC, especially after they announced their bullets were dipped in pig fat after a notorious Terrorist attack on the oil field manifold. Thousands of Raghead terrorists found out that these Marines weren't like the PC Marines under Clinton, they fought dirty! President Hatch was fed up with Islamic Terrorists, and reasoned correctly that the reason there was an abundance of suicide bombers is that dying as a martyr guaranteed a quick trip to paradise, and otherwise they had to live in their shithole countries and live a perfect life to get into paradise. By taking away their free pass to paradise, the number of attacks quickly dropped from the thousands per year to less than 10 per year. He told the Commandant of the Marines to do whatever was necessary to stop the terrorist attacks. So he took the President at his word, and the attacks stopped. Geraldo Rivera, now in his 60's and wearing a Che Guevara lapel pin, was broadcasting live from the front when he "accidentally" stepped on an anti-vehicle mine and was blown to smithereens. Of course it was an Islamic Terrorist's IED that he stepped on, and suddenly the Press shut up for once about "atrocities"!

General Shepard admitted for the first time in almost 30 years that his first name was Gene, since he felt funny with everyone calling him General after he retired. He noticed Anne one day when he was in the clinic for a physical, and was smitten. Later he remembered who she was, and asked Steve what he thought. He said his sister had been a widow long enough, and if he wanted to date his sister, he'd have to ask her! When Ron found out his mom was dating the General, he remembered what his Dad had told him at the cabin the day he died, to encourage his mom to date and remarry if she wanted to, since she was still relatively young. When Anne asked him, he gave his mom a big hug and told her what Roy told him that afternoon, virtually word for word. That clinched it for her, and she started dating the General, who was in no hurry to get married. They went shooting together, and he wanted to take her to the pool, but it took a while for her to want to be seen in mixed company in a bathing suit. For a woman in her late 50's early 60's, she had kept her figure, but was still self-conscious about being seen in a bathing suit. When she finally got a look at the General, she didn't feel so bad. Years of sitting at a desk had converted his washboard abs to a sizable jelly roll! He was still in good shape, and jogged each morning with Steve to stay in shape, and was a pretty good shot for an old guy!

Ron remembered how much work it was to live in that log cabin, but thanked God that they had



year-round running hot and cold water and flush toilets, or their summer in the lodge would have been a real short trip! Nancy asked Ron if he wanted to go hunting, and they talked about what to do with the kids. They didn't really need the meat, but Ron felt that caribou meat was better for you than the stuff they bought in the store. Nancy said she'd can it if he'd shoot it, but they couldn't figure out if they should bring the kids with them. Finally they decided to call Mom. Ron gave Anne a call, and asked her "Mom, what should we do?"

"I think it might be an idea to wait a couple of years to take the kids hunting. If I remember correctly, we waited until Ron was almost 12 before he went on his first hunt. With the 4 kids, especially since David's so young, you might want to wait a few years. I trust Ron is teaching them to shoot already?"

"Yeah, and Sarah is the best shooter of the bunch! She's hitting tin cans at 100 yards with her chipmunk!"

"Her older brothers must just love that!"

"It's giving them incentive to try harder, so I'm not discouraging the competition as long as it stays relatively civil."

"You mean until it degenerates into fist fights?"

"I won't let it get that far, Sarah might be catching up on her brothers, but even Josh outweighs her by 10-15 pounds, and Jake is almost twice her size. Besides, I think they're still protective of their "little sister" at least for now. Thanks for the advice Mom, Tell Gene I said hi!"

Anne laughed and hung up, and wondered how he knew Gene was visiting her. They were just on their way to the range, then they were going to the pool to swim laps. Even Bear found time to go swimming, especially now that he had two boys to raise, he wanted to live long enough to see them grown, and hopefully one of them would follow in his Dad's footsteps. He had a slightly longer trip to the pool, and took advantage of the 007, since there were two of them.

Meanwhile, back in Atlanta, Ralph and Sam had settled down to married life as doctors. During the 5 years at Grover, she had completed her Residency, and passed her board exams, and became a Board Certified General Surgeon with a specialty in Emergency Surgery. Ralph was glad she had completed her residency and was now Board Certified because they had to wait until she passed her boards before they could even think of starting a family, and Sam was on Birth Control since they didn't want to risk Sam's medical career by a pregnancy during her residency. You can't be pregnant and a surgeon, due to health risks to the baby from the anesthesia. Once she was board certified, she could take time off to have a baby, and come right back, because the hospital was a Major Trauma Center, and was practically begging for ER docs and surgeons, and immediately put Dr. Samantha Lacombe on staff, which was a huge raise in pay from her days as a Resident. She had privileges at the other hospitals in the area as

well, in case they had an emergency and she was the only surgeon available. Sam thought that was a very remote possibility, but the hospitals did it as a matter of course for Emergency Surgeons, and other specialties that were in high demand. Ralph was promoted to Chief Resident when the chief moved to another hospital, so his career was on track as well. They were still renting, and debated buying a house in Atlanta, or moving elsewhere, since Sam could work anywhere in the country.

Both of them were happy in Atlanta, they had a 2 bedroom apartment in a nice area of Atlanta, and plenty of friends at the Hospital and the local Baptist church they attended when they could. They wound up buying a large Chevy Suburban SUV with a 4x4 setup, 30-inch off-road tires, and lousy gas mileage. The front and rear bumpers were beefed up and carried a 10K winch. Sam thought it was a little overkill, but Ralph told her that less than 100 miles from Atlanta were some areas they would need a vehicle like this, besides in an emergency, the huge pipe bumpers and nerf bars would help them push smaller vehicles out of their way if they had to get to the hospital or get out of Atlanta in a hurry. Ralph always kept the tanks at least half full, and rotated the two spare 5-gallon fuel cans through the fuel tank every couple of months. He had a paramedic kit, an entire frontier tool kit, and a BOB /72-hr kit in the vehicle. They had a hidden compartment built and covered with the same carpet that covered the back of the vehicle. It was so well done that most people didn't know what he had back there. Ron had called Bear when he got back from vacation, and gave him the number of a retired SEAL that ran a shooting/self-defense school just outside Atlanta. Ron called Ralph and told him about the school, and after meeting the owner/Instructor, they signed up for his self-defense and shooting course. It was a year-long course for 2 hours once a week. It wasn't cheap, but by the end of the year, they had the equivalent of a black-belt in several different martial arts, and as much training in weapons as he could legally teach a civilian. Ralph was Sam's sparring partner, and he was almost scared of her when they sparred with rubber knives, being a surgeon meant she knew where to cut you so you bled the fastest.

George, the owner/instructor, liked teaching doctors, because they could be either the biggest sheep, or the most viscous knife fighters since they knew all the good targets. Sometimes, Ralph would check himself for chalk marks after a sparring session, and found faint lines right where veins and arteries were the closest to the skin, and easy to hit. Ralph really liked shooting much better, and took to pistol shooting like a duck to water. They were about equal when shooting at paper targets hanging in the air, but Ralph was much faster at the pop-up range. George rented time at a large range that had the budget to build a pop-up and mover range almost as good as the one at MacDill, so Ralph became a really good reactive shooter. With scoped rifles, they could both hit the kill zone of a B-27 out to 300 yards, so George said that was good enough since neither of them felt they needed to shoot much past 300 yards. Over time their weapons collection improved, then one day a letter showed up that had a return address of JSOC, MacDill AFB, Florida. Ralph was scratching his head until he opened the envelope and read a letter

Ralph and Sam:

Ron told me about you, and I've issued you both a Federal CCW. You're doctors in a city that could get nasty if TSHTF, so I felt it was worth issuing the permits based on Ron's letter attesting to your character and the level of training you have in Self-defense and firearms. I know how hard it is to get a CCW through your state, so I bypassed the entire bunch of red tape and issued you Federal CCW's that allow you to carry concealed anywhere in the US. Please don't abuse the privilege because I'm sticking my neck out for you two.

Sincerely,

General Shepard  
JSOC

Inside were 2 Federal CCWs. 1 in the name of Dr. Raphael Lacombe, and the other in the name of Dr. Samantha Lacombe. There was no expiration date on the permit.

"Sam, check this out - Ron got us 2 Federal CCW's."

"How'd he do that?"

"It says here General Shepard, JSOC. I'll look it up in the internet."

2 minutes later, Ralph entered General Shepard in Google, and it came back that he was the Commanding General of the Joint Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida. He was a 3-star General. Ralph realized that the General had a lot of pull, which explained an awful lot of the E-mail he had received recently from Ron and Nancy. Evidently Allakaket was now an armed camp, and everyone went around armed, and there was enough military hardware there to fight off a large well-equipped attack.

Ralph stuck his CCW in his wallet, and Sam put hers in her purse. They then went to the local gun store and bought 2 Para-Ord P-14's and 8 magazines on Ron's recommendation. They bought 2 IWB holsters, 2 double-mag carriers, and Sam bought a neat purse that she could carry her gun in when she wasn't wearing pants - like at church. She was leery about going armed in church until Ralph reminded her that if Ron hadn't been armed at church, they'd all be dead. Sam picked up her purse and the P-14, loaded the mag, stuck it in the gun, cycled the action, then topped off the mag, and stuck it in her holster inside the purse, and added a spare mag inside the gun compartment.

"Well I guess that answers my next question" Ralph laughed, and stuck his cocked and locked P-14 inside his IWB holster, and put 2 mags in his double-mag carrier, then stuck them inside his pants, and clipped the clips to his belt. Now they were ready for bear!

Ralph sent Ron an e-mail thanking him for the Federal CCW's, and Ron replied "You're

welcome! Wear them in good health!” Ralph hoped they would never need them. When they finished their year-long course, George gave them a very special gift. He had purchased several Emerson CQC-6 knives from Ernie Emerson years ago and stored them. He gave them to select customers as a graduation gift. The fee he charged for his training was great enough that giving the valuable knives away didn’t affect his bottom line. When they got home, Ralph ran Ernie Emerson and the CQC-6 knife in particular through Google, and found out they were collector’s items, and very valuable. Most owners were Special Forces people that Ernie made knives for before he became famous. Ralph told Sam that they should send George a note of thanks now that they knew the value of the gift. Ralph sent the e-mail that afternoon, and George replied that their best thank-you would be in the form of referrals since he didn’t advertise. Ralph and Sam sent several trusted Doctor friends to George’s school. Some just got refresher training, others signed up for his 6 month program. They all liked George’s training, and started practicing together after they completed his course. They knew each other socially, and eventually started an informal survival group, and started buying equipment as a group to get lower prices. They all got Bushmaster HBAR AR-15’s and matching web gear. They were well equipped medically since they all were doctors. Ralph e-mailed Ron asking for gear suggestions, and he forwarded it to Bear since he was the resident expert. His suggestions looked like a listing of the Brigade Quartermaster catalog. Since money wasn’t an issue, they accumulated 10 sets of very high-speed low-drag gear. Their main drawback was a total lack of military experience. They hoped to solve that problem soon, and see if they could bring in some members with military experience. Ralph decided to tell George what they were up to, and he met with them and eventually told them what he had been up to since his retirement. He had a very low profile militia set up in Atlanta that included only customers of his with the necessary security credentials to take his course. Ralph said “I don’t have a security clearance!”

“I know, one was never issued, but I run the equivalent of a DOD Secret background check on all my clients, and if you don’t pass, I don’t teach you! Most of my clients are ex-military or military dependents. Your group of friends was the first non-military people I’ve taught. If you’re interested, we meet next Wednesday at the Dojo.”

## Chapter 34 - Hunting

Ron decided the best thing to do was go hunting by himself for now, so the next morning, he packed his bag, and his Browning A-bolt, loaded them on the trailer, attached them to the trailer hitch of his ATV, kissed Nancy and the kids, and said he'd be back before dark. He was at the Caribou grounds a little over an hour later, hiked over the hill, and the meadow was full of Caribou. He wondered why they were there so early, but decided to save the deep thoughts for later, and set up to shoot two large male caribou. He stuck his ear plugs in his ears, and loaded the rifle, then selected the two bulls he wanted, and shot them right through the neck/shoulder junction, and they dropped in a heap where they stood. He emptied the magazine and picked up everything then hiked back over the hill to where his ATV was parked and drove it right up to the cooling bodies of the caribou he had shot. As soon as he cleared the treeline of the meadow, the entire herd spooked. He slit the throats of the bulls to bleed them out, and then started the skinning and butchering process. Once the skins were off, he set them aside to brain tan later. He made short work of both bulls, and had the prime cuts of meat out within hours. He left the rest for scavengers, and then proceeded to brain tan both hides. He finished with 2 hours of daylight to spare, so he hurried back to the lodge, and made it just before dark. He backed the trailer into the old smokehouse, removed the backpack and rifle from the trailer, and parked the ATV in the shed. He remembered to lock the smokehouse door, and then went inside. Nancy told him to hurry up and take a shower, so Ron took off his clothes and got cleaned up. When he walked down to the kitchen/dining room, dinner was ready. Nancy said "I put the kids down early, so we have the evening to ourselves." Ron decided to hurry up and eat dinner. When he finished, he leaned over and kissed Nancy, then put his plates in the sink, walked over, and picked her up and carried her to the bedroom.

The next day, Ron helped her with breakfast, then shooed the kids out of the kitchen so they could can the caribou meat in peace. Moose was getting older and slower, but still loved to play with the kids, and was an excellent baby sitter. Ron went outside and carried sections of caribou meat into the house and set them on the table. Nancy set a fire in the woodstove and got out the canning equipment. She got a large pot of water boiling to sterilize the lids while she washed and dried the jars. Ron was busy sectioning the meat into pieces that would fit in the jars. As soon as she was ready, he started filling jars, and she put them into the canner, then lifted the lids one at a time out of the boiling water with the tongs and carefully placed them on the glass jars, and screwed the lids down finger tight. Once the canner was full, she closed the lid, closed the relief valve, and moved it to a hot part of the stove. Once it was up to operating temperature and pressure, she started a timer, and carefully watched the pressure. If it got too high, she moved the canner to a cooler part of the stove, too cool and she moved it back. Finally the first batch was done, and after she let the canner cool, she tripped the pressure relief valve, and heard a bunch of pings as the lids sealed down as they cooled. She carefully lifted them out of the canner with the provided jar lifter, and set them on a towel on the counter to finish cooling to room temperature. They did almost 100 quart jars that day in shifts, and by the end of the day, they were both too tired to make a fancy dinner, so the kids got their favorite

meal, Spaghetti-O's and chopped up hot dogs. Even Ron liked it, and Nancy liked it because it was quick and easy. Moose got dry dog food, and was happy. After they put the kids to bed, they collapsed from exhaustion and fell right to sleep.

Next Wednesday Evening came sooner for Sam and Ralph than they thought. They had met with their friends at work, and decided that Sam and Ralph should meet the members of George's group before they met the rest of them. Sam thought they were a bunch of chickens, but kept her peace. They were worried that they might be a bunch of ex-Military Rambo types, and they wanted none of that, they just wanted to survive the occasional natural disaster, hurricane, or flood that hit Atlanta. They didn't realize their own government could be more of a danger than Mother Nature. When they got there, they were greeted by George and 4 other men, who George introduced as the leaders of the other cells. He gave introduced them as Larry, Moe, Curly, and Shemp. Ralph started laughing, the Three Stooges was his favorite cartoon in college. Once Ralph had calmed down, George explained OPSEC, and guerrilla fighter cells. They would be the only people to ever meet face to face with the leaders of the other cells, and they would never know their real names, only their code names. George said that they were the de-facto leaders of their cell, since the others weren't willing to come forward.

Ron said "Wait a minute, we never agreed to anything, we just wanted to find out what is going on here."

"Ok, there are several cells all over the state, and I'm not saying how many and where they are, that are informally linked into a loose network. Their prime objective is survival in the event of a natural disaster, invasion, or to defend our homes in the event that the government turns on us and the Constitution. We aren't set up or designed for offensive operations, but we will defend our homes and our rights."

"Wait a minute, I thought that had already happened?"

"We haven't crossed the Rubicon yet, since the government hasn't sent in the Jack Booted Thugs to confiscate food and weapons. When that happens, we'll act. Until then, we train secretly, and you'll never meet these gentlemen again unless it's either a SHTF or TEOTWAWKI scenario."

"Excuse me, but what does TSHTF and TEOTWAWKI mean?"

George laughed and explained "TSHTF stands for The Shit Hits The Fan, kind of a major disaster, but less than TEOTWAWKI, which stands for The End Of The World As We Know It. Basically emergencies fall on a continuum of how severe they are, and how many people they affect. A 10Km diameter meteor hitting the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean would be a TEOTWAWKI scenario, or Yellowstone blowing up. TSHTF might be a Mt. St. Helen's eruption that affects a local area in a major way, but the rest of the country is minimally

effected. Mild earthquakes wouldn't even reach a TSHTF designation, but a 7-8 Richter Earthquake could either be a TSHTF or a TEOTWAWKI depending on where it hit."

"Ok, I've got it now, so this whole organization is just for dire emergencies that affect more than the local area. So why did you bring us in?"

"Frankly we've been waiting for Medical people all along. We've got medics and RN's but you and Sam are exactly what we would need, an ER doc and an Emergency Surgeon. All that Sam would have needed to be a perfect candidate would have been MASH experience in an actual shooting war."

"This is going to work out great, because our whole group is composed of Doctors, Nurses and Paramedics, and we desperately needed someone to teach us Military tactics so we can move and evade if needed without getting caught. Is there someone in your group that can teach us?"

"Yeah Me! I don't want to expose anyone from another group for security reasons, and I can teach you all you need to know. If you join our Militia, the training is free, otherwise this meeting never happened, and you'll never see any of us again."

"If it were up to us, we'd join in a heartbeat, but we need to put it to a vote. Can I call you in a couple of days?"

George realized that Ralph and Sam couldn't speak for the rest of the group yet, so he told them to call him at his number in 48 hours. If he didn't get a call, they wouldn't see him again. With that, everyone left, and Ralph and Sam walked back to their SUV. Once they were safely inside, Sam said "Isn't he being a little paranoid?"

"Not really Sam, we're the only people he's trained that aren't either ex-military or military dependents. He's taking a big risk by even telling us about them. They must really need doctors."

"Ok, so what do we tell everyone else?"

"I'll give them the Reader's Digest version, and tell them we have to make our minds up quick."

When they got home, they called everyone, and set up a meeting at their house. Since they normally got together on Friday anyway, it was nothing unusual. Several docs were still leery, finally Sam spoke up.

"For Pete's sake, it's not like they're trying to blow up the UN or anything. This is just a contingency setup in case things got really bad." She looked straight at the Doctor that was raising the biggest objections "Remember that Cuban kid they took out of his home at

gunpoint? That could be any of us, and if the Government was to declare Martial Law and turn FEMA and the ATF loose, would you like the odds that they would actually behave themselves given their past behavior? Take it one step further, let's say that we get a Liberal President and Congress, and they pass something worse than the Patriot Act that calls for the confiscation of all firearms. We bought our AR-15's from a licensed dealer, which means the ATF knows we bought them. What if you got your door kicked in at 3:00am and a bunch of goons with MP-5s pointed in your face demand you surrender your guns. OK, let's take than 1 step further, say you refuse - maybe you sold it and they don't believe you. Do you think that they'd give a rip about your Civil Rights or even your personal safety at that point."

Ralph took over at that point "I'll be damned if I let some JBT bust in my door to grab my guns, and possibly shoot me and rape my wife while I watch. This sort of tyranny is exactly what George was talking about. Only by organizing can we have a chance to stop that kind of behavior in its tracks."

Ralph's little speech convinced the fence-sitters, who were more Pacificist than the rest of the team. He called for a vote, and it was unanimous. Ron called the Dojo, and said two words. "We're in" and hung up. He knew George would get the message, and its meaning. The meeting broke up shortly thereafter. He told them he'd let them know when George would schedule the rest of their training.

Ron, Nancy and the kids were enjoying their summer vacation, and as the summer turned to fall, Jake and Josh finally caught up with their little sister, and were hitting tin cans at 100 yards with their chipmunk .22 rifles. Ron decided he was going to teach Josh and Jake how to shoot a pistol, since Jake was almost 11, and Josh wanted to do whatever his big brother did. Ron took them out front and set up a row of tin cans, and explained how the .22 pistol worked, then showed them that it made almost no noise, and was as easy to shoot as their rifles. With the red dot sight, it was probably easier, since he told them all you do is put the red dot on the target and squeeze the trigger. Jake got the hang of it after 1 mag, and Josh only needed 1 more mag before he was nailing tin cans at 30 feet. Slowly Ron ran the distance out over the weeks until they could do it at 25 yards, then he reduced the target size. Right before the end of the summer, he showed them how to play 22 golf. Sarah used her Chipmunk, and Josh and Jake used their parent's 22/45's. He let Sarah throw the balls out because she couldn't throw them more than 25 yards, and her mechanics meant that they were scattered all over the place. Ron hoped she would learn how to throw soon, and Nancy hoped she would eventually like to play with dolls. When it got cold, Ron called BA, and requested the SuperGoose come and pick them up, since they had too much stuff to fit in the 007 now. When they got home, Ron signed the 3 of them up for the Junior Shooter's league, where they would compete with kids their own age shooting .22 pistols and rifles at the indoor shooting range. Jake didn't think it was as much fun as shooting golf balls, but it made him learn to shoot small groups. Sarah won her age group for the next couple of years, and Josh and Jake were neck and neck for #1 and #2 in their age group, until Jake moved up to the next age group, then Josh was #1 until he joined his older brother. Sarah made some friends at the shooting range, including a boy that thought she



wasn't too revolting for a girl. As David got older, Ron got him started on the chipmunk .22. Since he was much younger than his older brothers, he wasn't as competitive, but stuck with it, and by the time he reached his 8th birthday, he was routinely nailing tin cans out to 50 yards.

Bear scheduled his swimming trips to coincide with the Senior League shooting days, and his greatest competition was Gene Shepard. Bear was glad he wasn't a General anymore, because now he could show him how the Navy taught you how to shoot without having his CO mad at him for beating him by 20 points in a 500 point match. Steve competed in the Senior Division too, and was really grateful that Ron shot in the open division, because they didn't have a chance against him. Ron had shot a possible, or 500 points in a 500 point match more than once. Nancy was no slouch either, and often won the women's open pistol competition, closely followed by her mother in law, and BA's wife Sally. Anne ruled the women's open smallbore rifle competition, with Nancy and Sally a distant second and third. Ron occasionally shot smallbore rifle, but preferred shooting his .308 or his BMG.50. Shooting an open-sighted .22 rifle at 100 yards wasn't his idea of fun, but he did it during the winter to keep sharp. One day he brought his SU-16 to a match just to see how accurate it was. He was glad it broke in half, otherwise he would have broken it in half at the end of the match, since his Ruger 10/22 shot groups half the size of the Keltec SU-16 at 100 yards. He realized that the SU-16 was a better pilot gun, since the .223 round had several times the energy of the .22lr that the 10/22 shot. Anything smaller than a bear was dead with the first round out of his SU-16 out to 100 yards, and in close, if he put enough rounds into a bear, it might work. He was glad he bought several 20 round magazines for the rifle, because if he needed to shoot a bear, he might need all of them to kill it unless he got lucky and blew the bear's heart apart with the first round, because the .223 round wouldn't penetrate the bear's thick skull unless it went through an eye.

Later that week, George called Ralph and Sam, and said that they needed to meet at his dojo. They called the rest of the group, and at 7:00 that night, they were in his dojo, when George walked in.

"I understand you guys want to learn how to move and think like a soldier. I can teach you how to move, but thinking that way takes a mental attitude that I don't think most of you have. None of you have seen combat, except maybe Ralph and Sam, but they were bystanders to a shootout, so let me tell you what is going to happen. The first thing is you might panic, and if you do, you're as good as dead. Fear is normal, panic is deadly. The difference is training. I've already taught you self-defense, but that is over quickly in your minds, and you think the police will be there to pick up the pieces. I've got a news flash for you - it doesn't take much to destroy the thin veneer of civilization, and then it's the law of the jungle. It doesn't matter if it lasts an hour, day, week, or year if you die during the disruption, you don't get to come back later when things are normal. From your self-defense classes, we talked about the Cooper Conditions, now we need to train you how to recognize when things are about to go from Normal to Abnormal, and what to do in the small space of time you have to either defend yourself or flee. We aren't talking about a mugging here, but a riot or a near-riot situation, or even the panic that results from a natural disaster, or an attack. Nothing "just happens" except

maybe a sudden nuclear attack or an earthquake. Everything else has precursors that you can recognize and avoid. Since you're all doctors, you could be stuck at work, or drafted for the duration of the emergency. If not, none of your homes are defensible for maybe more than 30 seconds. Therefore, you either need to move to safer neighborhoods, or think about what you would do in an emergency. Civil defense in the United States is a joke, so there are no shelters for the average American, so you need to find your own."

Gary, the black neurosurgeon in the back spoke up. "What the heck are you talking about?"

"Gary, I know you think that things will always remain the way they are, but do you remember the Watts Riots?"

"I read something about them in a History Book."

"Ok, how about the Rodney King Riots - you have to be old enough to remember them."

"Ok, I vaguely remember them."

"Ok, instead of working at Granger, let's say you worked at UCLA Medical Center the morning of the verdict. You would have been at ground zero of one of the worst riots in recent history. What would you have done, remember the LAPD has left and gone home."

That brought Gary to a full stop. While he was trained in Self-defense, he had failed to change his mental attitude, and George was trying to rectify that situation. Gary finally shook his head and sat down saying "I don't know what I would have done."

"Gary, admitting you don't know is the first step. That's what I'm here for, to help you game out the situation, play "what-if" games in your head. That way if it happens, you've already figured out what you would do, so you just do it without wasting precious time deciding what to do. You see, most military men aren't supermen; they've just been trained to think differently. Ralph and Sam are almost there, but they need some help too. For the next couple of months, I'm going to need you here every Wednesday at 7:00pm. You're going to be given homework assignments to do. Don't worry, I won't turn you into a bunch of paranoid survivalists, just bump you out of Condition White that most people go around all day, into at least condition Green or Orange. It's called Situational Awareness, and before you learn anything else, you need to learn SA. Once we've got that, I can teach you how to move silently as a group, and how to escape and evade. I know some of you are now carrying CCW's, and I'd like the rest of you to seriously consider getting one, and carrying at least a mini Altoids tin kit in your pocket."

"What's an Altoids tin kit?"

"Ralph you care to answer that?"

“I found them on the internet, on a Website called the Frugal Squirrels. Some guy named SSKM seems to be the resident expert on them. You buy a small tin of Altoids breath mints, and replace the candy with tiny pieces of equipment that are the bare minimum you would need to survive, like a tiny knife blade, a ferrochromium rod, tinder, a soda straw full of water purification tablets, a tiny LED light, fishing line and hooks, a couple of Ziploc bags, maybe a trash bag or something else. You seal them up watertight, and leave it in your pocket all the time, in case you loose your main emergency gear.”

“What’s the point of that?”

“Gary, with the knife you can make other tools, and the other stuff helps you make fire and purify water, 2 essentials for survival. The last is shelter, and you can use stuff in the kit to make shelter. But none of it will do you any good without the knowledge to use it, so knowledge of primitive survival techniques is essential.”

“I thought that was what our BOB’s were for?”

“What if you loose it, or have to drop it in a firefight, what are you going to do then?”

The total silence indicated to George that they hadn’t thought about that. He opened up a demo kit he made up to show people. It wasn’t waterproof, just closed with a piece of tape. He set the kit on a table and described the contents, and what you could do with them, including the tin itself. When he finished his little demonstration, he could see that a few more light bulbs had turned on.

“Ok, let’s say I dropped you off in the middle of Afghanistan and told you to make your way to England with only what you had in your pockets right now, how many of you think you could do that?”

Ralph thought about it for a minute, and said, “I think I can!”

George looked at the rest of them, and said that if certain things happened in the US, they could find themselves in a far worse situation, and they might have to survive with what they had on them or could scrounge, but they couldn’t get caught by the authorities, or the game’s over.

## Chapter 35 - Newbies

The next Wednesday, the group raided the local Wal-mart and bought the tins and the following items:

Pack of single edge razor blades  
Petroleum Jelly  
Cotton balls  
Trick Candles  
BSA ferrochromium rod  
P-38 can opener (doubles as striker for rod)  
Micro LED light  
Contractor Trash bag  
Gallon Ziploc bags  
Roll of 10/50 Spyderwire  
1/8oz lead head jigs and plastic grubs  
Roll of Snare wire (Steel leader wire non-braided)  
Micro button compass  
Safety pins  
Box of finishing nails  
100mph tape (Military Duct tape)

Under George's supervision, they put their kits together from the common supply in the center of the table. First, they made a large handful of PJ saturated cotton balls, so that everyone would have 3, then George used his Seal-a-meal to seal sets of 3 cotton balls in plastic after he sucked the air out, which reduced the size by 3 times. They each put 2 single-edge razors with their cardboard covers, 1 pack of PJ tinder, 2 trick candles, 1 BSA rod, 1 P-38, 1 LED light, 1 Contractor bag, 1 Gallon Ziploc bag, 50 feet of Spyderwire rolled around a small piece of cardboard, 2 jigs and grubs, 50 feet of snare wire, 3 finishing nails, 1 button compass, and 1 large and 2 small safety pins in their Altoids tins. It took them several tries until 1 of them discovered a way to make it all fit, then they all copied him. Finally, they wrapped the tin with the 100mph tape, which did 3 things: 1) it gave them a source of tape, 2) It made the kit waterproof, and 3) it prevented them from raiding the kit unless it was an emergency.

As they were assembling their kits, George explained the uses for each. Using a pie pan on the center of the table, he took a ball of PJ saturated cotton, pulled a dime-sized piece off the ball, then pulled it apart until it was the size of a quarter, then using a P-38 and the ferrochromium rod, threw a shower of sparks into the tinder from the rod. The tinder ignited immediately and burned for over a minute. George told them that PJ saturated cotton balls was one of the best tinders he knew, the other being a piece of Rubber Innertube. If they had a tube of Purell, it was gelled Alcohol, and was an excellent firestarter if necessary. He said the trick candles were to use to light multiple fires, or if they found matches, to light a fire with matches, since a single

match might not light a fire if the wood was damp, but a trick match will burn for 5 minutes, and dry out the wood. The Contractor bag was a poncho or shelter. The wire and nails were to make simple snares to catch rodents for dinner. Some of the women made “Gross” sounds until George told them if they got hungry enough, even a filthy rat would look pretty appetizing. The Spyderwire could either be used with the jigs and grubs for fishing, or else to build shelter. George knew that the Newbies, as he called the group, were just starting to figure things out, and he hoped more of them would wake up as the weeks went on, otherwise he would dump everyone except Ron and Sam and incorporate them into another group.

Ron, Nancy and the kids had an uneventful winter and spring, except for the kids’ birthdays, which were fairly large parties full of noisy boisterous kids. Ron was about to break out the duct tape when his Mom walked up to him and suggested he go cut wood or something, because she could see that he wasn’t dealing with the commotion very well. Ron hated to admit it, but his Mom was right. He got a lot of wood split that afternoon, but he wasn’t proud to admit that he was thinking of something besides splitting wood as he drove the sledge hammer into the wedge, and the wood exploded with a satisfying sound. He came back in after the party was over feeling much better.

6 months later, BA got an emergency call from Don at the FAA office in Anchorage. “We’ve got a missing hunter and guide. It’s Mike Nelson and his client, I’ll give you two guesses as to who he uses as a pilot?”

BA swore under his breath, Fred Sanders was about the only bush pilot not working for Allakaket Airlines, for a good reason - he was an incorrigible drunk. He had been fired by several lodges for his drinking problem, and he refused to get help. BA had seen him more than once coming out of the Moose Café and getting into his plane. Ron and BA had a hard and fast rule. If you drank anything besides coffee, you couldn’t fly for 24 hours. Fred violated that rule on a daily basis. No one ever caught him flying while intoxicated, because Dan would have pulled his license in a heartbeat if he could prove it. Dan told BA that if anything happened to Mike and his client, he was revoking Fred’s license, and might even bring criminal charges if he could prove anything more than simple negligence. He asked Allakaket Airlines to contribute any available planes to an air/ground search for the lost guide and client, since they were now a week overdue. BA kept a log for the private guides who were supposed to file a hunting plan with him so if they turned up lost, they knew where to search. Since Fred was sitting in the Moose Café, he knew that he didn’t crash anywhere, so either he forgot to pick them up, or else dropped them off in the wrong spot. BA assigned all available planes to a grid-search pattern. He was going to put a plane up on listening watch when he remembered Mike didn’t believe in an emergency radio, and had no way to talk to a plane anyway. This was going to be a long visual search.

He called Ron and told him he was needed for a lost-hunter search. BA wanted him flying the SuperGoose with Anne as a flight nurse in case they needed him as a Medevac. Both 007s were available, so BA assigned them to the search as well. Every available bush pilot landed at

Allakaket and picked up a spotter. BA set up an inter-plane frequency for them to listen to, and cleared Allakaket Emergency frequency for the duration. He told the pilots to stay off Guard unless they had an in-flight emergency, and to stay off Allakaket Emergency unless they had a firm sighting of the guide or the hunter. The helicopters would fly to where they were supposed to be, and put in ground search teams, then fly low and slow over the area to expand the search area. Bear and Hunter each volunteered to lead a search team, and the students at their school also volunteered to help, realizing that this would be a good real-life exercise. They quickly packed their bags for a week on the ground, and took off in the 007 and headed toward the last known position of the guide and hunter. The Super Stallion and CH-47 were both available if they needed the rescue winch, but they were stood down on alert since they weren't very effective in searching, and very expensive to operate. The two S-76's would be more than enough, and the airspace around the search area would be crowded enough without the two huge helicopters. They started the search, and later that day the ground team located the hunter and guide. The hunter had fallen and broken his leg, and the guide had no means of calling anyone. Ron was livid, and felt badly for the hunter, who had endured the pain of a broken leg for a week because his cheapskate guide didn't have a radio, and his pilot was an irresponsible drunk. The S-76 landed and picked them up and flew them to Alaska General in Anchorage, so Ron was able to RTB instead of acting as a Medevac. When he got back to town, he called Dan and gave him an earful. Mike and the hunter were within a couple of miles of where they were supposed to be, and had been stranded over a week. That was all Dan needed to hear, and started proceedings to revoke Fred's Commercial ticket, meaning he could still fly, but not with paying passengers. Later that day Ron learned that the Hunter would lose his leg due to gangrene and infection. A couple of days longer, and he would have died from massive infection. He wondered if the State would take any action against the guide.

The first hurricane of the fall hit Florida on Monday. The news coverage of the disaster woke up the few members of Ralph and Sam's team that were still basically Sheeple. They showed up at the meeting Wednesday evening with a new-found enthusiasm for learning how to survive. George just hoped their interest wouldn't wane after their memories of the disaster faded. While they were interested, George took advantage of the situation, finished converting them from Sheeple. They now had the right mental attitude, all they needed was training. That would start next week. He told them next week to show up wearing dark clothes that they wouldn't mind getting dirty, they were going to learn how to be invisible.

#### **Dateline Beijing China. Council of Ministers Building 0900 Local**

Marshal Zang of the PLA presented Golden Dragon, the plan to attack and invade the US to a meeting of the Politburo.

"Comrades, we face starvation in a year if we take no action. The US has had bumper crops of wheat for the last 3 years, and we face progressively worse crop failures. Between lack of rain and the catastrophic collapse of the Three Gorges Dam, we have no water to irrigate 1/3 of our country, and are again importing electricity from other areas. Our very survival as a nation

depends on being able to feed the people. Even the Army has been cut back to short rations. Morale is at an all-time low between the lack of food, and fuel to train. We've been using the Army for the last couple of years as farmers instead of soldiers, and there is grumbling."

"Well, have MSS shoot the traitors and malcontents!" answered Premier Xu.

"Premier, that would mean executing 30% of our force, and some of my best officers. To do that would invite a mutiny. There must be a better way!"

Fang Yu, the Foreign Minister, objected "What you propose is naked aggression; surely we can ask the US for help. After all, if they have a bumper crop of wheat, wouldn't they rather sell it to us instead of face a nuclear war?"

"Who said anything about a nuclear war?"

"With all due respect Marshall, Golden Dragon calls for a first-strike use of nuclear warheads to destroy Washington DC, and the Naval bases in Hawaii and California, clearing the way for us to invade and occupy the United States. I tell you, this plan is madness."

Premier Xu could tell that he didn't have the votes to approve the attack, so he wisely tabled the vote. A white-faced Fang Yu strode purposefully out of the meeting. Shen Yu, the head of the MSS, caught up with him. "Fang, what is wrong?"

"This plan of the Marshall's will lead to the destruction of China, not our salvation. Even if we take out DC, the nuclear missile silos will execute their Doomsday commands and launch automatically if communication is lost with DC. We don't have enough missiles to take out DC, the west coast and the missile silos. Besides we can't take out the silos without destroying the very wheat fields we need to feed our people."

"How do you know this Minister Fang?"

"I can read as well as you, and have read your reports on US readiness. Ever since President Hatch was elected, their military readiness has dramatically improved. Under President Clinton, when the Central Committee designed the attack, it would have worked, because the US Military was weak and disorganized. Now it's doomed to failure, and us with it - what do you think would be the first target on the American's list - this building! You know they have nuclear bunker busters they built to get Saddam Hussein, but they would work just as well against us."

"True, but we still have millions of operatives in the US that could sabotage the very systems they would need to attack us."

"Shen, how will clerks, seamstresses and waiters succeed against what is now the best and

biggest military in the World. Even with SADMs, they could do minimal damage once they go on high alert. Our Navy is no match for their subs. I'm sure they have at least 1 boomer within cruise missile range right now, and at least 1 Fast Attack 688I sub in the South China Sea. As soon as the invasion fleet put to sea, they would be destroyed. We need to stop this madness right now!"

"Minister Fang, even with your opposition, the attack will go forward. Either you will suffer a fatal accident and be replaced, or they will foment a crisis that will force us to execute the plan. For your own safety, I ask you my friend not to be so vocal at the next meeting."

"Very well Minister Shen , since I don't have any choice in the matter, I can't resist if I'm dead."

"Exactly, and we'll need you for the peace negotiations afterward."

Minister Fang felt a sudden chill when Minister Shen bowed and left him. He knew he must stop this madness, but how. According to Shen, if he openly voiced his disapproval, they would kill him. If they went forward with it, he wouldn't live through the retaliatory strikes, and neither would half of his countrymen. He owed it to his country to stop it any way he could, but how. He remembered that he was going to meet the American Ambassador about a trade issue today, maybe the Americans could help. Fang decided it was his only option, and boldly decided he had to do it, even if it meant his death. Later that day, he met with the Ambassador, and made sure the Ambassador put his glass on a certain napkin that had a cryptic note on it. The Ambassador was no dummy, and saw the writing, and pocketed the note. He had Diplomatic Immunity, and if the Minister was so desperate to attempt contact like that, he knew that it was deadly serious. He knew his Charge de' affairs was a spook, and passed the note to him without a word other than telling him it came from Shen. Michael Stillman was indeed a Spook, and luckily he was the highest-placed spook in China, and TAPDANCED the message to Langley. They jumped on the translation. When the DDO read it, he hung a CRITIC on it and forwarded it to the White House. President Hatch's first outburst after reading it would have shocked his mother! He immediately called the Director's of the CIA and NSA and told them to give Minister Fang any assistance needed to get proof. The DDO knew that Fang preferred American Cross pens for his personal writing pens, and the NSA had one that could record and digitally store several hours worth of conversation, yet wouldn't show up on a standard scan. The NSA had several pens sent FEDEX overnight to the embassy, so they would have one that matched the minister's. Michael Stillman received the pens with 1 day to spare before the next meeting. He knew the minister preferred the brushed stainless Cross pens with a fine point, so he gave that pen to the Ambassador to give to Fang when he met the minister that morning. He switched pens with the minister, and Fang Yu went into the Politburo meeting.

Marshall Zang opened the meeting with an appeal to authorize the attacks.

"Comrades, if anything the situation has gotten worse. We will be out of food within 6 months,



and we barely have enough food to feed our military during the Pacific Transit.”

Minister Fang stood. “Marshall, can you go over the details of the plan again, I had a few questions.”

Marshall Zang assumed it was a delaying tactic, so he repeated the plan in a bored monotone. Unknown to him, Fang was recording the entire conversation. When he finished Zang asked for a vote for war. This time Fang didn’t object, but requested a week’s delay so he could make some preparations. Zang was stunned by Fang’s agreement, so he agreed to the week’s delay. Premier Xu polled the members of the Politburo for the amended war plan, and each member voted Yes, including Fang. He arranged to see the US Ambassador as soon as possible after the meeting, and the pen was sent to the NSA to be downloaded and decrypted. The entire conversation in the Politburo was recorded as cleanly as if they had dedicated mikes for each participant. President Hatch had a translated transcript on his desk 1 hour later, and he signed the EO authorizing a pre-emptive strike against the Council of Minister’s Building in Beijing during the Politburo’s next meeting that Wednesday night. A B-2 Stealth Bomber was dispatched from its base, and flown to Elmendorf, where it was refueled. Security was airtight since it was armed with 4 nuclear cruise missiles. Two to take out the Council of Ministers Building, and two to destroy the PLA Headquarters. It took off on schedule, and was in-flight refueled several times before penetrating Chinese airspace, and receiving the go code from President Hatch. Half an hour later, the Council of Ministers and the PLA headquarters went up with a blinding flash and a large mushroom cloud. NORAD waited for an hour on pins and needles for a retaliatory strike, but none ever occurred.

Once NORAD was sure that the coast was clear, and no birds were flying, President Hatch asked for an immediate nationwide live telecast.

“My Fellow Americans. It is with a heavy heart that I announce the US was forced to destroy the Council of Minister’s building in Beijing while the Politburo was meeting to make final preparations to launch a nuclear attack and invasion of the USA. We have no quarrel with the people of China. I was presented incontrovertible proof by Foreign Minister Fang Yu that next Wednesday, the People’s Liberation Army was going to launch an all-out nuclear attack against the US, then follow up with an invasion to conquer and subjugate the US. They wanted our wheat and oil, since they have had repeated crop failures. The ironic thing was all they had to do was ask, and we could have sold them enough wheat to feed their people, and all the oil they needed for domestic use. I guess their pride got in the way, and they got greedy. I have a word of warning for the remaining leadership of the People’s Republic of China. I have moved several boomers within close range of the entire country of China, and if we detect any launches or other hostile maneuvers they have already been ordered to attack on launch warning. We are indebted to Foreign Minister Fang Yu, who sacrificed his life to bring us this information. He perished in the attack, since his absence would have been noted, and they might have changed the meeting.

We hereby demand that the remaining government of China demilitarize to a level sufficient for National Defense, and destroy all nuclear missiles and warheads. We will perform our own verification, and there will be no negotiation of terms. To those of you who think I should have consulted Congress, the only thing I can say is I had to act immediately to defend the United States against an imminent attack, and if I hadn't acted, we would have been attacked, and I couldn't let that happen.

Premier Putin, I offer an olive branch of a demilitarized Asia, and the security of your southern border. We have no quarrel with Russia, who has been an ally of the United States for most of your history. We wish to continue to be your ally and friend. As soon as we see positive indications of demilitarization, we will begin shipping food aid to China, as well as experts to solve your crop failure problems.

Thank You, Good Night, and God Bless the USA!"

Ron was stunned when he watched the nationwide broadcast, and called Bear to ask if they needed to increase their security status. Bear didn't see any reason, since they had no Chinese residents, and if anyone wanted to mess with Alaska, they'd have to come through Russia, or fly a long distance. Vladimir Putin would probably enact measures to ensure that their southern border was secure, and deport all Chinese Nationals that were even remotely suspicious.

Meanwhile, back in Atlanta, Ralph and Samantha were coming out of the hospital after a long shift after dark, walking out to their SUV. They got within 12 feet of the vehicle when a young skinny black man stepped out of the shadows and said "Gimme yo wallet mo fo!"

Ron saw a blued revolver pointed shakily at them, so he said "Take it easy, here's my money clip" and reached with his left hand into his left front pocket, lifted the clip out of his pocket slowly and easily. Once the money clip was visible, Sam took several small steps to her left since she was on Ralph's left side, because George taught them never to walk with Ralph's gun hand occupied. The money clip was another idea of George's, it was a \$50.00 and 10 \$1 bills folded into a money clip with the \$50 showing, it was known as a distractor. With practiced ease, Ralph nervously flipped the clip 3 feet to the left of the dirtbag, whose attention was diverted by the clip. When the money landed he said, "Now give me the Bitch!", and looked Sam up and down as if he was undressing her with his eyes. With the dirtbags eyes off him, Ralph had slipped he right hand into his waistband and had a firing grip on his P-14. Realizing that he wasn't going to let them go and just take the money, Ralph drew and fired in one motion, hitting the dirtbag high in the right thigh, shattering his femur and probably severing his femoral artery. Ralph's second shot hit the dirtbag in his left shoulder. The dirtbag fell wounded and bleeding heavily to the ground, but still had his gun in his hand. As soon as Ralph started firing, Samantha reached into her purse and drew her gun. Her front sight locked on the Dirtbag's forehead, and she yelled "Drop the gun right now! Don't make me shoot you!" The Dirtbag made the wrong move and extended the gun to shoot Ralph, so Samantha finished squeezing the trigger, and 200 grains of jacketed hollow point lead entered the dirtbag's

forehead right above his nose, between his eyes, and the back of his head exploded, blowing brain matter all over the place. Ron stepped forward and kicked the revolver out of the dirtbag's hand, when off to his right he heard "Can someone help us?"

Ron holstered his gun and they checked out the call for help. A woman was lying on the ground next to a Crown Vic, and her husband was in a wheelchair next to her. Ron found out he was a Police Detective that had been shot in the leg in the line of duty, who had just been discharged to finish recuperating at home. He was in a wheelchair, and his wife was lying on the ground, and needed help getting back up. Seeing they were no threat, Sam holstered her gun too, and went to help the couple. They lifted his wife up and got her on her feet, and then the cop said he saw and heard the whole thing go down, and pushed his wife to the ground out of the line of fire and was able to look over the trunk of their car when the Dirtbag demanded that Ralph give him Samantha after he had tossed the money clip. Right then several cruisers showed up, and the police officer in the wheelchair was immediately recognized by them as a senior Atlanta detective. He told the officers exactly what happened, and they examined the scene. Ralph and Sam both showed the lead officer their Federal CCW's and driver's licenses. The computer check came back that they were indeed doctors at the hospital, and had valid federal CCW permits. Instead of taking them in, he recorded their statements, and the statement of the detective, and decided to release them OR.

The coroner and a photographer showed up, and Ron explained he had kicked the revolver over to where it lay, and the detective corroborated that the Dirtbag tried to shoot them even after being shot twice, and Sam's forehead shot was necessary to save their lives. A Supervisor showed up, and thought he recognized the Dirtbag as a 4-time loser who was on parole for armed robbery. Ralph wondered what a 4-time loser was doing out on parole, but didn't say anything. Sam got on her cell phone to George, who recommended an aggressive pro-gun defense attorney named James Francis. When she called Doc Richards, he told them that he was glad they were OK, and he'd pay any legal fees. When she told him the lawyer's name, Doc told her to mention his name, and he would probably take the case for nothing, since Doc had saved his brother's life years ago. Sam was amazed at how well Doc was connected. Finally, a Hospital Administrator showed up, and someone from Legal, since the parking lot was on Hospital property. Legal started asking why they were carrying on Hospital property and mouthing stuff like suspension. Ralph cut him off at the knees when he told him that they had retained James Francis Esq. as their defense attorney. The Hospital's legal rep shut up immediately, and the Administrator suggested they take a couple of days off. Ralph checked with the investigating officer, who said they were free to go, and if necessary, someone from the District Attorney's office would contact them. By now the Coroner had picked up the body and the shell casings, and had cleared the vehicle, so they could drive it home.

When they got home, there was a message from the law office of James Francis. Doc had called his office, and James would represent them personally and wouldn't charge a fee. He could see them tomorrow morning at 0900 in his office and he left the address. Ralph and Sam got in the shower, and then crawled into bed, drained from their experience. The next morning

they went to see James Francis. His personal office was larger than their living room, and the walls were paneled in dark oak, and lined with book cases full of law books. He stood up and shook their hands, then asked a legal stenographer to come in, and had them go over the whole incident again. He asked pointed questions, including their training, and what they were thinking. James knew George, and knew that if he trained them, it was almost certainly a legally righteous shoot since he knew the self-defense laws of Georgia and Atlanta almost as well as James did. When Ralph mentioned the Hospital's Legal rep's comment about suspension, James made a few notes, then told Ralph he had a few tricks up his sleeve to make any legal or civil problems go away. He was going to sue the hospital and the city jointly for Gross Negligence, specifically failure to maintain a safe workplace and failure to supervise and control the parolee among other things. He was sure that his PI could dig something up that would indicate that the Probation and Parole department screwed up, because he knew that they were understaffed and overloaded, with the Federal prison crowding issues, they were practically running a revolving door at the prison, releasing violent felons with less than 50% of their time served. He knew that if he asked for \$100 million dollars, which would be reasonable for 2 doctors' lifetime income and substantial punitive damages, that he could get the Hospital and City's attention, and make everything go away.

He told Ralph and Sam what he had in mind, and that playing hardball was the only way to make their problems go away forever, because otherwise the Hospital Legal staff would find a way to disarm them on Hospital property. They didn't even like having armed security guards due to the liability issues, and he knew that even if it went to trial, it was an excellent test case to hopefully change employer liability laws. He knew that if the hospital had the same security outside the building that several hospitals in other big cities had, this would never have happened. He was glad that Ralph and Anne held Federal CCW's because the Liberal City DA would be pre-empted by federal law against trying them for unauthorized carry. As soon as Ralph and Sam signed the retainer form, he had several paralegals working on the paperwork, and served the City and the Hospital that afternoon. 2 days later, he called them, and suggested they meet in his office; he had a proposal that could take care of the whole problem.

2 days later, the hospital administrator, the head of the Hospital legal department, the Deputy Assistant DA, and the City Attorney met in James Francis' office.

"Gentlemen, thanks for coming. I don't want to waste your time, so I wanted to propose a settlement to this case. You have the Coroner's report, and the reports of all officers and investigators involved. As you can see, this is clearly a righteous shoot.

My settlement terms are:

The hospital will install a secure parking lot for hospital employees

The City and State have to agree to dismiss any legal charges with prejudice.

There will be no legal or civil retaliation against my clients

They will be able to continue to carry concealed at work without any restrictions or repercussions

The City will investigate the Probation Department and correct any problems found

If the deceased's estate sues for wrongful death, the city and hospital will pay any costs including settlement with the plaintiffs, and reasonable legal fees.

This settlement is a 1-time take it or leave it offer, and is contingent upon absolute confidentiality.

You have 1 week from today to accept this offer, or we go to trial.

All parties must agree to this settlement, there will be no separate settlements.

James handed a copy of the settlement offer to each of the representatives, and told them to send their responses by either FEDEX or registered mail, and he had to have all their responses in hand within a week, or he was going through with the lawsuit.

1 week later, he had 5 signed settlement offers on his desk, including one from the State Attorney General's office promising that they weren't going to be charged in State Court. He called Ralph and Sam at home and gave them the good news.

## Chapter 36 - Aftermath

Later that week, Ralph and Sam reported back for work. Ralph realized that their attorney must have some serious juice because no one from Hospital Administration said anything to them other than “Welcome Back” and they had already started construction of a 6-foot high chain link fence with 3 strands of barbed wire on top, mounted on anti-climb brackets that leaned to the outside of the fence. An armed security guard patrolled the perimeter 7 days a week, 24 hours a day while they finished the fence, the electric gate with pass cards, and the security cameras that kept watch over the entire parking lot. The head of the Legal department told the Hospital Board that they were getting off cheap, that James Francis had the best reputation in Atlanta for being a hard-nosed jurist who almost always won his cases, and didn’t back down for anyone. He had been telling the board for years to install security, and if his memos had come out during discovery, they would have been damning to the point that any competent judge would have found for the plaintiffs and awarded huge punitive damages way in excess of the initial demand. The fence only cost less than \$50 Thousand including the gate, and the security cameras were a good idea anyway. He hoped that between the cameras and the signs, the dirtbags would move a couple of blocks away from the hospital, and eliminate the problem.

The District Attorney was livid, and knew that he had been totally outclassed by a superior attorney, who had an airtight case. He had been trying ever since he was elected to legally disarm everyone in Atlanta because he hated guns and blamed them for everything that was wrong with Atlanta, not realizing that the City’s Socialist mentality actually attracted scumbags to the city like ants to honey. He was glad this case didn’t go to trial, because that little SOB was right, even a jury full of retards could see this was a classic Righteous Shooting. The stupid criminal was offered the money, and instead of taking it and running, he attempted to kidnap and possibly rape the victim. Not even a bunch of Liberal New Yorkers would have much sympathy for a 4-time loser who got shot while attempting not only Armed Robbery, but possibly Kidnapping and Rape, even though the other 2 never happened, his intent was clear. Then that damned Detective had to go and stick his nose in it. The ironic thing was he was too senior for the DA to mess with him, and he would probably either get moved to a desk or medically retire due to the leg injury. He was hoping to use his career as District Attorney to run for Mayor of Atlanta, and now that was in doubt, because several people in the know knew that James Francis had beat his pants off in this case, and forced the City and the State to back off, or face a huge lawsuit.

Next Wednesday, Ralph and Sam showed up for their Wednesday night meeting, and George took them aside and gave them both hugs, and told them “Well done!” He had obtained a copy of the police reports through James Francis’ office, and read through it. Ralph’s shooting wasn’t too good, but George theorized that Ralph didn’t bother pulling the gun up to a Weaver stance, and shot from the hip as soon as the gun cleared, using his body to index and aim. The Coroner’s report showed a shattered right femur, lacerated femoral artery, shattered left collarbone, and another entry wound right above the bridge of the nose resulting in the

destruction of the Medulla Oblongata and the immediate cause of death. George knew the MO was a fairly small target, but if you hit it, it was Lights Out and Hasta La Vista Baby. Through either training or luck, Samantha hit the Dirtbag in the one spot that could instantly stop the fight. When the rest of the group gathered, George asked Ralph and Sam if it were OK for the group to hear their story, and for George to debrief them. When they finished telling their story, the rest of the group looked at them in total shock. They all knew it could have been them that it happened to, and they knew that none of them besides Ralph and Sam were prepared to deal with it. Suddenly their meeting took on an urgent air. Even the Pacifists were now firmly in George's camp, and were in no mood to back down. They realized that all their non-violence and pacifism would not matter one bit to a criminal intent on stealing what they had.

George collected the pairs of grey sweats that he told everyone to bring, and went out back to a 55-gallon drum half full of water, added a packet of RIT black dye, then loaded all the sweat suits into the drum, and stirred them with a stick until they were thoroughly dyed black. Using the same stick, he fished the sweats out of the drum and fed them through a hand-cranked clothes wringer that got most of the water out, and handed Ralph a poncho and rubber gloves, and told him to hang up the sweats without getting any dye on his skin. There was a clothesline already set up with spring clips, and he carefully hung them up to dry. One of the ladies asked why they didn't just use a commercial dryer, and George asked her if she would like to be the first person to use that dryer after they dried their damp sweats?

She realized that she didn't really think about that, and George used it as an object lesson. "People, if TSHTF, I can guarantee that society will be much more polite, and you'll have to consider the impact of what you do on everyone else in your group. Consideration, Courtesy, and Common Sense will be the watchwords. Remember the old saying "An Armed Society is a Polite Society." The West wasn't as wild as Hollywood made it out to be, but it was polite. You didn't go out of your way to offend someone who was openly carrying a Colt .45 Peacemaker!"

That remark got a couple of chuckles, and finally they were done dyeing and hanging the clothes. Ralph took off the poncho, and Sam checked him for dye spots. She was amazed when he didn't have a spot on him - she guessed he could be careful when it counted. While the clothes dried, they went back inside to start their classroom study of being sneaky as George called it. He started writing the basic rules of being sneaky on the chalkboard:

Stay in the shadows

Stay low

Don't get backlit

Be Quiet

Don't take the obvious approach

If you can, crawl instead of walking

Don't move in straight lines

Any time someone is looking remotely your way, freeze. The eye sees movement.

At night, don't look right at something, look to the side of it, or scan.  
Cheat!

George then handed them a copy of Dick Marcinko's famous 10 Rules of Specwar:

I am the War Lord and the wrathful God of Combat and I will always lead you from the front, not the rear.

I will treat you all alike - just like shit.

Thou shalt do nothing I will not do first, and thus you will be created Warriors in My deadly image.

I shall punish thy bodies because the more thou sweatest in training, the less thou bleedest in combat.

Indeed, if thou hurteth in thy efforts, and thou suffer painful dings, the thou art Doing It Right.

Thou has not to like it - thou hast just to do it.

Thou shalt Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Thou shalt never assume.

Verily, thou art not paid for thy methods, but for thy results, by which meaneth thou shalt kill thine enemy before he killeth you by any means available.

Thou shalt, in thy Warrior's Mind and Soul, always remember my ultimate and final Commandment: There Are No Rules - Thou Shalt Win at All Cost.

Several of the more pacifist docs laughed after they read them until George thundered "You think this is FUNNY! Damn it! If the stinky stuff hits the rotating blade - who you gonna call? The Cops will be out of business, and you will be on your own. I can guarantee that every Dirtbag is the world that is planning on surviving either has studied this stuff, or has the real-world experience to know it intuitively. You cake-eating Civilians have had it so easy for so long, you've forgotten how brutal things can get when Law and Order collapses. That little hurricane that hit Florida only disrupted things for less than a week, yet they had rampant looting, and probably a bunch of unreported robberies and murders they'll discover later. If that was only a couple of days after a minor disaster, imagine how bad things could get if it really hits the fan?"

George's "Drill Instructor From Hell" impersonation and what happened to Ralph and Sam stopped them dead in their tracks, and got them thinking in uncomfortable directions. George went on "You guys have all the fancy gear, but don't have a clue how to use it. You might be good at punching paper, but what about shooting a real human who is shooting back at you? You know zip about Tactics, yet you act like a bunch of know-it-alls. We've got a limited time here to get you guys up to speed, for all we know, something could happen tomorrow that would do away with civilization as we know it. Believe me, it wouldn't take much!"

George spent the rest of the evening talking about basic tactics. He was encouraged to see they were taking notes. He told them when they met next week that they would start practicing this



stuff in the woods out back of his studio, which was also his house. He had 10 acres of land out back, and he hadn't cleared it out for years, so it was in it's natural wild state, which was perfect for teaching this bunch of Newbies how to move through the wilderness. The first things he would teach them was the simple Patrol File, or how to move as group in low threat areas. He hoped one of them had enough woods skills to act as point man; otherwise they were doomed from the start. They went over map and compass use, and wilderness navigation, pace counting techniques, and a bunch of other stuff.

Ralph and Sam were tired when they got home, but after they had a shower together, they wound up making love the rest of the night. They were dragging the next day at work, but were used to it from their internships and residencies. Somehow they got through the day, and went out for dinner that night at a local Chinese restaurant, since they didn't feel like cooking. As they were departing the restaurant, Ralph was in condition Orange, and spotted something he didn't like, so they retreated back into the restaurant, and asked the manager to call the cops, because there was a small group of black men loitering in the parking lot, and Ralph thought he spotted a concealed gun on them, and told the manager they might be getting ready to rob the place. The police arrived a couple of minutes later code 2, and managed to corral the gang. When the police frisked them, several were carrying pistols, and one of them had a sawed-off shotgun. The kicker was the black masks in their pockets.

When they were taken downtown and fingerprinted, several turned out to be ex-cons with several armed robberies on their rap sheets. The police officer interviewed Sam and Ralph, and thanked them for spotting the robbers. The manager refunded their money for dinner, and handed them his card with some Chinese characters on it, which he said would entitle them to 2 free meals whenever they visited the restaurant for as long as they cared to use it. The manager said they had gotten robbed several times before, and it was usually right before they were going to make a bank run. Ralph suggested they might have someone inside. The manager's eyes went wide, then realized that Ralph was right. He remembered hiring a dishwasher with a shady past about a month before the robberies started. He called the police supervisor back into the building, and told him about Ralph's theory, and the coincidence of the robberies starting a month after they hired a new dishwasher. He was in the back working, so the supervisor told the manager to come in back and point him out. Two officers accompanied them, and 2 minutes later, they led the dishwasher out in cuffs. The manager was very grateful, over the last 6 months, they had been robbed twice, and each time they lost several thousand dollars. Ralph suggested they run any new employees through the PD and have them run a quick check on them, it was cheaper than paying for increased insurance payments or a funeral. The Manager thought that was an excellent idea, and told them to come back whenever they wanted. Ralph and Sam got home later that night, and were so exhausted that they just took a shower and crawled into bed.

The next day they read the papers, and were grateful that the police supervisor had managed to keep their names out of the paper. Ralph hoped the supervisor remembered their names from the shootout, and decided the last thing they wanted was the publicity. They went to work as if

nothing happened, and when they met at George's on Wednesday, Ralph told George about the incident. The three of them sat down and talked about it until the rest of the group got there. George told Ralph he did everything correctly as far as he could see, and he was impressed that his Situational Awareness was improving. Most Civilians would have blundered right into the group, and probably gotten robbed or car jacked, since crooks are opportunistic. The rest of the group showed up, and they got on with that night's training. They all changed into their sweats, and met out back. George showed them how to apply greasepaint to their skins to darken their skins, except Gary, who might want to lighten his up a shade or two! Gary took the good-natured ribbing, and asked them how you located a black man in a dark alley, when they gave up he said "Tell him a joke and wait for the smile." Everyone got a good laugh at that, and after they had their make up on, he handed them an inexpensive black mask to pull over their heads. Ralph said "If we're wearing masks, why the black face?"

George pulled his on without first putting on his black face to show them the areas around the eyes stood out like a sore thumb, and the area around the mouth was visible. He said "Besides, sometimes it's too hot to wear masks, and the black face helps until you start sweating. If you're in the tropics, mix some military DEET with the cammo so it goes on better, and it keeps the bugs away." With that he said "Follow me single file, and be quiet." He knew the last order was hopeless, but he wanted them to have a comparison for later when they really could move quietly, if they made it that far. Things were looking up. With the incident involving Ralph and Sam, they got serious, and quit goofing off.

Two weeks later, they decided to go to the Chinese restaurant near their apartment, and the manager recognized them, and greeted them like long-lost relatives. He escorted them to the best table, and asked if it were OK for him to order for them. When Ralph said OK, the manager went in back, and had a brief conversation with the cook. Half an hour later, three waiters carried platters of very expensive and fancy Chinese dishes. Ralph did not know what most of them were, but the presentation was beautiful, including vegetables carved like dragons, Peking Duck, General Tso's Chicken, a Mongolian Barbeque, and a very fancy presentation of Sweet and Sour pork with a flaming sauce and carved carrots. Ralph knew that they could never eat all that food, and asked the Manager if he could join them. He looked around, and the restaurant was slow, so he went in back, brought out his wife, and joined them for dinner. They both spoke fluent English with a Southern accent. Over dinner, they found out that they were from Hong Kong, and left to avoid becoming Chinese citizens again. They were both educated in the US, and moved back to Hong Kong to start a business. When they moved to the US, and became citizens, they took on American names, and spoke mostly English, except with the ancient cook, who turned out to be their 70-yr old Uncle, who could have retired, but loved to cook. Ralph told Tom and Violet they were ER docs at the local hospital, and their apartment was right around the corner. Tom said that in Oriental culture, the most respected man in the village was the village healer. They talked for almost an hour, and when the meal was done, Ralph asked if he could go in the back and thank the cook personally. Tom said he would be honored, and he'd have to accompany them since Uncle Charlie spoke very little English. When they walked back to the kitchen, Tom got his uncle's attention, spoke to him briefly in

Chinese, and they turned to Ralph. “Uncle Charlie, I wanted to thank you for that delicious meal, I can tell you really care about cooking, and go to meticulous detail to make your dishes perfect. Thank you very much!”

Ralph bowed at the waist like an oriental, and came back up slowly. Charlie started rattling off to Tom in Chinese, then Tom translated “Uncle Charlie says you are most welcome, and it is we who are grateful for you stopping those brigands from stealing from us. Please feel free to drop in anytime, we’d like to be your friends.”

“I’d like that Uncle Charlie, Merci Beaucoup!”

“Vous parlez français ? J’ai appris quand j’étais au Vietnam avant la guerre.”

“I’m Cajun de Louisiane. J’ai récemment réappris Cajun ainsi je pourrais traiter des personnes dans le bayou.”

Ralph and Charlie carried on in French as Tom stood in amazement. Finally Charlie dropped his cleaver, wiped his hands, and shook Ralph’s hand. When they walked back out to the table, Tom said that he had made a friend, and Charlie felt isolated since he could only converse with Tom and Violet since no one else spoke Chinese in the neighborhood. Ralph suggested that they come over some time when Charlie could join them, since Sam spoke Cajun almost as well as he did since she had to help him learn while they were engaged. Tom suggested if they wanted to come over any night for a late dinner, if they could call first, they could close the restaurant and dine comme la famille. Ralph thought that was an excellent idea, and he’d take them up on it. He didn’t get too many chances to practice his French any more. Tom said they could come over anytime, not just for a late dinner. They got up, and Ralph shook Tom’s hand, and Sam gave Violet a “girl hug” then they left. Remembering last time, Ralph stopped in the doorway, scanned the entire area, and it was perfectly normal. Samantha walked on Ron’s left, and they kept their hands free. Ralph had his car keys out, and Sam swept the area around their car quickly with her Surefire flashlight. No one was around, so they got in and drove home.

## Chapter 37 - Country Home

Things were going so well at Allakaket Airlines that BA told Ron to take a couple of months off with the family at their lodge up north. They packed up their stuff and loaded it aboard the Super Goose. Steve flew the SG with one of the baggage handlers to help unload while Ron and his family traveled in the 007, since the Super Goose was stuffed. The entourage landed at the lodge, then the SG touched down and taxied to the cabin after the 007 cleared out. It took a day to get organized and get everything cleaned up. The kids were 3 years older than the last time they went to the cabin, so Ron was hoping they would want to go hunting and fishing with Mom and Dad. Jake, who had just turned 13, was looking forward to shooting his first Caribou, and had been practicing with Dad's Browning A-bolt .308 at the 300-yard range owned by Alaska Survival. Ron turned out to be a pretty good shooting coach, and Jake wasn't quite the marksman his dad was, but he could shoot a 4-inch group at 300 yards shooting Military Prone, and a 3-inch group at 300 yards off the bipod. Ron agreed to let him use the bipod, since they weren't shooting for score, and he wanted Josh to get a clean humane kill.

Before they left, Ron sat down with his kids and explained life in Alaska was different from most of the United States since everyone that didn't live in the big cities were subsistence hunters, or else worked for a hunting lodge, or in some capacity related to hunting. He disagreed with trophy hunting on an ethical basis, but at least trophy hunters in Alaska didn't waste the meat like they did in some places. For his 13th birthday, Jake got a Ruger 22/45 that belonged to his Grandpa, and got his Grandma's set of knives, since she said she was too old to hunt anymore. Ron had made suitable fanny packs for all 4 kids. Jake, Josh and Sarah had graduated from shooting their .22 Chipmunks to shooting a competition grade 10/22 with the Volquartsen trigger group, match barrel, and overmolded stock., and a whole bunch of bells and whistles. Their guns cost more than Ron's Browning A-bolt, but they could shoot on the average a group smaller than ½" at 100 yards. They had since graduated to AR-15 HBAR rifles with nice scopes, and were shooting with Jake at Alaska Survival with Bear's two sons, Tom and Gary. They were Jake and Josh's age, and had grown up shooting even before Ron's kids. Since they weren't allowed to shoot them in the Junior Shooter's program, they kept shooting their .22's until they were old enough to compete in the Open division with their Dad. Tom and Gary turned out to be plenty of competition for Ron's kids, since they had the home field advantage, and could practice at the 300-yard range whenever they wanted, unless their Dad was running a shooting class, or there was too much snow on the ground. Bear decided to wait a year before allowing Tom and Gary go hunting, so Jake would be the only kid in their group to go hunting this year, and the main reason was Ron was tired of waiting for his kids to get old enough to go hunting with them.

They had purchased 3 ATV's, so Ron, Jake, and Nancy drove an ATV each, and Nancy towed a custom-built trailer with 3 safety seats for Josh, Sarah, and David. Ron and Jake each carried part of their camping gear with enough room on the trailer to carry a caribou skin, and a trash bag full of meat. Ron and Jake each carried a cased Browning A-bolt on the back of their

ATV's. Ron and Nancy both had their double shoulder holsters, and Jake had a single shoulder holster for his 22/45 with 3 mags on the off-side to help equalize the load. All 3 of them wore their fanny packs and knives. Josh, Sarah, and David had smaller fanny packs containing age-appropriate equipment. Ron bought a huge family tent and self-inflating sleeping pads for everyone. When he got a look at the pile of stuff they were bringing, he thought they were on an African Safari. Moose decided to jog along next to them the first day, and they made pretty good time to the campground. It took several hours to set up the tent with the 4 kids helping. If Ron and Nancy did it by themselves, it would have been up in less than half an hour. Ron had a brilliant idea, and sent the kids looking for stones for a fire ring, and told them to keep close.

While they picked up stones, Ron and Nancy got the tent set up quickly. Ron gathered the stones into a circle, and showed the kids how to safely start a fire, and all the tricks involved. They watched their dad with fascination, until they realized they had seen this hundreds of times before when Dad lit a fire in the fireplace. Only Jake paid enough attention to notice Ron wasn't using a match, instead he was using flint and steel, and a piece of char cloth to catch the spark. He set the char cloth in a small pile of pitchy pine sawdust that he had brought from home, struck the flint with the steel, and threw a shower of sparks into the char cloth. Ron blew gently until the spark burst into flame, then he slid the whole pile into the center of the fire circle, and carefully laid a tepee of tiny twigs over it, and as they caught, he added larger and larger sticks, until he had a nice fire going. Meanwhile, Nancy had set up the propane stove on the stand, and was about to make dinner. She liked modern conveniences!

Ron told Jake how to cook on an open fire, but admitted that cooking on a propane stove was easier and safer, but you couldn't always rely on having one. While Nancy made dinner, Ron told his son about his grandfather Roy, and how he survived a year in the wild, living in a tiny trapper's cabin for a year before he could build a dugout canoe and ride the river down to Allakaket. Jake had heard about his Grandpa from his grandmother, but hearing his father tell it to him out in the wilderness somehow brought a deeper understanding to Jake. Josh, Sarah, and David gathered around to hear the story too, but Ron was concentrating on Jake, since Ron felt Jake was ready to learn survival skills, and was old enough to be responsible. He told them how Roy crash landed at their lake, and swam to the shore, made a fire while he was wet, cold, and shivering with only what he carried in his fanny pack. Jake looked in his pack, and wondered if he could survive for a year with just the contents of his pack, and realized he couldn't, and he had a lot to learn. Ron told him that if he wanted to, he would add lessons in Wilderness Survival to the lessons he was learning at home. Jake liked that a lot. Ron pulled a memo pad out of his fanny pack, and made some notes, including what order to teach Jake the skills he would need to survive in the wilderness. He realized his kids had been raised in a town, instead of in a log cabin, and didn't have the daily experiences he had growing up. He'd have to make up for lost time.

The next morning, they were up at first light, and they quickly broke camp, and Jake helped his dad to make sure the fire was out. Once everything that they brought was packed up, they put on their helmets, and headed to the caribou grounds. Later that afternoon, they arrived at the foot of the hill, and Ron shut his ATV off, and told everyone that they had to be absolutely quiet from here on out, or they would spook the game, and they would have wasted at trip. They got off the ATV's as quietly as possible, and uncased their rifles. They already had the magazines loaded. Nancy took the 3 younger kids aside while they loaded the guns, and she handed out hearing protection. Ron and Jake took their rifles and shooting pads, and hiked over the hill. Nancy, the kids and Moose followed a ways behind and crested the top of the hill where they were out of the way. Ron and Jake set up, and selected 2 mature bulls. Ron told Jake to take the one that was about 150 yards away and on the right, and he'd take the one on the left. Jake got in a good stable shooting position, extended the bipod legs, took the scope covers off, cycled the action, and sighted through the scope. Once the crosshairs were centered on the heart/lung region of the bull, he looked over at his Dad, who gave him a Thumbs up. Jake got back behind the scope, and the bull's heart was still in the center of the crosshairs, so he flipped off the safety, and took a shooting grip on the rifle, and moved his right index finger to the trigger. The scope was still centered on the bull's heart, so he took 3 deep breaths, and blew half the 3rd one out, held his breath, and gently squeezed the trigger. Jake's gun roared, and Ron's went off a second later. Jake could see the caribou bull stagger and fall to the ground after taking 2 steps, so he knew it was dead. He set the safety so he could cycle the action, but lock the trigger, and unloaded his rifle just like his Dad showed him. They picked up their rifles and shooting pads, and hiked back over the hill to their ATVs, cased the rifles, and everyone got back on board for the short ride over the hill. Ron was amazed that he didn't hear a peep out of Moose during all the excitement. When the 3 ATV's crested the hill, the herd spooked, and they drove right up to the kills. They shut off their ATV's, and went over to check the carcasses. Ron saw that Jake had put a bullet right where he should, so he gave him a big hug and said "Well Done Jake - now we get to skin, gut, and butcher the caribou."

Jake took his Bowie knife just like his dad had told him, slit the throat of his bull to let it bleed, then stuck the skinner blade side up into the breast of the bull, and easily penetrated the hide. He quickly opened the hide right down the midline of the belly where he reached the sex organs of the bull. Ron told him to just cut around them, and he'd help him split the pelvis and finish the job. Ron spilt the pelvis with one blow from his Ulu/hatchet, and quickly removed the sex organs and anus of the bull. He tied a knot in the colon to keep the contents from contaminating the meat and helped Jake remove the internal organs. Jake thought it was kind of gross, but knew it was part of hunting to skin, gut, and butcher your own animal. You owed it to the animal not to waste anything by not doing the job right. Once they had the skin off, Ron showed Jake how to brain tan the hide, and almost lost his cookies when he smelled what the contents of the skull smelled like. Ron handed him a jar of Vicks Vaporub and told him to put a small amount under his nose, which would kill the smell. Jake felt better with the Vicks, and helped his father mash all the brains into the hide. When they were finished, Ron and Jake washed their hands very thoroughly; Jake didn't want to smell like that any longer than he had to!

Once both carcasses had cooled, Ron showed Jake how to butcher the animal and remove the cuts of meat they wanted. Once Jake got started, Ron took his Ulu/hatchet and expertly butchered his bull. Mary and April were excellent teachers, and he used the Ulu part of the blade like an Intuit would, and as a result, it took half as long as before to butcher the bull. They put the meat they wanted to keep into a trash bag, rolled up the skins, and piled everything back on the trailers. Since Nancy thought that they had stunk up the area butchering the bulls, she suggested they camp on the other side of the hill, so they all got onboard their ATVs and drove over the hill. With 2 hours of daylight left, Ron knew he couldn't make it home safely with his family, so they made camp. This time Ron and Nancy put the tent up by themselves, and had it up in plenty of time. Moose kept the 4 kids occupied, and earned Ron and Nancy's praise. Ron and Jake built another fire, and since they had the time, Ron showed Jake how to use flint and steel to start a fire. After a couple of tries, he got pretty good at striking sparks, so Ron decided to let him try the whole procedure. He had Jake put a small pile of sawdust in his hand, place a piece of char cloth in the middle, and after 3 attempts, he threw a spark right into the char cloth. He blew gently just like his dad told him, and was rewarded with a baby flame. While it was still manageable, he carefully set it down in the center of the fire ring, took several small twigs, and arranged them in a tepee fashion over the little flame. As the twigs caught, he added more wood and gradually bigger pieces, until he had a nice big fire going. Ron hugged the stuffing out of Jake, and said "Son, you've learned the most important skill for wilderness survival - how to build a fire. Doing it the old-fashioned way is the hardest but the most reliable. Later, I'll show you my fool-proof methods."

While they were playing Jeremiah Johnson, Nancy had assembled the stand and the propane stove, and had started dinner. An hour later, dinner was served. Nancy brought several jars of caribou stew, since she knew it would be simple to fix, and only used the Dutch oven, making clean-up easy as well. They roasted marshmallows over the fire for dessert, and finally it was bedtime, because Ron wanted to be up early so they could make it home tomorrow. They climbed into their sleeping bags, and the kids huddled around Moose who was looking pretty old but was in good shape for an older dog. Evidently he was lucky not to have any disabling genetic defects like hip dysplasia. Ron and Nancy slept on the other side of the tent, and as soon as it was light, they were up and about. Nancy fixed oatmeal with cinnamon, brown sugar and raisins, just like they liked it. Once breakfast was finished, and the dishes cleaned, they packed up and headed for home.

They got back to the lodge 2 hours later, and parked the ATVs in their "garage" next to the snow blower. Ron and Jake carried the Caribou meat into the kitchen, laid a tarp over the table to make cleaning the mess up easier while Nancy got the three younger kids settled and broke out the canning gear and jars. Ron did most of the packing and slicing, while Jake helped out his mom and dad where he could. Once Ron had all the meat packed, he remembered he needed to take the skins to the lake and rinse them off, then spread them over the smokehouse roof. He put his fanny pack and shoulder pack back on, grabbed the bundle of skins and secured them to the back of the ATV and drove to the lake. Once they were thoroughly rinsed, he rolled them back up and drove back to the lodge. Jake was splitting wood for the stove when

he came back. Ron was glad to see Jake was being careful. Ron parked the ATV and carried the skins to the smokehouse. Jake helped his dad spread them on the smokehouse roof, then he went back to splitting wood. After dinner, they gathered around the fireplace and Ron read them a story out of his Children's Bible, then the kids said goodnight and went to bed.

After breakfast, Ron asked them if they wanted to go fishing, and of course they said "yes!" They gathered their gear and walked to the lake, with Ron and Nancy keeping a careful lookout for predators. Soon they all had a couple of fish on their stringers, and these weren't little fish either, the lake trout they caught ranged from 2-10 pounds in weight. Ron was glad that he had that outdoor fish cleaning table installed. He realized that the outside tap wasn't being used, so he had someone build a large table next to the lodge, and route a water line to it. They covered the table with Formica so it wouldn't hold the fish smell, and the basin at one end of the table drained into a 5-gallon bucket which they dumped into what used to be the garden, but was now a hole in the ground to compost wastes that would enrich the soil. Ron knew that if he ever needed to use that garden again, it would be some of the richest soil in the neighborhood! Ron showed them how to open and gut a fish. He was amazed that Sarah wasn't the least bit squeamish, but probably didn't want to "act like a girl" in front of her brothers. Nancy made a huge fish fry for dinner with "freedom fries" Ron couldn't bear to call them French Fries!

The next day, Bear called and asked if they wanted to go shooting. Ron asked the kids, and the resounding YES told him that they were going to Alaskan Survival to go shooting with Tom and Gary. Bear said he'd send the 007 down for them. They got ready, and less than an hour, they heard the roar of a helicopter coming in for a landing. They carried their cased rifles on board, strapped into the VIP seats, and 30 minutes later they landed at Bear's compound. Tom and Gary were there to greet them, and they walked down to the shooting range. Bear brought a 50-cal ammo can full of 5.56 ammo and .308 ammo. Ron had brought his National Match Springfield M1-a to shoot against Bear. They walked to their individual lanes, and got ready. They all laid down their shooting mats, and loaded mags full of ammo. Ron and Bear were pretty equal on the 600 yard line since Ron was not allowed to use a scope. If he had a scope mounted on his rifle, it wouldn't have been even close, but Bear insisted that Ron learn to shoot with open sights, because he said that if the scope got damaged, he'd have to be able to shoot just as well with open sights. Since Ron couldn't see his bullet strikes, he had to learn how to shoot long-distance with open sights. Fortunately, Bear had mercy on him, and showed him the techniques he needed to shoot without a scope. Ron muttered more than once under his breath that he'd rather carry a spare scope, but he realized Bear did have a point, even if it was on top of his head! Finally after shooting a half-dozen 6-inch groups, Ron had enough, and when the shooting stopped Ron hopped on the ATV and drove down to the target line and put a B-27 silhouette target up with 2 1-inch orange dots on it: 1 over the heart, and 1 over the forehead where it would disrupt the M.O.

He drove back to the line, and while everyone else resumed shooting, he took the rear sight off his Picatinny rail, and mounted the Leupold Mark III scope with the QD rings, and set up. 2 shots later, Bear knew that Ron would be far more useful as a sniper than shooting with open



sights, and told him to keep the scope mounted, but keep the rear sight in his carry case just in case. Later when they pulled the targets, there were 2 holes in Ron's target, right in the center of the orange dots. Ron's kids had never seen him shoot a scoped rifle at 600 yards before, and were amazed. Jake remembered some rumors he heard about his Dad's shooting ability, and realized that those rumors, which he dismissed as tall tales, were true. He resolved then and there to really try, since he should be a much better shooter. Jake had a talk with his Dad, and the rest of the day, Ron worked with his son shooting the scoped National Match M-1a at the 600-yard line. Slowly Jake's shooting improved. Ron was glad, because he feared that none of his kids had inherited his shooting ability. Now he realized he just had to push and encourage them to try to shoot farther and farther. All the kids in Allakaket were shooting at the 100-yard range, so Ron didn't think that they were any different. Ron suggested Sarah, Josh, and David try the 300-yard range, which was about the limit of effective range of their AR-15's. While they weren't sniper accurate with the open sights, they were both able to put a 20-round magazine in the "Minute of Dirtbag" zone. Ron asked Bear if he could get some 3x9x40 QD scopes out of inventory and boresight them. Bear grabbed their rifles and drove back to the compound, and came back 30 minutes later with a Simmons 3x9x40 AO scope mounted on each rifle with QD rings. Ron left Jake shooting by himself on the 600-yard line, and concentrated on Josh, Sarah, and David for the rest of the afternoon. After some coaching and training, the 3 of them were shooting much smaller groups than before at the 300-yard targets. Ron told them to keep it up, and measure their group size, and they should notice their group sizes shrinking. By the end of the day, they had gone from shooting 6-inch groups to 5-inch groups while using scopes shooting prone on the 300-yard line. Ron was one proud papa!

## Chapter 38 - National Shooting Team

They made a daily trip to the shooting range since Ron had managed to get all 4 of his kids hooked on long-range shooting. Jake shot Ron's Springfield Armory National Match M-1a at the 600-yard line, while Josh, Sarah, and David were shooting the scoped AR-15s. Jake's group size slowly shrank from 8 inches to 6 inches. Ron was watching his eldest son shoot, and spotted something. When Jake had finished shooting, he sat down next to him, and asked him if he would mind some help. Jake was frustrated he couldn't shoot smaller groups than 6 inches, so he said yes. Ron had Jake fold up the bipod, and assume the Classic Military prone position. Once he got into the proper position, Jake realized what he was doing wrong, and shot a 5-inch group shooting Military prone. Ron told him to put the bipod back down, and the group size reduced to 4 inches. Jake was so happy that he could have floated all the way home. Ron told him it was all practice from there on out, and learning to concentrate. He told Jake that before he shot if he was nervous, he recited the 23rd psalm, and it calmed him right down. Bear told Jake that Ron was so good at concentrating when he shot that he was pretty sure he wouldn't notice a grenade going off once he was in the zone. Jake asked Bear what the Zone was. Ron explained that it was an area of intense concentration that allowed him to shoot super-small groups. The only thing he saw and thought of was his image of the target through the scope.

Ron stood up, and grabbed his cell phone, and called Gene Shepard "General, I'm here with Bear and my kids teaching Jake how to shoot long distance. I wanted to know if it were OK to tell Jake about the Barrett's shooting project."

"Sure, just don't tell him anything about the Bradley or the LAV-25 since they're still considered Top Secret."

"Thanks Gene!"

Ron walked back over to Jake. "That was Gene; he told me it was OK to tell you about a Military project I was involved in at your age. I grew up at our lodge except it was a little 2-room cabin back then, and I learned to shoot much younger than you did, and quickly started shooting my mom's Browning A-bolt - That's Grandma, anyway, Uncle Steve showed up at our cabin one day, and we were shooting at 12-inch logs from our porch to the lake. The farthest shot was 400 yards. When I shot a 2-inch group at 400 yards, Steve almost fainted. One thing lead to another and Steve invited us to MacDill AFB in Florida where he worked. He really wanted to show me off to his Boss, General Gene Shepard. They set me up on the 400 yard line with my Browning A-bolt, and after I fired a test round to make sure I doped the wind correctly, then I shot a 4-shot group of 1.092 inches. The General asked me to shoot at the 600-yard target, and I shot a 2.092 inch group. General Shepard told me that the best shooter on the Air Force Shooting Team only shot a 1.98 inch group at 600 yards prone.

"Holy Cow Dad, why didn't you tell me?"

“Until now it was a classified Government project, I couldn’t even talk to your Mom about everything I did. If you want to try some really long distance shooting, I’m sure we can go the Elmendorf and shoot my Barretts 50-cal rifle at their 1,000 yard range.”

“Thousand Yards? I can barely see good enough to shoot at the 600-yard line, I can see the target Ok, but I can’t see my bullet holes, or I’d use them as an aiming point and shoot much smaller groups.”

“You won’t believe this rifle, the scope is 3 times the size of the one you’re using now, and the gun itself is almost twice as long. It’s got a suppressor on it, but the round is supersonic, so you still need to wear hearing protection.”

“Why suppress the gun if you can still hear it?”

“Because the suppressor also suppresses muzzle blast, which is the biggest component of the recoil of the BMG .50 round. During Dessert Storm, US snipers could only fire a round or two, then they’d have to move because the muzzle blast disturbed enough dust to mark their shooting position. With the muzzle suppressor, the blast is almost non-existent, and it actually makes the gun more accurate. When I was your age, I shot a 10-inch group with the older model in front of General Shepard at 1,000 yards.”

“Yikes, talk about pressure! I’ve got enough problems shooting in front of you!”

“If I can get permission to bring you on base at Elmendorf, we can shoot the Barretts at their 1,000 yard range. I’m sure you’ll like it.”

“Thanks Dad, I’d love to go, just let me know when.”

“If I can get permission, it should be in the next couple of days, so practice up.”

Jake went back to practicing shooting at the 600-yard line with renewed enthusiasm. He hoped his dad could get permission. When he looked through the scope, he saw the image was more jittery than last time. Remembering his father’s advice, he tried all the techniques he had told him to slow down his breathing and pulse. Finally he started reciting the 23rd Psalm “The Lord is my Shepherd...” by the time he finished the psalm, he looked through the scope, and it looked like the gun was mounted in a rifle rest. Once the bullseye was centered in the crosshairs, he gently squeezed the trigger, and was rewarded with his first x-ring round, right in the center of the bullseye. When he came back to the scope it was wiggling again, so he started reciting the 23rd Psalm in his mind again. This time he didn’t even remember touching the trigger. When he looked at the target again, he had 5 holes in the target in a nice tight group. He realized that he must have finally gotten into the mythical Zone his dad was always telling him about. Ron was watching through the spotting scope, and realized about the same time Jake did that his son was in the Zone. He said a quick prayer of thanksgiving, then walked

forward to give his son a big hug.

When Josh, Sarah, David, and Bear's boys were done shooting, Ron walked down with Jake to retrieve his target. When they measured his group, and subtracted the bullet diameter, Ron told Jake he had just shot a 3" group at 600 yards. Ron picked Jake up and spun him around. Seeing all the commotion, Bear wandered over, and Ron explained what Jake had just did. Bear proceeded to give Jake a Bear hug, until he felt a thump on his forearm, and realized he was squeezing too hard. He set Jake back down, and was talking to him about the first time he met his dad, and how Ron had impressed all those SF shooting instructors, and had a target still up at the DELTA officer's club with his signature on it. Even Carlos Hathcock didn't have a target up on that wall. Ron wondered why Carlos didn't have a target on the wall, and Bear said Carlos had stopped shooting by then since his MS made it impossible for him to shoot long distances. Bear said one of the saddest days of his life was when the Delta instructor told him that Carlos had died. Ron misted up when he heard Bear relating the story, and he remembered the white feather Gunny had painted on his stock. Jake wouldn't know the significance of the symbol, and he didn't want to seem like he was bragging in front of Bear. He made a note to himself to show Jake the rifle later, and explain who Carlos Hathcock was, and give him the 2 books in his collection to read, Marine Sniper and One Shot, One Kill. If Jake wanted to have some heroes, Ron would prefer Jake select someone like Carlos instead of a basketball or football player, except for Patrick Tillman, who volunteered for the US Army and went to Afghanistan, where he died in combat. He left a huge Pro Football contract, a wife, and kids after 09/11 and volunteered for service in Afghanistan. Ron shook his head, and wondered if he could be so self-sacrificing. That would be like him leaving Nancy and the kids, and joining the Marines. Then he remembered he was almost in the Academy when Congress stupidly cut the military to pay for social programs, and basically did away with the Air Force. Ron hoped he would never run into his Congressman, because he was pretty sure he'd punch the idiot out, and spend at least a year in jail.

Ron rolled Jake's target up, and posted a new target on the board, then they all went back to shooting. Ron was working with Josh, Sarah, and David on the 300-yard line while Jake continued to practice. The three younger children were finally shooting groups now that they had a scope to clearly see the target. Ron thought about that for a minute. The scopes on the AR-15's were Simmons scopes, and at maximum they only had a 9x magnification. Even Ron's National Match only had a 10x scope on it. He wanted to check the internet, and check with Bear about getting some better scopes. The Simmons was better suited to the 10/22 on the 100-yard line than a Match AR-15 shooting at 300 yards. Ron walked over to Bear, and he agreed with Ron that they could get better scopes, since these scopes were bought by the case fairly cheaply for militia use, since Bear figured the average militia member wouldn't be shooting much outside of 300 yards anyway, and minute of Dirtbag accuracy was plenty accurate enough. Bear suggested Ron get a couple of Springfield Armory M-25 White Feather tactical rifles with the supplied scope and bipod for Jake and him, and he might want to get some Leupold Tactical scopes for the other 3 kids for their AR-15's. Ron told Bear he'd check the internet when he got back to the lodge this evening; then order them through Allakaket

Airlines' FFL, to see if he could get a discount price.

When they finished shooting Ron asked Bear if he could borrow his computer. Bear said there was one in the Conference Room with a high-speed satellite connection. Judging by the size of his dish, Ron guessed that Bear might be able to talk to Military Satellites. Bear got Ron logged in, then they surfed the internet. Ron located the Springfield Armory site, and then saw the M - 25 Tactical Rifle (White Feather) and decided then and there he wanted to buy one. It would make a good rifle for Jake as well, so he decided to order 2 with the scope they were showing. Checking further on the webpage, he found out that the M -25 could take a whole line of scopes that were made for the Springfield Armory M -1 rifles. He liked the 6-20x50 Mil-Dot BDC Government Model scope best, even though it listed at \$900 dollars, which about the same price as the Leupold Mark 4 he was originally looking at. He asked Bear what he'd do. Bear shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and raised his hands "I don't have a clue. The Leupold has always been the gold standard, but with Barrett going to Swarovski, Leupold has become just another high-priced top-quality scope line. I highly doubt that Springfield Armory would put a less than perfect scope on their M -25, especially since it has Carlos Hitchcock's endorsement and signature.

The extra magnification could come in handy during the day, but I highly doubt you'll be able to use all of it real early in the morning or late in the evening. At 20 power, that 50mm Objective means you have an exit pupil of 2.5mm which is OK during the bright light of day, but in the evening, it might not transmit enough light. Of course, your solution would be to dial down the zoom to about 15x to give you a 3mm exit pupil. They both were illuminated reticle tactical scopes with a mil-dot range estimating system. Ron had never used a mil-dot before, but figured Bear or someone could teach them how. The Springfield scope had a built-in Bullet-drop compensating elevation ring, with rings for 7.62 and .223, as well as a blank ring for another caliber. With the range-estimation and bullet-drop compensating system, the scope was designed for long-range shooting. He'd check with the shopkeeper, and have them price the scope through their distributor, and maybe buy 6 if they could get a good enough price. Jake's birthday was coming up, and Ron thought the M -25 with the scope and everything would make a killer birthday present. Between the rifle, scope, magazines, bipod, and case, it would be almost \$6 thousand. It wasn't like he couldn't afford it, but that was way more than he ever got for a birthday. If Jake kept shooting the way he was, he'd be able to take full advantage of the rifle and scope by his birthday.

For now the rest of the kids could shoot their Simmons scopes. He wasn't going to chance them breaking a \$900 dollar scope until they were a lot more mature and careful with the equipment. Ron told Bear his plans, and he agreed they should wait to get the younger kids better scopes, since they weren't shooting to the limits of the Simmons scopes yet. Remembering he promised Jake to take him shooting, he called Gene at home, and asked him to call the CO of Elmendorf, and get permission for Ron and Jake to shoot there tomorrow. Gene called back, and said it was OK with the CO, but they had a new Gunny, since the old Gunny retired several years ago, and moved to Alabama. Ron thought "Great, now I have to break in a new one."

Ron told Jake they could fly to Elmendorf tomorrow and go shooting. Ron called Allakaket and asked to have a 007 at their lodge by 0800 tomorrow, and to plan a round-trip to Elmendorf. Ron remembered he had plenty of Lake City BMG .50 Match ammo since he hadn't been shooting in a while. When they finished, and got ready to go home, Ron told them to roll up their best target and date it, so they could keep track of how they were shooting. Ron helped the younger 3, writing the size of their best group, the range, the date, and their name. Jake had already "autographed" his target with 3" @ 600 yds, today's date, and his first name, since Josh had the same first initial. Ron helped them load up and get buckled into the seats of 007 for the ride back to the lodge. Nancy had dinner ready, and told everyone to wash up. Ron showed Nancy Jake's target, and told her they were going shooting at Elmendorf tomorrow, and asked her if she'd mind taking the other 3 up to Bear's place shooting so they didn't feel too left out. Nancy didn't really like shooting the Barretts, even with the suppressor, the recoil was too much for her, and 5 rounds was about all she could take without a bruised shoulder. Ron remembered that, and asked her if Jake could borrow her shooting jacket, it would be a little big on him, but the shoulder should line up OK. Nancy said OK, she didn't want Jake coming home all black and blue. Ron was glad Jake and Josh had developed some table manners, and Sarah had developed a health appetite. Dinner went much more smoothly, and Ron said grace. After dinner, the 4 kids laid with Moose on the bearskin rug in front of the fire. Ron saw that Moose was getting really old, and knew he'd have to tell Jake that he was about to lose his best friend. Ron remembered how he felt when he lost Sam, and wished he could protect Jake from the heartbreak, but knew he could no more protect him from heartbreak than his dad could. Ron called Jake over, and sat down with him in his room.

"I don't know how to tell you this, but you need to prepare yourself for Moose's death. He's growing old, and won't live much longer. It's going to hurt, I know because I've buried 2 dogs so far, and vaguely remember Oliver. It hurts each time, but when you get a new dog, some of the hurt goes away."

"I don't want Moose to die!"

"Son, you don't have any choice. Dogs live much shorter lives than we do. I guess it's because we're put on this planet to learn how to love like God does, and dogs don't have as much to learn, since they are the most loving animals God created. Someone once said that when God created dogs, he made them to reflect his love, so he gave them a name that reflected his name, that's why Dog is God spelled backwards." Ron held his son while they cried. Ron put his hands on Jake's shoulders as they prayed together. "Lord, if you're ready to take Moose to you, please make his death painless, and give us the strength to bear the loss. And if it's your will, please provide another dog we can love as much as we love Moose. Amen" Jake echoed his Dad's Amen, then once they had dried their tears. Ron told Jake not to discuss this with his younger siblings, since they weren't old enough to understand anyway, and it would just upset them. As the Older Brother, Jake was very protective of his younger brothers and sister, when he wasn't teasing and tormenting them. He promised his Dad that he wouldn't mention it.

The next morning after Breakfast, Ron gathered his pelican case, and an ammo can full of BMG .50 Match ammo, and another soft case with their hearing and eye protection, and Jake's shooting jacket. Right at 0800, he heard the roar of a helicopter landing in the front yard. Jake kissed his mom goodbye, then helped his dad carry the stuff out to the helicopter. Jake was an old hand at boarding copters, and didn't need to be told to duck. Once their stuff was loaded, the crew chief made sure they were buckled in, then took his seat, buckled in, then tapped the pilot on the shoulder. He quickly lifted off and headed for Elmendorf. 2 hours later, they landed at the base, next to the shooting range. Ron and Jake got out while the rotor was still turning, and unloaded the chopper. Once they were clear, the pilot increased throttle and took off again. Once the dust settled, a different Gunnery Sergeant got out of his Hummer, walked over to Ron, and shook his hand. "You must be Ron Williams! Gunny Clark told me all about you before he retired. My Name is Gunnery Sergeant Simpson, but if you want you can just call me Gunny like everyone else. I take it this is Jake, nice to meet you." Jake shook the outstretched hand, and then Gunny told them the range already had targets set up, 2 at the 600-yard line, and 2 at the 1000-yard line, and their shooting positions were already set up with a pad and a tarp. Ron thanked Gunny, who picked up the ammo box and escorted them to the shooting line. The set up on the 600-yard line first, and Ron passed out eyes and ears before setting up. He set the Pelican case on the table and Gunny Simpson's eyes bugged out at the huge rifle. Jake thought the National Match was big until he saw this rifle out of its case, it was easily twice the size of Ron's National Match M-1a. Ron showed them the features of the rifle, and explained how it worked, and why they needed hearing protection even though the gun was suppressed. With the briefing complete, Ron took the rifle out of its case, ejected the magazine, and loaded 5 rounds of BMG .50 Match ammo into the mag, and carried everything to his shooting position. Gunny set up 2 60x120mm spotting scopes so they could watch from the tables while Ron set up on the 600-yard line. He knew this was just a chip-shot for the gun, but didn't want Jake to get discouraged his first time out, so decided to start on the shorter range.

Once Ron was set up, he looked back at the Gunny, who gave him a "thumbs up" then Ron returned to the scope. 5 minutes later, he had 5 rounds in the x-ring, and he was pretty sure the bullet holes were touching each other. Jake couldn't believe his eyes, his dad just shot a group smaller than 2 inches without practicing. Ron stood up, and motioned for Jake to join him at the gun. Ron was pretty sure Jake's feet never touched the ground from the bench to the rifle. Ron got Jake prone behind the rifle, and helped him adjust the rifle to fit him, then loaded a magazine with 5 rounds. Jake looked through the scope, and the target looked huge, like it was staring him right in the face 5 yards away. He asked his dad why the image of the target was so huge, and Ron explained that the scope was designed to shoot man-sized targets at over a mile, and as a result, had a huge magnification factor. He got back behind the scope, and noticed it wasn't hardly moving at all, then realized the bipod and monopod totally supported the rifle like a machine rest, and all he had to do was shoot. Ron handed him the magazine, and after inserting the magazine, Jake cycled the action, but left the safety on until the last minute. Ron took his position back at the spotting scope, and Jake looked back, then the Gunny gave him a thumbs up. Jake released the safety, and took a firing grip on the gun. He started reciting the

23rd Psalm, and halfway through, was startled when the gun went off. He looked through the scope, and his first round was right through the x-ring. He settled down, and soon put the other 4 rounds in the x-ring. Ron was amazed, and grateful that Jake had his gift for shooting long-distance, and said a quick prayer of thanksgiving. Jake locked the action open just like his Dad taught him, and reset the safety, then stood up. Gunny sent a runner down to retrieve their targets, and when he came back, Ron had shot a 1.5 inch group, and Jake's was right at 2 inches.

Ron asked Jake if he was ready to move to the 1,000 yard line. Since the gun was already set up for Jake, Ron told him to go first. They carried the rifle over to the other shooting lane, set everything up, and Jake got behind the gun. Now when he looked through the scope the target wasn't so close, more like it was 10 yards away, but he could still see the x-ring clearly, and the gun barely moved. Once he was ready, Ron handed him a loaded magazine, and retreated back to the tables to watch through the spotting scope. Jake looked back, got a thumbs-up from the Gunny, loaded the gun, cycled the action and got ready to shoot. Once everything was where he wanted it, he released the safety, and started reciting the 23rd Psalm again. The first shot startled him, and he was completely surprised to find a bullet hole right in the center of the x-ring at 1000 yards! He steadied back up, and fired the 4 remaining rounds in the magazine, then locked the bolt back and set the safety. As soon as he stood up, Ron ran forward and lifted his son high in the air. "You did it! That group has got to be smaller than 6 inches, and the best group I've ever shot out of this rifle was around 4-5 inches, and I've shot thousands of rounds out of this rifle! I'm so proud of you!" Gunny sent a runner down, and retrieved the target. Once they measured the group and deducted the size of the bullet, Jake had shot a 5.95" group at 1000 yards.

Gunny Simpson realized that Gunny Clark wasn't just telling tall tales, Ron and his kid were definitely in the top 1% of long-distance shooters world-wide. Ron took his turn behind the rifle, and once Gunny made sure the range was clear, he fired 5 shots within 5 minutes, and Gunny was going out of his tree, all 5 rounds were inside the 5-inch X-ring at 1000 yards. He guessed Ron had just shot a 4-5 inch group at 1,000 yards. Once Ron locked the bolt open, set the safety, and stood up, Gunny sent a runner to retrieve the target. Sure enough, Ron had shot a 4.5" group at 1,000 yards. Ron and Jake took turns shooting the rest of the afternoon, finally they let Gunny try it. Ron coached the gunny through the set-up and body position, and he was amazed at how steady the image in the scope was, and the crosshairs seemed to be locked on the x-ring. He loaded the rifle, cycled the action, then cleared the safety. 5 rounds later, he realized he had just shot a 7-8 inch group. He stood up shaking his head. He realized this rifle was way beyond a tack-driver, it behaved like a laser. Since he was a Gunnery Sergeant, he knew a lot about guns and ammunition, and realized that the people at Barretts had written a new chapter in accuracy. The combination of the precision Barrett's platform, and the suppressor design combined to make a gun that could easily shoot sub-moa groups all day long. He'd heard rumors of a new super gun for the Bradley and the LAV. If it were half as accurate as this rifle, the rest of the world had better look out!



Finally when they were finished shooting, Ron called Allakaket and asked them to send the 007 to Elmendorf to pick them up. When it arrived an hour later, Ron guessed that it must have already been in the air to Elmendorf when they called. Gunny helped them load the rifle and what was left of their match ammo into the helicopter, and once they were seated and secured, it took off for the lodge.

When they got home, Ron could tell something was wrong by the look on Nancy's face. She held Ron and said "Moose died while you were gone. We found his body out back, over by the graveyard. I think he knew it was his time." Ron turned and crouched down to Jake's level. "Son, I've got some bad news, Moose died while we were gone. Mom found him laying on the graveyard like he knew his time was done. Why don't we put everything up and then let's bury him next to everyone else." Jake teared up, but Ron was surprised he didn't cry. "Dad, I've been expecting this ever since you told me. Now that he's gone, it's kind of a relief. I'll miss him, but I'm OK since I know he's in Heaven waiting for us." Once everything was put up, Ron got 2 shovels, and they dug a hole next to Sam and Lucky for Moose. Jake rolled Moose's body up in a caribou skin, and said "See you later Moose" then carefully lowered the body into the grave. Ron knelt next to his son, and they just stayed there for a while. Finally Jake said, "Let's get him buried. Moose isn't there anyway, he's in heaven, this is just what's left here." Father and son quickly filled in the grave, then Jake took one last look at his friend's grave, then went into the house.

Meanwhile, at Camp Pendleton, CA a very incredulous Marine General couldn't believe the specs that he was reading about the new LAV- 25 Mark II. The range of the gun had to be a misprint. The spec sheet claimed it could take out anything less than an M -1 Abrams at 5 miles with the outriggers down. "NO @\$@# Way" he yelled. He got on the phone, and the CO of 29 Palms told him to fly on up there, they were putting the Mark II through its paces. He got off the phone, and found out an FA-18 2-seater was available, and asked the ops officer to make it ready for flight to 29 Palms, he'd be there in 20 minutes. He picked up his flight bag and his helmet, and drove to the flight line. He got into his G-suit, and climbed aboard. The pilot started the engines as soon as the crew chief gave him a thumbs-up, indicating everything was OK. He lowered the canopy and taxied to the runway. He figured the general must be in a hurry, since a VC-11A was available as well. He received immediate clearance, and pushed the throttles to zone 5 afterburner. Once he was airborne, he shut down the afterburners, and proceeded at full military thrust to 29 Palms. Half an hour later, he was on the ground, and was met by a Hummer with General's stars. Once the General climbed out, and took off his helmet, his Friend General Pittman said "You must really have been in a hurry to detail a FA-18 to fly here."

"Sam, I just want to see the damn Robo-tank in action - let's go!" They got aboard the Hummer and drove out to the gunnery range. The LAV-25-II was hull down in a revetment with its outriggers deployed. General Pittman handed General Stevens a set of hearing protectors, and they took their seats in the bleachers. Once they were seated, the Gunny running the range activated the range, and the gun on the LAV started belching rounds and swiveling left and

right. General Stevens was glad he brought his binoculars, because the Robo-tank was engaging targets over a mile away, and scoring 1st round kills. At the end of the demonstration, the whine of the engine died down, and 2 soldier crawled out of the hatches, then stood at attention in front of the Generals. The test engineer came running up, skidded to a stop, and saluted when he saw the 2 generals. General Stevens said "Let me see that!" and the engineer handed him the score sheet. It had the target number, the range to target and the score on a scale of 1-10 where 10 was a kill. Looking down the spreadsheet, he didn't see a score lower than a 9, and the range was from 1-5 miles. They had a perfect score of 30-30 and an engagement time of 5 minutes. General Stevens shook his head, evidently they weren't exaggerating, since he had just seen it with his own eyes.

Later, in the CO's office, General Stevens said "George, I still don't believe it. If we had this gun in WWII, the Jerries would have been wiped out, and we could have spared thousands of Marine lives. I don't know if we're going to get into any more tank wars, but if we do, this Mark II will absolutely destroy an armored division. When I was reading the classified spec sheet, it listed the PK for an Abrams at 50% and a Bradley or equivalent at over 80% with any range inside 5 miles with the outriggers down. I know the Abrams is a tough kill, so how did they get the 50% PK rating?"

"Larry, as near as I can tell, they said that with the precision firepower of the new Mark II, they could disable an Abrams with 1 shot, rendering it combat ineffective. While it's not a hard kill, a tank is out of action if it can't fight, even if the crew's alive. My guess is they rated a tank rendered CI as being 50% of a kill, since the crew wasn't effected. Personally, I wouldn't want to be an enemy tanker anywhere near the new Bradley or the LAV. The only other foreign tanks that stand a chance are the Leopard and the Challenger. All the others would probably not do much better than the Bradley's - maybe a 70% PK due to their heavier armor than the Bradley. Of course, any truck or APC less armored than the Bradley would be a 100% PK out to 5 miles. Not only that, but in Sniper mode, the Mark II could kill an enemy general with 1 shot out to 5 miles, even if he's moving!"

"Holy Shit George, I'm glad they're on our side! So who do we have to thank for this?"

"Gene Shepard, who just retired as the JSOC was running the program, but I was told it was an offshoot from research that Barretts was doing to improve the Barretts Light 50. I heard they produced a man-portable rifle that's fully suppressed and capable of a 5-inch group at 1,000 yards off a bipod and monopod. Some kid was testing them for Barretts at MacDill."

"George, see if you can get hold of Gene for me - I'd like to thank him personally!"

"He's retired now and living in Alaska. I'll call him, and see if I can make arrangements." Larry shook his friend's hand, then got a ride back to the flight line, where the FA-18 was waiting for him, fueled and ready to go. He got back into his flight gear, and climbed aboard. Meanwhile, George took out his shoe phone and called a number from the directory.

“Gene, this is George. Yeah, long time no see - anyway, General Stevens just saw the LAV-25 Mark II in action here, and wanted to thank you personally. Yeah, I’m sure he wouldn’t mind flying to Elmendorf. OK, I’ll let you know when he’s going to be available. Thanks, talk to you later. Right, bye!”

General George Pitman sent an e-mail to General Stevens telling him that General Gene Shepard would love to meet him at Elmendorf whenever he wanted to.

Gene had a bright idea, and called up Ron. “Ron, General Stevens of the USMC wants to meet us and thank us for a job well done on the LAV-25 Mk II. I don’t know when, but he will fly to Elmendorf, and we could meet him there. Great, I’ll let you know - Right, Bye!”

Ron checked, and the Super Goose wasn’t being used for the next couple of weeks, and Bear had just made the monthly Gold Run from the mine to the mint in Anchorage. If the general didn’t wait too long, he’d be able to arrange it easily.

The next day, General Stevens checked his e-mail, then checked his schedule. All he had tomorrow was a dog and pony show for a junior condel. His junior officer could handle it easily, and called Flight Ops to tell them to have the VC-11A ready to go at 0800 tomorrow morning, and to file a flight plan for Elmendorf Alaska. Used to unusual requests from the general, the major didn’t ask any questions, and said “Aye, Aye Sir!” and made sure the VC-11A would be ready to fly at 0800 tomorrow, and the flight plan got filed. General Stevens called George, and asked him to have Gene meet him tomorrow. George called Gene, and told him General Stevens would be in Elmendorf around 1400 tomorrow. Gene thanked George, and said that he’d be there, and he was going to bring someone with him that the General was sure he would want to meet, since he was the person responsible for testing the Barrett’s prototypes, and he lived in Alaska. George trusted Gene’s judgment, so he said “bring him along; I’m sure the general would approve.”

## Chapter 39 - Uncle Sam's Misguided Children

Gene called Ron and asked him to pick him up in the Super Goose and fly him to Elmendorf by 1400 tomorrow. Ron knew his flight time to Elmendorf was 1.5 hours, and it took the 007 an hour to get from Allakaket to the lodge, so he needed to be picked up at least 2.5 hours in advance if there were no delays, better make that 3 hours to be on the safe side, Ron called Allakaket and told BA he needed the 007 to pick him up and fly him back to Allakaket at 1100 the next morning. BA said he'd take care of it. Gene called back, and reminded Ron to bring his TS ID with him, and he might want to bring the suppressed Barrett's rifle and some ammo just in case. Not knowing what the ex-general had up his sleeve, Ron agreed. The next morning right at 1100, he heard the sound of the 007 coming in for a landing. Jake helped his dad load the chopper, and gave him a hug before he left. Ron wondered what was up; Jake usually wasn't the cuddly type, at least with him. They landed back in Allakaket at 1200, and Gene was waiting for him. They transferred the rifle case and ammo to the Super Goose, then Ron asked Gene to fly up front with him. The turbines were already idling when he got inside, so Ron called the tower and quickly preflighted the Super Goose while they taxied to the lake. Once they were waterborne, he taxied to the downwind end of the lake, and got permission to take off. Once he had permission, Ron turned the plane smartly into the wind using the rudders and pushed the twin throttles to the stops. Quickly they accelerated to 85 knots, and he pulled back on the yoke, and they quickly climbed to 2,000 feet while he turned toward Elmendorf. Once he was straight and level, he turned on the autopilot and asked Gene what the heck was going on.

"Sorry about the secrecy Ron. A friend of a friend of mine wanted to visit and thank you and me for the LAV-25 MK II. He's a 1-star Marine General from Camp Pendleton, CA. George told me he was really impressed with the new gun on the LAV, so I told George that I'd love to meet him. His name is General Stevens, and he should be arriving at Elmendorf at 1400 from California."

"Either he left early, or he's flying a fighter."

"If I remember correctly, neither. His personal VIP transport is a Gulfstream VC-11a. It's got a 3500 mile range, and flies around 588 mph."

"When I flew in your VC-20, we were lucky to be doing 500knots, and it took forever."

"Yeah, but it's got almost twice the legs of the VC-11a. The VC-20H is a Gulfstream IV, and its range is over 4800 miles, but its cruise speed is only 450 knots and it carries 14 passengers plus 5 crew members."

"Ok, so he's got a small fast VIP jet, but can it land on water?"

“Not on purpose!”

They both got a good laugh at that. Ron called Elmendorf when he was ½ an hour out, and since the General was with him - Ron wondered how they knew that - they directed him right in. When they landed, there was a small Gulfstream jet parked next to them. Ron guessed that was General Stevens, and figured out how the ATC knew that General Shepard was aboard. Ron shut down the engines, and Gene got out first to greet General Stevens. Gene wasn't wearing his uniform, so instead of saluting, they shook hands. As Ron came out of the Super Goose, General Shepard introduced him to General Stevens. “General, this is Ron Williams. He's the guy who did the testing for Barretts, and was directly responsible for the accuracy of the LAV-25 MK II gun.”

“General, I was just the test engineer. The designers are back at Barretts.”

“Ron Williams, where have I heard that name before?”

General Stevens remembered something his senior Recon Marine Shooting instructor told him about a 13-year old kid that could shoot the left eye of a gnat at 1000 yards. But that was almost 20 years ago. Larry looked carefully at Ron and realized that it could be him.

“Ron, did you do some shooting at MacDill about 10-20 years ago?”

Ron looked to Gene, who nodded; evidently it was OK to tell General Stevens.

“My Uncle Steve Fellows invited us to MacDill AFB after he saw me shoot a 2” group at 400 yards with my Browning A-Bolt in .308.”

“So you were the wunderkind who could shoot the left eye of a gnat at 1000 yards?”

“Not exactly General, but close. That was a joke that Gunny used to tell. My best group with the Barretts so far has been around 4 or 5 inches at 1,000 yards.”

General Stevens sputtered “4 or 5 inches - my snipers don't shoot that good!”

Gene interrupted “General, it's all true. Right up until those idiot congresscritters destroyed the Air Force, Ron was set to go to the Academy, shoot on our Rifle team, and hopefully fly the F-15 Strike Eagle. Now he owns Allakaket Airlines and that plane we arrived in is one of I believe 8 planes and 2 helicopters he owns.”

General Stevens took a closer look at Ron's plane. It looked like a miniature C-130, but it was an Amphibian.

“Ron, what the heck kind of plane is that - it looks like a miniature C-130, but I know for a fact

that they didn't make any Amphibs."

"General, that's a Super Goose. It's an evolution of the original Grumman WWII Goose. I replaced the original Wasp radials with a couple of old Allison test-bench turboprops, and installed them in 1950's RCAF Goose airframes. When I ran out of engines, I looked up Allison, and they were amazed that the engines I got were still flying. They offered to build me some new and improved motors if they could have the old ones back to test. Eventually the RCAF got wind of the Turbo Goose as I called it, and wanted some for SAR/SF applications, and they talked to Northrop Grumman, and they lengthened the original Goose airframe 6 feet, added a rear ramp, and a twin boom tail to clear the ramp. They also installed a more powerful set of Allison turboprops. Northrop Grumman built several hundred of the new airplane, and called it the Super Goose to differentiate it from the Turbo Goose."

"I never heard of it, mind if I look inside?"

"Sure general, hang on a second while I deploy the ramp so you can see how much room it really has."

Ron crawled into the cockpit, and lowered the tail ramp and unlocked the cabin doors. The general walked up the ramp, and was amazed that he could comfortably walk from the ramp up to the cockpit door, and he was almost 6 feet tall. Ron unlocked the cockpit door, and asked the General to take the right seat while he showed him the avionics suite. Larry saw all the cases bolted to the bulkheads and asked about them.

"General, the two on the inside of the cockpit contain my emergency ditch kits, and the two on the cabin side contain my Alaskan Paramedic kit, a first aid kit, and an oxygen delivery kit for when I'm flying Medevac."

"This plane would make a great SAR/SF platform!"

"That's exactly what the RCAF thought. They bought 100 of them."

"How fast does she go?"

"She can fly at over 300 knots for 500 miles in an emergency, or 280 knots for about 1200 miles, or 250 knots for around 1500 miles. She can climb at 2500 feet per second, and she's fully STOL capable. I've landed her at lakes that are smaller than the runway is wide, and taken off again. With the reversible props, it's like throwing an anchor out."

"Can we take her for a spin?"

"Sure, there's a lake right around here that the hospital that bought 2 of these used for me to demonstrate the STOL characteristics of the plane. Gene, you want to come along?"

Gene climbed in, and they fastened the jump seat into its location right in front of the cockpit door right after Ron closed and locked all the doors. Once he started the turbines, he raised the rear ramp and secured it. General Stevens decided he wanted to ride in the jump seat where he could see everything. Ron warned him it wasn't the most comfortable seat, and Larry explained that he was a Mustang and had come up through the ranks, and this was a lot more comfortable than the seats in the back of a C-130 configured for paratroopers. Ron shrugged his shoulders and completed the preflight checklist, then got permission from Elmendorf for a demonstration flight, a max-performance take off, and aerobatic maneuvers. That last one shook Gene up, but figured Ron knew what he was doing. The tower gave him clearance for the demonstration flight, and he punched in the coordinates for the nearby lake. When he reached the end of the runway, he suggested that the generals hold onto their seats, pushed the throttles to max, and as soon as he could, hauled the yoke back into his lap, and maintained that rate of climb until he reached 2,000 feet. When he reached the lake, he performed a wing-over and caught his altitude right at 500 feet AGL, then cranked madly on the flaps while he slowed to 50 knots exactly. Gene saw the postage stamp ahead, and said "There's NO way you can land on that!"

"General, I land this baby at Help Me Jack practically every day - this is a walk in the park in comparison."

Right as they cleared the treeline, Ron pushed in the throttle, and they floated down to the lake like they were on a parachute. Right before touchdown, Ron pushed the nose forward, and as soon as they were down, he reversed the props and revved up to 30% power. They stopped just like they had thrown out an anchor. Both generals sat there speechless. Ron taxied to the end of the lake, and did another max performance take-off, and flew back to Elmendorf. He made a little more sedate landing, and parked right next to General Stevens' VC-11A. When they were both able to talk again. General Stevens said "That beat the pants off flying aerobatics in an FA-18! I thought for sure we were going to crash during that landing. You would have made one heck of a Naval Aviator Ron; you'd probably be able to catch a 3-wire in a typhoon in the dark!"

"General, if you want to, I brought the latest Barrett Light 50 with the suppressor with me, so we can shoot at Elmendorf's 1,000 yard range."

"Really, I'd like to try that - lead on McDuff!"

Ron called Gunny Simpson, who met them with his personal Hummer, and quickly put General Flags on it, then loaded the rifle and the ammo, and drove them back to the range. Ron set the rifle up, and asked General Simpson if he'd do the honors. Ron acted as a shooting coach, and once the General got settled and the rifle adjusted properly, the scope was stuck on the x-ring like the gun was permanently fixed. Gunny Simpson had already cleared the range, and he had a whole squad of runners this time, he didn't want to keep the generals waiting! Ron retreated to the spotting scope; the General loaded the gun, cleared the safety, and when the crosshairs were exactly in the center of the bullseye, barely squeezed the trigger. It wasn't as loud as he

expected, and through the scope he could clearly see his first round right in the middle of the X-ring. He'd shot a bullseye at 1,000 yards - he'd never done that before. As soon as he settled down, he shot 4 more rounds. His groups weren't as good as Ron's, but Ron wasn't 50 years old either. When the General stood up, the runner ran down to the target and back again. Gunny measured his group, subtracted the bullet diameter, and came up with a 9.85 inch group! General Stevens was amazed. He had shot a sub-moa group with an unfamiliar gun at 1,000 yards. He usually shot for score on the 600 yard line at the most.

Ron asked General Shepard to go next. Realizing that this was a chance of a lifetime to shoot the prototype gun, Gene hurried to the gun. Ron acted as a shooting coach, got Gene set up behind the scope, and handed him a loaded magazine with 5 rounds of BMG 50 Match ammo. Ron quickly retreated to the spotting scope, and Gene cleared the safety, and as soon as the sights were centered on the center of the X-ring, he squeezed the trigger just as Ron told him. He too hit the bullseye, and proceeded to shoot off the other 4 rounds. Looking through his scope he could see he shot right around a 9-inch group. When he stood up, another runner was dispatched to get his target. Gunny measured his group, and after subtracting the bullet diameter, he had shot an 8.75-inch group. He was ready to dance a jig, but didn't want to rub it in too bad, since General Stevens was still active duty, and a Marine. Finally it was Ron's turn. He re-adjusted the stock to fit him, and once he got behind the scope, he blocked out everything but the image of the target in the scope. The next thing he knew, he'd fired all 5 rounds, and they were all in the X-ring! Gunny Simpson just shook his head. If Ron's kids could shoot half as good as he did, they could form their own National Shooting Team, and clean up on the International shooting circuit. Ron's target came back, and Gunny couldn't believe it. After subtracting the bullet diameter, he just shot a 3.98 inch group in front of 2 generals! Ron was amazed, he had never shot a sub-4" group before.

General Stevens was smiling, and asked Ron when his cape was coming back from the cleaners. Ron laughed, then General Stevens asked him if he wanted to work as a Shooting Instructor for the Marines. He wouldn't have to enlist, he would be a paid civilian instructor. Gene looked at General Stevens funny - he'd never heard of that before! Larry explained that the USMC was going to implement the new Barrett's suppressed rifle as their new Sniper rifle, and since Ron was the most experienced shooter he knew with the system, the Marine Corps wanted to hire him to teach the instructors on the finer points of shooting the rifle, including using both scopes. Ron said he wasn't qualified.

"Son, I make the determination as to who is qualified. You just shot a 4-inch group at 1,000 yards in front of 2 generals. That's pressure! Gene told me you were the original test engineer for the Barretts system when you were only 13 or 14. You've got over 10 years experience with this rifle, and the Marine Corps needs your experience. I could draft you, but I think you'd be happier as a paid consultant."

Gene spoke up "Ron, he does have the authority to draft you, so you're going either way - if I were you, I'd make it as a Civilian Contractor, the pay's much better!"



“Ok, General, you win. Let me know when and where, and I’d appreciate as much of a heads-up as possible. Any idea how long this will take?”

“If I can get everyone together at once, maybe just a couple of weeks.”

“Ok, General, I can handle that. Thanks, it will be an honor and a privilege.”

“Now about that plane. I want to talk to some of my friends in the Pentagon about buying some. Gene, who replaced you as JSOC - I need to get him on board about this too!

“Larry, he’s a 2-star by the name of Piper. Sam Piper if I remember correctly.”

“Thanks Gene. I need to be heading back. Thanks for an interesting and very informative day, both of you! Ron, you’ll hear from me soon. How do I get hold of you?”

Ron apologized and handed the general his Allakaket Airlines business card. General Stevens thanked him, and got aboard his VC-11a and flew back to California. Once they were back aboard the Super Goose, Ron said “Thanks a lot Gene, I thought I was out of the Consultant Business!”

“Grow up Ron, you have skills the military desperately needs. The average Marine Marksmanship qualifying scores over the last 20 years have been falling steadily, mostly due to the lack of shooting instruction outside of the military. It used to be every kid that lived outside the city was a crack shot, now they’re more worried about playing soccer than shooting squirrels. You are probably among the top 1% of long-distance shooters world-wide. I can imagine as the Army and Special Forces adopt the new rifle, you’ll be busy teaching their instructors. Military contracting is lucrative. You could earn several hundred thousand dollars for a couple of weeks work.”

“What about my kids - Jake and Josh are at the age where they really need their dad home.”

“Like I said, you’ll only be gone a week or so, and once you’re done training the trainers, you’re done!”

“Ok Gene, if you say so.”

“Remember a couple of years ago, I told you that you’re doing the United States more good as a shooter than you ever could as a pilot. This is just an extension of that.”

Ron and Gene flew home, and Ron dropped Gene off at Allakaket and had the 007 fly him back up to the lodge. When he got home, he was mugged by 4 kids. He missed Moose’s greetings, and realized he needed to do something about it. Once he had a minute to himself, he called Bill and BA and asked if anyone in town had puppies for sale or free, they needed to replace

Moose, since he died. BA was very sad, since his kids played with Moose often enough that they knew him. They recently got their own dog, a Husky called Sitka. BA said he'd check around and get back to him.

## Chapter 40 - Fallout

Ron was reading the online newspaper when he saw an article on the AP news wire, and he called Gene.

“Gene, Ron Williams. Can you find out something for me. Log onto the internet, and check the AP news listings. See the article about the shake-up at Northrop Grumman. OK, can you find out if that involved you-know-who and you-know-what. Great, thanks.”

Two hours later, Gene was knocking on his door. Ron opened the door and Gene said, “come outside for a minute, we need to talk.”

Once they were out in the driveway away from everyone, Gene said “OK, I got hold of my buddy at FBI counterintelligence, and it’s as you guessed. Jack Snyder is going to be indicted for multiple counts of Espionage. Here’s the kicker. It won’t be in open court due to the National Security issues. They caught him red-handed with one of the data recorders they had tagged. One of our VC-20’s was sent in for maintenance, and the digital recorder was removed, and we traced it as it was passed from person to person. It finally wound up in Jack Snyder’s possession, we ID’d the Aircraft mechanic that installed the recorder from his fingerprint, and he was persuaded to turn state’s evidence.” Ron wondered how they got the guy to turn state’s evidence. He guessed the thought of spending the rest of his life at Leavenworth with a 300lb black guy as a cellmate might have had something to do with it!

Ron was reading the Internet 2 weeks later when he read about a mysterious car crash in Los Angeles. It seemed a high-profile defense attorney was driving his client to a pre-trial hearing when the brakes failed on their limousine right as it entered a busy intersection. The limo was hit by an 18-wheeler tractor trailer that was running at full speed. The limo was destroyed on impact, and there were no survivors. One of the victims was listed as Jack Snyder. Ron wondered if someone had decided that Jack should never stand trial, and took him out. He decided that it would be better if he didn’t know for sure, and never asked Gene about it.

Since it was getting cold, Ron decided that now would be a good time to pack up the family and move back to their house in Allakaket. He contacted BA, who said he would set everything up for tomorrow, and he had a line on someone with Husky puppies for sale. Ron said that they could go see them tomorrow or the next day, and to e-mail him the details. They spent the rest of the day packing up their stuff to move back to Allakaket. The next morning after breakfast they heard the distinctive noise of the 007 coming in for a landing. Before it could land, the Super Goose taxied up to the doorway, and lowered its ramp. They quickly loaded everything inside the Super Goose, and Ron walked forward, and gave Steve a thumbs up, and he lifted the rear ramp, and turned to taxi to the lake. Once he was clear the 007 landed to pick them up. The pilot apologized for the mix-up, and Ron told him never mind, BA was just a little too precise in arranging their take-off times so they could land within a couple of minutes of each

other. Once the kids were secured, Ron belted himself in, and the crew chief double checked their harnesses, then sat down in his seat, secured himself, and tapped the pilot on his shoulder. He grabbed pitch, and the chopper rose smoothly into the air, then pivoted and flew to Allakaket. It landed at the airport on 1 of 2 helipads that they had built for the 007's. They walked to their truck, and Ron was surprised to find the bed of the truck already loaded. He called BA, and asked him to find out who was making his life so easy, and give him a raise or a bonus, and Ron's thanks. BA said the couple that was selling their puppies were home, and suggested they get over there today. Ron turned to Jake and asked him if he'd like a new puppy. Jake's smile told him everything he needed to know, and Ron got the address from BA. They drove over there and got out of the truck. Ron knocked on the door, only to be swarmed by a half-dozen puppies. He turned to Jake and said "Pick one Son!" Jake picked one up, only to have one of the puppies whine. When Josh picked up the other one, they both settled right down. The wife explained that those two had been inseparable from birth. Ron said "Well we can't break up a set!" He turned to Jake, who was vigorously nodding his head. He looked at Nancy, who gave him the look "Ok if you really have to!" Ron asked the lady how much for both of them. She said "They're free - I just wanted to give them to good homes, and not break those two up. I only said I was selling them to discourage people who weren't serious dog owners."

"Thanks, Moose just died last week, and another dog or two would be perfect."

"Ok, but they're barely weaned, and definitely not paper trained."

"What have you been feeding them?"

"The vet said they should be on puppy chow for another couple of weeks, then regular dog food, but you might want to moisten it for them until their teeth grow in."

"Have they had their shots?"

"They've been wormed and given their puppy shots. We haven't spayed the females or neutered the males yet."

Nancy was a Veterinary Assistant, and was looking over the pups carefully, feeling the hips, and checking the dogs over carefully. "No signs of hip dysplasia or other major genetic defect. You either are a very careful breeder, or got very lucky."

"The Mom's an AKC Husky, but the father was a sled dog, so there shouldn't be any inbreeding problems. This will probably be her last litter, since we're going to have her fixed after we give away the rest of her pups, but we might keep one of them if my daughter has her way."

Ron shook her hand, and thanked her, then they turned to go. Jake held one pup, and Josh held the other. They sat next to each other on the way home. Ron stopped at the General Store on

the way home, and picked up a 35-pound bag of puppy chow, and four dog bowls. He swiped his debit card through the reader instead of writing a check, and was back in the truck 10 minutes later. When they got home, Jake and Josh set the puppies down, and as soon as they smelled Moose's scent, they peed right where Moose did. When they finished, Jake and Josh picked up their puppies and praised them then carried them inside. When they got inside and unloaded Ron asked them what they were going to call them. The re-make of Starsky and Hutch just came out on DVD, so Jake suggested calling them Starsky and Hutch. Ron laughed since he remembered seeing the original show on TV once. He thought that was OK, so he told them to put Starsky and Hutch on the bearskin rug, and clean up for supper. The two puppies sacked out, and Nancy made dinner while Ron put stuff up. After dinner, Ron sat his two oldest sons down and said, "Those dogs are your responsibility. You alone are responsible for feeding, training, and cleaning up after them. Don't let me down." Ron showed them where the puppy chow was, and how much to give the puppies and how often. He told them the dog's water needed to be changed twice a day, or more frequently if they drank it all. He told them not to feed them anything but puppy chow and water, because they couldn't digest people food too well, since they were still very young. Jake left Josh to play with the puppies and asked his dad how long those two might live. "If nothing happens to them, they'll probably live 10-15 years."

Jake did some quick mental arithmetic and said "Good, because I wouldn't want Josh, Sarah or David to experience losing a friend while they're still kids." Ron held his son, then he ran back to check on the puppies. They were still asleep, so Ron suggested they get ready for bed too. Jake complained it was too early, and Ron gave him the look, and he said "Ok Dad, I'm going." Ron stopped Jake and asked him how school was doing. Jake said it was going OK, but he was having some trouble with his multiplication tables. Ron could remember what a hassle they were, and told Jake he could do it, all he needed to do was memorize them, like his Bible verses. Jake smiled when he realized that was all he needed to do. He hugged his dad and said goodnight. Ron walked into the master bedroom, and Nancy was waiting for him "I hope you know what you're doing."

"I talked to Jake and Josh, and put the puppies totally in their care. I told them not to disappoint me. I don't think we'll have any problems."

"If you say so dear. I already took a shower, so hurry up and take a shower and let's go to bed." Ron kissed Nancy, got undressed, took a quick shower, and went to bed.

Meanwhile General Larry Stevens, USMC had been busy. He contacted a whole gaggle of generals including USMC, Army, and Special Forces, including LtGen. Sam Piper, JSOC, and got them all on board about the new Barrett's rifle, and possibly buying a bunch of the Super Goose for SAR and SF use. It turned out the new Super Goose could be a perfect inter-coastal SAR platform, and could carry a SF Team or a squad of Recon Marines on short-range interdiction missions near bodies of water or short rough runways. They kicked their ideas up to the office of the Joint Chiefs, and General Michael Hagee, the Commandant of the USMC.

He sent an E-mail to Ronnie Barrett at Barrett Arms, and carbon copied Ron Williams at Allakaket Airlines, and Gen. Gene Shepard in Allakaket.

It read:

Gentlemen:

The USMC will be the first service to field the new Barretts M -200. We request the following people at MCBH Kaneohe Bay on 01Nov04 at 0900. Travel expenses will be reimbursed by the USMC/DOD and consulting contract rates will be paid for this project, not to exceed 2 weeks.

Roy Hunter, Barrett Arms, Designer  
Chief Stuart Smith, USMC(ret) Barrett Arms, Assembly Technician/Armorer  
Lance Miller, Barrett Arms, Tech Rep

Ron Williams, Allakaket Airlines, Chief Consultant  
Gen. Gene Shepard, USAF (ret), Consultant

Ron called Gene "Guess we're going to Hawaii?"

"I wonder why they added my name to the consultant list, I don't know bupkiss about the rifle."

"My guess would be your name is all over the documentation as the Officer In Charge."

"Right - I forgot about that. At least I'll get a nice Hawaiian vacation out of this!"

Gene remembered as an honorably retired General, he could wear his uniform, but he would travel as a civilian unless they flew a MAC flight from Elmendorf to Kaneohe Bay, since they had a Marine Air Station there, with a long runway. He told Ron he'd call him back that afternoon, he had to check something. Gene e-mailed a copy of Commandant Hagee's letter to the CO at Elmendorf, and asked him if they could use a VC-11a to fly from Elmendorf to MCB Kaneohe Bay instead of booking 2 first-class round trip tickets from Anchorage International to Honolulu. When he got a look at the Commandant's letter, he immediately authorized the use of the VC-11a, and suggested Gene travel in uniform to avoid any questions. Gene replied that Ron needed to transport his rifle and ammunition aboard Air Force aircraft for the purpose of this project, plus they would both be armed with Federal CCW permits. The CO told Gene he would make all the arrangements, and to be at Elmendorf Saturday 30Oct04 at 1200.

Gene sent a copy of the General's reply to Ron, then called him. He said that they would have a 007 fly them to Elmendorf from Allakaket at 1000 on 30Oct04, to arrive at Elmendorf at 1200.

Ron arrived at the Allakaket heliport at 0945 to give the crew chief time to load the aircraft.

Gene arrived 5 minutes later in uniform, carrying a duffle bag and a garment bag. The crew chief saluted Gene since they were both in uniform and outdoors. Gene returned the salute smartly. He missed some things in the military, and was grateful he could still wear his uniform. They climbed into the helicopter, the crew chief checked that they were secured, then they lifted off right at 1000 and arrived at Elmendorf at 1200. The 007 landed right next to the VC-11a, and the crew chief saluted Gene again as he boarded the VC-11. They quickly transferred their baggage, and the VC-11 was backed away from the parking stall, and taxied to the active runway. Gene and Ron sat next to each other, and Ron took out his CD player and 2 headsets with an adapter, and asked Gene if he wanted to listen to something while they flew. Gene took the headset, and Ron pushed play on the CD player, and they leaned back to listen to a Bach Concerto. 5 hours later, they arrived at Kaneohe Bay, where a USMC Staff Sergeant met them at the foot of the air stairs, saluted General Shepard, and escorted them to the Humvee while a couple of privates loaded their baggage in the back of the Hummer. He introduced himself as Staff Sergeant Wilson, Headquarters. He was to deliver them to the VIP quarters, and then would pick them up at 0830 tomorrow and deliver them to the secure conference room.

They checked into the VIP quarters, and were assigned adjoining rooms. The sergeant manning the desk told them Ronnie Barrett had already checked in, and his group was in the cafeteria. Gene and Ron quickly stowed their bags in their rooms and hurried to the cafeteria. Once they got their food, and walked over to their table Ron stood up since Gene was still in uniform. "What do I owe this privilege to General?"

"Mr. Barrett, you might not know me or my guest, but I was the OIC for the M -200 project."

"General Shepard, I finally get to meet you. I'm guessing, but you must be Ron Williams - I've always wanted to meet you sir!"

Ron set his tray down quickly, and shook Ronnie Barrett's hand. "The pleasure is all mine sir - I can definitely say that you now make the most accurate rifles in the world!"

"Can I quote you on that?"

They all started laughing, then General Shepard asked "May we join you?"

"By all means General, Ron - please join us, we were just talking about the project."

For the next several hours they were talking shop, Ron and Ronnie found out they were very much alike during the time. Ronnie said he loved hunting, but rarely got the time. Ron invited him and his wife to their lodge next hunting season, and they could go caribou hunting on his land. All they'd need was their rifles and an Alaskan Non-resident hunting license, and a caribou tag. He could send a plane or helicopter to Anchorage to fly them in.

Ronnie said "I'll have to take you up on that!"

Larry the Tech Rep asked Ron “What’s your group size down to now?”

Gene replied “The last time he shot at Elmendorf with General Stevens and I, he shot a 4.5” group at 1,000 yards, and both of us shot sub-moa groups and we never fired the rifle before.”

That comment started a whole new line of questions. If two middle-aged Generals could shoot sub-moa groups, they wanted to find out why. Gene said part of it was the rifle, and part of it was Ron’s coaching. He told them how he acted as a shooting coach to both generals, and got them comfortably behind the rifle, with their right eye in the sweet spot behind the scope. He showed them how to adjust the stock to fit them, how to set up the bipod and monopod so the scope was locked on the bullseye, and all they had to do was pull the trigger. Gene told Ronnie that he was amazed at the trigger, it was light and crisp, and broke like the proverbial glass rod. Larry had his tape recorder running, recording all these comments for later, so he could play them back to the design group. “Ronnie, I don’t know how you did it, but you guys designed the perfect sniper rifle, and the Swarovski scope is just awesome!”

“Ron, you’ve shot the night sight, what did you think of it?”

“I’ve never shot a night scope before the first trial with the prototype. The Gunny at MacDill was extremely helpful setting up the scope for me and explaining how it worked. I was really impressed. Except for the green tint, it basically turned night into day. I could see the target clearly in my sights, and the lighted chevron aiming point was a nice touch. Once the engineers worked out the QD problem, I’d say it was basically a perfect night scope, but I haven’t shot any others to compare it to.”

Finally it was getting late, so General Shepard said they could continue this conversation at 0800 tomorrow at breakfast. They shook hands around the table and said goodnight. Ron and Gene went to their rooms, took showers, and went to bed. They got up at 0730, got dressed, and met Ronnie Barrett and his team in the buffet line for breakfast. Once they were all seated, Ron started saying grace, and was pleased to hear 5 “Amens”.

“I didn’t know you guys were Christians?”

Ronnie said, “Guess it never came up! Thanks for saying Grace, sometimes I forget!”

The conversation quickly switched back to the upcoming demonstration and instruction on the Barretts M -200 as the Pentagon was calling it. Ron had brought both rifles, both scopes, and enough BMG-50 Match ammo to last 2 weeks. Ronnie Barrett brought another case with them from Murfreesboro, TN just in case they ran out. They all traveled in the corporate jet, a new Gulfstream V. Since it was almost 4,000 miles to Honolulu, the extra unrefueled range of the V saved them at least an hour or two, and even at 459 knots, it was almost as fast as some commercial jets, besides, flying your own private jet bypassed all the TSA BS! Since he was a firearms manufacturer, flying demo weapons and ammo to various locations via commercial air



transport was a bigger headache than it was worth.

At 0855, a whole procession of hummers showed up at the VIP area. Ron showed the Marines which cases to carry, and felt sorry for the poor Marines that got detailed to carry the case of ammo Ronnie Barrett brought. They all met at 0900 at the secure conference facility. They were searched, and when the hand-held metal detectors went off on Ron and Gene, they showed the Federal CCWs, so the Marines let it slide. The sergeant in charge of Security highly suggested to the general that they leave the hardware at the VIP safe deposit for the duration of their stay on base. Gene figured with all those Marines around, they were right. Once they were seated, a Sergeant Major yelled "Attention on Deck" and Brigadier General George Trautman walked in, and said "As you were". When they continued to stand, he said "Gentlemen, please be seated so we can start." When they finally sat down, he said "Welcome to Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay. We're here for a training session by Barrett Firearms, and the Testing and Evaluation team. Gentlemen, Welcome." With that the General turned and marched out of the room.

The head of the Scout Sniper school stood up, and said "I'm Colonel Saunders, and any chicken jokes might get you court-martialed or flogged. I'm in charge of the Scout Sniper school, and in the front row are all the active Marine Scout Sniper Instructors, we're here to learn everything we can about this new weapons system, so you have our undivided attention. General Shepard why don't you lead off." Colonel Sanders shook Gene's hand, and handed him a note that read "Gene, just give them the background on the project from the perspective of the SF JSOC, thanks, Jim."

Gene pocketed the note and said "Gentlemen, Ronnie Barrett approached the Military with an idea for a new sniper rifle and a new scope. Since we already had the M-82A1, we were wondering how much better a new rifle could be, since the M82 was shooting MOA out to 1,000 yards. Still, Ronnie had surprised us before, so we agreed to test it. A couple of months into the T&E project, my aide and the CO of the Pave Hawks approached me with a request to bring his family on base for a week or two. When he told me his 13-yr old nephew was shooting a .5 moa group at 400 yards, I told him I wanted to see this with my own eyes. 2 weeks later, Ron Williams and his family arrived at Elmendorf. Just like Colonel Fellows said, his nephew shot a 2-inch group at 400 yards out of a stock Browning A-bolt in .308 with a BOSS unit and a synthetic stock. I asked Ron if he wanted to try the 600 yard line, and still he shot a .5 MOA group. Later that day I found out the Gunny had let Ron shoot the prototype, and had managed a group smaller than the snipers that were assigned to the T&E project. He taped Ron's impressions of the rifle, and a couple of suggestions he had. That got Ronnie Barretts thinking in different ways, and a year of so later, came up with the idea of a suppressed Barretts with a different stock and a superior scope from Swarovski. He told the engineers at Swarovski to pull out all the stops with this scope. We called Ron Williams back to MacDill to test the new prototype, and found out in the right hands, it made the previous Barretts rifles look like standard issue rifles. Ron's best group at 1,000 yards so far with this gun and the daylight scope was 4.5 inches in front of General Stevens and myself at Elmendorf AFB a couple of

months ago. That brings you current on the project.”

Gene answered a couple of questions, then took his seat.

Ronnie Barrett was next, and described the design process, and the nuts and bolts behind the design. Ron Williams was impressed at all the detail that went into designing this gun, no wonder it shot like a laser rifle, and cost over \$10,000 per copy plus the scope! Once he was finished, the Designer and the Tech rep went up with cut-away rifles, and a sample to show the Marine instructors how the rifles went together, and the field stripping procedures as well as the Armory maintenance procedures. Ron stuck his hand up, and Larry said “Yes, Ron?”

“I don’t know how to tell you this, but my rifle has never been through the Armory procedures, and I have almost 2,000 rounds through it!”

Larry got really excited, and asked Ron if they could disassemble his rifle in front of the group and mike it out. Ron reluctantly agreed. No long range shooter wants someone else messing with his rifle. Two sergeants picked up the case containing Ron’s new prototype, and when they opened the case, Larry was surprised the rifle was so clean. Ron said the rifle got cleaned regularly, but never stripped past the field strip recommendations. Larry was scratching his head, because the rifle should be gummed solid in all the nooks and crannies that needed cleaning during an Armory maintenance cycle. Larry called Chief Smith over to the table with his armorers tools, and they detail stripped the weapon, miked out all the parts, and found that there was virtually no wear on the components. Chief Smith couldn’t see any liquid lubricants on the rifle, and asked Ron what he used for lubricant. Ron said in Alaska, the only lubricant you can use year-round is super-fine graphite powder. Larry’s eyes got as big as Ron had ever seen them - no one had thought of using graphite powder as a lubricant. Maybe that was why Ron’s rifle was such a tack driver. Rummaging around in the case, Larry found a small tube of superfine graphite powder. Once Chief Smith had the rifle apart, he asked Ron to come up and help him put it back together, and lubricate the parts as he saw fit. Ron put a very small amount of graphite powder on all pivot points, and the bolt. He cycled the action a couple of times, and it was even slicker than it was before. Evidently graphite had worn off a couple of internal parts. Ron wondered aloud if the gun would shoot better or worse now. Since everyone wanted to see him shoot anyway, the adjourned the meeting to the shooting range. They called ahead and cleared the range.

While Ron set up, a team of runners was organized to pull targets, and all the instructors were on the benches with their spotting scopes, ready for a shooting demonstration. Ron could really feel the pressure now, and took his time calming down. It took 2 trips through the 23rd psalm before he felt confident enough to get ready to shoot. He looked up and the Range Master nodded, then retreated to his scope. The wind was blowing from left to right at about 5 knots, so Ron added left windage, and called a trial shot. His first shot was just outside the X-ring to the left, so he took some of the windage out. He started reciting the 23rd Psalm again, and started getting into the Zone. He never remembered pulling the trigger 5 times, but when he

looked through the scope again, there were 5 shots in the X-ring in a small cloverleaf pattern. There was plenty of space around the group and the outer edge of the 5-inch x-ring, so he might have beaten his best group yet. As soon as he stood up, a runner took off like he was running the 100-yard dash to retrieve the target and put a fresh one up. Ronnie Barrett was stunned. He'd heard the reports, but until now never realized how good of a shot Ron Williams was. He wondered if he built a 25mm version of this gun, how far he could shoot an x-ring group with it. He remembered the Bushmaster project, and the 1,000 yard 28mm group he was reported to have shot, and realized this guy had a God-Given gift for long distance shooting, and if the Gunny at Elmendorf was right, his kid Jake had it too.

When they finally got the target back and measured it, then subtracted the bullet diameter, Ron realized he had done it again. He shot a 3.98 inch group at 1,000 yards under tremendous pressure. Ron decided that now was a good time to become a "shooting coach" and asked the Instructors to come up one at a time to shoot the rifle. While someone was videotaping the entire sequence, Ron talked the senior instructor through setting the rifle up for his build and shooting style, then how to get into the proper position to shoot the rifle. Once he had the bipod and monopod set, he could see the X-ring right in the center of the scope. He took a firing grip on the rifle, and Ron retreated to the table. He fired 5 shots at the target while Ron watched him. According to the spotting scope, he shot a 10-inch group, but Ron could see a slight twitch in his right adductor muscle every time he fired. He walked up to the instructor, and asked him if he could make a suggestion. Ron guessed that the Senior Instructor was an old-school Marine that was taught to shoot Marine Prone without the bipod, since his adductor muscle twitched every time he shot, which normally happened as the body's response to the recoil, but would throw your aim off if you were using a bipod and monopod setup. Ron suggested the Master Chief pretend he was a jelly fish and relax behind the gun, and just concentrate on sight alignment, trigger squeeze, and follow-through. He relaxed visibly as Ron spoke, and he handed the instructor a full magazine of BMG Match rounds, and retreated back to the tables. This time he shot an 8-inch group, which was the smallest group he had shot ever on the 1,000 yard line. He stood up, shook Ron's hand, then gave him a "guy hug", and sat down.

He addressed the rest of the instructors. "Gentlemen, we've been shooting long distance for decades, and sometimes we pick up bad habits we're not even aware of that limit our ability to shoot really small groups. I know a Sniper is more worried about that first shot and getting in position to take the shot, but shooting techniques are still important especially with this rifle, since it just is getting started at 1,000 yards. I wouldn't be surprised if someone doesn't start hitting bullseyes at 2,000 yards as soon as the optical technology catches up." He walked over to Gene and whispered in his ear, and Gene nodded

"Right now there is a new LAV that I worked on that can hit a man-sized target at 5 miles using a highly modified Bushmaster cannon re-designed by Barretts, with a brand-new video-optical sighting system that works night and day. I shot a 28mm 1-hole group at 1,000 yards with it during the early prototype stage when the gun and the T&E mount were secured to a 6x6 foot

block of concrete. A 4-inch group at 1,000 yards with this gun isn't that hard, and if you can engage a target at say 1,500 to 2,000 yards, that makes your job much easier. It also makes the jobs of the people securing our enemy's leadership that much more difficult."

Ron spent the rest of the day coaching the shooting instructors, and most of them improved their groups dramatically. When they watched the videotape later, the instructors realized they needed to re-vamp the course of instruction, since they concentrated more on field-craft than shooting ability. They realized with this gun, someone who was a better shot, and poorer at field craft could out-range a sniper trained in the old methods by about 50%. So far Marine Snipers were told not to take shots at man-sized targets outside of a half-mile, even with their M-82a1 Barrett rifles. With the new suppressor, the enemy wouldn't have a clue where they were, and they could resume anti-personnel shooting like they had in Vietnam. Shooting an enemy's field commanders was extremely demoralizing to the troops, especially when it was a shot out of the blue.

## Chapter 41 - Training the Trainers

The next day, they moved back into the conference room. The Sergeant in charge of the security detail was pleased that Ron and Gene had decided to check their sidearms in the VIP safe. Once everyone was seated, the Master Chief in charge of the Shooting School called the meeting to order, and 2 marines rolled a huge white board to the center of the stage.

“Ok, we need to re-write the curriculum - so let’s brainstorm it out!”

Ron spoke up “We don’t need to reinvent the wheel here, let’s reuse the parts of the curriculum that works - I read your most recent training manual, and the only part I’d change was the part about long-distance shooting. With the new Barretts M -200, a realistic engagement distance of 1,000 yards should change your shooting philosophy. Between the super-long range of the gun, and the suppressor hiding the muzzle blast, and disguising the direction of the shot, a well-hidden sniper could decimate an entire headquarters company, getting off at least 5 shots before they had a clue where he was shooting from.”

The senior Sniper Instructor was thinking about what Ron was saying. If he dropped a 2-man Scout Sniper team behind the lines of an army in the field, and they got within 1,000 yards of their Headquarters area, they could easily decapitate that army and either force their surrender or severely hinder their ability to fight a war. Generals would have to live underground to be safe from snipers, and junior officers wouldn’t want to show their faces either. The risk to the sniper team would be minimal, since the opposition wouldn’t have a clue where they were, unless they didn’t choose their hide wisely, and were hiding in the one obvious spot that a sniper would be. His snipers already had the field craft skills, and all they needed was the long-distance shooting skills. He was hoping that some of them would be capable of hitting a man-sized target at a mile. With a BMG-50 round, any hit would probably be lethal. He called Ron up to the white board, and had him start outlining his procedure for setting up the rifle and adjusting the rifle to the shooter. Adjusting the rifle should be a 1-time thing if they could afford to issue an M -200 to each shooter. He said the Springfield M -25 would be a good rifle for the back-up shooter, and he’d love to find out what Swarovski could come up with in the lines of spotting scopes, given the new optics they used in the new daylight scope. Once Ron was finished outlining the procedure to fit the stock to the shooter, he asked Ron to outline his procedure for getting set up to shoot, including adjusting and setting the bipod and monopod. Finally he had Ron detail the ideal shooting position behind the scope. Once he finished, Ron threw it open for questions, and there were a lot of them.

Someone sent out for sandwiches and soda, so they could keep working through lunch. One really old-school instructor remembered some stuff Carlos Hathcock had suggested, but for some reason the Marines never implemented, and Ron was saying the same stuff. It was like “deja-vu” all over again! The whole session reminded him of the old EF Hutton commercials. Everyone was hanging on Ron’s every word. The meeting was being taped, so they would have

it for later.

The Senior Instructor had another flash of insight when he remembered the Night Vision Scope contained a laser designator. Instead of shooting individual officers, if they could designate the command bunker, a laser-guided JDAM could ruin their collective days. He'd have to pass that idea up the chain of command and get target designation added to the syllabus. Ron wrapped up the session in time for everyone to make it to the mess hall. Ron wasn't off the hook even then, as some of the instructors sat with him while they ate dinner. Ron said grace, and several Instructors said Amen, then they ate and talked. It was like the Bull sessions they held after hours in the Instructor's lounge. Their discussions could get blunt and heated, but they still respected each other. Ron didn't quite feel like he was in front of the Spanish Inquisition, but felt the resistance some instructors had to changing the way the Marines did things. Finally Ron said "I'm here just to explain and teach the employment of this new weapons system, and to provide instruction in how to teach others to shoot this rifle to it's full potential. Right up to the point that Congress disbanded the Air Force, I was scheduled to go to the Academy, and General Shepard already had my appointment in hand. I wanted to fly the Strike Eagle, and that opportunity was taken away from me, so this is the only opportunity I'll have to give back to my country, so I wanted to make the most of it. Sorry if I'm coming across like a Revival Preacher, but I have some ideas I want to get across, and little time to do it."

Ron's little speech struck a chord with the Marines. They knew he wasn't just another know-it-all consultant coming in to tell them how to do their jobs. The session the next morning went much better, and that evening they re-located to the shooting range to learn how to use the new night vision sight. Ron asked Larry to run that, since he wasn't an expert on the system. Larry helped Ron set the night scope up for him, and Ron was impressed, he could see the target even better than last time. They all put on hearing protection, and broke out their spotting scopes, and Ron fired another 5-shot group. It wasn't as good as his daylight groups, but he still managed a 6-inch group at 1,000 yards. Larry talked the rest of the instructors through shooting the scope, and they all shot groups that were slightly larger than their daytime groups, except for the 2 instructors that had field experience with the latest Night Vision scope. Their groups were only ½" bigger than their daytime groups. They explained the difference as due to experience with the system, since the older NVS used the same aim point, and they were used to it.

The next day, they each received a printed copy of what they were talking about, and they spent the day going through their copies and editing it. The group went through the document after lunch, and they were done by dinner. They added things that they discussed later that day, and added sections on the NVS. Ron had been on base almost a week, when he asked the instructors if they had any questions or if there was any areas he didn't cover. The Chief Instructor stood after he could see that there were no real questions, and thanked Ron for coming. Ron handed the instructors his business card, and suggested that if they had any questions, to feel free to call or e-mail him with them. When he finished, the Chief told Ron that they were finished with him, and Gene wanted to play some more golf with the Base CO,

so he had a couple of days to kill. He handed Ron a cell phone so they could reach him if he were needed, and told him to take the next couple of days to go sightseeing, and he could stay in VIP quarters.

There was an air-conditioned SUV out front, and someone had taken the time to highlight the route to Pearl Harbor, and enclose tickets to the major attractions in Honolulu. Ron remembered he packed his digital camera in his bags, and drove over to VIP quarters to retrieve it, and his Para-Ord. He felt safe on base, but he was taking no chances off base. Ron didn't know, but all his tickets had a special code on them identifying him as a VIP with special access privileges. As he drove south to Pearl, he saw the huge naval base surrounding the Memorial. He went to the exhibit, and was deeply moved by the images he saw. Hollywood didn't do justice to the horrors of war. Finally he boarded the boat for the trip out to the Arizona Memorial. Ron thought that was one of the spookiest, but most somber places he had been in his life. He took several pictures, and when he was finished, it was almost time for dinner, so he drove back to the base, presented his TS ID card, and the guard told him to drive straight to the VIP area and park, since the vehicle didn't have a base tag on it. He explained that if the vehicle was parked anywhere else on the base, it might be towed due to new anti-terrorism regulations. Ron was pleasantly surprised to see Gene in the VIP cafeteria, sitting with several generals. He walked up to them and said "Excuse me General Shepard, may I join you?" Gene almost laughed at Ron's formality, then realized it was for the benefit of the other generals seated with him. "Generals, I'm sure some of you know Ron Williams." The generals stood and shook Ron's hand and introduced themselves. One of them said "Ron, I'm really glad you could come from Alaska and teach my Instructors about the new Barretts rifle. That weapon will save a bunch of Marine lives."

"How so General?"

"We have to accomplish the mission, regardless of the cost, and if we can send 2 Marines with that rifle behind lines, and take out the Enemy headquarters, the battle is over, saving the lives of all the other Marines that would have to invade the country in a normal battle. Between the long-range capability and the laser designator built into the NVS, that is one very capable weapon, and frankly, I'm glad they're on our side!"

Ron agreed, and the conversation returned to Gene and the other generals telling old war stories. Ron listened intently. It was like old friends getting together, even though none of these men had served together. When dinner was over, Ron excused himself and went to his room to get some sleep. He caught up with Gene the next morning at breakfast, and he told Ron that he had golfing sessions scheduled for the next two days, then they could fly home. Ron said he had enough tickets to attractions to last 2 days, so he'd see him on Friday morning to fly home. Gene said he'd leave a note at the desk Thursday with their flight number and time it left the VIP terminal. He looked at his watch and told Ron he had to be at the base golf course in half an hour, so he'd see Ron later. Ron said goodbye to Gene's retreating back.

He spent the next 2 days seeing the sights, and driving around the island past Hanauma Bay, and the North Shore. He stopped at the Banzai pipeline, since the waves were up. He couldn't understand why someone would try to ride a 50ft. wave over a 10-foot deep reef that would rip your skin off if you fell off your board, but then again, he didn't understand why Steve would volunteer for the PJs either. He kept going around the North Shore, which was actually the Northwest Shore, to a point that someone had noted on his map as being a beautiful spot for sunsets. He got to Kaena point with half an hour to spare, so he set up his tripod, and configured his camera to take sunset shots. He decided to use the cable release to see if he could record the "green flash" he had heard about. One of his best pictures was almost totally an accident as a couple was walking along the beach, and silhouetted against the sunset with their footprints in the sand coming into the center of frame from the lower right corner. Once the sun finally set, he had a long drive back in the dark to the base at Kaneohe Bay. One of the locals recommended a place to stop and eat, and he was glad he listened. They served Hawaiian cuisine, and the prices were reasonable, unlike the rest of the island as he had heard. He drove back to the gas station, topped off the tank, then thanked the attendant for the tip. He suggested a quicker route back to the base, and Ron checked it, and it was almost half the distance he traveled up the coast on the way up. If he took 930 to 803 to the H2, to H1E, to 63 to H3 right into the base, it would save him almost an hour of driving time, especially at night. Since he couldn't see anything but the roadway, there wasn't much point of driving back along the coast. When he got to the gate at the base, the guards were much more wary, since not many people drove into the base at night. He told the guards he was out sightseeing, and was shooting the sunset at Kaena point, and just got back. When he showed his ID, they let him in, and closed the gate right behind him.

The next day he went shopping for gifts in Waikiki. What passed for a swimsuit amazed him. He hadn't seen so many bare butts since the last time he gave the 3 Amigos a bath years ago! When he got to the open air market, the sellers were hawking a bunch of cheap imported junk, then someone suggested Hilo Hatties had the best Hawaiian shirts and dresses in the islands, and the best prices. He got directions and drove over there. It was nearly impossible to find a parking space, and just as he was about to give up, someone pulled out of a space. He pulled in, skipped the tour, and walked right into the sales floor. He walked up to the Hawaiian shirt racks, got Jake a Medium, and the rest of them a small, and got Nancy a Medium floor-length muumuu she could wear as a nightgown - right like she ever wore one! Next to the shirts was the jewelry counter. He was all set to check out when Ron spotted a beautiful piece of jewelry. It was a sterling silver cross, and some little ancient Hawaiian woman was sitting right there with a lit torch making more of them. Ron asked her if she could mount a Cubic Zirconia ½ carat round solitaire in the intersection using a prong mount. She smiled and said that he must know something about jewelry. "Just what I read in books." She said it would be \$50 extra for the time and trouble. Ron said if she did an excellent job, he'd pay her \$150 for the cross (they were marked \$50 each). She said she had some beautiful sterling silver Italian rope chains in stock, and she could put it on a 20" chain for \$20. The lady was so nice that he told her if she'd take his American Express card and put it in a nice velvet box, he'd pay her \$200 if she paid the sales tax. Her eyes lit up, and she said she'd have it done in an hour. They had a coffee shop,



or he could take the tour for free, and she handed him a card good for a free tour.

Since he had an hour to kill anyway, he decided to take the tour. When he was finished an hour later, she smiled and said “Aloha - I just finished the cross.” She showed him the cross, and he asked to borrow her loupe. He checked the soldering job on the mount, and she knew what she was doing, it was practically invisible, and the cross didn’t show any signs of damage from the heat. He asked if he could pay for everything together, and she said she could ring up his clothing purchases as well. He handed her his AMEX, and she saw that it was a business card from Allakaket Airlines. She asked where that was, and Ron said Central Alaska. He was the owner of the airline. She smiled, took the card and swiped it through the reader, and handed him the receipt for his signature. She charged him \$200 for the cross and the stone, and the marked price on the shirts and muumuu. He thanked her, signed the receipt, and picked up his purchases. She not only put the necklace in a beautiful gift box, she gift wrapped it in some pretty Hawaiian print paper. Ron thanked her, and walked out the door, right into one of Honolulu’s finest. “Excuse me officer, I was just leaving.”

“You’re ten minutes over your meter.”

“Sorry officer, I was making some purchases inside Hilo Hatties and lost track of time. How much do I owe you?”

“Don’t worry about it - you’re here now, Aloha!”

“Thanks officer.”

Ron was glad that encounter went smoothly, even with his Federal CCW, it would be a hassle to explain why he was armed to the teeth. He pulled carefully out of his parking space and drove back to the Marine base where it was safe! He made it back in time to join General Shepard and his cohorts for dinner. When dinner was over, Gene told him that their flight left at 0900 tomorrow from the VIP terminal, and a Hummer would drive them over from VIP quarters at 0845. Ron hoped they had some Marines with strong backs to carry his rifles and the rest of the ammunition. Since Ronnie Barrett didn’t want to lug the ammo back with him, he gave the 3 ammo boxes that were left over full of 50-cal ammo to Ron. Ron thanked Gene, and went upstairs for a quick shower and some sleep.

The next morning, he was up early, got dressed and packed, and headed down for breakfast at 0800. Gene met him for breakfast, and at 0840, an MP Sergeant walked in, and asked them for their room keys so they could load their stuff in the Hummers. He said he would check them out as well. Gene and Ron handed him their electronic room keys, and thanked the Sergeant, who saluted Gene again since Gene was in uniform for the return trip. Ron asked him why he was in uniform, and Gene said the Base CO said it would be a good idea, or else they might think they were a CONDEL. Ron got a laugh when he realized that the Marines would be proper to a CONDEL, but they would go out of the way for a general in uniform, even an Air

Force uniform. Besides he was pretty sure Gene missed the VIP treatment. He noticed the other day when Gene was wearing golf clothes that his ball cap had scrambled eggs and 3 gold stars on it, just to make sure every Marine that saw him knew he was a visiting General. While they couldn't salute him when he was out of uniform, they'd show the proper respect. At 0845, they boarded the Hummer for the short ride to the VIP terminal. Both Gene and Ron pinged the metal detectors, but they were ready with their Federal CCW's, and the MP Sergeant waved them through. The Crew Chief of the VC-11a checked their ID's again as they boarded, and saluted Gene. Once they were seated, the aircraft was pushed back, and the engines spooled up from idle as they taxied toward the runway. Ron handed Gene a headphone, and loaded a Beethoven CD this time for the flight home.

Someone must have called ahead, because when they landed at Elmendorf, the 007 was waiting for them. Several airmen grunted and groaned while they transferred their baggage. Once they were airborne, Gene said "I almost forgot, here you go."

The letter was addressed to Ron Williams, and the return address was the office of the Commandant of the Marines. Ron opened it:

Dear Ron Williams. I'd like to extend a Bravo Zulu to you for a job well done. According to the CO in charge of the Scout Sniper program, your information was invaluable to the USMC, and you've earned this. Thanks for saving Marine Lives.

General Michael Hagee, Commandant USMC  
Semper Fi

Attached was a check made out to Ron Williams for \$100,000.00 as a consulting fee. He didn't show the check to Gene, because he didn't want to offend the General, but he showed him the letter.

"Ron, General Hagee wrote that himself. I'd hang on to it if I were you."

"I was planning on it."

2 hours later, they landed at Allakaket, and someone helped them unload the helicopter, and Ron drove home. He hugged the kids and Nancy, then gave them their gifts, and whispered to Nancy that she'd get hers in their bedroom. She giggled, and shooed the kids into the den in the basement. When they got behind closed doors, Nancy attacked Ron, who obviously missed his wife, but was too tired to really enjoy it. They wound up cuddling in bed, then Ron handed her presents to her. She opened the big package with the muumuu in it, and slipped it on. Ron handed her a smaller package, and she tore it open. When she saw the necklace and put it around her neck, she almost took off the muumuu and attacked him again. He said "Nada Mas!" then they both laughed, remembering the old Roberto Duran joke. A couple of hours later, Nancy disentangled herself from Ron and slipped the muumuu back on and went to check

on the kids. They were playing in the den with Starsky and Hutch.

## Chapter 42 - Birthday Surprise

Ron had ordered the 2 M-25's from Springfield Armory, with the scopes, bipods, cases, and 20 20-round mags (10 each) through AA's FFL Dealer. They got such a good price that instead of the Leupold scopes, he got 4 more of the 6-20x50 Mil-dot BDC scopes from Springfield. They normally listed for \$899.00, but thanks to a cancellation of a government contract, Springfield was sitting on a bunch of them, and they got them for around \$600 each including the 30mm QD mounting rings, the sunshades, and a box of batteries. Jake's 14th birthday was right around the corner, so Bear flew in one day, picked the rifles up, mounted and boresighted the scopes, and left them at Bill's place for safe-keeping. Jake's 14th birthday wasn't quite as noisy as the last couple, until he opened the big box and squealed like a girl. He ran over and gave his dad a Bear hug, then his Mom. When they finished Ron told Jake that they could go over to Bear's place tomorrow, and try out their new range. Since the last time they shot, Ron had the helicopter lift his tractor to Bear's place, and they logged out enough of the forest to extend the range to 1,000 yards, now he wouldn't have to go to Elmendorf to shoot. Ron was anticipating the Army would want their Instructors trained on the Barretts M - 200 as well, and thought that it would be easier to have them come to Alaska Survival than for him to fly around the country training everyone. Besides, that way, they could charge the government for the use of the facility. Bear now had a huge supply of wood stacked up, and chopped it into sections as needed. Actually, his kids would chop and split it, since he was assigning them chores, and splitting wood was one of them.

The next day they took the SuperGoose to Bear's place, and they set up to shoot. Josh, Sarah, and David went to the 300-yard line to shoot their AR-15's. Ron suggested they start on the 100-yard line just to verify Bear's zero, since he had boresighted it, but it could still be off. It took quite a while for Ron and Jake to get Jake's gun adjusted to him, but finally they got it exactly right. Jake extended the bipod, and was wishing for a monopod, but was SOL. When he got into a good shooting position, he got behind the scope and dialed up the magnification until he could clearly see the x-ring and call his shots. They put their Wolf Ears on, and got ready to shoot. Ron had broken out his spotting scope to confirm Jake's shots. Jake loaded the factory stock mag with 10 rounds of Match ammo, and got ready. The trigger broke unexpectedly, and Ron could see a strike right in the X-ring. Jake fired 5 more rounds and they were outside the x-ring, so Ron knew Jake was nervous, or there was a mechanical problem with the gun. Ron stood up, and Jake put the safety on the rifle.

"Jake, that first round was right in the x-ring, and the rest were outside. Why do you think they were outside?"

"Not sure dad, there isn't enough wind to affect my aim at that short of a distance. I guess I'm nervous and excited about shooting a new gun."

"OK, let's try your relaxation techniques before you shoot this next group, OK son?"

Jake settled down behind the rifle just as his dad showed him, and steadied his breathing and pulse. Finally he started reciting the 23rd Psalm. When he looked through the scope again, the image was sharp and clear, and the scope wasn't moving. He moved his trigger finger a fraction of an inch, and his first round went through the center of the x-ring. He managed to keep the scope focused on the x-ring, and squeezed the trigger 4 more times. When he finished, he could clearly see 5 bullet holes in the x-ring of the 100-yard sighting target, he knew he shot a group that measured less than 1" in diameter because the x-ring was exactly 1 inch in diameter. Jake cleared the gun, and walked over to his dad. "How was that Dad?"

"Not bad for your second group out of a new gun. Now we need to move you to the 300 yard range. Make sure you set the elevation knob to the 300-yard mark, and you should be right in the x-ring again."

Jake carefully carried his rifle over to the far side of the 300-yard line as far away from his younger siblings as he could so his muzzle bark wouldn't disturb them. He got set up again, and Ron joined him with his spotting scope. When he got set up behind the rifle, he looked through the scope and realized he had to dial up the magnification again. He had it set for 10x, so he cranked it up to 15x, then re-focused the scope on the X-ring. When everything was perfect, he stuck a loaded 10-round magazine in the action, cycled the action, and made sure he kept his trigger finger off the trigger until he was ready to shoot. The range was still hot because Josh and Sarah were shooting off to his left, so he checked his position, got behind the scope, and concentrated on the target. He went through his relaxation techniques this time without being told, and was totally surprised when he looked at the target, and he had 5 holes in the target. Judging by the impacts, he had shot a 3" group, but it was to the left of the x-ring by 1 inch. He looked over at his dad and said "I'm 1 inch to the left, what should I do - is it me, the gun, or is there enough wind on this range to move the bullet 1 inch at 300 yards?" Ron realized he hadn't taught his son how to dope the wind. The wind was practically still on the firing line, but he could see dirt and leaves moving down near the target. He asked Jake to look at the dirt and leaves around his target, and tell him what he saw.

"It looks like there's a slight breeze from right to left, but I can't tell how fast."

"Good eye Jake. When we get home, I'm going to give you a book on long distance shooting that teaches you how to dope the wind and mirage. Let's see, that windage adjustment is 1/8 MOA. A minute-of-angle at 300 yards equals 3-inches, and you need to move it 1 inch right, so I'd add 8 clicks of right windage, you'll probably be right of the target, since it's not exact, but it will get you close. Besides, this wind is variable, so don't worry about your group sizes for now."

Jake dialed in 8 clicks of right windage, and got behind the scope. When the sight was centered on the x-ring, and he was steady, he touched the trigger, and his first shot was through the x-ring, but on the right side of it. Jake kept firing, and 4 shots later, he had all 5 rounds inside the 3-inch x-ring. Ron thought "not bad for his first time with this gun. I'd love to see what he

does at 600 yards, but I don't want to discourage him." So he said "OK Jake, go ahead and practice on the 300-yard line for now. Once you get used to this gun, we'll move you back to the 600-yard line. Jake thought the 300-yard line was plenty tough enough, but didn't say anything. Ron wandered over to where his 3 other kids were shooting with Bear's 2 sons while Jake continued to shoot at the 300-yard line. Ron got behind his spotting scope, and was pleasantly surprised to find that Sarah was shooting about a 2.5" group, Josh was shooting right around 3 inches, and David was holding his own, but was averaging 4-5 inches. He was almost 2 years younger than Sarah, but Ron knew he was mature enough to be shooting at the 300-yard line with his older brother and sister. Seeing that everyone was doing OK, Ron broke out his M-25, and walked to the 100-yard line to sight his scope in. Once he was satisfied with his zero, he picked up and moved to the 300-yard line next to Jake. He hoped the competition would motivate him to try harder. They shot for several more hours until Ron could tell Jake was getting tired. Ron was proud of his son, he'd fired about 500 rounds downrange, and had reduced his group size by over ½". When they finished, Ron sent them downrange to retrieve their targets, then they packed up and went home. Ron showed their targets to Nancy, who spent the day with Anne helping her get her garden planted. Ron suggested that next time they come with Ron and the kids; since Anne could see fine now and Nancy needed the long-distance practice too.

"Ron, I'm having problems with this - you're really practicing so you can shoot someone. I don't know if I could do that!"

Ron sat his wife down and said "I know it goes against your nurturing nature to consciously take a life. Remember back when you and Sally were #1 and #2 on the women's pistol competition. Bear suspected your motivation for becoming such a good shot was to defend your kids. Ever since you shot Steve, you've hardly practiced at all. Do you want to talk about it?"

"I still have nightmares where I see his brains blown all over the church, except in my dreams the effects are much more horrific, and everyone in the church including me gets covered with brains and blood. I know it's not logical, and it was him or us, but that's why I haven't been practicing, I'm afraid if I do, the nightmares will get worse and more frequent."

"Have you talked to my mom about it?"

"Yeah, that's what we were doing today - she's helpful, but she still hasn't been able to crack through."

"Nancy, I know how you feel - I had nightmares for a week afterward about Steve, but in my dreams, he got back up and hosed the entire church, killing everyone. If you want to, I think we should talk to Bill about it, maybe he can help?"

"At this point I'm willing to try anything - let's give him a call!"

“Bill, its Ron, you busy? Ok, Nancy and I need to come over and talk about something. OK, we’ll drop the kids over at my Mom’s and come right over.”

“Ok, let’s get the kids loaded up and deposit them at Mom’s - Bill said he could see us.”

They loaded the kids up in the truck and drove to Anne’s house. All Ron said was they needed to talk to Bill, they might be gone a while. Anne hugged Nancy and told her it would be all right, then they got back in the truck and drove to Bill’s office.

“Bill, Nancy and I need some counseling. Remember when Nancy and I shot Steve Stone when he tried to shoot everyone at Sam’s wedding? We’re both suffering from the effects of Delayed Stress Syndrome. We’re both having nightmares. Nancy’s dreaming that Steve’s blood and brain matter is flying all over the room, and I’m dreaming he’s gets back up and kills everyone.”

“Ron, Nancy, I’m going to skip the psychobabble, and use the “Tough love” approach. Both of you are feeling inappropriate feelings. Nancy feels guilt for taking Steve’s life, and Ron feels guilt for making Nancy take the 3rd shot when he felt he should have killed Steve by himself. Well, you’re both WRONG! Nancy, you didn’t take Steve’s life, he forfeited it when he walked into that church brandishing a machine gun and threatening to kill everyone. All you did was save everyone’s lives, including your own. What would have happened to your kids, Nancy, if Steve had succeeded in killing all of you? And Ron, aren’t you two supposed to be a team. That’s what teams do, they back each other up when times get tough. Now you two need to pray about this together, and I’ll give you a list of bible readings that will help, but you need to help each other through this, and you need to suck it up and be there for your kids and each other. Now let’s pray together.” 15 minutes later, they felt relieved, and their guilt was washed away. They still needed to help each other, but they knew that they wouldn’t have as many nightmares as before. They drove back over to Anne’s house, picked up the kids, gave Anne a big hug, and drove home. They sat down on the couch together, broke out their bible, and started reading several Old Testament accounts of God sending the Israelites to kill their enemies, and a couple of chapters in the New Testament about love. Later, Nancy asked Ron if they could go shooting tomorrow at Bear’s. He gave her a big hug, and asked her if she wanted to invite Anne. “Sure - let’s ask her!” Ron called his Mom, who answered the phone “Anne’s Babysitting Service, please leave a message after the beep.”

“Real funny Mom, would you like to go shooting with us tomorrow at Bear’s place?”

“Sure, I think that would be fun - what time?”

“We’ll pick you up at 0800, and we’re flying the SuperGoose, so you get a nice comfortable seat with your grandkids!”

“At least I’m not up front with you doing a max-performance take-off!”

“Sorry Mom, I didn’t mean to scare you! See you at eight.”

When they hung up, they were giggling like school kids. Ron knew he was in for a long night, he just hoped he could shoot worth a darn tomorrow.

The next morning, they got dressed, made breakfast, which was now a lot simpler and easier than it used to be, since the kids were old enough to either make their own, or help. They got their stuff packed and out the door by 0745. When they arrived at Anne’s house, a familiar pickup was in the driveway, so Ron got out and knocked on the door. Gene answered, then Anne said “I hope it’s OK if Gene comes with us?”

“Sure, the more the merrier. It’s a little crowded in our truck, so you might want to take Gene’s. See ya over at the plane.”

Ron got back in his truck wondering what Gene was doing over there so early in the morning. They didn’t look guilty, so he probably didn’t spend the night. He remembered his Dad told him before he died that he wanted Anne to remarry, since she was too young to remain a widow the rest of her life. Ron got along with Gene OK, so his mom could do worse. They arrived at the plane minutes before Anne and Gene, and just managed to get everything loaded before they arrived. Gene carried 2 cased AR-15 rifles, and an ammo can full of .223 Match Ammo and their eye and ear protection. Ron and Nancy got up front, started the turbines, and let them idle until they were up to operating temperature, then bumped the throttles out of idle and started taxiing to the lake. Nancy called the tower for take-off clearance while Ron finished the checklist and configured the plane for take-off. They were clear to take off when they reached the end of the lake, so Ron advanced the throttles, and soon they were airborne. Once they cleared the far ridge line, he eased off the back pressure on the yoke to reduce their rate of climb, and flew to Bear’s lake. Ron made a very gentle water landing, and taxied out onto the ground using the ramp Bear had installed since the ground was so soft. Ron shut the plane down, and when the propellers stopped turning, he opened the cabin door and deployed the air stairs. The kids were big enough now to get themselves out of the plane safely, and Bear came over with an ATV and a trailer to help carry their guns and ammo to the shooting range. They piled everything on and secured it with straps. Bear drove over to the range while everyone else walked. Anne said she wanted to try the AR-15 on the 300 yard line, and Ron suggested they mount a 3x9x40 scope on her rifle. She thought that was a good idea, and when they caught up with Bear, he pulled out Anne’s rifle, said he’d be right back in a couple of minutes, and drove his ATV over to the lodge. He took a Simmons 3x9x40 AO scope out of storage, mounted it, and boresighted it using the laser boresighter, then put the scoped gun back in its case, and drove back out to the range. Ron suggested Anne take it to the 100-yard range to verify the zero. Ron went with his mom while Gene and Nancy got the kids organized and set up on their ranges. Bear had set most of the range up for 300 yard targets to give them enough lanes for everyone. Ron helped his mom set up, then whispered “Anything I should know about?”

“Gene showed up around breakfast like he usually does, and asked me if I wanted to go



shooting and go for a swim. I told him I had already promised you we'd go shooting at Bear's. I hope you're OK with me inviting him."

"Mom, I know you really like, and maybe love Gene. Dad told me to remind you that it was OK with him if you remarried, and he even wanted to encourage you to. I like Gene, he's a good guy. I don't think I'll be calling him Dad any time soon, but he seems to be OK with me calling him Gene."

"Thanks, I knew you'd understand. I think Gene is ready to ask me to marry him, but he's afraid I'll say no."

"OK Mom, if you want to marry him, I'm happy for you." Ron gave his mom a big hug, then finished helping her set up. She down the legs of her bipod, and looking through the scope, the target was nice and bright and steady. She put on her eyes and ears, and got behind the rifle. Ron put his on, and moved over to the spotting scope. Anne's first round went right through the x-ring, so she knew Bear's zero was right on. She fired 4 more rounds, and Ron thought she had just shot a group smaller than 1". She said "enough of this sissy stuff - let's get over to the 300-yard line, and see how the old lady does!"

Ron laughed and helped his mom carry the stuff over to the other side of the range. She set up next to Gene, who was shooting his National Match M-1a at the 300 yard line. Anne clicked up the elevation knob to allow for the longer distance, and fired a test round, then added another click. Her next round went through the X-ring, and she proceeded to put 4 more rounds in the X-ring. When she put her gun down, she saw Gene looking at her group with his mouth hanging open, then he got up, and she gave him a bear hug and a serious kiss.

Ron laughed "You two want to get a room?"

Gene finally got up the courage, knelt on one knee, and took a ring out of his pocket. "Anne, I love you, and I know I can never replace Roy, but I want us to spend what time we have left together, will you marry me?"

Anne waited about 100 milliseconds before she said "What took you so long Gene, of course I'll marry you!" and laid a real passionate lip lock on Gene.

Nancy turned to her kids and said "I guess this means you guys just got yourselves a Grandpa!" and everyone got up and gathered for a group hug. Nancy asked Anne "So when's the wedding?"

"How about tomorrow. I just wanted something small, with Steve and your family. Ron, is it OK if Steve gives me away again?"

"Sure! He's got practice already."

They all started laughing at that. Ron grabbed his shoe phone, called Bill, and handed the phone to Anne “Bill, its Anne. Gene and I are getting married tomorrow, can you do the ceremony on short notice? Great - see you tomorrow!”

“Ok guys we’re all set for tomorrow. I hate to cut this short, but we’ve got a million things to do. Ron, can you fly us back to Allakaket so we can get ready for tomorrow?”

“Sure Mom - let’s go!”

Bear helped them pack up, and gave Gene a big hug “Bout time Sir - I was wondering when you’d get up the nerve to ask her. Take care, and I’ll talk to you later.” After they loaded the plane, they got on board. Ron noticed that Gene and Anne were sitting together holding hands the whole flight. He was happy for his Mom, and hoped they would be happy together. After they landed at Allakaket and got unloaded, Anne and Gene said they had to meet with Bill, and they’d talk to them later. Ron got his family packed up and loaded into the pickup for the drive home. When they got home, Starsky and Hutch greeted them, and Ron noticed one or both puppies had an accident. “Jake, Josh Clean-up Detail!” They got out the paper towels, cleaned up the mess, and flushed it down the toilet. Jake and Josh picked up the puppies and petted them, then carried them outside in case they needed to go some more. When it was obvious they had already did everything they were going to, they carried the pups back inside and put them on the bearskin rug. A couple of hours later, the phone rang, and Nancy talked with Anne, getting the details for the wedding tomorrow. Everyone was going to meet in the chapel at noon. It would be just family, so they weren’t going to get all formal and fancy.

The next day, they met at the chapel, and right at noon, Anne marched down the isle wearing a simple dress. Gene was wearing a suit, as were Ron and Steve. Nancy made the kids wear their Sunday best. The simple ceremony only took 45 minutes, then Bill told Gene to kiss his bride, and they walked down the isle together. They had a small reception at Anne and Gene’s house. (Jim’s old place) which was twice the size of Gene’s house, so they were going to live there. After the reception, Gene whispered to Anne “Now its Honeymoon time!” To which Anne said “I hope I remember how!” and they both had a good laugh.

## Chapter 43 - Compensation

Monday Morning, Ron got an early phone call.

“Ron Williams”

“Speaking”

“Mr. Williams, this is Ronald Sugar, the CEO of Northrop Grumman Inc.”

Ron turned on his tape recorder, and said “How may I help you sir?”

“I know you’re probably taping this call, but that’s OK because I am too. I’ll get right to the point. I just found out what Jack Snyder was up to, and I can assure you that Northrop Grumman had nothing to do with it, or any foreknowledge of his illegal activities.”

“I know that sir, my question is what are you calling for?”

“Ok. I’m trying to avoid you suing Northrop Grumman over what Jack was up to. I’m prepared to offer to replace all your TurboGoose Aircraft with brand new SuperGoose aircraft.”

“That’s awfully generous sir, but I had no intention of suing your company - I was assured that your company had nothing to do with what happened, and suing people at the drop of a hat isn’t my style, I’m a Born Again Christian.”

“I’m glad you’re not planning on suing us, but we found out that the FAA will have to decertify all the TurboGoose airframes for Airline Transport in 10 years anyway.”

“Why didn’t I hear of this?”

“Ron, we have 10 SuperGoose aircraft sitting unsold taking up ramp space at the El Segundo Plant we need for something else. If I remember correctly, you have 8 TurboGoose aircraft we can trade you for 10 SuperGoose, if you sign a declaration that you won’t sue us over this unfortunate incident.”

“I can assume these aircraft are free of any unauthorized electronics?”

“Any unauthorized electronics as you call them have been removed from all aircraft in our possession, and we have notified previous buyers of the existence of possible unauthorized electronics, and how to safely remove them.”

“How about the avionics, the prototype was pretty Spartan?”

“We took your advice and upgraded the avionics suite in all our SuperGoose. They match the avionics and features of your current SuperGoose. I understand you have SuperGoose #1.”

“Yes Sir, the RCAF awarded me tail number 1 instead of a cash payment.”

“That was awfully nice of them. Anyway, the offer is open for the next 30 days.”

“What are you planning to do with our existing TurboGoose?”

“There’s a limited market for TurboGoose with collectors and private pilots who like or need amphibians.”

“You’re not planning on selling them to someone who is going to start a competing airline?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Ok, I’ll need that assurance in writing; I don’t want to subsidize any potential competition.”

“I’ll have legal work on it. So do we have a deal?”

“Can you e-mail the agreement to my attention? I’d like to review the agreement first, and have our corporate attorney review it as well.”

“That would be reasonable. Ok, as soon as Legal finishes with it, I’ll e-mail you a copy. If you want the aircraft, you’ll have to fly to Los Angeles to pick them up; we can’t spare the ferry pilots since they’re all tied up with deliveries.”

“One last question, how are the aircraft configured?”

“If memory serves, they should be configured like SG#1 including the conformal liquid oxygen tanks.”

“Ok, if you could put the agreement in writing, and e-mail it to me, I’ll arrange for ferry pilots to fly our aircraft to Los Angeles, and fly the new SuperGoose back.”

“Nice doing business with you Mr. Williams.”

Ron called BA and gave him the Reader’s Digest version of his conversation with Donald Sugar.

“Ron, the CEO of a multi-million dollar company doesn’t call up to chew the fat. Something must have happened for their legal department to tell them to settle. Maybe they came across a memo in Jack’s private files that made it through the corporate chain of command implicating

Northrop Grumman in conspiracy to commit espionage. Either way, that's a sweetheart of a settlement offer. They're basically offering you over \$2 Million worth of aircraft to settle out of court before you even file a lawsuit."

"What's this deal with the FAA decertifying all the TurboGoose Aircraft in 10 years?"

"My guess is some Senator that is in Northrop's hip pocket got the FAA to decertify the aircraft so that users of the TurboGoose would have to buy the new aircraft. Luckily for us, this little snag will cost them 10 planes, less the trade-in value of the old planes. They might get \$100 thousand from private collectors each for the TurboGoose, since no one in their right mind would buy an aircraft that would be decertified in 10 years for a commercial route."

"Man, when we get lucky, we really get lucky. It would cost us \$4 Million to replace those aircraft if he hadn't offered to exchange them for SuperGoose planes."

"Don't count your chickens just yet Ron!"

"What do you mean?"

"They could sell those aircraft out from under you, or any number of dodges. They might say that your aircraft aren't worth what they thought they were. I'll get with our Corporate Attorney to head them off at the pass. He knows several tricks to lock them into this settlement offer, or they will wind up owing us 5-10 times the settlement when we're through with them."

"OK BA, you take care of it!"

1 week later, BA called Ron "It's a done deal, our Corporate Lawyer talked to their Corporate Lawyer, and they're both satisfied that neither one of us is trying to screw each other. The agreement was signed this morning, so all you have to do is fly 8 planes out and 10 planes back in the next week - they need the space."

"Ok, I'll get the pilots lined up, and line up fuel stops on the way down and back." Ron called Don at the FAA office, and asked he could get hold of a couple of pilots that were qualified to fly a SuperGoose from Los Angeles to Allakaket. Don said he had recently upgraded his certs to include the equivalent of an ATP, so he could fly 1, and the IP still had his certs, so that was 2. Ron asked Don if Nancy could fly a plane back by herself. Don knew Ron would come up short pilots if he couldn't use Nancy, and it wasn't like she was flying passengers. She had almost half as many landings and take-offs in the SuperGoose as Ron did. Don said OK, but she'd have to fly formation on Ron so she wouldn't get in trouble. Ron asked if flying in trail would be OK. Don said that if they could stay within 5 miles of each other, and not fly in IFR conditions, he'd OK it. Ron reminded him that they would probably have to refuel up and back in Seattle, and probably at SeaTac, one of the busiest airports in the Pacific Northwest. Don realized that SeaTac's ATC was so huge that landing at a nearby commuter airport would be

just as bad, so he hoped Ron knew what he was doing. Ron said he'd call Don when they were ready to go, and give them a day's heads-up. They needed to meet them in Allakaket, and the planes stationed in Fairbanks would have to fly down separately. Don said he'd file flight plans for all 8 TurboGoose aircraft to fly from Southern Alaska to SeaTac, and south to Los Angeles. Ron said that the planes were sitting at Northrop Grumman's El Segundo Plant. Don knew that NG's plant had a huge runway, almost as long as LAX's, so they would be OK. He suggested staying overnight in LA and flying home the next morning to avoid Pilot Fatigue. Ron thought that was a good idea, since it would take forever to fly from Alaska to LA at 250 knots. Ron thanked Don, and said he'd get back to him.

He walked out to the living room, and told Nancy he needed a favor, and explained the deal for the new SuperGoose planes. Then he told her she'd have to fly solo 2300 miles back from LAX to Allakaket. At 250 knots and around 2,000 nautical miles, it would be a 10 hour flight, plus refueling time at SeaTac. Nancy realized Ron wouldn't ask her to do something that dangerous if 1) he didn't think she could do it, and 2) he badly needed her help. Ron told her they would be staying overnight in LA and flying out first thing in the morning, since Don recommended sleeping in LA overnight to avoid pilot fatigue from flying 24 hours straight. Ron said if it got really bad, they could stay overnight in Seattle as well. Nancy thought that would be a better idea, since they were in no hurry to get the extra 2 aircraft back, since only the original 8 had to get back to fly their routes. That jarred Ron's memory, and he called BA to have him arrange a 48-hr shut down of service so they could replace their aircraft. BA got right on it. Alaska Airlines wouldn't be happy, but stuff happened. He offered to fly urgent passengers via their corporate helicopters for the duration of the shut-down, which calmed Bradley down. Luckily it wasn't peak season, and they only made 1 flight per day from Anchorage and Fairbanks, and they had both 007's that could carry 8 passengers each. It would take longer, but they'd get there.

Ron made hotel reservations in LA at the Sheraton he stayed at last time, and looked up hotels adjacent to SeaTac, and found one that they could stay at if they needed to. 3 days later, they were ready to go, so Ron called Don at the FAA office, and asked him to be in Allakaket at 0800 tomorrow morning. He and the IP were going to fly a TurboGoose down, and they each were going to fly a SuperGoose back. Their other 6 pilots were taking off at first light to make Seattle an hour before them so there wouldn't be a traffic jam. Ron and Nancy would fly the last TurboGoose down, then they would each fly a SuperGoose back. Ron told Don they already had reservations at the Sheraton in El Segundo next to the El Segundo plant of Northrop Grumman. They were to land at the NG airfield, and take off with SuperGoose planes northbound the next morning. It would be a long couple of days, so they should bring some coffee and food. He'd already put porta-potties in each aircraft because 5 hours was an awful long time to hold it when you're drinking coffee. Ron brought a sheet for Nancy to cover herself up, and blankets and a couple of pillows in case she needed a nap on the way down. He suggested to Don that they do likewise. Ron decided he wasn't going to try to join the Mile High Club again, this trip was too long and dangerous, besides, he'd been a member so many times that it was starting to get old. He'd rather fool around on the ground where it was safer.

Ron and Nancy went to bed early, and dropped the kids off at Gene and Anne's place after dinner. They were already starting to call Gene Grandpa, and he was already starting to spoil them rotten.

The next morning, they were up around 0630, took showers, used the bathroom, drank some coffee, and used the bathroom again just to be sure their tanks were empty, then drove to the airfield. Both planes were pulled out of their hangars, and their engines idling. Ron was glad to see his orders were carried out, and everything that didn't come with the plane from the RCAF had been taken out and stored, including the paramedic kits. He still had his emergency ditch kit, and his first aid kit with him; as well as his shoulder holster containing the Colt Anaconda in .44 Magnum, and the suppressed Ruger 22/45. He had strapped on his fanny pack and his shoulder harness while Nancy made coffee, and packed a bag full of raisin-bran muffins. Nancy thought it was overkill, but Ron realized a large portion of their flight was over water, and they had no life raft, so he hoped they didn't have to ditch. He was confused by the big yellow package inside the door of the plane as he opened the passenger compartment to crawl inside. The sticker on the package said "USN pt. #xxxxxx-xxx, 1 4-man life raft, and 4-man ditch kit." Evidently this was BA's idea. Ron guessed there was one in every one of their aircraft. He'd have to make sure that he took them back with them on the flight home.

Don and the IP, who Ron found out was called Joe, showed up 5 minutes before 0800, and quickly climbed into the other TurboGoose and were in the process of pre-flighting it, when Ron came on the radio, and requested clearance for take-off. Ron called the other Goose, and gave them the inter-plane frequency in case they needed to call. Ron set his hand-held to the inter-plane, and left his main radio on Allakaket until they left their airspace, then he switched to the Alaskan Main frequency, and monitored it until he was out of range. Once he entered Canadian Airspace, he called the national air traffic control frequency, gave them his tail number, and requested permission to transit Canadian airspace en route to Seattle. Don must have done everything right, because the controllers knew about them, and told them to maintain altitude and heading until they cleared Canadian airspace. Nancy got sleepy, and said she was going to take a nap, and to wake her when they got there. A couple of hours later, they started descending in preparation for landing. The nose-down attitude woke Nancy up, and she climbed back in the co-pilot's chair. Ron landed without incident, taxied right to the pumps, and filled his tanks full of JP-5. He didn't have any hassle paying, so he guessed BA had made credit arrangements in advance. Once they were filled, he could see the other TurboGoose landing. He taxied back out to the runway while they taxied in. He got clearance to take off again, and contacted the Air Traffic Control Center in Seattle, and they directed him to the Southbound corridor heading 166 magnetic, and got a 10,000 foot flight level since they didn't have oxygen, or a pressurized cabin. At 250 knots, it would take 3-4 hours to arrive at the Northrop Grumman airstrip in El Segundo. A little over 4 hours later, they landed at the NG private airstrip, took all their possessions out of the aircraft, thanked the maintenance chief for letting them use their portable sewage dump facility, and loaded everything into a truck that drove them over to the new planes. Ron recognized Ronald Sugar, the CEO of Northrop Grumman from his internet website, and shook his hand. "I hope it's OK to leave the planes

here tonight, and we'll take delivery first thing tomorrow, so we can be airborne at 0800."

"My legal department already made the arrangements. Here's the keys to the aircraft so you can stow your gear aboard for the return flight. Thanks for working with us on this, I was really embarrassed when I heard what Jack was up to, and I wanted to express my personal apology."

"Don't worry, as we say in Hockey, No harm, no foul. Thanks for the planes." Ronald Sugar shook Ron's hand and turned to leave. Once they had their stuff stowed aboard the new aircraft, the Maintenance Chief drove them in the company van to the Sheraton across the street. "I'll be here at 0745 tomorrow to pick you all up. See you later."

Ron and Nancy grabbed a bite to eat in their restaurant, and took a shower and went straight to sleep, they were exhausted. Their alarm went off at 0700, and they took a quick shower, got dressed, ate a light breakfast of coffee and rolls, and met the van at exactly 0745. They were on the flight line at Northrop Grumman at 0800, and had the turbines idling minutes later. They thoroughly checked the aircraft, and when they were satisfied, Ron bumped the throttles out of idle, and taxied to the fuel depot, and they topped off their tanks. The Maintenance chief signed for the fuel, so Allakaket wouldn't get billed for it, since they delivered the aircraft with fuel in the tanks, and they only took around 100 gallons each to top off their tanks. Nancy was soloing for the first time, and was nervous and excited at the same time. The only difference between what she was doing now, and what she had done hundreds of times before was that Ron wasn't sitting next to her. She was glad she gave Ron a big kiss and told him she loved him before she climbed aboard her SuperGoose, just in case. Once her turbines were in the green, she too taxied to the runway right behind her husband. They left 2 minutes apart to minimize the risk of wake turbulence, even if it was minimal. They flew west until they reached the Northbound corridor, and flew for 5 hours, because they had to detour around the western edge of SeaTac's ATC to enter the pattern from the east. Once they landed, they quickly refueled, and Ron asked Nancy how she was feeling. It was only another 6 hours max until they were home, and the autopilot worked perfectly. She was sure she could land this plane at Allakaket, so she said they should keep going. Ron shrugged and climbed back into the pilot's seat of his plane, and requested take-off clearance. They had to wait for an inbound 767, and when it had cleared, Ron took off first, since he was the best equipped to deal with the wake turbulence of the big aircraft. 2 minutes later, Nancy followed him into the air. Her take-off was a little bumpy, but as soon as she cleared the area around the airport, the air smoothed out. They turned west and flew until they were in the Northbound corridor, and then they set their autopilots, and sat back to relax. 4 hours later, Ron called Nancy on the inter-plane frequency, advising her they needed to turn for Allakaket, and to follow him. Nancy took off the autopilot, and turned to follow Ron. Suddenly, the stall warning horn sounded, and she was falling like a rock. Somehow she realized she was in either an air pocket, or a down-draft, and pushed the throttles to max, and as her airspeed climbed above 85 knots, hauled back on the stick to regain altitude. Once she was straight and level, and breathing normally again, she called Ron. "Allakaket Airlines number 2 to Number 1, over."



“What’s wrong, Nancy?”

“I hit the air pocket from hell, I’m all shook up, but the plane’s fine, and I’m flying at about 5,000 feet 5 miles behind you.”

“I’ll be there in a second to check out the plane, keep her straight and level.”

Ron pulled a wingover and dove to 5,000 feet, then came up on Nancy’s 6. “I’m right behind you. Just keep it straight and level, and I’ll fly around you and make sure.”

Ron flew up next to Nancy’s plane, and saw that nothing was damaged on the plane, so he got back on the radio “Nancy, everything’s OK, how you feeling.”

“I’m going to put the plane back on autopilot and rest for a while. Call me when we’re close to Allakaket so I can get up and land the plane.”

“OK, I’ll stick close. I’m a mile back on your 6 o’clock high.”

“Thanks hubby, keep an eye on me while I take a nap. I’ve got the radio on, and the plane is on autopilot.”

“I love you Nancy, have a good nap. We’ve got about an hour until we reach Allakaket.”

An hour later, Ron came back on the air “Nancy, wake up, we’re here.”

Ron heard the best sound he could hear when Nancy said “I’m right here, let’s get these birds down, then I’m taking a real nap!”

“I’ll follow you down Nancy. OK, flaps to full, speed to 80 knots, and turn to 175 magnetic for final approach. OK, you’re looking fine, now slowly descend to 500 feet, and reduce speed to 65 knots.”

Right as she cleared the ridge, she started floating down to the lake, and Ron followed her down. She touched down kind of rough, but not bad considering what she’d been through. As soon as Ron was down, he reversed pitch to open a gap between the two of them, then followed her up the ramp to the fuel tanks, where they shut down and climbed down. Nancy ran to her husband crying, and hugged the stuffing out of him. “I thought I’d never see you back then. I’m so glad to be alive that I feel like kissing the ground, or maybe having another kid.”

“Well you COULD do the first one, but the second one would involve a surgeon getting a knife way too close to something I want to keep, but we can pretend anyway!”

Nancy made sure Ron understood how she felt with her next kiss, pressing her body into his.

Ron said “Maybe we should leave the kids at Mom’s tonight?”

Nancy said “Race you” and ran for their truck. Ron thought “No fair, I still have to unload our suitcases and throw them in the back.” Once the truck was loaded they drove home, and they made mad passionate love the rest of the night.

## Chapter 44 - The Morning After

Ron woke up around 10:00 the next morning in the arms of his wife. He realized how lucky he was; he had 4 beautiful kids, and a wife that loved him to death. He felt really protective right then, and was frustrated that something as simple as a downdraft or an air pocket almost took her from him. He swore to himself that was the last time they'd ever fly separate planes. He was stupid, he had the money, he could have hired pilots to fly the planes from Alaska to LA and back, but he wasn't thinking. He needed to talk to BA, and ask him to stop him from doing something stupid like that again. The company itself was worth over \$50 million, and he personally had between \$15 and \$17 Million in the bank, not including equity in all the subsidiaries of Allakaket Airlines. They spent the rest of the morning in bed just holding each other. Once they decided that they had to get up, (they were really hungry) Nancy slipped into her muumuu, and made brunch. Ron called his Mom, and gave her the Readers Digest version of what happened. Anne said not to worry; they'd keep the kids until they were ready to take them back.

She quit working for the doctor after she married Gene. She found out another fringe benefit of marrying a General who had never been married. He was almost as rich as BA, and had an excellent retirement package that guaranteed that he'd never have to touch his savings - so she was officially retired. Ron told her that now they had 2 extra Super Goose, if they wanted to go anywhere in the area, he could let Gene use the 007 whenever they wanted to, and they'd use the SuperGoose as their personal aircraft. Anne thought that was an excellent idea, since Gene had turned into a golf nut, and then he found out Elmendorf had a golf course that was open 6-8 months out of the year depending on the weather. He said that he'd teach her how to play so they could play together, and they'd still have time for the grandkids, and going shooting. Gene wanted Anne to teach him long-distance shooting. He couldn't beat Bear at the pistol range, but he wanted to whoop Bear's butt on the rifle range next year!

Ron called BA and told him his ideas. BA thought that would work out great, as long as the 007's weren't busy with Allakaket Airlines business, they'd be available to fly back and forth to Elmendorf, or anywhere they wanted to go within the range of the S-76. He agreed with Ron that he needed to start thinking differently. He had the money to hire people to do the risky stuff; he didn't need to take chances like that anymore. Next Ron called up the aircraft mechanic, and asked him to go over both planes with a fine-tooth comb. He told him about the incident with the air pocket/downdraft, and the coincidence that it occurred right after she disengaged the autopilot. Ron doubted it was a computer glitch, since the SuperGoose wasn't a fly-by-wire system, but used hydraulics, so whatever went wrong might have been a bad connection, or a faulty link. The Senior Aircraft Mechanic assured Ron he'd get right on it, and if he found anything, he'd be the first to know.

A couple of hours later, Ron got a cryptic message to come down to the maintenance area, and bring Gene; he'd want to see this. Ron called Gene, and said he'd be there in 10 minutes.

When they got there, the chief mechanic had the autopilot wired into a test bench, and told Ron and Gene to watch as he cycled the power on and off of the autopilot. He flicked the switch 4 times, and nothing, but the 5th time, there was a strange and unexplainable signal coming out of the autopilot. Gene put two and two together, and asked the mechanic to pull the autopilot unit from Ron's plane, and compare the signals. He was going to make some phone calls. He told the mechanic to tag this box with a non-removable ID tag, and log the tag number in his master repair log. Ron got a cold shiver, and called Bear, and told him to double check their security. If someone was really trying to kill him, and found out they missed, they might try again with a less subtle method. Bear told Ron to get back home and get his kids and everyone in or near the house, and keep his cell phone on. Bear told him to hand the phone to Gene. After a very brief conversation, Gene practically shoved Ron into his truck, and told him to take Anne and the kids, and take them all to his house. Ron drove as fast as he safely could to Anne's house, and told Anne to pack up enough for a couple of days, they were going to stay at his house. Anne saw the look on Ron's face, and packed an overnight bag, and got the kids loaded quickly in the truck. Ron was really glad he had his .45 on him right now. He got everyone into the house, and sent the kids down into the playroom. He gave Anne and Nancy the Reader's Digest version. Nancy actually felt better thinking someone had tried to kill them instead of almost having died in a random accident.

2 hours later, Gene called, they tested the other unit, and there was no malfunctions found. He was going to get hold of some people, and get to the bottom of this. Gene knew he was probably investigating an attempted murder, and he had a pretty good reason why. Northrop Grumman had over \$100 million reasons why, the US government wanted to buy some SuperGoose planes for the Coast Guard and Special Forces. It was a smaller 2-engine aircraft with only a pilot and co-pilot, and an amphibian, making it cheaper and better for Search and Rescue than a C-130, and could land on the ocean if the swell was small enough. With the addition of an air to air refueling probe, a KC-130 could act as a mother ship and flying gas station for a small fleet of SuperGoose aircraft that could search a much larger area faster than boats could. The original \$35 Million loss would now be more than \$100 Million, because there was no way the US government was going to pay more for a plane than the Canadians were. Gene wanted to get the autopilot controls to Elmendorf, where the technicians could read the codes line by line, and see if anyone tampered with the autopilot. He put the autopilot units in 2 sealed boxes, clearly labeled with the tail numbers of the aircraft involved, and flew them to Elmendorf using the 007. He told the pilot the nature of the flight, and if any aircraft flew too close, and appeared hostile, and he couldn't evade, he was to shoot it down. The pilot's pucker factor went through the roof, and he said "Yes Sir" even though Gene was in civilian clothes.

2 hours later they landed at Elmendorf, and he was greeted by the Base CO. Gene gave him a short briefing about what he thought happened, and the CO told him he had assigned his top aircraft avionics technicians to examine the autopilot. Gene flew back home, knowing the parts were in good hands. He called Bear and gave him a sitrep. The radar showed no aircraft in the air except their helicopter within a 200 mile range of Allakaket, so Bear stood down the security

alert, and called Ron and told him to Stand Down. Gene knew it would take a week or so for them to take the black box apart and run the code through the test equipment to do a line-by-line comparison. Since this was potential evidence in a criminal trial, a MP stood within sight of the black boxes at all times, and all chain-of-evidence paperwork was carried out. If someone tried to kill Ron, the CO of Elmendorf wanted the SOB's hide, and told them to make sure, and do a very thorough job so there would be no doubt the autopilot had been tampered with if it had in fact been tampered with. They also registered and photographed all the ID numbers off the case and the sub assemblies for later tracking in case this did turn out to be a criminal investigation.

Ron let out a sigh of relief when Bear called him and told him to Stand Down. By Stand Down, he didn't mean to go to Condition Green, more like yellow. A week later, the CO of Elmendorf called Gene in Allakaket. "Gene, my technician found 5 lines of code in the bad autopilot module that weren't in the other module, and they're both from the same lot and series, so it's not a board or component difference. Someone must have deliberately tampered with that box. They're looking up the codes now to see what command those 5 lines send where. Right now, I'd say we're conducting a Criminal Investigation, so I'm going to get an agent from the Anchorage FBI over here to observe."

"Good idea General. I'll get hold of a couple of friends of mine in the FBI, and get them up to speed on this investigation too. I'd lock down your avionics department until the FBI guy gets there, just to make sure." Gene hung up and made a few phone calls. Those calls started a cascade of activity, including hundreds of warrants they were going to serve on Northrop Grumman for the records and personnel involved with the avionics design, programming, installation, and assembly. Once the warrants were served, the Deputy Director of the FBI contacted the director of the FAA, and had them issue a Notice to Airmen telling them NOT to use the autopilot on the Grumman SuperGoose until further notice. The Los Angeles office of the FBI worked fast, and had the documents and personnel in custody with the exception of an aircraft mechanic who couldn't be located but they had a Federal BOLO out for him. Once they ran the trail of evidence, and found out that Ron Williams had personally cost Northrop Grumman over \$120 Million dollars in lost revenue they would have gotten by overcharging for the Grumman Goose, the list of suspects shortened dramatically. Several technicians were induced to turn State's evidence, and pointed the finger at Senior Management. There wasn't much of a paper trail, but they got enough to arrest and indict the CEO of Northrop Grumman for conspiracy to commit murder, and tampering with a commercial aircraft. He plead Not Guilty, and arranged bail of \$1 Million, and was released on bail.

1 week later, he died in a mysterious limo accident. The limousine he was driving in had stalled across 2 railroad tracks, and the oncoming trains couldn't stop in time, and shredded the limousine to the point that they had to use DNA records to positively ID the CEO. Ron read about it on the internet, and was pretty sure he threatened to squeal unless someone got him out of that jam, and they decided to take him out instead. One problem with high-powered "friends" is if you threaten them, they become high-powered enemies with the power to make you disappear. Northrop Grumman considered the matter closed, and shipped 2 new autopilot

units to Allakaket Airlines. Gene had the technician check them, and they were identical to the good unit, so Ron had them installed. The new CEO of Northrop Grumman disassociated himself and the company from his predecessor, and sent Ron a written apology, claiming of course that no one else at Northrop Grumman had any knowledge of his activities. With the death of the prime suspect, the Federal Prosecutor saw no reason why the technicians should get a free pass; and since the State of California wasn't a party to the immunity agreement, he sent his case documents to the State of California, which prosecuted the technicians for a whole raft of felonies, that put them behind bars for a long time. Gene considered the matter closed, and life slowly returned to normal at Allakaket Airlines.

With the conviction of the technicians involved, and the death of the prime suspect, the FAA realized that the single autopilot unit had been tampered with in a conspiracy to commit murder, and lifted the Notice to Airmen. Ron still didn't trust his autopilot, and never flew with it engaged again. He kept the aircraft, even though he was pretty sure the whole thing was a setup by the CEO to try and kill him. The next week, Ron, Nancy, Gene, Anne, and the kids flew to Bear's shooting range to get in some shooting. Jake was ready to shoot at the 600-yard line, so Ron uncased his M -25 and joined him on the 600-yard line. Nancy, Gene, Anne, and the 3 younger kids stayed on the 300-yard line. Bear and his sons came down to join them, and soon Gene and Bear were involved in some "friendly" competition. Bear didn't know that Anne had been working with Gene until it was too late, and Gene had won \$50.00 from Bear after beating his pants off at the 300-yard line. They were both shooting match-grade AR-15's with Simmons scopes to keep things equal. While they played, Anne asked her son if she could borrow his M -25 and try the 600-yard line. Ron agreed in a heartbeat. She got prone behind the rifle, and proceeded to put 5 shots into a 5-inch group. Jake looked up and groaned. His best group was 6 inches - he realized he needed to buckle down and concentrate, 600 yards was a LONG way! His next group reduced by ½ inch, and steadily crept down to the 5-inch mark over the afternoon. Ron was pleased that Jake was concentrating so hard. He could only stay in the Zone for a few seconds at a time, but he was getting better! When she was done shooting Ron's rifle, she convinced Gene to buy 2 more of them for them. Ron was glad he had his FFL dealer order a dozen rifles and scopes, since the one-upmanship had started. It might end with everyone equipped with the latest M - 200 Barrett rifle!

When they got home later that afternoon, there was a message on Ron's voicemail to call Sam and Ralph in Atlanta. He called them back, and Sam gave him the good news - they were expecting, and they wanted Ron and Nancy to be the godparents, since Doc and Bert were already the grandparents. Ron thanked and congratulated Sam and Ralph, and invited them up to the lodge for the summer, so they could spend a couple of weeks together. He suggested they ask Doc and Bert to come along as well, since he knew Doc loved to hunt Caribou. Sam said she'd call Doc, and call them back later. Ron called Bill and asked him what the hunting regulations were on private land. Bill told him that as long as he wasn't charging anyone for the right to hunt on his land, all they needed was their individual hunting licenses, and the appropriate tags. Ron asked him if he knew where to get some more 4x4 ATVs, and a bigger garage to house them. He had 3 units, and he needed 3 more with trailers. Bill said he'd get

back to him.

A couple of hours later, Doc called Ron back and said he wanted to take him up on his offer to spend 2 weeks hunting on their land. He'd love for Bert, Sam, and Ralph to be able to join them. Ron told Doc to get to Anchorage with their hunting licenses, tags and rifles, and he'd take care of the rest. He suggested that they can the caribou they shot and take it home with them, since they'd never be able to eat all of it, and he had plenty more caribou where that came from. Doc thought that was an excellent idea, and said he'd give him a week's notice to let them know they were ready to come up, but it would probably be later in the season, since he had surgeries scheduled for the next month or so. Ron thanked Doc, and said he'd see him later that season.

Two weeks later, Ron got an e-mail from Ronnie Barrett, asking if he could bring 6 people with him to go hunting at his lodge. Ron thought about it for a minute, and realized he had offered Ronnie the use of his lodge, so he said "Sure Come on up - so when do you think you'll be here?"

Ronnie replied: How about next Wednesday.

Ron replied that would be OK, and to plan on canning any Caribou they shot so they could take the meat home.

Ronnie thanked him, and said he appreciated his ideas, since he grew up in the country, and you never wasted anything.

Ron asked him to e-mail him their flight number, and arrival date and time, and he'd meet them in Anchorage. They needed to provide their own Alaska non-resident hunting licenses, and caribou tags, since they weren't a licensed hunting lodge. Ronnie said they'd take care of it, they were just glad that Ron had offered. The group was him, his wife, and 4 older teenage kids. Ron felt better, since Ronnie didn't invite 5 of his hunting buddies. Ron showed Nancy the note, and asked if she wanted to stay in Allakaket with the kids, or join them at the lodge. She said she'd rather stay in Allakaket since she didn't know Ronnie Barrett from Adam. Ron told her Doc, Bert, Sam and Ralph would be coming later that year, and she said she'd love to see them, and would make arrangements with Anne and Gene to take the kids for 2 weeks. Ron thought he could batch it for a couple of weeks, then remembered he needed to order several cases of quart Mason glass jars and lids to can all the Caribou they would need to can in the next couple of months. Ron called BA, who said he'd order double the number of jars and lids from their supplier, and they could pick them up in Anchorage later that week with their weekly shipment. BA said the best way to get an order that large back to Allakaket in 1 piece would be to send the Super Stallion to carry it as a sling load, since that was over 4,000 glass jars, and that took up a lot of room, but didn't weigh that much.

2 days later, The Super Stallion made a trip to Anchorage, and picked up a load of supplies that

was almost as big as the helicopter, but much lighter since it only weighed 10,000 pounds. They had packed the loads on pallets, and set the pallets into a huge Kevlar reinforced cargo net with the glass jars on top, and hooked it to the cargo hook of the Super Stallion. It took a while to get back, but it would have taken 10 trips with the Super Goose. They gently set the load down right next to the General Store, and flew off to land at the Heliport and refuel. Ron knew the pilot knew what he was doing when the shopkeeper called and told him that nothing was broken from the trip.

Ron remembered Ronnie Barrett would be flying into Anchorage in a few days, and decided to call BA and have him give Alaska Airlines a heads-up so Ronnie and his family would get the VIP treatment. He asked BA to ask them where he should meet them, at the VIP terminal, or if they had a spare slot for Allakaket Airlines if he could pull up to the gate, and have their baggage transferred directly to his aircraft. BA said he'd get back to him, and Ron checked on some other things. He got an E-mail from Ronnie with his flight number and arrival time, and he forwarded it to BA so he could make the arrangements with Alaska Airlines. Once that was taken care of, Ron asked Nancy if they wanted to go swimming, and use the shooting range. Nancy thought that was an excellent idea, since the kids were rambunctious and driving her nuts. They put their stuff together, and Ron warmed up the truck. They piled on in, and drove to the swimming pool, then once they were all settled down, Ron asked them if they wanted to go to the range. He hoped all the time shooting at 300 yards with scopes would pay off at the 100-yard range with open sighted .22 rifles.

When Jake and Josh pulled their first targets, Ron could see that it had, their groups were half the size they were last year. Jake shot a .65 inch group, and Josh shot a .75 inch group. Considering they were using William's peep sights instead of 10x scopes, that was a darned good group, and Ron told them so. Then Sarah came waltzing in with a .50 group and started rubbing it in. Jake said that he should have held her under longer at the pool! Ron laughed, thinking "Sibling Rivalry is Alive and well" then told Jake to be nicer to his sister, one day she'd bring home one of her friends, and he'd fall head over heels for her. Josh heard this and started making gagging noises. Jake was 14 going on 15, and starting to notice girls, but Josh was 13, and girls were still the enemy. Sarah, a very mature 12 year old, just shook her head, thinking "what a bunch of boys!"

Ron took them over to the pistol range, and everyone got quiet. Ron unloaded his carry ammo, loaded up some 230gr. FMJ practice ammo, and ran the target out to 25-yards. Ron felt anything closer was too easy. He holstered his weapon, made sure the kids were clear, and had Nancy take the club timer off to his left, and press the button when his hands were all the way up in the surrender position. As soon as he heard the beep, Ron swept his t-shirt back, drew from his IWB holster, and as he was drawing, once the barrel was pointed downrange, swept the safety off and took a firing grip on the gun. As soon as his Meprolight 3-dot sights were lined up on the target, just below the x-ring, Ron squeezed off his first shot, and as soon as the barrel was back down out of recoil, squeezed off the second round. He kept this up until the gun locked open. He took his ears off, and reeled in the target. All the rounds were in the kill zone



of the B-27, but he wanted to know how long it took to draw and fire 14 rounds from concealment. Ron was surprised to learn it had taken over 7 seconds to unload the magazine into the target. The good news was the first round went off just under 2 seconds after the beeper, which was pretty quick. Ron knew he could go much faster with an open carry IPSC rig, but the point of this exercise was speed and accuracy from concealment.

Nancy went next, and took 9 seconds, but her first round got off 1/10th of a second quicker than Ron's, and he checked the timer, and the main difference was her shot to shot interval was ¼ second longer than his, probably due to his stronger forearm muscles. Cutting and stacking all that wood must have been worth something after all. When she finished, the kids lined up to try the same drill, except Ron insisted all but Jake start from a low ready. Jake wanted to draw from his shoulder holster, since Ron had told him about the bear encounter and Sam. It took longer for Jake to draw from his shoulder holster with the 7" barrel on the suppressed 22/45, but his shot-to-shot interval was much quicker than his dad's. When Ron checked the target, he found out why. Jake's target looked like someone had blasted it with a shotgun full of 00 buck from 20 yards. Most of the rounds were in the kill zone, but not enough for the lack of stopping power the .22lr round had. Ron told Jake to do it again, and slow it down enough to ensure that all the rounds were in the kill zone. Jake's time went up by 2 seconds, taking 10 seconds to fire 15 rounds, but they were all in the kill zone.

Jake wanted to try again with his Colt Anaconda, but there were too many people around, and Ron didn't bring any practice ammo with him. He promised Jake he'd try and remember to bring it next time. Jake said that they could just stock it at the shooting range, since several people in Allakaket were carrying .44 Magnums, including the guides and pilots. Ron thought "Out of the mouths of babes..." and realized Jake was right, if they could practice with their carry guns, it might save a life in the bush. Besides, Ron hadn't practiced in a while. He called up the FFL dealer in town, and asked her to deliver a case of .44 Magnum practice rounds to the range, and bill Allakaket Airlines for it. She said "Yes Sir, I'll have the driver deliver it in 10 minutes." Ron knew they could wait for 10 minutes, so he went and talked to the range master, who assured him the backstop could handle .44 Magnum rounds, and he'd warn people that they were going to be making a lot of noise on the pistol range, so they could add earplugs under their muffs. Ron thought that was a good idea, and grabbed a box of earplugs, and passed them around, saying "If we're going to shoot those cannons indoors, they're going to get loud, and we need earplugs under our earmuffs to make sure you don't hurt your hearing."

10 minutes later the range master walked over with 4 boxes of .44 Magnum practice ammo. Ron bought it because it closely matched the spec of the ammo his Mom and Dad got from the gunsmith. It was a Cowboy action load that was loaded to 70% of SAMMI spec, and considered a light round. Ron went first, sent a target out to the 25-yard line, made sure everyone had eye and ear protection, and turned to the range master, who gave him a thumbs-up, dumped his carry ammo, put it in his pocket, and loaded the practice ammo. He shot from the low ready, and Nancy ran the timer, then she shot, then Jake. Ron was amazed, their targets looked identical, and Jake had shot faster than his mom, probably because she hadn't fired a .44

magnum in years. They kept shooting for an hour, and finally Ron called a halt because they had shot up all four boxes of ammo. By the end of the 4th box, you couldn't tell their targets apart, and Nancy was faster than Jake, but not by much. Ron was proud of his son, he had learned to shoot the big hand cannons when he was 14 too. He remembered why, and turned to Nancy while he cried. He got over it quickly when he remembered where he was, and they hurried out to the car. Jake asked his Mom why Dad was crying, and she said he was remembering what happened to Sam, his dog. Jake kind of understood, and walked over to Ron and gave him a big hug, saying "I love you Dad!" Ron lost it, and didn't care he was right on Main Street. Once they got control of their emotions, they piled into the truck, and drove home.

Jake and Josh took care of Starsky and Hutch, who had each gained about 5 pounds since they got them, and Ron had bought leashes for them so Jake and Josh could leash-train them when they took them outside to water the plants. Ron was impressed when he didn't see any accidents this time, but Josh and Jake didn't take any chances, and got Starsky and Hutch outside as quickly as they could. Nancy took out a pile of newspaper, and the gun cleaning kits, and they set up in the garage to clean their rifles and pistols. They field stripped the rifles, and cleaned out the chambers and barrel of their revolvers. Once they had cleaned them and lubricated them, they reassembled them, and put the rifles back in their cases. Ron and Jake reloaded their .44 Magnums and stuck them back in their holsters, then cleaned the 22/45's and reloaded them. While they were cleaning guns, Nancy made lasagna for dinner, and stuck her head in the garage to tell them dinner was ready.

## Chapter 45 - Long-Range Hunting?

Ron flew to pick up Ronnie Barrett and his family, and was surprised when he was diverted to the Alaska Airlines VIP terminal until he saw Ronnie's Gulfstream parked in a VIP slot. Ron shut down and walked over to greet Ronnie. "I've got a favor to ask. I need a T&E session on a new rifle while we're here. The Pentagon came up with another idea after we re-designed the Bushmaster cannon, and asked us if we could up-scale the M -200 to fire the 25mm round that the Bushmaster did. I thought they had lost it until they explained that they wanted to have a couple hundred rifles in their inventory that could use explosive ammo to quietly destroy a high value target."

"Why not just use a missile or rocket?"

"I asked them that too, and they said that a rifle-launched 25mm HE round taking out a SCUD rocket or a fuel depot would have plausible deniability, but a missile or rocket left a visible trail, and too much debris. During Desert Storm, they used the M82a1 to punch holes in Scuds, so when they tried to launch, they blew up on the launch pad. Problem is the BMG-50 round isn't High Explosive - not enough room. The 25mm Bushmaster round is about the smallest round that carries a HE bullet. Could you imagine being over a mile away from an enemy fuel depot, and with 1 shot, turning the entire depot into a huge mushroom cloud? Anyway, I sent the idea to my engineers, and they said, "sure, we'll just build everything bigger!" so I brought the rifle with me, since I know Elmendorf has a 1,000 yard range."

"Ronnie, we've got a 1,000 yard range too at Alaska Survival Inc. Allakaket Airlines owns it, and my SEAL friend Bear runs it for me. We could test it there, it's remote, secure, and best of all, just a half-hour by air from my lodge." Just then, 2 huge baggage handlers showed up to transfer their baggage to Ron's plane. Ron offered Ronnie the right seat so they could talk on the way over. He got the rest of his family secured, then locked the door, and walked through the cockpit door, and sat in the right seat. Ron had started the pre-flight checklist, and taxied to the runway. Ronnie was watching him like a hawk, since his pilots never let him inside the cockpit. Ron called the tower and received permission to take off.. He asked Ronnie if he wanted a nice gentle take-off, or one that would make an e-ticket ride at Disneyland seem tame. Ronnie reminded him they had a million-dollar prototype in the cargo compartment, and Ron said "Guess that means nice and gentle?" and they both got a good laugh. 2 hours later, they landed at Bear's lake, and taxied up to the parking area. Ron called ahead, and Bear met them with an ATV and a trailer so they wouldn't have to haul the heavy case of ammo and the rifle to the range. Bear walked over to Ronnie Barrett and said "Sir, may I shake your hand. I wanted to tell you I know for a fact your rifles saved SEAL lives, because I was one of the ones saved." Ronnie gave Bear a "guy hug" and said that he loved hearing stuff like that, because the Liberals were always demonizing his rifles, and made him feel bad. Ronnie asked Bear if he wanted to watch the T&E session. Bear nodded his head vigorously, and climbed aboard his ATV to pull the trailer over to the 1,000 yard line. He even put the case up on his bench, and

almost herniated himself picking up the 25mm ammo case. “What do you have in here - Lead?”

When they opened the cases and the ammo box, Bear knew why it was so heavy. This rifle had been built to shoot the same round as the Bushmaster, and it was man-portable - barely! Ronnie told Ron that the gun had been test-fired for safety, but not accuracy, and the scope had been boresighted and adjusted for 1,000 yards. The huge Swarovski scope had a build-in BDC turret, but the lowest mark on it was 500 yards and it went out to 3500 yards. Ron noticed the scope was even bigger than the one mounted on the M -200. He asked Ronnie Barrett, who said that he hoped it could engage targets out to 2 miles away, so it had a huge 200mm objective, and a zoom eyepiece that went from 10-80 times magnification. Ron thought that at 80 times magnification, any object that was 2 miles away would look like it was about 100 feet away, but the field of view would be like looking through a soda straw. Ron and Bear set the rifle up, and Ron adjusted the stock to fit, then noticed the magazine only held 3 rounds, then he remembered how huge those rounds were!

Ron made sure the range was clear, and everyone was safely behind him, then he cycled the action, released the safety, and got behind the scope. The bipod/monopod setup meant that the sights were locked on the x-ring, so all he had to do was hold the gun still and touch the trigger. The recoil was stout, but no worse than the heaviest 12-gauge he had shot. Bear was looking through his spotting scope, and saw the first round go tearing through the x-ring. Ron steadied down, and fired the other 2 rounds, and they went through the x-ring as well. Even with the higher recoil, the gun was very accurate, and he shot an 8-inch group, which was twice the size of his best group with the M -200. Since they didn't have any target stands farther than 1,000 yards that was all the testing he could do. Ron told Ronnie the gun worked as well as the M -200, but the recoil was twice as much. Ronnie told him the 25mm round had way more energy than the 50cal, and the level of recoil was expected. Frankly he was amazed that they could shoot that monster round out of a man-portable rifle. Ron told him that if it weren't for the suppressor, he couldn't, the recoil energy would probably break his shoulder. He explained to Ronnie that the muzzle blast of a BMG-50 or any round larger was a sizeable portion of the felt recoil. Ronnie said that's why his first rifle had a huge muzzle brake like a tank cannon. The suppressors were better at restricting muzzle blast, and the gun was much quieter too!

Ronnie said he had a couple of High explosive rounds on him if Bear had a suitable target. Bear pointed out a huge boulder that he said was about 2,000 yards away. Ron looked at it, and figured he could hit it, so he asked Ronnie to get the ammo, he felt like busting some rocks. Ronnie handed him 3 rounds, and Ron asked if he could use Bear's table, since he couldn't get the elevation off the ground to shoot that high. Bear cleared his spotting scope off the table, and they moved the rifle to the table, and Ron sat in Bear's chair. He raised the bipod as high as it would go, and lowered the monopod until the crosshairs of the scope were centered on the rock with the BDC set to 3,000 yards since it was uphill Ron knew it would shoot longer than it was. The rock was so huge that he could hit it regardless, but he wanted to turn that rock into dust. His first round hit dead center, but only blew some big pieces off the boulder. The next round hit close enough to the first round to blow a huge hole in the boulder, and knocked even more

pieces off. Ron knew he had 1 round left, and if he could hit the same spot, he might disintegrate that rock, so he really took his time, and the sight suddenly stayed rock still on the hole he had started, and he touched the trigger without even realizing it. The sight of the 10-ton boulder exploding was spectacular. Ronnie told him that was what the Pentagon wanted the gun to do, hit targets a couple of thousand yards away and blow them up. Ron said this rifle would do the trick. Ronnie thanked Ron for the test, and tried to hand him a check. Ron said "This one's on me!" and handed Ronnie Barrett his check back.

Bear helped them reload the SuperGoose, and they flew to Ron's lodge at HelpmeJack Lake. They got set up and ready for hunting. Ron showed Ronnie and his family the setup of the lodge. He liked the rustic atmosphere, and Ronnie's wife said the wood-fired stove was like the one she used to use when she was a kid in Tennessee, and brought back fond memories. Ron commented she might not be too fond of it once they got done canning 2 Caribou's worth of meat, and making sausage out of the scraps. Ronnie laughed, and said they did that all the time when they hunted at home in Murfreesboro. Ron explained your average male Caribou weighed about the same as a cow. Ronnie said "Holy Cow!" and they all got a good laugh. Ronnie commented on Ron's shoulder holster when they got indoors, and Ron hung it up on a peg. He told Ronnie they were in the middle of bear country and going anywhere unarmed was foolhardy. Then he told Ronnie not to shoot any wolves he saw since they were habituated to humans, and not a threat. Ronnie said "If you say so!" They made dinner and got to sleep early, since Ron wanted to be out hunting at first light.

The next morning, they were up at dawn, and were ready to go right after breakfast. Ron put on his shoulder holster and fanny pack, then they walked out to the garage, and got out 6 ATVs. With 6 ATVs and 7 people, Ronnie and his wife doubled up with 2 of his smaller kids. Ron passed out helmets and goggles for everyone, and gave them the basic safety lecture, then they hitched trailers on 5 ATV's and headed out. 2 hours later, they drove up to the knoll on their side of the Caribou grounds. Ron quickly shut down, and put his finger to his lips, then whispered to Ronnie that the Caribou were on the other side. He wanted the shooters only, with their rifles loaded and safeties on, to follow him quietly and he'd show them where he wanted them to set up. Ron brought his .308 Browning A-bolt and a shooting pad, and they followed him single file up the narrow game trail. There were 5 shooters including him, and he got them safely spread around, and told them each to pick a separate bull. He told them NOT to shoot the prime bull, because he was the one that did all the breeding, and not to shoot any pregnant cows. He said they could tell because their bellies were bigger than the non-pregnant cows, and they kept to themselves. 2 minutes later they were ready to shoot, so they all put in earplugs and got ready to shoot. Ron stuck up his hand where they could see it, and started counting down by lowering fingers. When he got down to 3, he lowered his hand right to the trigger, and shot when he would have reached 0. 5 shots rang out, and 5 mature bulls dropped. Ron told them to put their safeties on, and hike carefully back to their ATV's and drive them over the hill. As they drove over the hill, the herd spooked.

Each one of the shooters drove his ATV with a trailer on it right to their bull, and started

skinning them. Once the skins were off, Ron showed them how to brain tan them in the field. Ronnie was amazed, he had heard something about Brain tanning, but never had a chance to try it. Ron told him “God gave each animal just enough brain to tan their hide with.” Ronnie found that funny, and hoped no one would try to tan him, or they might not have enough brains for the job! Once Ron started cracking skulls and started the brain tanning process, Ronnie knew why they never did it in the South, it Stank - BAD! Ronnie was glad he ate a light breakfast, or he might have blown it all over the field. They got through the stinky part, and were glad to be able to wash the stinky gunk off their hands, and get down to butchering their animals. Ron handed out trash bags to put the meat in, and when they were finished, they packed everything up, and made it back to the lodge before dark. “I don’t know how you do it year after year Ron, Brain tanning would just about make me buy my meat at the grocery store!”

“There’s a lot of stuff you have to do for yourself out here, brain tanning skins is just one of the stinkier ones.”

They put the meat in Ron’s huge chest freezer, and laid the skins on top of the smokehouse roof to dry, and went inside for dinner.

The next morning, Ron broke out 2 cases of quart canning jars and lids, and the canning gear. He showed Ronnie’s wife how to use it, then spread a piece of visqueen over the table, and a large polyethylene cutting board, and took out his Bowie knife to slice the meat into quart-sized pieces. Ronnie quipped “Now that’s a knife!” and Ron quipped back “You just ain’t Whistling Dixie there pardner!” Ronnie called a truce to the bad pun war, and asked how he could help. Ron said that he could help run jars over to his wife, and help her set up jars to cool. The kids kept themselves entertained in the lodge and out from underfoot. Ronnie was amazed at how many jars of meat they could make out of 5 caribou. Ron told them to keep all the jars, since his friend Doc Richards was coming out later, and he’d shoot 2 bulls when they were out there, and he’d have all the meat he’d need for the winter. They made sausage out of the leftovers, and when they were finished, Ron and Ronnie took the skins and drove them down to the lake to rinse them off.

“Ron, I don’t know how to thank you - You barely know me, yet you opened your home to my family, and even took us hunting. I’d like to do this again sometime if we get the chance.”

“Ronnie, I’d like that.”

Once they had the skins thoroughly washed and dried, they rolled them back up, and drove to the lodge to hang the skins on the smokehouse roof to dry again. 2 days later, when the skins were dry, Ronnie said he had to get back, he couldn’t take too much time away from his business. Ron said he understood, if he didn’t have a Business Manager he trusted absolutely to run things for him, he’d be exhausted since they not only had the airlines, but the power, phone, and general store to run. Hearing this, Ronnie was incredulous, he thought he was busy just

running Barretts Firearms. He asked Ron how he did it. He said “I pray a lot!” Ronnie said “Amen Brother!” They packed everything up into the SuperGoose, and Ron flew them back to Anchorage. Ron parked next to Ronnie’s G, and helped them load the plane, then they shook hands and Ronnie climbed aboard his jet to fly home. Once they were gone, Ron got back in the SuperGoose and flew home to Allakaket.

2 weeks later, Ron got an e-mail from Ronnie Barrett to expect a large package for him in Anchorage the next day. The message said it was a small token of thanks. Ron got a call from the UPS office in Anchorage the next day. There was a huge box from Barrett’s Firearms inc. Ron hoped Ronnie didn’t ship him a 25mm rifle, since he had no need for a gun that shot high-explosive rounds over a mile away. He told UPS he had a delivery run tomorrow, and to allow the delivery company Allakaket Airlines used pick it up. Ron flew the delivery run himself, since Steve was sick with the flu, and met the driver in Anchorage at 1000 sharp. Ron knew it wasn’t another rifle by the size of the box, but figured it might be another case of BMG-50 Match ammo. He flew the entire load back to Allakaket since that’s where it was going anyway. One of the baggage handlers helped him load the crate into the bed of his pickup. The suspense was killing him, and Ron opened the crate. Inside was a case of BMG-50 ammo, packed in ammo boxes, and a note.

Ron,

Thanks for everything. Here’s a case of ammo to keep in practice in case we come up with any other bright ideas we need you to test. BTW: The Pentagon bought 100 of the 25mm Barretts Rifles for Special Forces.

Ronnie

## Chapter 46 - Snipers in Training

Ron got a call from Gene the next day, and said that they needed to meet, and Bear, BA, and Bill needed to be there. They'd meet at the indoor shooting range to keep the kids occupied. Ron called BA and Bear, and they said they were on their way. Next he called Bill, and Bill was wondering what was up. They loaded the truck and drove to the range. Sally volunteered to stay with the kids at the range and keep them occupied.

Gene opened the meeting when everyone was there. "I've got some bad news for you, it seems some of our esteemed politicians have decided to spend us into the poorhouse, and are now looking for something to bail them out. Several of the more Socialist Liberals suggested nationalizing the Gold, Silver, Oil and Timber industries. So far the Conservatives are holding them off, but if the economy goes in the toilet, which it probably will shortly after they institute National Health Care, they might come after our Gold mine, and anything else not nailed down and take it by force. I've also heard rumblings from the rest of the world that if we default on our international loans, the foreigners holding the debt will seize "national assets" to pay for the debts. Right now, the FedGov is over \$3 Trillion in debt, and we're paying interest payments only on the debt. The good news is everyone in the know thinks they can string things out for 10-20 years, but the bad news is barring a major miracle, the US and probably the world economy is going in the toilet."

Ron said "So why you telling us? If we can't do anything about it happening, it's just 1 more thing to worry about!"

Bear answered for Gene, "Ah Grasshopper, what you fail to understand is being forewarned is to be forearmed! If we know it's going to happen in advance, like that fiasco in Saudi Arabia, we can take steps to lessen the impact. I can guarantee if TSHTF, Allakaket Airlines is going out of business for good. People will be too worried about basic survival to think about hunting and traveling. Second of all, we will find ourselves under attack, both from within and without. Our very own Government might send troops to confiscate everything we have, or another nation could try it. That leaves us between the proverbial rock and hard place. Ron - Gene, Bill, and I are probably going to be in rocking chairs by the time this happens, which leaves you and BA holding the bag so to speak, and most of our militia members are in their 40's now. We need to start training the kids. We don't need to turn them into Mujahadeen just yet, but the earlier we start the better. We've got enough hardware to repel an invasion, unless a major army attacks. Gene, maybe now would be a good time for one of those Cruise Missiles?"

"I keep telling you, you hairy overgrown Aquatic Freak, it's not time to "Shoot the Bastards" yet!" BA and Ron recognized the Claire Wolfe quote, and practically fell out of their chairs laughing, while Anne and Nancy looked at the men like they had lost it! When they finally came up for air, Bear said "OK, we need to make concrete contingency plans just in case this comes true. For now, we tell no one outside this group except Sally, we don't want to start a



panic.”

BA and Ron started talking, and asked Bear and Gene to put their heads together, and come up with the most likely scenarios and their best defense against them. Ron and BA would start socking away all their profits into stuff they’d need to survive if TSHTF. This would be just like the Saudi fiasco, only worse. Bill, BA, and Ron went over Allakaket Airlines’ cash position, and tried to find holes in their preps. The only holes they could find were they were too dependent on goods manufactured elsewhere, and they couldn’t make their own fossil fuels, except possibly biodiesel. They needed Jet Fuel and Avgas to keep flying. Jet fuel was kerosene based, and Avgas was really high octane gasoline. Ron said he’d check with the mechanic about alternative fuels like methanol to run instead of Avgas. BA showed Ron his Net Worth spreadsheet, and if they sold everything, Allakaket Airlines was worth over \$100 Million, including the Airline, Power company, General Store, Shooting Range, pool, and greenhouse/aquiculture. The mine itself was worth between \$20 and \$50 Million depending on proven reserves, and the price of gold at sale. Ron knew that selling out wasn’t an option, because when the money ran out, they’d be at the mercy of whomever they sold out to. BA and Ron had over \$15 million each in the bank, between investments, cash, and other investments not tied to Allakaket Airlines. Ron suggested slowly maxing out their fuel storage capacity, especially AVGAS if it could be preserved and stored long term, since the smaller bush planes were more fuel economical. Ron knew the JP-5 that they got was a military fuel, and was already stabilized, but he wondered how long they could store it. They also needed to double or triple their storage of canned goods and staples, and invest in long-term storage techniques for staples, like 5-gallon buckets with lids, oxygen absorbers, etc. The thing that really rattled Ron was the invasion scenario. They could lose 1/3 the population of Allakaket in a major attack, and they would run out of SAMs before the Chinese or Russians ran out of Air transport. Ron realized right then the best thing he could do was pray, and prepare for the things he COULD deal with.

Several weeks later, Doc Richards sent Ron an E-mail, asking if it were OK for them to come up and spend a week or two at their lodge. Ron called Anne and asked if they could watch the kids. Anne suggested buying a wall tent, and letting the kids sleep outside, since it was warm enough, and Starsky and Hutch were big enough to warn them of any predators. Ron said he wasn’t too sure about that idea, since either he or Nancy would have to join them, or Nancy would be out there every 5 minutes making sure they hadn’t been eaten by a wild animal. Anne scolded her son, and said “Now Ron, Nancy’s not that overprotective!”

“Compared to you mom?”

“Ron that was a cheap shot!”

“Sorry Mom, just call them as I see them!”

“Oh, really, I seem to remember a 14-year old boy that scared his mother half to death when

her brother's best friend told her they nearly died in a plane crash!"

"Sorry Mom, I guess I wasn't all that easy to raise."

"You were a good boy, you just scared me half to death on occasion!"

"Thanks Mom, I guess I shouldn't be so hard on Nancy, after all neither Jake nor Josh have expressed an interest in learning how to fly!"

"So far - just wait until they realize that anyone without a pilot's license either has to bum a ride, or pay someone to fly them anywhere they wanted to go in Alaska."

"Ok Mom, I'll talk it over with Nancy. Bye, love you Mom!"

"Love you too son - take care!"

Ron walked into the living room and asked Nancy what they should do. Nancy agreed with her mom, and said that she wouldn't be out every 5 minutes to check on them, maybe every hour or so! Ron walked down to the den, and told the kids the good news. Jake was jazzed because he liked hunting. Josh, Sarah, and David were OK with it, but would rather stay home with their toys. Ron said that Starsky and Hutch were coming too, and that got Josh's vote. Ron realized they would all need new sleeping bags, since they grew enough since the last time they were hunting that they probably didn't fit into their bags anymore. Ron called the General Store, and she said they had a bunch of child and teenage sized sleeping bags, and she'd put 4 aside that should fit Ron's kids. He asked her if they had a good tent, and she said she'd add one to the list. Ron remembered air mattresses, and she recommended the self-inflating type, or she could guarantee several punctured air mattresses, since kids were hard on stuff. Ron thought the storekeeper knew her stuff, and thanked her. Nancy finished dinner, and they sat down together. Jake and Josh were both eating a second helping, but Sarah and David weren't such chow hounds yet. Sarah was watching her figure, and David hadn't hit his growth spurt. Ron wondered why a 12-year old girl in the middle of nowhere would watch her figure. Ron didn't know what to say, and hoped Nancy would talk to Sarah about eating sensibly. The twiggy look was out. When they finished dinner, Ron took Nancy aside and asked her. "I make sure Sarah's eating OK, it's just her friends are feeding her all this BS from the teen mags that are still glorifying the skinny teen image. I'm pretty sure it's a backlash against the rampant obesity of the 90's couch potatoes, which was probably a backlash against the 80's soccer kid movement."

"Can we get her some better role models, like some teenage magazines written for Christian teens, that emphasize positive things instead of how skinny you are, and how far your pants fall off your hips? Or which parts of your anatomy are the latest fads to get pierced?"

"OK Ron, you made your point - I'll talk to her, and we'll get her some better magazines to

read, maybe she'll hand them out to her friends, and change a couple of viewpoints.”

“Thanks Nancy, I know it's not easy raising teenagers this day and age. We should be thankful we live here in the middle of nowhere, otherwise, their friends would be in gangs, and doing drugs. At least we don't have that to worry about!”

Ron picked up the camping gear the next morning, and got everything organized. Nancy said she should stay with the kids in the cabin while Ron picked Doc and his family up in Anchorage. Ron thought that was a good idea, because judging from last time, Nancy would want to pack the plane full of stuff for a 2-week trip. Luckily Jake and Josh were big enough to handle packing the plane. Ron packed his Barretts M -200 and an ammo can full of ammo just in case one of them wanted to try shooting it. Jake packed both M-25's, and the other kids packed their AR-15's, and Ron made sure there was enough ammo for each of the rifles. They took off shortly after they were loaded, and Ron dropped Nancy and the kids off at the lodge. Once the plane was unloaded, he turned and taxied back to the lake, and flew to Anchorage just in time to pick Doc and his family up. Once their baggage was loaded, he taxied to the fuel pumps, filled all his tanks, and flew back to the lodge. Sam positively glowed, and Ralph was acting like the proud papa. Bert and Doc were talking about being grandparents, and how badly they were going to spoil the grandkids. Doc was amazed when he saw how small HelpmeJack Lake was. Ron told him not to worry, the new SuperGoose could float on in to this lake like a Cessna, and then he'd reverse the props, and they'd stop like he'd thrown out an anchor. True to his word, they floated in like they were on a parachute, and Ron stopped with half the lake remaining, and taxied to the lodge. Once they were stopped, Ron opened the doors and helped everyone out, then the kids and the dogs ran to greet everyone followed by Nancy. She gave Sam a girl hug, and told her “congratulations Mom, so when's the baby due?” Sam was only in her 3rd month, and wanted to go hunting. Her OBGYN didn't see any problems, since she was only firing one shot. Nancy showed them the lodge, and their rooms. Doc asked “where are the kids sleeping?”

Ron said he was going to pitch a tent out front, since they were young enough to enjoy sleeping on the ground. Doc had to agree with that - if he didn't sleep in a comfortable bed, he didn't sleep at all! Ron told him they were all set up to can all the Caribou meat they shot, since they didn't believe in trophy hunting, and the best way to preserve the meat was to can it. Bert volunteered to help Nancy, she was an old pro at canning, since they used to have a garden and orchard at their house. Ralph and Sam wanted to ask Ron about the boxes they saw strapped to the bulkheads of the aircraft. Ron said he was a State Licensed Paramedic, and the Super Goose was configured for SAR and Medevac including a full paramedic kit, onboard liquid oxygen, and a radio to talk to the hospital while in route. He told them the Hospital bought 2 SuperGoose aircraft, and the state of Alaska had a dozen for SAR and Medevac stationed throughout the state. All Allakaket Airlines pilots were trained paramedics, and all the small commercial pilots had to be trained to EMT II, and the guides had to be trained to First Responder, but most opted for EMT I since the state paid for the training and the gear. Ralph said that was a neat setup. Ron told them the hunting trip would only take a day, since they

drove ATVs out to the Caribou grounds, and brought the meat home using the trailers attached to the ATV's. Ralph thought that was a good idea, since Doc and Bert were getting up in years, and couldn't handle a multi-day trip. That was the main reason Doc hadn't gone hunting for the last couple of years, he couldn't sleep unless he was in a comfortable bed. Ron said that if they wanted to, Bear had a Survival School half an hour away with a 1,000 yard range, and they could try their hand at long-range shooting. Ralph said the farthest he'd ever shot was 300yards with a Bushmaster HBAR AR-15 and a scope. Ron said they had 4 of those with Simmons Scopes, and 2 M -25 M-1a's with high-powered scopes, or if they really wanted to go long, he brought his Barrett's M -200 that fired a BMG-50 round over 1,000 yards, and had a Swarovski scope to match. Ralph definitely wanted to try that, but Sam didn't want to risk her pregnancy. Ron thought that was smart, and if she wanted to, she could shoot the AR-15's.

The next morning, they got on the 6 ATV's. Ron, Nancy, Jake, Doc, Sam, and Ralph were all going hunting. Doc had taken 3 7mm Magnums out of his gun closet, and sent them to the gunsmiths to be checked over, and boresighted. Ron had told him to zero the rifles for 200 yards, since 99% of their shots were between 150 and 250 yards away, and 50 yards was only a ½" difference in point of impact. Ron made sure they had earplugs and eye protection before they left, and before they got on the ATVs, everyone put on helmets and goggles. They stopped at the knoll 2 hours after they left the cabin, and carried their rifles and shooting pads up the trail. Ron got everyone set up, and got their earplugs in. They had already selected which animal they were going to shoot. With Ron, Nancy, and Jake shooting, they'd have plenty of meat for the winter, even with Jake and Josh eating like pigs. Ron didn't bother counting down this time, and when his crosshairs centered on the neck of the bull he wanted, he squeezed his trigger. He heard 5 more closely spaced loud booms, and 6 bulls were down and not moving. Ron had them get up, put the safeties on their guns, and hike back to the ATVs. When they drove into the clearing, the herd stampeded. They all drove up to the caribou they shot, and Ron, Nancy, Jake and Sam made quick work of skinning their bulls. Sam was quick because it smelled, and since she was a surgeon, she really knew how to use a knife. Doc knew what he was doing, but wasn't in a hurry, and Ralph didn't have a clue. As soon as Sam was finished with hers, she showed her husband how to skin a caribou, and he caught on quickly. Ron volunteered to brain tan the hides while they butchered the carcasses. Nancy and Sam took him up in a heartbeat. Jake wanted to do his own, but when he got a whiff of the brain of his dad's caribou, he decided to let Dad do them all.

Sam was the quickest at butchering, followed by Nancy and Jake. Again Doc wasn't in a hurry, and Ralph was doing his best. Ron had all the skins brain tanned, and they were through butchering the meat well before evening, so they drove home after Nancy insisted her husband take a bath in the pond and get the stench off! They made it home with an hour to spare, and Bert said she had fun watching the kids. The next day they canned the meat and made sausage out of the leftovers. Just like she said, Bert was an old pro, and showed Nancy a couple of tricks that made it go faster. They had everything canned before dinner, and were finished with the sausage before bed time. Ron went out to check on the kids, and they were laying in their sleeping bags with Starsky and Hutch pulling guard duty. He went back in the house and told

Nancy everything was fine. He hoped he would get lucky, but Nancy told him he still smelled like Caribou brains, and wasn't getting anywhere near her!

The next morning Ron volunteered to kill 2 birds with 1 stone, and wash the skins, and himself. Nancy handed him a bar of pine soap, and told him to use a lot of it! He came back smelling like a pine tree, but Nancy said it beat smelling like the inside of a caribou's skull. After breakfast, Ron asked them if they wanted to go shooting at Bear's. Everyone wanted to go, so Ron flew them over in 2 trips, since the plane only had 8 passenger seats, and Ron's 6 plus Doc's 6 equaled 12! Ralph was having fun shooting the Barretts on the 1000 yard line, when he heard a scream, and rushed over to see his Mother in Law collapsed, and Sam working on her. She yelled to Ralph "It's her heart, we need to start CPR and evacuate her to a hospital ASAP. Ron ran to the SuperGoose, grabbed his paramedic kit, and ran back. He took out his Cellular phone, and Ralph took charge of her, since he was an ER doc, and knew exactly what to do. Ron called Doc Miller told him what happened, and that she was in the care of 2 Atlanta MD's, and her husband was a neurosurgeon. Doc Miller told them to transport ASAP. Ron told them he was going to get the stretcher, and get the plane set up to transport her to Anchorage.

15 minutes later, they were ready to fly her to Anchorage, and they carried her to the plane. Bear said he'd stay with the kids so Nancy could fly right seat, in case they had to fly somewhere after dark. Ron broke all speed rules getting the plane airborne, and set the plane for maximum speed to Anchorage. While he flew the plane, Nancy worked the radio, and got emergency clearance to land right at Alaska Regional Hospital. Doc came forward, and gave them the good news that Bert was stable. Ron flew the entire route at 330 knots, and landed at 120 knots without deploying the flaps, then reversed the props and applied the brakes so they stopped right out in front of their door. Ron did an emergency shut down to get the props slowed, and the attendants took Bert and loaded her on a gurney. "We've got her Ma'am" they told Sam, who was still working on her mom when they were trying to get her out of the plane. Once they were all out, Sam grabbed Ralph and hugged the stuffing out of him and cried. When she regained her composure, they walked into the ER entrance. Steve, the Director of Emergency Services, greeted them at the door. "She's going to be fine, but she needs bypass surgery. You guys did an amazing job getting her here in as good a shape as you did."

Ralph introduced himself as Dr. Raphael Lacombe, Chief ER Resident at Granger Memorial, then Sam introduced herself as Samantha Lacombe, Emergency Surgical Resident at Granger. Doc Richards introduced himself as a Professor of Neurosurgery at UNC Chapel Hill, and the husband of the patient, Bert Richards. Steve said "No wonder she made it, two ER docs and a Neurosurgeon in the same family." Ralph said that they would have been up the creek without a Lear Jet if it weren't for Ron's State Paramedic kit, which had all the drugs they needed to give her to stabilize her heart. Steve was amazed, he never thought that those kits would come in so handy. He realized that the Paramedic Kit, and the Medevac capabilities of the SuperGoose equaled or exceeded Anchorage's ALS ambulances. Plus the fact that this ambulance could fly faster than 300 knots made it a very fast ambulance. Steve told Ralph and Sam they were really short of trained ER Docs and especially ER surgeons, and he could offer

them a job in Alaska paying 50% more than they made in Atlanta any time they wanted to move. Ralph said they'd have to think about it, right now they had more important things on their minds. Steve apologized and said "of course. I'll have the Chief Resident give you an update as soon as possible."

15 minutes later, the Chief Resident and the head of Cardiac Surgery met the three of them. They addressed the 3 visiting doctors as Dr. so and so, and showed them a lot of professional courtesy, including letting them review Bert's charts, EKG, and ECG results. Ralph and Sam agreed that she needed an immediate bypass, and she was next for the OR, and they needed to leave and scrub up. Ralph and Sam knew better than to ask to scrub in, since having relatives working on relatives could cause problems. Doc asked if anyone had gone an EEG, but the Chief said that unless she lost consciousness, there was no point. Doc insisted, saying that he thought she might have thrown a clot, which caused the heart attack in the first place. The "Oh Shit" look on the Chief's face said it all, and he grabbed his radio, and ordered a whole bunch of tests STAT to make sure she wouldn't stroke out on the table. Half an hour later, a much relieved Chief came back to report Bert's EEG was normal, and there was no sign of blood clots or pre-stroke conditions, so they were going to do the surgery ASAP.

2 hours later, the Chief came into the Chapel to report that Bert came through the surgery with flying colors, and could go home in a week after she recovered from surgery. Doc huddled up with Ralph and Sam, and said they needed to get back to work, and he'd stay here with Bert. Doc turned to Ron and asked him if he could fly Sam and Ralph back to the lodge to get their stuff, and then fly them to Anchorage so they could catch a flight tomorrow. Ron gave Doc a hug, and said he'd take care of Sam and Ralph, and he'd be praying for Doc and Bert. Doc gave Ron a hug back and said "I'm sorry I forgot to thank you - you saved my wife's life."

"Doc, your daughter and Son in law did all the work, I just flew the plane. Besides, talk about strange coincidences, I guess you never thought that the gear you insisted the state of Alaska include in their kits would save your wife's life!"

Doc shook his head in amazement, then asked Ron to take care of Sam and Ralph. Ron said he could count on him, then Doc turned back into the Chapel to be alone and pray. Sam and Ralph reluctantly came with Ron since they realized the hospital would use any excuse they could get to terminate or suspend them. On the way out, they ran into Steve again, and Ralph asked him point blank if they had any problem with doctors being armed on Hospital property. Steve said the Administration had zero problems with armed docs, and half the staff had CCW's, but it wasn't because they needed them. Even a big town like Anchorage had 1/10 the crime rate of Atlanta.

Ralph said "Were you serious about giving us a 50% raise?"

"Well, how much were they paying you?"

Ron grabbed a pad and paper, and wrote two figures.

Steve said “I could easily double those!”

Ralph said he was definitely interested, and said he’d have to talk to Sam about it. Steve handed them his card, and said that he was in charge of the entire Emergency Services program for the hospital, and the county, and he had the authority to hire them. He said if they’re backgrounds checked out, he could hire them on the spot! Ralph was real tempted, but said he’d have to talk to Sam, and then mentioned they weren’t scheduled to fly to Atlanta until tomorrow. Steve pulled out the stops, and said that if they’d stop by and talk to him tomorrow, if they didn’t decide to move, he’d pay their airfare back to Atlanta. If they stayed, he’d pay up to \$10 Thousand in moving expenses. Ralph shook Steve’s hand, and asked him what time tomorrow? Steve said he got in at 0830, so any time after 0900 would be fine. Ralph said he’d see them at 0900 tomorrow, then looked to Ron, who was nodding OK. Steve shook their hands, and they turned to walk out to the plane.

The first thing out of Sam’s mouth was “Why didn’t you take it?”

“I thought you liked the south?”

“I did - when I was young, now it’s just another Big Liberal Slime pit!”

Ron spoke up “Guys, I’ve got a news flash, keep this under your hats, but several economists were predicting the collapse of the US economy in the next 10-20 years. The last place you’d want to be would be in a big Southern City, the Blacks would riot in a heartbeat as soon as the welfare checks stopped.”

“That’s exactly what the guy Bear sent us to told us, we were right in the middle of Ground Zero if TSHTF living in Atlanta. I’m seriously thinking walking back in there and telling Steve we’ll take the jobs!”

“So what you waiting for? Ron and Nancy are only a couple of hours away by air, and he owns the airline. Doc and Bert are almost twice as far away, and they might not live much longer.”

The 4 of them turned around, and walked back inside to find Steve. Ralph talked to Steve, who said they had an opening for a new Chief Resident for Emergency Medicine, and they needed a new Staff Emergency Surgeon. He had checked with Granger, and they verified all their qualifications, and the fact that Sam had successfully completed her residency. Since she would now be Staff, he could bump her salary by 30% over what he quoted. Ralph asked if they could have a week or two to pack, and ship their stuff to Anchorage. Steve said they could have two weeks, and he’d pay for them to ship their stuff to Anchorage, up to \$10,000. He knew of a nice apartment complex close to the hospital that catered to doctors, and waived the first and last requirement. They had a nice 2 bedroom/2 bath apartment for rent cheap. Ralph asked

where he signed up. Steve said “You just did.” He handed Ralph 2 employment contracts for their signature, listing the salaries Steve had mentioned, plus free medical and dental for the entire family, a month paid vacation to start, and profit sharing that was deposited into their 401K accounts, instead of state retirement, since they were a private hospital. Ralph read and signed his contract, then Sam signed, and they gave each other a big hug. Steve shook their hands and welcomed them to the hospital. The 4 of them walked out of Steve’s office, and ran into Doc. Ralph gave him the good news. Doc didn’t look so hot, and Ron was worried something was wrong with him. They sat down, and Ron got a glass of water. Doc finally said “she’s gone!” Sam couldn’t believe her ears, didn’t want to believe it, but Doc’s face said it all.

“She never woke up from the anesthesia. They were transferring her from the recovery room to ICU when she coded. It was the best way for her to go, she never felt a thing.” Sam suggested they adjourn to the Chapel, and they all helped Doc walk.



## Chapter 47 - Photographs and Memories

After a long prayer session in the Chapel, Doc announced that since Ralph and Sam were relocating to Alaska, he wanted to move to Allakaket. Ron said “Are you sure?”

“Ron, I never told anyone this, but the only reason I stayed there so long was Bert was in love with the big huge Southern Mansion. When we found out we couldn’t have kids, it devastated Bert, and she withdrew into herself and the house, which came to represent everything she had lost. I had several offers from other Medical Schools, but Bert always wanted to stay there. She’d only leave the house to go to church or dinner. After 30 years as a Neurosurgeon, I needed to work like you needed 2 heads, but staying there was driving me stir-crazy. I had to get out and do something. Someone at the school suggested consulting on risky or dangerous surgeries. I tried it, and I was good at it. I was amazed at how much hospitals would pay to consult on 1 surgery. I did 5-10 consults per year, and doubled my savings each year. The house sits on 100 acres of prime real estate, and developers have been offering anywhere from \$10-50 Million to me to sell, but we never would. I loved Bert, and I’ll miss her, but it’s time for me to move on.”

“Doc, if you want, I’ll fly back to Chapel Hill and help you close up the house, box up and ship anything you want, and help you sell the property.”

“Thanks Ron, I could use the company right now.”

Sam asked Doc “What are we going to do about a funeral?”

“Bert hated them, so she told me not to have one for her, so I hope she won’t be upset since we went into the chapel and prayed for her and us.”

“Doc, none of my relatives had funerals either and they’re all buried next to the lodge. So I know how she feels.”

“Bert wanted a direct cremation, I’ve got to make the arrangements with a local funeral home, and so if you excuse me, I’ll be right back.”

A hospital social worker walked up to Doc, and he told her Bert’s wishes, and she said she could make the arrangements, and deliver a nice ceramic urn with her ashes to him sometime in the next couple of days. Doc motioned to Ron, and asked him to give her a delivery address in Allakaket for Bert’s ashes. Ron gave her the General Delivery address in Allakaket, and she thanked him. Doc turned around and they walked out of the hospital, and got in the SuperGoose and left for Bear’s shooting range, where they left the kids. Sam and Ralph sat on either side of Doc on the way home, and Sam was holding Doc’s hand. “Doc, I’m sad that Bert never lived to see her grandchildren.”

“I’m sure she’ll be smiling down from heaven when you give birth to your first son!”

Sam thought “How’d he know, I just found out last week that we were having a boy?”

Sam told him he was right, and they wanted to name their son Bert, in honor of Bert Richards.

Doc grinned, and said “Just as long as you don’t name the next one Ernie!”

Sam didn’t get it - she wasn’t raised with TV, but Ralph got it, and if he wasn’t belted into his seat, he would have been rolling in the aisles. When he could finally speak coherently he said “Doc, I don’t know who writes your material, but he’s good - maybe you should be a comedian!” Ralph explained the Sesame Street joke to Sam, who chuckled, but didn’t find it as hysterically funny as Ralph did. They landed at Bear’s lake an hour later, Ron had already given Bear a heads-up, so he could prepare the kids for bad news. Bear decided to break it to them, since they had just met Bert, and it would give them time to deal with it, instead of putting Doc through it all over again. They landed and taxied right up to the parking spot. As soon as they got down, Jake, Josh, Sarah and David ran to Doc and gave him a big hug. Doc felt like a grandfather for the first time in his life, and cried happy tears, then knelt down, and said that he was OK; he knew Bert was in Heaven with Jesus. Sarah wouldn’t let go, so Doc gave her an extra hug, and then let her go. She ran back to her brothers, and Ron told them to pack up and get ready to go back to the lodge. Nancy stayed with her kids, and Ron flew Doc, Ralph and Samantha back to the lodge, then turned around and picked up Nancy and the kids. It was getting dark by the time he got to the lake, but not dark enough that he couldn’t see. He turned on the landing lights to give him a better idea of where the surface of the lake was, and performed a very good landing, considering it was almost an hour past sunset. The way the sun set in Alaska during the summer meant that it really didn’t get dark out. They weren’t far enough North to have 24-hour sunlight during the winter, but it meant that it didn’t get pitch dark either as it did further south. The landing light really helped, and Ron was glad he had it installed, even though this was the first time he had used it with the SuperGoose. While she was waiting for Ron to get back with his family, Sam had made dinner, so Nancy was thankful, since she was drained.

The next day, Ron loaded his family into the SuperGoose and flew them back to Allakaket, packed a bag with a couple of weeks of clothes, including his “shaving kit” survival kit, packed his P-14 and 5 magazines, left the shoulder holster and fanny pack on, but left room for them in his bag, kissed Nancy and gave the kids a hug, then drove back to the airport. His SuperGoose was fueled and idling when he got there, so he stowed his baggage, and flew to the lodge. When he got there, Doc said they were going to leave everything here they didn’t need, since Ralph and Sam were coming back in 2 weeks or less, and he’d be back as soon as he packed up and sold his house. They all had a carry-on and a checked bag. Ron had already made arrangements with the airlines to bump all 3 of their tickets to First Class and seat them next to him. Ralph and Sam had left their Suburban at Doc’s house, so they would be flying together to North Carolina. Ron parked the SuperGoose at Alaska Airlines VIP terminal, and a baggage

handler loaded their baggage in the back of the truck, and said he'd make sure it got aboard their flight, handed them 3 boarding passes. Doc noticed they were First Class, with VIP codes. He thought "RHIP" and the driver dropped them off right at their gate.

They climbed the stairs to the terminal, and he let them through the security gate. They presented their boarding passes, and the gate worker remembered them from when Ron asked her to intercept his bags, and made sure they were checked through to Delta in Seattle. She handed them their Delta boarding passes, and had written the gate number and flight number on a post-it. They were seated in First Class with Doc and Ron taking up one row, with Sam and Ralph behind them. Ron took out his Tom Clancy book for the long flight, and Doc was soon asleep. They landed in Seattle a couple of hours later, and they had to walk to the other side of the concourse to get to the Delta side of the SeaTac terminal. Ron suggested to Ralph that they get out their CCW's and follow his lead. They walked up to the Security Gate, and Ron showed his CCW while he was holding Doc by the elbow, and Ralph and Sam flashed their CCWs as well, and they were escorted through Security without stopping. Doc was amazed, and asked Ron how he did that. "Doc, I just took advantage of a weakness in their security. The TSA goons aren't the brightest crayons in the box, and when they saw the 3 of us with Federal CCW's and as bad as you look, they just assumed you were in our custody and let us all through."

"You SOB; they probably thought I was a criminal!"

"Hey, would you rather deal with the idiots and get harassed and patted down, or cruise through security with us? I'm sure you'll never see those jokers again!"

"I know you've got a Federal CCW, but when did Ralph and Sam get one?"

Ralph reminded Doc about that incident in the hospital parking lot. He said that Bear had made arrangements through a friend of his General Shepard to get both of them Federal CCW's, which was a good thing, because it prevented that liberal weasel of a DA from prosecuting them for unauthorized carry.

"You mean you two are carrying guns right now?"

"Doc, it's just like the American Express Card, we don't leave home without them, they've come in handy more than once since then."

Doc realized he needed a major attitude adjustment, he still believed all the Liberal BS the media had been feeding him about guns, and here he had been given several examples of evidence to the contrary. Armed private citizens didn't CAUSE crime, they Prevented it! That thought shook him to the core, and he wondered what else the media had been lying about. They boarded the Delta flight to North Carolina, and 6 hours later, they were met at the baggage pickup by Nelson. He was confused by the absence of Bert, or Mrs. Richards, as he knew her.

Doc told him she died in Alaska, and he came back to pack up the house, sell it, and move to Alaska. Nelson's usual impassive demeanor broke down. "I'm deeply sorry for your loss sir; I really liked you and Mrs. Richards."

"Thank you Nelson. Don't worry; I'll take care of you. You've been a loyal servant all these years, and I've had a trust fund already set aside for your retirement. Any ideas about what or where you want to go?"

"Really sir, I've no where to go, and I'm too young to retire. I imagine you won't need a Chauffeur in Allakaket, but perhaps a butler or manservant?"

"No, but I could use a friend and a roommate. Ron could arrange a house that would be big enough for the two of us, and we could both retire and spend our time fishing and hunting."

"If you say so sir!"

"Nelson, please stop the subservient stuff, Bert might had lapped that up like a cat laps cream, but I bugs the heck out of me - My name's Doc, ok Nelson?"

"Yes sir Doc."

"Well that's a start. OK, Nelson, we need a lift back to the mansion, and then if you could help Ron pack up my personal clothes, my library, and gun collection and help him ship them to Alaska, I'd appreciate it. Make sure you include all your personal affects as well."

"Yes sir Doc, it would be my pleasure."

"Nelson, you're doing it again."

"Sorry sir, old habits die hard."

"Well I hope these subservient ways of yours die fast!"

Nelson swallowed hard, and opened the limousine. He'd miss driving the big beautiful Lincoln Continental Limousine. He wondered what it was like to be retired. He realized he'd rather be with Doc than by himself in some retirement community in Miami Florida. Besides Doc might need him anyway, and he'd grown attached to Bert and Doc. He'd known no other life since his adulthood, it was what he was. He got them all loaded, and realized that everyone except Doc was packing heat. He had a friend that was a tailor, and it irked him when he spotted sloppy tailoring that allowed a gun to show when you wore a suit, and he told Nelson that none of his customers who routinely went armed had ever been made by a bulge showing in their suit jacket. Nelson closed the doors, and realized he had some adjusting to do. Where he was going, probably everyone was armed either openly or concealed. He drove to the old mansion,

and realized he wouldn't be seeing this sight much longer; the view from the driveway was stunning. He parked out front, and helped everyone out, and parked out back after removing their luggage.

Ralph and Sam were in a hurry to get back to Atlanta and start packing. Ron suggested selling their Suburban since it would cost a fortune to ship, and to buy a diesel-powered 4wd pickup or SUV when they got there. Ron would be surprised to find out what they were shipping. They had several boxes full of Survival Gear and stuff. Ron suggested not leaving a forwarding address, unless it was to a local Mailboxes Etc. that they paid to forward their mail for 90 days, and then canceled their contract. Ralph thought that was an excellent idea. Hopefully if anyone came looking for them based on the registration of their weapons, they'd run up against a brick wall when the Mailboxes place didn't have a current address on them either. If they used their Atlanta address to open the account, and left a deposit to forward their mail, they'd lose track of them after their contract expired. Since they were doctors, and easy to find through the Medical registry, it was a long shot, but worth the effort in case it worked. They drove back to Atlanta, gave notice at the hospital, and gave George and their group the bad news. George was glad they were getting out of Atlanta and going some place relatively safe, but frustrated since now he had to locate another surgeon and ER doc. The rest of their friends were pretty useless, and had failed miserably in the time since they went on vacation. It seemed if Ralph, Sam or George wasn't constantly motivating them, they fell right back into their old Sheeple thought patterns. As soon as Ralph and Sam were gone, he'd give the Sheeple the bad news - he figured two-thirds of them wouldn't care one way or another, and maybe 1 or two might survive the coming economic and political upheaval that he was hearing about.

Ralph sent their friends an e-mail saying they had found new jobs and were moving effective immediately, but left no forwarding address just like George suggested. They unplugged and boxed up the computer, and cancelled all their utility services. It took 2 days of hard packing to pack everything, only to discover that shipping stuff to Alaska was \$\$\$\$. Some of the stuff would have to donate or sell, since it cost more to ship it than it was worth. Ralph remembered Steve said the hospital would pay \$10K of moving expenses, and decided that anything over that amount would be sold or donated to charity. They had a huge moving sale, and made almost 3 thousand dollars by selling their furniture and household stuff. The only things they shipped were their clothes, survival gear, medical books, and their CDs and Videos. The stereo would have to go, as well as the TV, since it would cost more to ship than it was worth. George bought their Suburban for the asking price when Ralph showed him the hidden features. He paid Ralph for the gear he had in it, instead of having him take it out and ship or sell it to someone else. George knew someone who could really use a vehicle set up like that, and got hold of them and sold it that day for the equivalent value in gold. George did as little as possible above board. The new owner would never register the vehicle, because he lived so far away from civilization that a bill of sale was all that they needed, so George never transferred the title to his name, or paid any of the fees demanded by the state. For all intents and purposes, the vehicle disappeared into a black hole.

Ralph took a cab to a local internet café, and located several 4x4 Chevy Suburbans with the 6.5 liter V-8 diesel motor, and an aftermarket Banks turbocharger installed. He did some more checking and automobile costs were substantially more in Alaska than in the lower 48. One of the turbodiesels was located in Seattle. He sent the owner an E-mail, and he said the vehicle had just been put up for sale, he was moving overseas, and couldn't keep it. He had to fly out in a week, so if they could pay him \$15 thousand cash, it was theirs. Ralph asked him if he could give them a ride from SeaTac, they were flying to SeaTac on Delta flight # 83, and would be in SeaTac at 3:00 pm local 2 days from today. If they decided to buy the vehicle, he could accompany them to the bank and he could cash a check since they banked at BofA. He told Ralph he could do that, and his name was Jack, and he'd have a sign right outside baggage claim with their names on it. Ralph said he would see them then. He called the airport, and asked them what would happen if they didn't use the Alaska Airlines portion of their ticket. She was really nice, and said they could apply for a refund if they called the airline at least 15 minutes before take-off and told them they wouldn't need the seats. Ralph got her name and the local number for Alaska Airlines at SeaTac.

He told Sam of his plans. Since they had an overnight layover, it was a good idea. He got back on line, and got the names of several diesel mechanics in Seattle, and sent them an e-mail asking how much they would charge for a pre-purchase vehicle inspection of a 1998 Chevy Suburban 2500 with a 6.5 liter turbodiesel V-8. Half an hour later, Ralph got a reply that they did it all the time, and would charge \$100 for a thorough inspection including compression test, transmission, belts hoses, electrical and transfer case. Ralph replied and said they were on a short time-frame, and would be in Seattle 2 days from today at 3:00pm local. He replied that the inspection only took an hour, and they would make sure they got right on it. Ralph got their information, including address and phone number, and wrote it all down. Ralph e-mailed the seller that they were expecting him to be there, and not to sell the vehicle out from under them. He assured Ralph that he'd be there, since he didn't want to wind up doing KP in Reykjavik Iceland. Ralph thought about that, and realized the seller believed in Karma, and Ralph thought he didn't care, as long as the guy didn't stiff them. They finished packing, and when the moving van showed up, they loaded their boxes, but made sure they had 2 weeks worth of clothes packed since the moving company said it would take 2 weeks to ship their boxes via common carrier, which was the cheapest way to do it since they didn't have any furniture or big items. They turned in their keys and spent the night in a hotel close to the airport. They were glad they were getting out of Atlanta, and hoped Doc was doing OK.

Between Ron, Nelson and Doc, they had Doc's books, gun collection, clothes, and a box of photo albums and stuff packed in a couple of days. He contacted a realtor, who called him back the next day with a cash non-contingent offer from a developer for \$35 Million. After the realtor's commission, he'd net out just under \$34 Million. Ron almost fainted when he heard that figure. Doc would make him and BA combined look like paupers! Ron didn't know the land had been in Bert's family for generations, and Bert was an only child from old Southern money, and Doc had met and married her while they both attended Chapel Hill North Carolina. She was a nursing major, and Doc, who went by Eugene at the time, was studying to become a

surgeon. Her dad made the house and property a wedding present to the newlyweds. It was owned by Bert's family for generations, so the only expenses Doc had to pay was the property tax and upkeep of the mansion, which was considerable since the old stately mansion was several hundred years old, and falling apart.

Nelson and Ron loaded the Ryder Rental truck with all the boxes, and drove it to the Common Carrier's shipping dock. Nelson wrote a check for Doc for the shipping charges, which seemed to be a lot of money to Nelson, but was a drop in the bucket to Doc. When they got back to the mansion, Doc was ready to go. He'd spent the last hour looking at their Wedding photo album, and saying goodbye to Bert and the house, which contained so many memories, but some heartache. Doc prayed that Bert was happy now in heaven, since she was rarely truly happy, but content to live with Doc. They loaded the limousine up one last time for the trip to the airport, where they were met by the sales manager of a limousine service, who gave them \$20 thousand cash for the limousine. Doc told Nelson to keep the money, and consider it a tax-free bonus for taking such good care of the limousine. They boarded a flight to Seattle an hour later, then flew to Anchorage, where Ron retrieved the SuperGoose and flew them to Allakaket. Ron had made a call while he was cleaning out Doc's house, and BA had an unused rental cleaned out and prepped for Doc and Nelson.

Doc flew up front with Ron, and Nelson found himself in the unusual position of riding in the back. Ron told Doc he was going to give him a Cessna 185 that he learned to fly on, and had been mothballed in the hangar. Doc was glad he had kept his Private Pilot's license current, and thanked Ron for the gift. 2 hours later, they landed in Allakaket, and Ron showed Doc the plane, and handed him the keys. He told Doc that the plane had an in-vehicle cross-band repeater, and had a GPS unit just like his DeHaviland had. Nelson loaded their bags into Ron's pickup, and Ron drove Doc to his new home. Ron explained that they could live there rent-free as long as they liked, or they could build a larger house in town. Looking around, Doc said that this would be fine. It was a small 2bd/2bth house with a large living room, and a small study that was lined with bookshelves. Doc thought that Ron had called ahead, and thanked him for his hospitality. Nelson moved his stuff into the smaller room, and moved Doc's stuff into the master bedroom, then started cleaning the place up, even though it was already clean. Ron shook Doc's hand, and drove home. Doc practically had to physically restrain Nelson to get him to stop cleaning. Finally he realized that Nelson was a Butler, and nothing he could do would change that. He talked to Nelson, and said if he felt like cooking and cleaning, he could, but would he please call him Doc. Nelson smiled and almost said "as you wish sir" then caught himself.

Ron came home, and Nancy practically hugged the stuffing out of him, then he got attacked by 4 kids and 2 dogs that seemed to be much larger than the last time he saw them.

Ralph and Sam remembered Ron's trick at the Security gate, and had their CCW's out and showed the TSA Goon, who waved them through. Ralph shook his head in wonder, and kept going. When they got to the Delta Gate, Ralph was confused to find that their tickets had been

upgraded for free to First Class. Finally Ralph remembered that Ron had their previous tickets upgraded, and someone must have left the VIP codes in the computer. Ralph smiled and remembered to thank Ron later, and boarded the aircraft. When they landed in Seattle, they went to Baggage claim, got their checked luggage, and standing right outside the gate was a middle-aged guy in an Air Force uniform with a sign that said Ralph and Sam. They introduced themselves, and they walked out to his vehicle. It was in immaculate shape, and looked like it had just been washed and detailed. It was dark green metallic, and Jack said it had the LT package which included a killer sound system, leather seating, and the towing and suspension upgrade package. Ralph noticed the vehicle wasn't at the stock ride height, and Jack said he had a custom Rancho suspension and 31x12.5x16 BF Goodrich TA All-terrain tires installed on 12-inch aluminum rims. Ralph looked carefully, and sure enough, it had the Rancho dual shock setup on all 4 corners, and skid plates under the transmission, oil pan, and transfer case. Jack said the only off-road preps that he didn't have done was a snorkel kit since he wasn't going to ford any rivers, and he wanted to leave it as stock-looking as possible. The rear differential had been replaced by a Torsen unit, and the front by a ARB air locker, which also included an under-the hood air compressor and air tank to air up the tires. He opened the back, and showed Ralph that he had installed the same under-carpet kit to store all his emergency gear that Ralph had, but it was empty now, except for the jack and a few other pieces of equipment that came with the vehicle. Ralph was impressed, whoever set up this Suburban knew what they were doing. It even had a 12K Warn winch up front with an aftermarket fairlead pipe bumper with some pretty spendy fog and driving lights. Jack opened the hood, and showed him the dual-battery setup, and the oversize alternator. Ralph noticed the logo on the turbocharger said Banks, and asked Jeff what the deal was. He said that very few Suburbans came from the factory with a turbocharged diesel, and Banks Engineering saw an opportunity to change a gutless diesel-powered tank into a not-so gutless diesel powered tank, and designed the turbocharger setup he saw in front of him. It included a chip swap to take advantage of the turbocharger, and it had an option for propane injection that Jeff decided he didn't need since he didn't do any heavy-duty towing with it.

Ralph asked Jack if he could drive them over to Sam's Auto Shop. Jeff smiled, and said that was where he took the Suburban all the time. 15 minutes later, Ralph met Sam, who said they didn't need to pay him, because Jeff brought the vehicle over less than a month ago for periodic maintenance, and everything was cherry. Sam took Ralph aside and said the vehicle was in excellent shape, and 100K miles on a diesel was nothing. He personally knew the guy who installed all the off-road equipment. Jeff was an off-road nut, but wound up getting divorced and transferred before he got a chance to use it off-road. His ex-wife was after him for half of the vehicle, and Jeff only needed \$7 thousand to pay off his credit cards, and he was damned if he were going to pay the two-timing bitch a penny more than he had to. Sam said the vehicle as it sat was easily worth \$20K, but that just meant that Jeff would have to give her \$3,000 more. Ralph walked up to Jeff and asked him point-blank why he was selling the vehicle so cheap, it was worth over \$20K. "Ralph, if I sell it for anything more, my ex gets half, and I'd rather not give that little 2-timing witch 1 penny more than I had to, and I owe the credit card companies 7 grand, so 15 would cover my debts. I'm going overseas, and I can't keep the vehicle."



Ralph asked to see the title and registration to the vehicle. Jeff said the registration was in the glove box, and he had the title in his briefcase. Jeff took out the title, and Ralph saw that only Jeff's name appeared on the title and the registration. He looked at his watch, and asked Jeff where the nearest Bank of America was. Jeff told him there was 1 less than 5 miles away that was open for another hour. Ralph asked if Jeff had a Bill of Sale Form. Sam spoke up and said he had a few, and went into his shop to grab 1. He explained that sometimes customers couldn't pay for their repairs, so instead of getting sued, they sold the vehicle to Jeff, and he needed Bill of Sale forms just in case. Ralph watched while Jeff filled out the Bill of Sale, including Ralph and Sam's names as the buyers, and himself as the seller. He listed the sale price as \$15,000.00 but didn't sign it. Jeff said he'd sign it when he had cash in hand, so they drove to the bank, and withdrew \$15 thousand from their savings account. Jeff signed the Bill of Sale right there in the lobby, and Ralph handed him the cash. Ralph asked Jeff if he wanted a ride home, and Jeff said thanks. Ralph dropped Jeff off at his apartment, and they drove to the DMV and got the paperwork started. Since they were going to register it in Alaska in the next 30 days, they got a temporary registration that allowed them to travel for 30 days, and got the title paperwork transferred to their names.

Ralph asked the DMV clerk where a good motel or hotel was, and she gave them directions to a nearby Sheraton with a secure parking lot. They checked in, paid for the room, and then Ralph asked the clerk if they had a computer with the Internet he could borrow, they needed to plan a route to drive their vehicle to Alaska. The clerk said she could do 1 better, and handed them a AAA map that had the route marked out, and recommended hotels and diesel gas stops marked out. Ralph got a look at the distance, and realized that it would take the bulk of the time they had left just to get to Anchorage, then he asked the Clerk if there were a quicker way to get their SUV to Alaska. She said they had several long-distance car ferries that went through the Inland Passage, and stopped in Juneau that would cut their driving in half or better, but it would still take 3-6 days depending on schedules. Ralph asked how much it would cost, and she punched some buttons, and said for the 2 of them and a vehicle, right around \$1500. Ralph talked to Sam, and she said that he could either spend 4 days on a boat, and drive a short distance, or spend 4-5 days driving through Canada and Alaska. He asked the Clerk how tough it was to get diesel in Canada and Alaska. She admitted that it was probably easier than in the lower 48, since almost everyone drove diesels that far north, and had engine and tank heaters to keep their fuel and oil from gelling. She showed him on the map where all the truck stops were, and they definitely had diesel. Ralph noticed the motels were about 500 miles apart too, and asked if that was a coincidence. She told him that 500 miles was about the max you could make in 1 day because of the slower speed limits in sections of Canada. Once Ralph looked at the maps, and realized it took 2 ferries to get from Washington to Seward, which was the closest port of call to Anchorage, it was more like a week on the ferry, plus port of call stops, so he decided they were driving. He asked the Clerk where the REI store was in Seattle, and she gave him directions to the front door. He asked her about parking, and she said they had a huge lot out back. Ralph knew if they drove, he'd have to buy some sleeping bags and emergency stuff in case they got stranded.

They drove to REI the next day, and bought a small backpacking stove, fuel, emergency food (chocolate bars), 3 5-gallon water jugs, and a small tent. Samantha still had her fanny pack with her, and made one for Ralph a couple of years ago, so they were set for stuff like that. Ralph bought a compass and map, then spotted a GPS unit with mapping software already loaded. He checked, and it had the streets and roads between Seattle and Anchorage already programmed into it. The clerk said it would give them turn by turn directions, distance to the next waypoint and speed, both current and average, plus the usual GPS functions. It was a couple of hundred bucks, but Ralph didn't want to get lost or stranded. He told the clerk they were driving between Seattle and Anchorage, and he helped Ralph program all the fuel stops as waypoints, then he showed Ralph how to use it. He said that when they got ready to leave from the hotel tomorrow, to enter that as a starting point. Ralph handed the clerk his credit card, and the clerk helped him load the Suburban. He said "Nice truck - you'll definitely need it where you're going! I lived in Anchorage for a couple of years, and you talk about COLD! Alaska wrote the book! One of your first purchases should be a set of Alaskan Pac boots, a set of insulated bib overall style snowmobile pants, and a really warm parka, then get 3 sets of gloves, a polypro liner, a middle glove, and an outer mitten or you'll freeze your fingers off."

Ralph knew they were committed, but wasn't so sure about this Cold thing - to him cold was anything below 60 degrees! He made the mistake of asking Sam about it. "Oh yeah, where we lived, daytime temperatures could drop to 40 or 60 below with a wind chill of 100 degrees below zero. Why you ask?"

"It's nothing, I just think anything below 60 is cold!"

"You spend a few winters in Alaska, and you'll know what Cold is!" Samantha started laughing, since her poor husband hadn't been any further north than North Carolina in the winter. He'd freak out when he saw all that white stuff! While she thought about that, she highly suggested Ralph get some snow chains and a towing strap before they left. That got Ralph thinking, and he made a stop at an auto parts store, bought a box of flares, a gallon of Arctic Grade anti-freeze, 4 quarts of the right kind of oil for their diesel, a gallon of arctic grade windshield washer fluid, new wiper blades, a snow brush, snow shovel, 2 sets of chains that would fit their 31x 12 tires, a roll of duct tape, a roll of electrical wire, a set of the right kind of fuses, a roll of bailing wire, and a small tool kit to supplement their Gerber Multipliers. The clerk suggested a 5-pound bag of kitty litter as a traction aid, and a couple of mag light flashlights. Ralph didn't want to look at the total, but paid it anyway. Sam wondered why Ralph was going overboard -they were driving up during summer, the only snow they'd see would be on Denali and a couple of lower mountains along the way. They packed the Suburban, ate dinner, and went to bed.

They checked out the next morning, and Ralph made sure he programmed the hotel as their starting point, and plugged in the Cigarette Lighter adapter for the GPS, and attached the mounting bracket to the windshield where he could read it easily, but didn't block his view.

They both went to the bathroom, and Ralph did his best John Wayne impression “Let’s Move em Out!” and Sam laughed. They drove north on I-5 to 542, then turned onto WA-9 West until they hit the Canadian Border. They stopped them for a minute, and when Ralph explained they just bought the Suburban, and were moving to Anchorage, the border guard waved them through, and told them to have a nice trip. They took Highway 11 North to the Trans-Canada Highway headed North, then turned onto Provincial Highway 97. They drove north until the GPS beeped, and Ralph saw they were approaching Williams Lake. They drove into the truck stop, filled up, stretched and used the bathroom. Ralph came out and Sam handed him some coffee, and a muffin. “where’d you get those?”

“They’ve got a general store, and I remembered Mr. Einstein forgot to buy some food, so I stocked up, there’s a box of food big enough to last us a week, and it doesn’t need refrigeration.”

“Ok, how’d you get the coffee hot?”

“They had an immersion heater for \$10.00, so I bought it, along with a pack of 50 instant coffee packets with cream and sugar already added, and a box of 50 instant hot chocolate and 2 large travel mugs that just fit perfectly in the cup holders. The guy was nice enough to give me a couple of spoons, forks and knives, and I bought a pack of napkins, and a large 8-roll pack of TP, and a large pump dispenser of Purell just in case.”

“I guess I’d probably starve without you?”

“Yup, probably - well Albert, let’s hit the road!”

“Why, what did it do to us?”

They got back on 97 north before Ralph made any more bad jokes. At Prince George, they turned West to get onto 16. They spent the night in this small quaint motel just outside of Stewart, took advantage of their free breakfast, used the bathroom, and were on the road by 0800. They had a very long drive ahead of them. They had to go way north on 37 almost 400 miles, and there weren’t many stops in between. When they found a fuel station in Stewart, the owner highly recommended they buy 2 5-gallon cans full of diesel, just in case, because some of the stations ran out during the summer. Ralph was glad the old geezer was nice enough to warn them, and he only charged them \$10.00 each for the 2 DOT 5-gallon cans, plus the diesel. Ralph told the old Geezer “Merci monsieur!” Ralph was amazed when he started talking to him in French. He didn’t realize there was that many French Canadians this far west. They carried on in French for 5 minutes, then the old geezer refunded half the cost of the cans, Ralph guessed that they only gouged the tourists, or maybe the fact that they were doctors moving to Anchorage. He recommended emptying the cans as soon as they were down 10 gallons, and refilling them every time they filled up, gas stations that had fuel were far and between, especially between here and Whitehorse. He didn’t know how things were in Alaska, but they

were probably similar. Ralph said “Au revoir” and got back in the Suburban.

They put the 5-gallon cans in the back of the vehicle, and hit the road, they had a long drive ahead. Ralph was glad that the old guy had sold them the extra diesel, since several smaller stations had “NO FUEL” signs in their windows. When they had gone about 250 miles, Ralph carefully poured the 2 5-gallon cans of diesel into the tank, almost filling it again. Ralph guessed that if he stayed out of boost, the Suburban got almost 20 mpg. Finally they found another small gas station that had diesel, and filled up the tank and both cans. They made it to Whitehorse without any further incidents, filled up, got a room, ate dinner at a small café, and ate breakfast at the breakfast bar the next morning. They were on the road again by 0800, today would be even longer than yesterday. They drove northwest until they reached Beaver Creek, which was just this side of the Canadian border, and filled up, used the restroom, and got out to stretch. They were going to stay overnight in Tok Alaska, which was just over 400 miles from Whitehorse. From Tok, it was only about 300 miles to Anchorage. So far they had seen a lot of scenery, and their trip was significantly cheaper and faster than taking the ferry. It should only take them 4-5 days to drive, versus at least 4 days via ferry, plus driving up from Seward, not to mention almost \$1500 for the ferry.

They reached Tok a couple of hours later, and they were too tired to drive into Anchorage, so they got a motel room, and stayed the night. The next morning they filled up the tank and both cans, and ate a quick breakfast, then hit the road. They were in Anchorage 6 hours later, and parked in the Hospital parking lot, and let Steve know they were in town. Steve said he had already arranged a nice apartment for them, and all they had to do was sign the lease and move in. Ralph said they had no furniture, and Steve said he could fix that, and handed them a check for \$10,000.00. They deposited it at the nearest B of A and transferred their account to that branch. Ralph said they would get them an address for the account. The teller was really nice, and suggested a branch of the post office right near their apartment to rent a PO Box from. They drove to the apartment, signed a 6-month lease, paid the first month (the landlord took an out-of-state check since it was drawn against B of A and Steve vouched for them so he waived the deposits), and handed them 2 keys. It was a downstairs apartment, and Ralph liked Steve’s taste, the apartment was big, airy and clean, with new carpets and paint.

They unloaded the Suburban, and checked the phone book for a furniture store. There was one nearby, so they went there and bought enough furniture to get by for now. The store owner made them a killer deal on a 27” HDTV and a small stereo system with a CD/DVD player, VCR, and an AM/FM receiver. Ralph gave him the apartment number, and asked that it be delivered that afternoon, since they had no furniture. He asked the manager where you went to get your phone and electric turned on, and the Manager called a friend of his at the phone company, explained they were doctors, and needed the phone service in case of emergency, and he told Ralph the service would be connected within the hour. He gave him the phone number for the electric company, and they told him the power was already on, and all they had to do was switch it into their name. Ralph said he didn’t have a billing address yet, she said that he had to call back within 48 hours or they would disconnect and it would take a week to get it

turned back on. Ralph wrote the number down, drove to the Post office, got a PO Box, and called the lady at the power company back. She updated their records, and thanked Ralph. Ralph called back the phone company to change the billing address, and they did it over the phone. Finally he called the Cable Company, signed up for basic cable and cable modem service. He asked the operator if he could use his existing cable modem. She said probably not, and they'd send a repairman to their apartment today to install the cable and the cable modem. Ralph thanked her and drove home right before the furniture company truck arrived. Ralph stayed out of the way, while Sam told them which room the furniture went in, and where she wanted it. Just when they left, the Cable guy showed up, hooked up their brand-new TV and stereo (they had FM stereo over their coax system as well) and connected their cable modem. He said that Ralph's unit was close, but the wrong configuration. He admitted that they all bought their cable modems from the same company, and installed a proprietary chip so they wouldn't work on anyone else's system to keep people from switching. When Ralph checked his AOL account, he had a ton of E-mails. He only answered the ones from Doc and George, and tossed the rest. Sam made dinner, and they went to bed early.

## Chapter 48 - Setting up

Ralph and Sam made a list of stuff they had to do on their last day off before they started work at Anchorage Regional Hospital. They had power, cable, and phone. The water and heat were paid for by the landlord since he used the same boiler to make steam for the radiant heat system, and hot water for the showers. He used a blend valve to reduce the temperature of the hot water below 120 degrees, and had the hot water on a recirculating pump. Since the boiler had plenty of hot water on demand, he saved the cost of a hot water tank by tapping off his boiler that was running pretty much year round anyway. Anchorage was all on Natural Gas and they had a huge supply of it, so there were no worries of running out, so the stove and dryer were both gas. Sam realized they had washer/dryer hookups on an alcove off the kitchen, so she added that to their list, especially since she was due in 6 months. Ralph wanted a new computer desk, and she suggested getting a folding table for now, since the 2nd bedroom would have to be rearranged in 6 months anyway. Ralph was glad, because right now his monitor was sitting on a milk crate, and he was sitting on the floor Indian style, and it was beaucoup awkward! Ralph got out the phone book, and checked the Yellow Pages for stores to get stuff. Sam said they needed food, and she checked the refrigerator, turned it on so it would be cold by the time they got back. She started making a grocery list, and wondered if there was a Warehouse Store nearby like Costco or Sam's. Looking through the Yellow Pages, Ralph couldn't find a listing for Costco or Sam's Club, but spotted a listing for Cellular phone companies, so Ralph added Cellular Phone service to the list. There was a bunch of them, so he decided to call Steve at the Hospital for advice.

"Alaska Regional Hospital, this is Steve."

"Steve, Dr. Raphael Lacombe, what Cellular service does the hospital use - we were thinking of getting personal cellular service for Samantha and me."

"Ralph, the hospital provides Cellular phones with unlimited local minutes and paging service to all doctors on Staff, that includes you and Sam."

"Great, how about personal use?"

"The hospital wants you to have that phone on your person 24/7, so they don't care how much you personally use that phone, but you do pay for your own long-distance calls. The hospital will send you a statement each month with any long distance calls they can't identify. If any of them are business calls, like to doctors, patients, pharmacies, etc, just highlight them and deduct them from the bill when you pay the hospital, otherwise the service is free. They issue a digital PCS phone with a speed charger, case, and cigarette lighter adapter to you when you start. Personnel will take care of all that tomorrow."

"Thanks Steve, by the way, here's our personal home phone number (xxx) xxx-xxxx."

“Ok, thanks Ralph, just make sure Personnel has that number as well, and make sure you give them the PO Box or your account number for direct deposit.”

“Thanks Steve, you saved us a couple of stops. If you wanted to buy food in large quantities, like by the case, where do you go in Anchorage?”

“Wilson Brothers on Rosewood is about it, we don’t have a Costco or Sam’s yet.”

“Thanks Steve, see ya tomorrow!”

Ralph scratched a couple of stops off his list, and told Sam they could buy most of the foodstuff at Wilson Brothers. He said that they could find everything else at Wal-mart or Northway Mall. He walked outside, and set all the seats flush with the floor except the front 2 to maximize storage, they were going to need it! Ralph remembered Jack said the vehicle had an alarm on it, so once they started putting stuff in it, he’d activate the alarm. Sam was ready to go, so they got in and started the Suburban. Ralph filled it up yesterday, so they were good to go, and they went. Sam piled a flat-bed cart full of canned goods and frozen food. They didn’t have a big freezer, so she didn’t buy too much frozen stuff, just enough for several quick meals, since their schedules could get hectic. By the time they got out of Wal-Mart, Ralph was just about shopped-out. They took everything home, and Ralph assembled the heavy-duty metal shelving they bought at Wal-mart, then they loaded it full of canned goods and supplies that went into the second bedroom. Ralph hoped they bought a house before they had kids #2-4, or they would be really crowded.

Ralph put up the 4-foot long folding table, put his monitor on it, and slid the CPU underneath, and plugged everything into a small UPS he bought, then he set the printer up, connected it to the computer, and plugged it into the surge suppression side of the UPS. Ralph connected the Coax cable to the cable modem, and the modem to the computer using the supplied Ethernet cable. Since the Cable guy had already installed everything the other day, as soon as it was plugged in, and everything powered up, he was able to log onto the internet. Once he was satisfied everything was working, he shut it back down to await the delivery of their washer and dryer. They picked up a ding and scratch discounted washer/dryer pair for 50% off, and later that afternoon, the 2 guys delivering it put a few more scratches in it, so Ralph was glad they didn’t buy the pretty model, because he would have been mad!

Ralph called the B of A branch, and verified they had his PO Box as his mailing address, and his account number was still the same. She asked if they should put his Driver’s License number on their new checks, and Ralph felt like smacking himself - they had to get to the DMV ASAP! He asked the teller where the nearest DMV office was, and she gave him directions from their apartment, since she still had their apartment number in the computer. He thanked her and hung up, and said “Sam, we’ve got to get to the DMV right now!” They jumped into the Suburban, and arrived 15 minutes before they closed. Luckily there was no waiting line, so he took all the paperwork up to the next open window, got the Suburban registered in Alaska,

got the new plates, and traded their Georgia Driver's Licenses for Alaskan Driver's licenses. Ralph was amazed that they didn't have to pass a test. The clerk did say they needed to get proof of insurance within 30 days, so Ralph added that to his Do List. His old insurance company was paid up through next month, and he already notified them of the sale of the old Suburban, and the purchase of the new one. When he got home, he called the insurance company's 800 Customer Service line, and the lady that answered the phone said they did business in Alaska, and they could file the proof of insurance with the Alaskan Department of Transportation. Ralph wrote her name down and thanked her.

Ralph thought "Food...Check, Utilities...Check, Bank...Check, Apartment...Duh (check), Vehicle...Check, So what am I forgetting?"

Ralph decided to ask Sam. "Did you e-mail Doc and Ron, and let them know we arrived safely, and are going to work tomorrow?"

"Nope, I just responded to their e-mails, so they know we're here. Uh, Sam...Did you forget something?"

"What?"

"Aren't you supposed to put in for a leave of absence when you are pregnant?"

"I talked to my OBGYN, and they used to insist, but now the only reason to stop surgery is when my belly gets too big for me to operate, usually during the 3rd trimester. Since I'm not in the room when they're administering the large initial dose of gas, I'm fine."

"OK Sam, whatever you say!"

Sam thought that sounded suspiciously like a "Yes Dear" but decided to let it slide.

The next day they faced the gauntlet of Personnel. The good news was they issued them a 2-week supply of green scrubs and 4 white coats, a brand new stethoscope, their nameplates and ID tags with a magnetic strip to punch in and out, a cell phone with all the bells and whistles including call waiting, a brand new PDA with the PDR and some other stuff pre-loaded, and enough manuals to make a nice bonfire. They got paid their salary every 2 weeks via direct deposit, and they'd get a monthly statement showing accrued vacation and sick leave as well as a monthly statement for their cellular phones. They explained the hospital's long distance policy, that if it wasn't demonstrably business related, the doctor was responsible for paying for their own long distance cellular calls. They had a free roaming feature, but the cellular system didn't work too far outside of Anchorage, so roaming was pretty moot until they got to another area with cellular coverage, like Whitehorse or Tok. Ralph asked if their system worked in Allakaket. The Personnel Director thought it was a strange request, but looked it up, and was amazed that Allakaket had a bigger Cellular system than Anchorage. She asked why they were



interested, and Sam explained they were good friends of Ron Williams. The Director immediately recognized Ron's name, and knew he was the President and Owner of Allakaket Airlines. These two had some high-powered friends, so she typed a notation into their files while she talked that said they were to get the VIP treatment. Once she was finished, she said they'd have to go to Steve's office to discuss their schedules.

They stood, and she shook their hands, then they went to see Steve. Steve stood to greet them, and handed them some more forms to sign. One brought Ralph to a full stop, and asked Steve what the heck it meant. Steve said the "no weapons" policy didn't apply to CCW holders, it was just there to discourage non-CCW holders from carrying openly. He said that as long as their weapons were concealed and they had a CCW, they didn't care. Ralph felt better. Steve asked them about their scheduling requests. Ralph said they basically had to work the same shift, since they only had 1 vehicle, and getting to the hospital without a 4wd during the winter could be a bitch! Steve laughed and said he was right, that even with the city plowing like crazy, sometimes the city just shut down during snow emergencies, which happened once or twice a year, but their Suburban could handle it as long as they had their chains on and they took it easy. He typed into his computer, and told them they were both working days, Monday through Friday, they let the Junior Residents handle the evening and weekend traffic. Since there wasn't a lot of Major Trauma from gunfights and stabbings, the night and weekends could be slow. The only time the ER got busy was during Hunting Season, when all the hunters from the Lower 48 came to Alaska to try and bag a Caribou or Grizzly, and ran into trouble. Steve said they were free to go home, their first scheduled shift wasn't until tomorrow. Ralph asked if they could meet the staff first. Steve thought that was a good idea, it was slow today, and he had no idea what it would be like tomorrow. He stood up and said "This way please" and led them to the Staff Lounge. He pushed the intercom button and said "5-minute Staff meeting in the Doctor's lounge. Any available staff please attend."

10 minutes later, the lounge filled up, and Steve stood up in front. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd like to introduce our new ER Chief Resident, Dr. Raphael Lacombe, and his wife Dr. Samantha Lacombe, who joins our Staff as a Board Certified Emergency Surgeon. Raphael goes by Ralph, and Samantha goes by Sam. Please use their first initials and last name on any orders or documents to avoid confusion. Thank you, and that is all." Steve walked back to his office, leaving Sam and Ralph to get acquainted with the rest of the staff. Most of them had to get back to work, so they said hi, and shook hands, then left. The head nurse stayed around for a few minutes, and asked if they had any questions. "Thanks, but not today."

"Ok, if you need anything, my name's Nurse Ratchet, and if I hear any cracks about "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest" you might get stuck washing bedpans." Ralph and Sam both assured her that they wouldn't be so rude, then she said she had to get back to work, and it was nice meeting them. On their way out, Ralph asked Steve if he needed anything else. He said that Personnel needed a copy of their CCW's for the records. Ralph and Sam both produced their Federal CCW's, and Steve thought that it must be nice to have low friends in high places, and made a copy of each, and handed them back their CCW's. He said he'd hand carry them up to

Personnel in a minute. Other than that, they were free to go. Ralph and Sam walked back out to their Suburban, and drove home to organize everything.

Back in Allakaket, Ron was thinking, but not getting anywhere. Suddenly, he remembered Ralph and Sam had moved to Anchorage, which triggered other thoughts. He got on the Internet, then called Bill and BA, and made a suggestion. BA said that Ron should ask Doc first, so he called Doc.

“Doc, its Ron. Now that Sam and Ralph are living in Alaska, I had an idea that you might be interested in. They have to live in Anchorage to work, but where would they go if a disaster struck?”

“I never thought of that, obviously you have an idea, so let’s hear it.”

“I’ve got over 1,000 acres around my lodge at HelpmeJack Lake, and the clearing behind the lodge is now fairly big due to logging over the years for firewood. I was wondering if you wanted to become a partner in a Hunting/Fishing lodge behind our summer lodge. That way the building and supplies would be available to Sam’s family in an emergency in case Anchorage became too dangerous.”

“Interesting idea Ron, now that I’m rolling in money, I don’t see why not, it would also give Nelson and I a place to stay if we wanted to go fishing or hunting.”

“Ok, if you’re interested, I suggest we form a Limited Partnership, as a subsidiary of Allakaket Airlines, and call it Doc’s Lodge, Inc. We’d need to hire people including an Alaskan Registered Guide if non-residents wish to hunt big game, and enough people to run the lodge during hunting and fishing season, plus a couple of boats to fish other spots on HelpmeJack lake. Allakaket Airlines would provide Air transport, and I could split the costs of opening the business and building the lodge, less the value of the land. All we’d need is a Business License and incorporation documents, and some paperwork from Fish and Game.”

“How much is all this going to cost?”

“They built our lodge for less than \$150 thousand, so I’m guessing right around \$200 thousand for the building, and the supplies incidental to the lodge. The boats and stuff might run another \$100 grand, so you’re looking at between \$300 and \$400 thousand.”

“Ok, so my share of the start-up costs would be around \$200 Thousand.”

“Plus food and other start-up costs, then we’d have recurring costs of food, supplies, maintenance and repairs, and wages. That would be offset by income provided by hunters and fishermen.”

“Sounds like a plan, why don’t you have BA crunch the numbers and let me know. By the Way, Thanks Ron.”

“What for - I haven’t done anything yet?”

“For thinking about the safety and security of Sam, Ralph, and their kids.”

“Doc, Sam and I will always be close. Anything I can do to help her, Ralph and their kids without jeopardizing Nancy and the Kids, I’ll do in a heartbeat.”

“I know Ron, you still love her.”

“In a way, I’ll always have a special place in my heart for Sam. I just want her to be happy, and anything I can do to help that, or their survival would make me happy!”

“Thanks Ron, take care and God Bless!”

“You too Doc.”

Ron called BA, and told him he had a tentative Go, but not to spend a lot of money until Doc got on board. BA said that filing the incorporation and business licenses would be small change, and if it fell through, they could write off the expenses. Ron said the Corporation would be a limited partnership, and a subsidiary of Allakaket Airlines, so he could spend AA money on the project, without having to dip into his personal savings. BA thought Ron was starting to get the hang of this Big Business stuff.

## Chapter 49 - The Lodge

BA had a brainstorm, and called the manager of the biggest lodge in the area, and asked for his help. When BA told him they were setting up a lodge at the HelpmeJack Lake, he got more helpful, since they wouldn't be in direct competition, the only species they really had there were moose and caribou, and the big record-breaking bulls were way east of them and closer to Denali. He gave BA the skinny about what they would need to get started, what paperwork they would need, and he even recommended a Registered Guide that was looking for a lodge to work with, he was tired of living in the field 6 months out of the year, so the manager knew he'd love their set-up with a resident herd of Caribou and moose. BA thanked him for his help, and started making phone calls and crunching numbers. 2 days later he called Ron.

"Your preliminary estimate was pretty close, I talked to the manager of a big lodge south of Allakaket, who was more than willing to help, and he even recommended a Registered Guide we could hire on a seasonal basis. I'm e-mailing you the spreadsheet I've done."

"BA, could you e-mail a copy to Doc, so he'll have a copy when I call him. Thanks, talk to you later."

An hour later Doc called Ron.

"I got the spreadsheet BA worked up. I'll authorize up to \$500,000 to start up the lodge, that's my share of the \$1 Million that this project better not exceed."

"BA's estimates only show an initial outlay of \$500 thousand, so why did you authorize up to \$500 thousand each?"

"Because stuff happens, and I don't want this project to come to a standstill while you get my approval for every cost overrun. Just go ahead and do it right the first time. What were you planning for power?"

"The same setup as our lodge uses. A huge military diesel generator hooked to a battery bank and inverters in the basement, with 1,000 gallons of diesel. The main power source will be a PV roof, and wind turbines that will charge the batteries, and run the inverter."

"Sounds like a plan, so when do they start construction?"

"BA is finishing the legal paperwork. If it's OK with you, we wanted to call the business Doc's Lodge Inc. and it would be a limited partnership between you and Allakaket Airlines, so I can use AA money for operating expenses, and write off any losses against the corporation. I wanted to do a limited partnership so neither one of us would be liable for anything more than our initial investment. We also need to get a Million-dollar General Commercial Liability

policy before we can bring in any paying customers. My work comp carrier said they'd cover any employees of Doc's Lodge, so we're set there. I'll have BA call you when we're done with the legal paperwork so we can sign the paperwork and get things started."

2 days later, BA called Doc and Ron, and they signed the paperwork, and Doc's Lodge LLC was in business. Ron hired the contractors that built his lodge, and they got right to work. Ron had the space out behind their lodge, and build a huge ranch-style structure, with the main roofline oriented east-west to take full advantage of the huge southern exposure the design would have. They flew Ron's tractor out to the site to dig the basement and the septic field, and brought in their own well drilling rig that tapped into the same aquifer that Ron's house did. They logged the trees off Ron's property like last time, but the building went up much faster, since they had all done this before when they built Ron's place. They bought the inverters and power-handling equipment from Outback Power, and installed the generator, battery bank and inverters, and the fuel tank in the basement, leaving over half the basement available for storage. Once the building was up and the contractors cleared out, Ron called Bear, and they arranged a "storm shelter" next to the hunting lodge that was bigger than even Ron's place, and they located a steel building big enough to hold Doc's Cessna and parked it on top of the shelter to camouflage the shelter. The only hint that there was anything underneath the hangar was the trap door in the corner. Bear was still crowded in his shelter/bunker, so Ron called Ralph, and they said they'd love to store some serious hardware in their shelter, especially when Ron told them what they had access to, evidently George had really rubbed off on those two, and they thought that having a fully prepared Bug out shelter would be a perfect idea, and called up Doc and thanked him. They neglected to tell him about the hardware, because he was still having problems with them being armed in a hospital.

Once everything was good to go, Ron got some help in the form of several Baggage Handlers, and transferred furniture, supplies and everything needed for a hunting lodge to the new lodge. It would be ready to open at the start of next year's hunting season. Ron flew Doc out to see his new hunting lodge. To say he was impressed was an understatement. He asked Ron about the hangar, and Ron said that Doc needed someplace to store his Cessna when he visited the lodge. Doc gave Ron a big hug, and said "Thanks, I'd forgotten about the Cessna. It's too late to go hunting or fishing this season, but I'll make sure I use it next year." Doc had been busy this year, because when the Hospital Administrator found out they had a retired professor of neurosurgery living in Allakaket, he called him a couple of times a year to consult on several surgeries. Doc thought he was volunteering his time until the hospital paid him a \$50,000.00 consulting fee. He put all his fees into a trust fund for Ralph and Sam, to be transferred upon his signature releasing the account, or upon his death. They even gave him a title "Professor Emeritus of Neurosurgery" and put him on staff. Doc thought it was funny, but didn't turn down the money, or the occasional consult. Besides, he enjoyed flying right seat with Ron when they flew to Anchorage for the consultations. He didn't do the surgery any more; he consulted with their surgeons who were going to perform the delicate surgery.

Bert was born right on time, and Sam wound up taking 6 months off from the hospital, 3 before

and 3 after delivery. The hospital had an excellent day care system that allowed nursing mothers to nurse their babies, and to spend their break time with their kids, so Sam returned to work. Just like his Mom, Bert was a blond cherub as an infant. 6 months later, Sam was pregnant again, and they were well on their way to the 4 kids they wanted. Ralph knew that they would soon need a house, and called BA and asked for suggestions. He knew of a lot on the southwest corner of Anchorage that had been for sale for decades, with an OK view, but a lot of timber and privacy.

They drove over to see the lot, and found out it wasn't in the City of Anchorage, and not connected to city services, except power and phone. That was OK with Ralph and Sam, who had different ideas about what they wanted to do with their homes than the average American. By the time they were finished, the contractor said that a nuclear bomb could hit Elmendorf and they'd be fine, but that was exactly what Ralph wanted, and they had money to burn, thanks to Doc's wedding present. Between the half-mil original deposit, plus interest, they had almost twice as much money as they needed. Their house was 3,000 square feet above ground, plus a full basement below ground that went down over 12 feet due to the deep freeze line in Anchorage. The basement and house had 6" thick reinforced concrete walls, with a stucco outer treatment to make it look like the other houses, and R-60 insulation. The roof itself was a double layer, with a conventional outer, and a concrete slab inside to seal the house completely from the outside air. They installed air handling equipment in the basement that would keep the pressure in the house slightly higher than atmospheric in the event of an emergency so any bio or chemical agents wouldn't penetrate. The floor between the house and the basement was actually as strong as some high-rise buildings, with a steel deck supporting a 6" thick reinforced concrete floor.

Part of the basement housed their Grid-intertie power system by Outback power, and a huge propane-powered generator. They dug another hole, and installed a 3,000 gallon propane tank in a concrete-reinforced CMU brick enclosure, which was blast-resistant by design. They had their own well and a 1,000 gallon cistern with booster pumps to provide pressure. The roofing surface was covered with thin-film PV panels that made an estimated 10KWH in full sun. They had a wind turbine bank consisting of 6 Air-x wind turbines connected to their battery bank rated at 120KWH. Their inverter was sized at 10KW, so they had a 12-hour backup at full power, which they never figured on using, but with the Outback system, their 10KW inverter was actually 4 2500w inverters in parallel, and their smart system only activated inverters as needed, so if they were only using 2500 watts, the other 3 inverters would disconnect, and draw zero power until the control system detected an increased load, and turned them back on. With the huge propane tank, their water heater, stove, and furnace were all gas. They even installed a small gas-burning, glass-front cast-iron stove with a sealed firebox, so there was no air exchange inside the building to eliminate the CO hazard instead of a fireplace. They didn't have enough wood on their property to warrant a wood-burning stove.

During their spare time, Ralph rented a rototiller and planted a small garden out back. They knew they had their Bug-out location at the lodge, but they wanted to make their home as

survivable as possible. All the windows were built with 3/8" armor steel shutters with a thin wood veneer, and the door would stop a .308 round at point blank range, or a 12 gauge slug. The multiple locks on the doors were extra-long throw, and set into a steel frame, that was bolted into the concrete with 6" long bolts, and wasn't coming out without high explosives. When the contractor saw the design, he said they were building a fortress, to which Ralph said "It's our money!" Their new house was finished before their second son, Larry, was born. Moving while 9 months pregnant was no fun, but they had some help. They had made friends with some committed Christians from the same church that BA used to go to, and one of them commented he wished he could own a house like theirs; it looked like it could stop a horde of MZB's. Ralph didn't say anything, but remembered the comment; they might have stumbled onto some preparedness types.

By the time Sam had Larry, she was ready to be a full-time Mommy, and they checked their finances. Since the house was paid off, and Ralph was raking in the dough, there was no real reason for Sam to work, so she talked to Steve. She could either take an extended leave of absence, or quit. If she ever wanted to return to surgery at this hospital, he'd highly suggest the extended leave of absence, which could be up to 10 years for mothers with children. Since they had #2 of 4, she'd need 3-4 years to have #3 and 4, then 5-10 years until they were in school. She agreed to the 10-year leave of absence on two conditions: 1) she could come back sooner if they decided not to have #3 or #4, and she could permanently resign at any time. Steve agreed, since the hospital was hurting for ER Surgeons, and keeping her on staff on an extended leave of absence would help them for their next review. She talked it over with Ralph, who agreed, and she signed the leave of absence form. She gave Steve back her cell phone and all her stuff. He said he'd keep her ID handy just in case, and wished them well. Sam felt funny, she'd gone from Doctor Lacombe to Mommy, and hoped she was doing the right thing.

Driving home that afternoon, Ralph spotted an older 4x4 sitting on a street corner with a For Sale sign on it. He got a better look at it, and noticed it was an International Harvester, probably either a Scout II or a Traveler by the looks of it. Sam was wondering why he made a sudden right turn, stopped and parked until he said "You're not going to believe this, but I just saw a vehicle I've always wanted, and since you're going to be a stay-at home mom, we're going to need 2 vehicles" and he got out to look at it. He released the hood clamps, and couldn't believe his eyes, it was an in-line 6-cylinder turbodiesel. Doing some more checking, he could see someone had done some serious work restoring and refurbishing the vehicle. It looked like it had an air compressor and tank just like their Suburban. He saw the phone number on the windshield, and grabbed his cell phone, and called the number. An older man answered the phone, and said yes, it was for sale; he had to have surgery, and couldn't afford the surgery and the vehicle. The longer they talked, the more Ralph was interested. The vehicle was a complete restore/rebuild, and had several aftermarket upgrades including ARB air lockers front and rear, and a custom Atlas transfer case that gave him a 2-wheel low/high, and a 4-wheel low/high range, a 10k warn winch, dual batteries, a high-output alternator, Warn locking hubs on all 4 corners, and a nice set of Hella driving and fog lights attached to the front pipe bumper with radiator guard. The body was as-is, but he had done everything needed.

mechanically to make it a very formidable off-road vehicle. Ralph saw the lift kit, and the BFG 33x10x15 Mud-Terrain tires, and the guy said it had a 3-inch lift kit to clear the 33's, and a custom Rancho suspension upgrade. When the guy mentioned it was a Traveler, and not a Scout II, Ralph was really interested. He asked the guy if he could come over so he could start it up, and he admitted he couldn't drive, so Ralph offered to come over and pick him up in the Suburban. They got back in the Suburban, and the guy gave him turn-by-turn directions to his house. He walked out front, and opened the back door, and climbed in.

"Ralph, my name is Jacques Turner."

« Jacques, Mon nom est Raphaël Lacombe »

« You're pas d'autour ici, n'est-ce pas ? »

« You're redressent, I'm un Cajun français de Louisiane, mon dernier nom est Lacombe. »

« You're loin de maison, ce qui vous apporte en Alaska ? »

« Mon épouse et moi sont des médecins, et travaillent à l'hôpital ici à Anchorage. »

« L'épouse de you're parle-t-elle français ? »

Sam spoke up, « Oui, je Fai's monsieur, quand nous avons été engagés, il ai dû pratiquer son Cajun ainsi il pourrait aider ses parents' en Louisiane. »

Switching back to English, Jacques said, "I hope you like my baby, she was a labor of love. The only thing I didn't do to it that I wanted to was to install a snorkel kit. I've got the receipts for all the work done and the parts if you want them."

10 minutes later, they reached the IH Traveler, and Jacques ran his hands down the side, caressing it like a little child, and speaking quietly in French. Ralph and Sam knew he was saying goodbye to his creation, so they didn't interrupt. Finally, he handed Ralph the keys, and he used the nerf bar step to climb into the cab, and turned the key in the ignition to engage the glow plugs, and after a minute, turned it to start, and it started right up. Ralph let it idle and climbed back down.

"Jacques, you did an excellent job, she purrs like a kitten, and starts right up. Is there anyone around here you trust to work on it?"

Jacques handed him the card of the mechanic that helped him rebuild it "This is the gentleman who helped me rebuild her, he knows everything about her."

Ralph asked him if he could take it for a test ride, and asked Jacques if he wanted to get in the



passenger seat. After a slight struggle, Jacques made it into the deep bucket seat on the passenger side, and clipped into the 4-point restraint system. When he saw the 4-point system and the full roll cage, he knew Jacques was serious about off-road driving. Ralph buckled his 4-point as well, and Sam waited in the Suburban where it was warm. Half an hour later, Ralph came back grinning from ear to ear. Between the Nissan 3.3 liter diesel, the turbocharger, and the 4-speed manual transmission, and the 2-speed transfer case, the Traveler was capable of great acceleration on the street, and good highway performance. Ralph asked Jacques how much he wanted for it, and he said he needed 15,000 for the surgery. Ralph offered him \$20,000.00 for it, and Jacques said "That's too much!"

"Jacques, you did a wonder rebuilding her, and I wanted to pay you more than you asked. I can afford to pay you \$20,000 easily. That way, when you recover, you can buy another International Harvester, and build another one."

"Thanks Ralph, I'd like that!"

Ralph knew that there was a B of A nearby and asked Jacques about registration, title, and bill of sale. Jacques took out a folder with everything in it, and receipts for all the parts and labor, and on top was the title, registration, and a blank bill of sale. Ralph checked the title and registration, and the names and addresses matched. He wasn't too worried that the Title was a wreck title, since most IHC trucks and vehicles are resurrected from junkyards. He asked Jacques if they could go to his bank so Ralph could pay him cash, and Jacques could fill out the Bill of Sale. Jacques said he banked at the same bank, so they could just do a bank draft to his account. Ralph asked Samantha to follow them to the bank, and then Jacques needed a lift home. Sam suggested she just drive home, since the kids were still with the babysitter, and he take care of the details. Ralph gave her a kiss, and said he'd see her at home. An hour later, Ralph pulled up in his IHC Traveler, and parked it in the garage next to Sam's Suburban. Sam had Bert and Larry fed, and was ready for a nap herself. Ralph gave her a hug and a kiss, and said he'd make dinner, and to take it easy. She laid down on the couch, and half an hour later Ralph had dinner ready. Sam was really hungry, and the gumbo he made looked delicious. They said grace, and ate quickly in case either of the boys would wake up. They went back into the living room, and watched a movie, then got the boys ready for bed, and went to bed themselves.

The next morning Ralph drove over to the DMV office and registered the vehicle in his name, and paid the licensing fees for 1 year. He called his insurance company, and added the new vehicle to their insurance. He told them to list the value of the vehicle at \$20,000.00 since it was a full restoration with receipts. The customer service clerk told him to keep track of his receipts, they'd need it for an insurance claim, since the vehicle had no blue book value. On the way home, he stopped at the bank, and took out a Safe Deposit box in both their names, with a single signature required. The teller told Ralph that Sam would have to sign the signature card before she'd have access, and Ralph thanked her for reminding him. He put the title and receipts in the box, and received 2 keys from the teller. When he got home, he told Sam he got

a safe deposit box, and she needed to stop at the bank sometime to sign the signature card so she'd have access to their safe deposit box. After playing with the boys, Ralph logged onto the internet, and located some web sites dedicated to old IHC vehicles, and copied several of their ideas, including an idea for secure storage, and a list of things to put in there. He decided to leave the top on the Traveler for security, and have someone install a security box under the rear carpet. He made a list of contents, and realized he needed 2 of them, and a security box for the Suburban as well. He'd kill 2 birds with 1 stone, and buy twice as much of everything he needed, and have a local body shop fabricate and install the security box. All he had to tell them was he was a doctor and that should satisfy their curiosity. He found a website that sold off-road equipment cheap, and bookmarked it for later. He went through the yellow pages, and located a couple of auto body shops. A couple hung up on him when he mentioned a secure storage box, and 1 showed some interest, but suggested coming in person, so he drove on over.

"I don't know what the big secret is, I'm a doctor, and need to store my medical kit, and some gear in my vehicle, and I need a secure and hidden storage to keep my vehicle from getting broken into."

The owner of the shop said he was sorry, since he never knew whom he was dealing with over the phone, and was afraid of entrapment, or getting involved in smuggling or other illegal activities.

"I can assure you there is nothing illegal involved, I just need 2 hidden secure storage boxes made and installed in my 2 vehicles. One is this Suburban, and the other is a IHC Traveler."

The shop owner pulled out a pad and paper, then a calculator, and quoted a pretty reasonable price to Ralph. He added 50 bucks each when Ralph said the cases had to be locking with pick-resistant locks, since he carried narcotics in his medical kit. The owner took some measurements of Ralph's Suburban, and told him to come back a week later to have it installed after hours. He did all this work on the side after hours so his employees wouldn't know and cause security issues. Ralph appreciated that, and said he'd be back a week later to get the box installed in the Suburban. He showed up a week later, and the box fit perfectly. The owner opened the lid, checked under the body to make sure he wasn't going to hit anything, and installed 4 heavy-duty rivets to keep the box in place, and cut them flush on the bottom, and sprayed them with a can of undercoating. He replaced the carpet with a slightly oversized piece of carpet, and finished it to look stock. He had Ralph write him a check personally, so Ralph paid him \$500 for the first box. The owner said for him to bring in the other vehicle tomorrow at this time, and he'd measure it up. A little over a week later, Ralph had secure storage boxes in both vehicles, and started ordering the gear to fill them. He was amazed at how much stuff he could get into the box, including a complete emergency kit, clothes, food, water, an advanced first aid kit, their medical bags, a spare box of .45 acp ammo and 2 spare magazines for their P-14s loaded with Flying Ashcan rounds.

## Chapter 50 - The Book of Armaments

Once Ralph had anything he wanted in the case which was the full width of the back, 6 inches tall, and 4 feet deep; he still had room left over. He thought of his AR-15's but the Bushmasters were way too big to fit. He called Ron, and told him of his problem. Ron said he knew exactly what he needed, and Allakaket Airlines had a couple of spares to give them on a long-term loan. Ralph said his next day off was Saturday, and asked Ron if they'd like to come over and see their new house. Ron said he could bring the items while he was at it, and Ralph said "Yes" in a heartbeat. Ron asked Ralph if they could meet him at the Alaska Airlines VIP lot where they dropped off the SuperGoose last time. Ron said the guard would be expecting him. Ralph said he'd have to come by himself, since Sam was busy with their two boys. Ron asked if 10:00 Saturday morning would be OK, and Ralph said "sure, see ya then."

When Ron got off the phone, he called Bear, and asked him if they could spare 2 of the SOPMOD M - 4 kits, and a couple of cases of grenades. Bear asked whom it was for, and Ron told him it was for Ralph and Sam. Bear knew they were ER trained docs, and would be worth their weight in gold if TSHTF, so he said "Heck Yeah, I'll take 2 kits from the armory in Allakaket and 2 bandoleers full of 40mm HE grenades. Anything we can do for those 2 is OK by me."

"Doc and I are building a hunting lodge behind our cabin, it's also going to be their bug-out retreat if TSHTF."

"We should get them to train with our militia, and ask if they want to cross-train our medics."

"We're going to see them tomorrow, want to come with us?"

"I'll be there, when are you going to leave?"

"Ralph's picking us up at 1000, so we need to be out of Allakaket at 0800, can you get 007 to fly you to Allakaket by 0800?"

"Sure, I'll bring some toys they might want, I mean if we're already giving them weapons that would put them away for a long time if caught with them, they might as well go for the whole shooting match."

"Just make sure you don't blow us up en route."

"That shouldn't be a problem; they're in their original shipping crates."

"Ok, see you at 0800 at the airport."

Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to see Ralph & Sam's new house in Anchorage, and their two boys. Nancy thought he meant "now" and almost flattened him in her haste to get to the door. Ron quickly explained that he meant Saturday. She apologized for running him over, and asked why she was telling him now. Ron said that they needed Anne to babysit since they were bringing some "presents" to them that he didn't want the kids anywhere near. Nancy picked up on his euphemism, and suggested they call Anne and Gene right now. Ron called, and Anne said "Anne's Babysitting service, whom do you need sat on?"

Ron tried not to laugh, and asked his mom if they could take the kids Saturday. They were going to see Ralph and Sam, and give them some presents they didn't want the kids around. Gene had filled Anne in on some of the toys they had stashed around Allakaket, and agreed she didn't want the kids anywhere near them either. All she needed is for Jake or Josh to pull the pin on a grenade, and blow their whole family to smithereens. Ron said they would drop them off early Saturday, so Anne said she'd get Gene's lazy butt up early so they were decent. Ron was having a hard time not laughing, and finally said "bye mom" before she tried harder to make him laugh. He told Nancy they were all set, and got ready for tomorrow.

Saturday morning, getting the kids and the 2 dogs into the truck was as easy as opening the front door, and saying "we're going to Grandma's house!" 10 minutes later, Jake and Josh at least waited for the truck to stop before running into Anne's arms, followed by Starsky and Hutch, and Sarah and David. Gene was amazed at how big Starsky and Hutch had gotten since the last time he saw them. Jake and Josh were getting big too. Ron and Nancy hugged Anne and Gene respectively, and got back into the truck, saying they should be home by tonight. Bear was waiting for them with several crates already loaded on the SuperGoose, and the turbines idling. They parked and climbed aboard the SuperGoose. Bear told them, "If I were you, I'd land and take-off real gently!" Ron took the hint, no Max performance take-offs or rough landings unless he wanted to go "Boom!" He called the tower, and was given take-off clearance while he taxied out to the lake. Ron took off gently, and cruise-climbed to 2,000 feet. He called Anchorage control about 2 hours later, and got clearance to land and taxi over to Alaska Airlines VIP terminal. When he got to the AA VIP lot, a ground crewman guided him into a slot, and they shut down. As soon as the props stopped spinning, Ralph's green Suburban cruised up next to the cabin door, and they soon had the boxes transferred. Ralph gave Ron and Nancy a big hug, and Ron introduced Bear. Ralph remembered who he was, and gave him a hug too. They all piled into the Suburban for the drive back to Ralph and Sam's house. From the outside, Ron thought their house was large but unremarkable. The closer he got, the more intrigued he was. Finally he blurted out "Ralph, were you trying to build a fortress - because you succeeded."

"I call it a "Stealth Fortress. It looks like a normal house from a distance, but as you can see, this house could stop 30 caliber rifle fire all day, and maybe .50 caliber fire."

Bear said "I guess what we brought will fit right in. I hope you have a cart, or someone's going to have a hernia."

Ralph got their heavy duty cart, and they loaded the cases and boxes onto it. Ralph thought the boxes were exceptionally heavy, and knew better to ask about it until they were behind closed doors. Once they were in the foyer, Ralph told Bear to take a right, and he reached up, slid a picture aside, and entered a code on the pad, and a door clicked open, and a freight elevator hummed to a stop.”

“You’ve got a freight elevator?”

“Beats the alternative!”

They rolled the cart onto the elevator, and Ralph pressed the down button. 2 minutes later it stopped, and the door opened onto their basement. Ron and Nancy were amazed at what they saw; they had a complete survival shelter with most of the stuff they did. Bear was glad to see they were a little thin on the armaments department, and knew what he was bringing in would help. Once they were all out of the elevator, Sam gave Ron and Nancy a big hug, and said she was in the middle of feeding her boys, and would catch them later, and hurried back upstairs. Curiosity got the better of Ralph, and he asked “so what did you bring us.”

Bear said, “This stuff is on long-term loan, but feel free to use it.” Then he took out his Ka-bar and pried open the cases. The first thing out was the SOPMOD M - 4 kits in a padded steel case. The next case included the 40mm Grenades for the M - 203 in the kits. The next case contained 12 Claymores. Ralph realized that if they got caught with this stuff, Hell would freeze over before they got out of prison.

“Why are you giving us all this stuff?”

Bear said “The M - 4 is a Class III weapon, its Full Auto, so even having it was enough to put you away for 20 years or more. Since you were in for a penny, I thought I’d give you some stuff to really defend this place if TSHTF, and if this isn’t enough, I can have either Ron pick you up in the SuperGoose if things are fairly calm, or one of our armed 007 helicopters, or if things really are FUBAR, I can send the Super Stallion armed with 7.62 GE Mini-guns and an assault team to get you and yours out of here, and to the hunting lodge/Bug-Out retreat Doc and Ron are building right behind their lodge at HelpmeJack Lake. No one is getting anywhere near there without either a lot of work, a helicopter, or an Amphibian. And even if they did, we need to show you some stuff General Shepard gave us right before he retired and moved to Allakaket.”

“General Shepard retired to Allakaket - This I gotta see! I wanted to thank him anyway; those Federal CCW’s saved our lives at least once.”

“You’re going to be in for a bigger shock. Gene, that’s General Shepard’s first name, married my mom a little while ago, and he’s now the Senior Pistol champion at our Company Indoor Shooting range and pool complex.”

“Must be nice to have the bucks?”

“It’s not bad, but when Doc moved to Allakaket after selling the mansion, he made BA and I look like paupers. He’s putting up half the money to build what we’re calling Doc’s Lodge behind our lodge at HelpmeJack Lake. We need to take you guys there as soon as you’d like, maybe early next summer after the snow melts, and before the hunters arrive.”

Ralph took a closer look at the box of grenades, and realized they were High Explosive grenades and said “Holy Hand grenades Batman!”

Ron quipped “Sorry Ralph, wrong movie. I think the “Holy Hand Grenade was in Monty Python and the Holy Grail!”

Ralph turned out to be a Monty Python fan, and came back with “She turned me into a Newt!” in a perfect Cockney accent.

They were both laughing themselves silly as Bear stood there wondering WTF. It seems Bear was the wrong generation to have seen much Monty Python, and didn’t get the joke. Ron decided to move on instead of explaining things. Bear handed Ralph a box full of field manuals covering the M -4 SOPMOD kit, the M -203 40mm Grenade launcher and grenades, and the Claymore mines. Bear noticed that Ralph had cleared all the trees and shrubbery around his house that could provide cover in a firefight, but neglected to cut firing ports into his shutters, or make prepared fighting holes. Bear took Ralph aside, and kindly pointed those deficiencies out. Ralph took it as Bear meant it, and asked for help, since George decided to stay in Atlanta and build his militia. They walked outside, and Ralph was carrying a clipboard and a legal pad, and writing down everything Bear suggested. Bear said that if he planted planters far enough away from the house, and about 3-4 feet high, and made them out of thick timbers, they could stand behind the planters and shoot, except if whoever was attacking them had grenades of some type, they could loft them between the planter and the wall, and create a killing zone. If they fought from inside the house, and cut cross-shaped slots in the shutters, they could shoot through the windows, from behind bulletproof cover, and it would take a LAWS rocket or RPG to punch through their walls.

Ralph said that the house wasn’t designed to stand up to a military assault, just stop looters and Dirtbags from killing them, since they probably wouldn’t be armed with anything heavier than 30 caliber weapons. If it got that bad, they’d contact Bear or Ron, and request an evacuation.

Bear stopped him dead in his tracks when he asked “How?”

Ralph had never considered that. If things were totally FUBAR, the cell system, phones, and the internet would probably be toast. He had no ideas for long-distance comms.

Bear suggested they get their Ham radio license, put radios in both vehicles, and a base station

in the basement, with enough power to reach Allakaket. Ralph said he'd look into that ASAP. Bear said most of the information he needed was on the Amateur Radio Relay League or ARRL website. <http://www.arrl.org>

Ralph walked over to his computer, and 15 minutes later, knew more than he ever wanted to about Amateur Radio. He decided that the 2-meter handy talkies and 50-watt mobile radios would be sufficient for local communications, and a multi-band transceiver would be necessary to get onto the HF frequencies to reach Allakaket over 300 miles away. He also discovered that both he and Sam would have to have licenses and at least pass the Tech requirements. Later, he'd need a General to gain HF privileges so he could reach Allakaket. Ralph asked Bear if he had a clue how long it was before he thought that the stinky stuff would hit the rotating blade. Bear laughed and said that his crystal ball was in the shop, but if he were Ralph, he'd get fully certified in Ham radio ASAP, since it was tough to use voice on the HF frequencies.

Later that afternoon, Bear helped Ralph repack his kits in his vehicle, so he could get his medical and first aid stuff out without accidentally displaying the M -4 setup. Bear repacked the M -4 kit, and took several items out that they couldn't use without NVG's or couldn't use with the M -203 mounted (which it was), which made room for 10 loaded 30-round magazines, and 6 40mm grenades. Nancy and Sam spent the time getting caught up, and Sam was pumping Nancy for information about how to raise kids, especially boys, since these two were driving her out of her mind. Nancy said that controlled panic was normal, and the best thing she could do was get them on a routine, and don't deviate from that unless necessary. She said having a baby-proof "Kid room" helped. Nancy said it was up to them, but a good dog was a great babysitter, once the kids were old enough to know not to pull its ears or tail to see if they came off. Sam was laughing her head off, imagining that, and then she realized why Nancy had said it. Pulling on a dog's ears or tail was a good way to get bit, and dogs normally bit to punish by biting the face, which didn't really hurt a puppy, but could scar a kid for life. Nancy said installing a whole-house video monitoring system was a good idea to keep an eye on the kids, and see who's coming up the driveway. Sam said she was going to get Ralph to get one installed ASAP. Later that afternoon, Ron, Ralph, and Bear made an appearance, spent some time with Sam and Nancy, and then Ron said they needed to get home if they wanted to land at Allakaket in daylight. Nancy wasn't too keen on landing in the dark so she agreed. Ralph said he'd drive them back to the airport, and he'd be back later. Sam kissed him goodbye, and they were out the door. On the way there Ron, Ralph, and Bear all exchanged contact information so they could get in touch with each other. Ralph gave them all a hug when he dropped them off next to the SuperGoose, and they climbed aboard. Ron dropped Bear off at his place, and landed in Allakaket with barely enough daylight to call it a daylight landing. He used the landing light again because he had it, and it didn't hurt to use it in twilight conditions. When they got to the truck, Ron called his mom to let them know they were home. Anne said they sounded tired, and she already had the kids fed and in their PJs so they could keep them overnight. Ron didn't argue, and thanked his Mom. Ron and Nancy went home and crashed since they were exhausted. They picked up the kids the next morning, and spent the rest of the day goofing off.

When Ralph got home, he contacted a local ARRL-affiliated radio club and talked to Virgil, their President, who was a total Elmer. When Ralph told him what he was planning on installing, he suggested a 100-foot tower, which would increase his transmit and receive range for the Kenwood TS-480SAT Multiband radio he wanted. He agreed that the Kenwood G-707A/E would make a great, but pricey mobile unit, and the THG71A was a really durable handheld, with dual-band capability, but to get the bigger battery, and the Cigarette Lighter Adapter for it, since it ate up battery power on high power. He thought Ralph's idea to connect a 100Ah AGM-type deep cycle battery to his battery bank with a big diode to keep the bank from discharging the battery would work as good as or better than buying a Regulated Power Supply for several hundred dollars, and it could extend the use of his radio for several hours even in he lost his battery bank. Virgil suggested a local radio shop that could install everything, and didn't gouge members of the local radio club.

Ralph asked how he joined, and Virgil said the dues were \$25.00 per year per family, but they both had to have their FCC Technician licenses first. He mailed Ralph a spare copy of the ARRL book "Now you're talking" and suggested taking the practice tests to find out what areas they were weak in, the test was pass/fail, and fairly easy if you knew anything about basic electronics. To transmit on his HF radio, he'd want a General ticket to take full advantage of the radio's capabilities, which required copying Morse code at 5wpm. Ralph said he'd probably use Packet Radio comms, since they were quicker. Virgil explained that Morse code was a FCC requirement, and he had to have it to transmit on most of the HF frequencies. Ralph said ok, and asked how long it would take to get their Tech licenses. Virgil said it usually took a month or two to study, then they could schedule a test session, and usually within a week of taking the test, they had their license registered with the FCC, and they were good to go. The club met once a month at the local café, and did a club-wide Net on the radio Wednesday evenings from about 8:00 to 8:30. Virgil told Ralph to call him with any questions, but try to look it up in the book first, and to call him when they were ready to take their Technician License test.

Ralph walked upstairs, and talked with Sam. She agreed that Ham Radios would be way more useful in an emergency than Cellular phones, because 1) If the Cell Phones worked, they would probably be jammed with emergency calls, and 2) Both the regular phone service and the Cellular Network had to be working for Cellular calls to go through, and 3) The Club's 2-meter and 440MHz band repeater network had an auto-patch feature into the phone system for emergencies. Ralph told her that Virgil had loaned them his study guide for the technician license. Ralph knew quite a bit about electronics, but Sam didn't have a clue. Ralph offered to tutor her in Electronics so she could pass the test. Virgil admitted if you bombed the questions on FCC regulations, but got all the rest right, you'd still pass easily, since there was only 3-5 questions on FCC regulations in the test, and the rest was basic electronics, safety, and common-sense questions. If they spent a month and really studied, they could probably ace the test. Ralph helped Sam feed the boys, and get them to bed, then they started studying for the test. Ralph was impressed, Sam seemed to pick up on this quickly. She told him that she had always been good at Math, and formulas were a walk in the park for her. The rest of the test information was rote memorization, but after they read it through a couple of times, they figured



out where the critical information was, and were ready to go in 2 weeks when they both aced the practice tests. Ralph called Virgil, and said they could set up a test date next Saturday. Ralph asked what to do about their two infant sons. Virgil said his wife Marge would come along so she could babysit them for the test session. They had another room where they could stay in their car seats and hopefully sleep through the testing session. Ralph asked Sam, and asked how long the testing session lasted. It was only an hour or so, so Sam thought that would be OK.

Ralph and Sam packed Bert and Larry up in their car seats, and loaded the Suburban full of kid stuff, and drove to the test site. Marge was more than happy to watch the kids, and Sam decided it would be OK. An hour later, they both passed their Technician license exams, and would be good to go in a week or two. Ralph wrote a check for the 2 exam fees, and 1 year's membership in the Anchorage Amateur Radio Club. Virgil handed him a receipt for the membership dues, and suggested they show it to Tom at the radio store. It might be cheaper to buy the radios through him that to pay to have them shipped to Alaska, besides, if there was anything wrong, it would save them the shipping back to the lower 48. Ralph called Tom, and said he was a new member of the AARC, and got pretty reasonable quotes for all his radio gear, antennas, and installation. Tom told Ralph that he had a used tower out back that he could sell Ralph cheap as long as he installed it, since he needed to climb up the tower to install his base station antennas. Even though they rarely got major thunderstorms in Anchorage, Tom suggested an antenna switch with a lightning grounding system that also protected the system against EMP. That got Ralph's attention, and he asked Tom to bring a 4-position switch plus ground, and enough Coax cable to install 4 antennas on the tower, even though he only was going to use 2 for now. Tom said he had a 150Ah 12vdc Concorde VRLA battery in stock, that was sitting in his shop for 3 months when a customer ordered it and changed his mind. Tom said he'd sell it for 10% below his cost installed, because if he kept it another 90 days, it would be impossible to sell. Ralph asked what his normal selling price was, and realized he was selling the battery for an effective 50% discount if he included delivery and installation. Ralph asked if he had a large blocking diode to keep the battery from discharging back into the battery bank. Tom said he'd throw one in at no charge. Ralph decided to go ahead and give Tom all his business, and Tom said he'd call him when the radios were in to set up the installation. Ralph asked him if he could pay for everything now except the installation labor, and Tom said he'd drop his price by 10% if he could, so Ralph gave Tom his credit card number, and Tom e-mailed Ralph a receipt showing all the radios and parts were paid in full, and a quote for the installation labor.

2 weeks later, Tom called and said the radios were in. Ralph asked if he could install the radios in the vehicles Saturday morning. Tom said he usually didn't work Saturdays, but he'd come in for Ralph since he was a Doctor, and couldn't get off during the week. The next Saturday morning, Ralph dropped off the IH Traveler, and walked next door to the coffee shop, since Tom said it would only take an hour. When Ralph came back, the radio was installed, and Tom was programming it with all the repeater frequencies for this section of Alaska, and entering the repeater name into the memory, since the radio had an alphanumeric memory. Tom handed him

a printout showing the names and locations of all the repeaters in the county, and the names and locations of nearby area repeaters for Tok and Whitehorse. Ralph asked him if he had time to install the other mobile radio, and Tom said he'd need an hour for a lunch break. Ralph replied that it would take him that long to drive home and back, since he was on the other side of Anchorage. An hour later, Ralph drove up in the Suburban, and it barely fit in Tom's work bay. Ralph went next door to read a book and kill an hour, and when he came back, Tom was finished everything including programming the mobile and both handy talkies. He said that he'd program the 3rd mobile radio when he came over next Saturday to install the base station system and the antenna. He suggested that Ralph be ready for him at 0800 Saturday morning, since it was an all-day job. Ralph checked to make sure the radios were on the seat, shook Tom's hand, and said he'd see him next Saturday at 0800, and backed out of his shop.

When Ralph got home, their licenses had come in the mail, and they decided to check out their radios. They set both of their hand-held radios to the closest repeater, and Ralph jogged out to the driveway, and keyed his microphone. "KO7CXY calling KO7CZY, how do you copy?"

"Copy 5x5, full quieting."

"Roger, I'll be back in a second, let me try the mobiles in both vehicles."

After 2 more radio checks, Ralph knew all 4 radios worked perfectly, and came back inside. Next week Tom would be over to install their radio antenna tower, and both base station radios. Since Ralph didn't have his General yet, he decided to go with 4 dual-band omni antennas instead of 1 multi-band antenna, leaving 2 slots open on the antenna switch. He wanted 1 high-gain antenna, and 1 long-wire dipole antenna for the HF frequencies. The 2-meter was going to be connected to a 1/2-wave omni antenna since it would be mounted high enough that he could take advantage of the 1/2-wave propagation characteristics. Ralph wanted 1 high-gain antenna to reach Allakaket, but was worried about wind load. Tom said he had some tricks up his sleeve that could get him a 9-12dB gain with a low sail area to minimize wind load on the tall tower.

## Chapter 51 - Now You're Talking

Tom called back the next day, and said in his best Don Corleone Voice "I'm gonna make you an offer you can't refuse!"

Ralph came back as Clint Eastwood "Go Ahead, Make my day!"

Tom was laughing so hard he couldn't talk, finally he managed to say "I found a used Gap Titan DX, it was still mounted to the tower I was going to sell you. They're worth around \$350 new, so I'll sell it to you for \$250 and guarantee it works. The Gap Challenger DX I was going to sell you costs more than \$250 just for shipping, it's so big and heavy. I'll throw in a 1/2-wave 2-meter/440 antenna I have so you have all your bands covered."

Ralph decided to be a character, switched voices to Dom DeLuise (as Don Giovanni) "I accept your offer of friendship."

Tom decided to forego any Tomfoolery and get serious. "Ok, see you at 8:00 Saturday!"

Ralph could not resist, and said "Hasta La Vista, Baby!"

Tom hung up before things got any punnier.

Saturday morning arrived, and Ralph was ready when Tom drove up at 0800 in a F-450 pickup towing a huge flatbed trailer with the disassembled tower on it. Right behind him was a utility truck with a light-duty hydraulic crane to lift the assembled tower. Tom showed him where he thought the tower should go, and Ralph was surprised that Tom wanted it so far from the house. "Ralph, these antennas will be kicking out tons of RF energy, you don't want that anywhere near your wife and kids. Besides, I brought a whole roll of 50-ohm coax and some plastic conduit to bury the line in. You said that you wanted your ham shack in the basement. I hope you planned ahead for that?"

"I had them install a 2" conduit just for radio cables and stuff. There's a threaded cap right over there painted bright orange." Tom fired up his compressor, and bolted the tower together using an air ratchet, and an air impact wrench set to 80 foot pounds for the final torque. His assistant grabbed the 6" gas powered auger and bored 3 holes 6-foot deep to bury the footings, and mixed a bag of quick-drying concrete. With help from the crane, they muscled the base unit over to the holes, and sunk the legs in 6 feet deep, and filled the holes with quick-drying concrete. He bored 3 more holes about 20 feet away for guy wire anchors. By the time Tom had the tower together, the concrete was set enough to work, and he hooked the cable of the crane to the balance point of the tower, and while the crane lifted the tower, the 4 of them muscled it into place. Once the bolts slipped home, Tom drove the nuts home with the air impact wrench. "Now for the fun stuff" said Tom as he put on his safety harness and tool belt.

They connected the crane's lift hook to the antenna and extended the boom to its maximum length and height. While Tom climbed the tower with his climber's safety belt, the crane operator slowly lifted the antenna aloft to match. Once they reached the top, Tom secured himself, and fastened the brackets to the top of the tower, and connected the base of the antenna at 3 points to the tower. The operator let the cable slack, which released it from the antenna, and he lowered it all the way to the ground, and lifted the coax cable with the PL-259 connector on it up to Tom, who tightened the connection, then zip-tied the cable to the tower every 6 feet as he descended. 80 feet above ground, he connected the dual-band omni-directional 2-Meter/440Mhz antenna and coax cable to a 6-foot stand-off to keep it from interacting with the tower, and keep it out of the path of any ice falling from the Titan antenna above. When he got to the 75 foot level, he attached the guy connectors, and the crane hauled the guy wires aloft, and he secured guy wires to each of the 3 legs of the tower. He kept securing the coax cables as he descended, and stopped when he was 6-feet above ground. When he got on the ground, he took off his tool belt and safety harness, saying he was glad that was over, and his assistant filled the 3 holes with concrete, and stuck the guy wire anchor bolts into the concrete.

Tom said they'd have to wait a week for the concrete to get to full strength before they could fully tighten the guy wires, so they were going to leave them loose for now. They connected the guy wires to the anchors with adjustable turnbuckles, and attached orange Surveyor's tape to the wire every couple of feet from ground to about 10 feet in the air. Tom grabbed a huge copper-clad grounding rod, and drove it 8 feet into the ground with a fence post driver close to the tower, then he attached a heavy-gauge grounding wire to the tower, and ran it down to the rod. The tower was now grounded in case of lightning, and as soon as the concrete set, they'd come back and fully tension the guy wires. They adjourned to the basement to install the radios while his assistant used the Ditch Witch to dig a trench from the tower to the conduit outlet. Tom connected the 12vdc battery bank power lead to the huge AGM-type deep-cycle battery, and installed a large blocking diode and a 50amp fuse on the positive lead between the battery and the bank, then he connected the radios to the battery using the included in-line fuses. After he finished digging the trench, the assistant fed 5 color-coded coax cables through the conduit from the tower to the house, then fed them into the basement, adding a huge grounding cable. He drove a grounding rod into the ground next to the house and connected the grounding cable to it.

Tom connected the 2-meter/440 antenna coax cable with a PL-259 directly to the Kenwood G-707A/E, so he had enough room on the antenna switch for 3 additional antennas for the Kenwood TS-480SAT Multiband radio, but Tom doubted he would need any more. Once everything was connected, Tom connected a SWR meter between the G-707 and the antenna cable, and ran several tests to make sure the SWR was below 2:1. When it tested around 1.5:1, Tom told Ralph that he had a darn near perfect setup, and he shouldn't have any antenna problems, and if his transmissions got noisy, he could borrow the SWR meter, and if the SWR was above 2:1, he had a problem. Since the TS-480 had a built-in antenna tuner, it was not necessary to check the SWR, but he did it anyway, and it was also below 2:1. Tom connected the grounding cable to the antenna switch, and showed Ralph how to use everything. He looked

at his watch, and it was almost 5:00, so he said he had to get home for dinner, and packed everything up and left, telling Ralph he'd be back next Saturday to adjust the guy wires and check everything. He made Ralph promise not to transmit on any HF bands he wasn't authorized for until he got his General, and Ralph assured him that if he heard Ralph on a HF frequency, it would be an emergency, unless he really got into DX'ing.

Ralph had better things to do with his time than talk to a stranger in Australia he'd never see again. Some Hams were into DX, but Ralph was a preparedness nut, and was willing to go to the extra expense to have a means of emergency comms, and would only practice enough to stay current so he could communicate in an emergency. Ron realized Sam needed a General too, since he might be stuck at work during an emergency, and she'd need to use the radio. On the other hand, if it was an emergency, all the rules went out the window as far as the FCC was concerned. Ralph e-mailed Ron and told him he had long-range HF capability, and they arranged several emergency frequencies and protocols. The Airport tower at Allakaket as well as Ron, BA, and Bear had long-range HF sets for emergency use, so one of them should hear the message, and be able to pass it on to the correct party.

Ralph realized it had been over a month since he last practiced shooting with his pistol, and checked the yellow pages for a nearby indoor shooting range. The closest range was Alaska Guns, but when Ralph called, a nice guy named Jim said they had recently moved and were in the process of remodeling, and they planned on having a nice 7-lane shooting range adjacent to the new store some time next year. He suggested the Fish and Game range, since the nearest indoor range was in Palmer, over 40 miles north of them. He called the phone number for the Rabbit Creek range, and found out it was a rifle range. The only place he knew for sure that he could shoot his pistols until Alaska Guns finished their range was the range at Allakaket, or Bear's range. Either one was a 2-hour plane ride away. Ralph realized that unless he flew to Allakaket, his pistol-shooting skills would deteriorate until the other range was built. Ralph went upstairs to spend some quality time with Sam, Bert, and Larry. Ralph noticed Sam didn't seem so stressed, and chalked it up to Sam talking to Nancy, and getting some tips from the "old pro." Sam asked Ralph if he wanted to have a dog, since Nancy said a good dog was invaluable as a playmate and babysitter. Ralph pointed out that he didn't have time to take care of it during the day while he was working, and a puppy would be almost as troublesome as another child. Sam told Ralph that since she talked to Nancy, she didn't feel so stressed, since most of her stress came from not knowing what to expect, since she was an only child, without a mother to advise her on child-rearing techniques. Thankfully Nancy volunteered to help whenever possible, and if she needed to she should call her if she needed something right now. Ralph marveled at the lengths Ron and Nancy were willing to go to help them. He asked Sam about it and Sam admitted that Ron probably loved her, but wasn't in love with her, and Nancy saw her as a younger sister. They were probably closer than most friends now due to the incident at their wedding. Ralph had to admit that risking your life to save a friend was pretty high up on the Friends totem pole. Ralph was really grateful for Ron and Nancy, and hoped one day to be able to return the favor. Ralph helped Sam diaper his sons and feed them dinner, then he reheated some Crawfish Gumbo he had in the freezer. He liked making a big pot of Gumbo

or Jambalaya and freezing the leftovers for later. They even bought a big chest freezer so they would have room to do that when Sam thought that was an excellent idea, since she liked Cajun food too! While he reheated dinner, Sam put the kids down for the night, and took a shower. Ralph said grace, then after dinner they cuddled on the couch until Sam whispered in Ralph's ear, and he picked her up and carried her to the bedroom.

## Chapter 52 - First Snow

Luckily Ralph took Ron's advice and got their vehicles ready early for winter. His Traveler had an engine block heater, but the mechanic wanted to add a fuel tank heater, explaining it didn't do any good to have warm oil if the fuel had jelled. Ralph was pleasantly surprised to find that the heaters weren't that expensive, and had Sam's Suburban checked. Both vehicles already had recovery and repair kits and chains, so they were set. The mechanic drained their summer fluids, and replaced the windshield washer fluid with Arctic grade fluid, and made sure the radiator fluids and oil were fresh. He drained and replaced the transmission fluid on Sam's Suburban and replaced the gear oil in both differentials and the transfer case. He knew that Ralph's Traveler just had the diffs and transfer case serviced, so he just topped them off. Ralph asked if the Suburban should get a tune-up, then he realized that Ralph was just playing with him. He told Ralph "Don't laugh, I personally know of some mechanics that charged someone with a diesel for a tune-up." Ralph was surprised when Ron called and said he was flying to Anchorage, and had a couple of packages for them, and he needed to meet Ron at the Alaska Air VIP terminal in an hour.

An hour later, Ron taxied up to the terminal, and when he shut down, he opened the door. Ralph backed the Suburban up and dropped the tailgate. Ron handed him several boxes of jars. Ralph remembered they never picked up the canned caribou meat that was the last thing he remembered Bert doing. Then Ron handed him a big package, saying there were all 5 caribou skins in there, since Doc didn't want his from that year, and his family had more than they needed. He suggested taking one of the skins and making knee-high lace-up boots with vibram soles with the fur out, saying they would be the warmest boots he'd ever worn, but they weren't waterproof. He told Ralph of a good boot maker that was quick and relatively inexpensive. With Sam pregnant again, they should make a nice loose maternity dress for her, and if she made the bodice lace up like Anne did, she could nurse with it on. Ron almost suggested a shirt and pants combo for Ralph, but figured he would get laughed off the planet if he showed up in Anchorage wearing that. Instead, he suggested a knee-length nightshirt that he could wear over polypro longjohns around the house. Ralph almost made a crack about guys and dresses, and decided against it, he'd wear sweat pants under it. He thanked Ron and asked him if he could come to the house. Ron said he would like to, but was here to pick up the weekly delivery since Steve was sick, and he had to get back to Allakaket. They shook hands, and Ron got back into the SuperGoose and taxied over to the delivery terminal, where the driver was waiting for him. Half an hour later, he was in the air flying back to Allakaket with a full plane.

Ralph drove home and showed Sam what Ron had delivered. For some reason, Sam was crying when Ralph showed her the caribou meat. He put the package of skins down and held his wife until she stopped crying. Together they put the cases of canned caribou meat up in their storage, and then Ralph showed her the skins, and told her Ron's suggestions. She was taken aback at Ron's suggestion for the lace-up bodice, but remembered she told Nancy what a hassle it was to breast feed with a regular bra. Nancy told her that if she were at home, forget the bra,

and if she had a caribou skin maternity gown like Anne and Nancy did, it was a lot easier to unlace the bodice and go ahead and nurse. Sam had enough problems with Ralph keeping his hands off her; she hoped he wouldn't take her open bodice as an invitation. She really didn't mind, it's just with two energetic boys and a 3rd boy on the way, she was really tired most of the time. She told Ralph that if he bought her a sewing machine and some heavy denim needles, she could make a maternity gown and a night shirt easy enough. She thought the caribou skin boots were an excellent idea, and remembered Nancy saying how warm they were.

The next day they drove to the boot maker's shop, with Bert and Larry in their child-seat carriers. He measured their feet and legs, and said the knee-high lace-up boots would be \$200 per pair if he could keep the leftovers from a caribou skin, because he could make 3 pairs of boots out of 1 skin, and this one was huge and in excellent shape. Ralph said that it was taken over by HelpmeJack Lake, and Ron Williams brain tanned it for him. He was impressed, the only people who brain-tanned skins anymore were the Inuit people who still lived in their tribal villages. Ralph told him to make sure that the boots were hair side out. He noted that on the work order, and showed them what he used for soles and inner soles. The inner sole was heavily insulated with a Mylar layer to reflect heat and keep the foot warmer, and the sole was a heavy Vibram stitch-on sole with a deep lug pattern, so he could re-sole them for \$25 per pair. When they finished, they stopped at the sporting goods shop Ron shopped at, and bought a bunch of polypro longjohns, knee-high socks, and glove liners. They bought a dozen pairs of their warmest knee-high wool hiking socks as well. Sam saw a pair of Shearling indoor boots and bought 2 pairs, 1 for her, and 1 for Ralph, since she doubted he wanted to wear his big monster boots inside the house. They tried them on first, and they fit like gloves. The manager recommended either wearing them barefoot, or with a polypro liner, since the natural lanolin in the wool was good for their feet. Finally, they drove over to Wal-mart and bought a Brother sewing machine and a bunch of denim needles, since the clerk said the denim needles would get dull from punching through the caribou skins. She recommended a heavyweight Dacron thread, and sold Sam a 3-yard length of round leather lace for the lace-up bodice. Looking at Sam's pregnant form, she suggested a round style bodice, and handed her a pattern she said would fit her better. Sam was uncomfortable with her new "Jane Mansfield" body as she called it, but Ralph didn't complain!

Later when they got home, Sam put Bert and Larry down for a nap, and decided she needed one too. Ralph joined her, and sensing she was exhausted, just cuddled up next to her, and they were both soon fast asleep.

The next morning Ralph woke up and looked out the window. "Sam, what the heck is this?" Sam got up and looked out the window "Rafe, it's snowing out!"

"I kind of figured that, any idea how long it's going to snow?"

"Why not look it up on the internet, or tune one of the ham radios to the NOAA weather broadcast." Ralph thought "Duh..." and walked over to where his Kenwood HT was sitting on



the charger, turned it on, and switched through the frequencies until he heard “Anchorage and vicinity will experience 3-5 inches of snowfall in the next 24 hours, winds are expected not to exceed 15mph, so visibility will remain fair. No chain or snow tire restrictions posted yet, but be prepared. This is NOAA Weather radio...”

Ralph turned the radio off, he had heard enough. He wondered why it was warm inside while it was snowing out, and remembered the heater must have kicked in, and was keeping the place comfortably warm. He put on his shearling booties and his sweats, and made a pot of coffee. He watched the snow fall for a while, then made breakfast, and got the boy’s breakfast ready. Sam was wearing her sweat suit with the zip-up top since Larry wasn’t totally weaned yet. Sam told him she was glad she bought these booties, since this was the warmest her feet had been in a while. Ralph was glad today was Sunday, so he didn’t have to go to work until tomorrow. After he helped Sam feed the boys, he got on the internet, and checked the extended forecast. What he saw made him almost want to move back to Atlanta. The high the rest of the week was only 40 degrees! Besides that, they were forecasting snow the rest of the week. Sam walked in and said “Get used to it - it can snow most of the winter around here, and the winters can be 6 months long!” Ralph thought about that, and remembered they were prepared for snow - they didn’t buy the Suburban and the Traveler just because they were great off-road machines, they also were excellent in the snow. Ralph thought about work, and remembered they all parked in a secured parking garage with outlets for their vehicle heating systems. Ralph didn’t need to double-check the winter gear in their vehicles; they were good to go- he had confirmed that for the 6th time last week. Sam reminded him he needed to make an overnight bag in case he got stuck at work. He packed 2 sets of greens, 2 changes of underwear, a toiletry kit, and battery powered alarm clock in case he had to sleep at work into a duffle bag that would just fit into his locker at work. Later that day, Ralph and Sam both practiced their CW so they could get their General. They were slowly getting it, and hopefully next spring, they’d both be ready for their FCC General License exam. He talked to Virgil on the radio once or twice a week, and he was amazed at how fast they were picking this up. Ralph would have had a major case of cabin fever if he wasn’t working, but he couldn’t wait for spring.

A couple of days later, the boot maker called and said their boots were done. They took the Suburban since it was easier to get Bert and Larry in and out of, not to mention the now obviously pregnant Samantha. Sam stayed in the car with the kids, and Ralph ran in and paid the boot maker with a check for \$400. The boot maker told him that if he came across any more skins like the last one he used, he’d pay \$500 each for them. Ralph said that they had 3 more skins at home, but his wife was making herself a maternity gown and a night shirt for him out of them, and anything that was left would probably be smaller pieces. He told Ralph to bring the pieces over, and he’d buy them if they were big enough to be useful. Ralph took his card and the boots, thanked him and left. On the way home he told Sam that the boot maker offered to buy any whole caribou skins for \$500 each and he’d even buy any larger pieces they had left over from her sewing project. Sam had just finished laying out the gown and the nightshirt, and told Ralph they’d have 1 whole skin and a large bag full of scraps left when they were through. Ralph asked her what she’d like to do, keep the skins, or buy something with the \$500. Sam

pointed out they were rolling in dough, and didn't need the money, so she wanted to keep the skins. Ralph thought "Pretty Smart!" and kept driving. The snow got thick enough that he decided to flip on the auxiliary lights, and was amazed at how well they lit the road. Oncoming cars started flashing their lights, so he shut off the driving lights, and ran with the fogs and headlights only. Still they really lit up the road ahead. When they got home, he decided he might need to use the snow blower tonight or tomorrow morning before work. They got out carefully, and carried the boys into the house, and Ralph knew he had a couple of hours of daylight left, so he took out the snow blower and cleared the driveway.

While Ralph cleared the driveway, Sam heated up dinner, fed the boys, and relaxed until Ralph came in reading her bible on the couch. She got up slowly from the couch, and gave Ralph a hug and a kiss.

"What's that for?"

"Just thought you'd like to warm up" Sam said seductively "but first, dinner's ready."

Ralph said grace, then they put the boys down for the night, and they settled on the couch. Ralph noticed Sam's glow, and said "Sam, you're especially beautiful when you're pregnant, you just glow."

She unzipped her top and said "and you don't mind my new Jane Mansfield figure either?"

"Not a bit!"

Ralph reached over, kissed her on the lips, then Sam whispered in his ear. She was too big to carry now, and he didn't want to risk dropping her, so they walked to the bedroom, and Ralph remembered one benefit of these long winter nights!

The next morning, Ralph got up, got dressed, and checked outside, sure enough, it was snowing again. He made some coffee, and went in to check on Sam. She wasn't in bed, when all of a sudden he heard a blood-curdling scream, then moaning coming from the bathroom. He ran to the door, and knocked "Sam, are you in there, are you OK?" All he could hear was a weak "Rafe, help, I miscarried!"

He opened the door to a nightmarish image of his wife on the toilet with blood running down her legs. He picked her up as gently as possible, carried her to bed, covered her with blankets, and called 911.

"This is Doctor Raphael Lacombe at 1911 South Caribou Dr. My wife's miscarried and is hemorrhaging. Get ALS here STAT. I'll leave the front door open."

"Roger Dr. Lacombe. Repeat 1911 South Caribou Dr. wife miscarried and hemorrhaging. ALS

en-route, ETA 30 minutes.”

Ralph got the front porch light on, unlocked the door, grabbed his medical kit, and went to check on Sam. She had all the signs of a mid-term miscarriage, including heavy bleeding and hemorrhaging. He couldn't stop the hemorrhage, since it was internal bleeding, so he started 2 liters of IV Ringer's Lactate wide-open, 1 in each arm to replace the lost blood volume. Sam's heart sounded OK considering, but her pulse was getting weak and thready like she was going into deep shock from the loss of blood.

“Sam, you've got to stay with me... You Hear Me!”

“Rafe, I love you, take care of the Boys!”

“Sam, you're going to make it, just hang on, I've got 2 liters of Ringer's in you to replace the lost blood volume, and ALS is only 10 minutes away.”

“Rafe, I love you, take care...”

As Samantha slowly lost consciousness, Ralph thought he was losing his wife, so he whispered to her, “Je t'aime Samantha, je prendrai soin des gosses. Je vous aimerai toujours!”

## Chapter 53 - Awakening

Samantha woke up staring into a bright light. “Where am I?” she thought. As her vision cleared, she saw a familiar face. Her husband Ralph was standing over her saying “Samantha, wake up dear.”

She blinked her eyes and tried to talk, but her throat hurt too much from the airway they had just removed.

“Don’t try to talk, you’re in the recovery room at Alaska Regional Hospital. I love you, and I’ll see you later.”

Ralph left the room so his wife wouldn’t see him crying. Doc Nelson, who was the emergency surgeon on staff that day, had to perform a D&C and direct cauterization. Due to the scarring, they were pretty sure she couldn’t have any kids. Even still, they almost lost her twice after they got her into the hospital, and the Paramedics were amazed they got her that far. She had literally died twice on the table, and they brought her back.

Later that afternoon, Ralph was allowed to see her again. This time she could talk, although weakly. “Rafe, I was in heaven. I saw Jesus, Bert and our little boy Jacques.”

“Doc Nelson said you died twice on the table, but they brought you back.”

“I know, the second time Bert told me it wasn’t my time, and I had to go back, then I felt this intense pain, it must have been when they zapped me, then I woke up here, and you were looking at me.”

“I’m glad your alive Sam, I couldn’t live without you!”

“I’m not afraid of dying anymore. Heaven is so beautiful, it’s just amazing. Jesus had the sweetest smile on his face. He had little Jacques sitting on his lap. His mouth never moved, but I heard Jacques’ voice in my head saying “Mommy, I’m here on Jesus’ lap, and I’ll be here when you come back for good. I love you, and don’t worry about me. Then I felt this indescribably warm peace and love, and I heard Jesus’ voice telling me how much he loved me, but it wasn’t my time, that my race wasn’t finished yet. Finally I saw Bert, not as she was when she died, but as a young teenager. She was beautiful and full of love. She said that while she missed Doc, she knew they would be reunited soon. Then she told me I had to go back, and the next thing I know, I woke up here with you looking at me, I love you Rafe, and I never want to leave you again, but I know the next time I do, I’ll be in Heaven with Jesus forever.”

Despite the tubes sticking in her arms, Ralph held his wife and cried. They had 2 beautiful sons, and now he had his wife back, and losing the ability to have more kids was a small price

to pay for that. Ralph thanked God for returning his beloved wife to him, and thanked him for taking care of Jacques for them.

The next day when Ralph came in to see her, she didn't look too good, so he called the attending, and told him they needed to get her back into surgery, since she's probably having a post-operative infection of the uterus. Dr. Nelson came running in, took one look at her, and told them to prep her for immediate surgery, then he gave Ralph the good news/bad news. They probably caught it in time to save her life, but they should consider a hysterectomy since the last time he was in there, the scarring was so bad that even if she conceived, she couldn't carry to term. Ralph told him, "I'm going to the chapel to pray, you do whatever you feel is right." Ralph kissed his wife on the forehead, said "I love you", and squeezed her hand before they wheeled her into surgery. He walked to the Chapel, and was kneeling in prayer when he thought of the Second Book of Timothy, Chapter 1, verse 7 "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2Ti 1:7 NKJV) he knew Samantha was going to be OK, and he thanked God. When he got up, Dr. Nelson was standing there "We had to do a complete hysterectomy. It was the weirdest thing, I felt such peace, like I knew everything was OK."

"Dan, Sam and I are Born-Again Christians. Just now, I got done praying and even before you came in here, I knew she was OK."

"Wow, I'm a church-going Christian, but that rarely happens to me."

"Dan, any time you want to talk about it, just let me know. Thanks for saving Sam for me."

"Sure thing Ralph. Some weird things have been happening to me, and I'm getting the feeling God is trying to tell me something."

"I know he is! Do you want to pray about it?"

Dan looked around, and seeing no one there, nodded his head. Ralph put his hands on Dan's shoulders, and Dan felt a power and peace pouring through him. He wanted to get much closer to God, and stop just going to church, but to really live for God, and do what he wanted. When they finished, Dan gave Ralph a hug and said "Thanks Ralph, I don't know how, but it was like I was having a talk with God, and he showed me what I could do if I lived for him. It was awesome."

"Dan, your life is on a new path. Find a good bible-believing church, and make sure you keep reading your bible. If you need anything, or have any questions, feel free to call me." Ralph handed Dan his card, and walked into the Recovery room. When Sam woke up, Ralph told her everything was going to be all right. She said "I know" with a sweet Angelic smile. They got the infection under control, and she was ready to come home a week later. When she got home, the kids were fed, the house cleaned up, and Sam asked "Ok Rafe, fess up!"

“I did have a little help. Between people at our church who were constantly volunteering to help, then Ron and Nancy came over here for a couple of days while Anne watched their kids. We got it all covered. I made enough food to last 2 weeks in the freezer, and everything’s taken care of. Sam gave Ralph a big hug and said “Thanks Rafe, you know I love you?”

“Not as much as I love you!”

“Wanna Bet?”

They held each other tightly, and Sam tried to outdo that kiss she laid on Ron when she left at the airport. When they came up for air, she was pretty sure she succeeded.

Ralph and Sam put the incident behind them, and concentrated on raising Bert and Larry. Once the docs said it was Ok to resume normal sexual relations, they did so - frequently now that there was no risk of pregnancy.

Later that spring, Ralph got a call from Ron inviting them to the Grand Opening of Doc’s Lodge. He checked with work, and found out he was entitled to a week’s vacation, so he called Ron back and set it up. Sam packed like Nancy used to for the trip. Ralph was just glad that they didn’t have to carry this stuff very far. The day they were to meet Ron, they packed the Suburban and drove to the VIP terminal for Alaska Airlines. The gate guard gave them a parking pass to put on their dash, and an assigned space next to where Ron would park the SuperGoose. When he landed, Ron was all by himself. Sam ran up to him and hugged the stuffing out of him, then asked him where Nancy and the kids were. Ron explained they were already at their lodge, getting things set up for their “Summer at the Lodge” as they called it. Jake was now 16, Josh would be 15 soon, Sarah was 14, and David was 13, and they were all willing to help (Bear had bribed them with a daily trip to the range in the 007) so as soon as they got the SuperGoose loaded, they could open the lodge with their first “guests”. Ron commented on the bags and bags of kids’ clothes, commiserating with Ralph that Nancy used to do the same thing until Anne talked some sense into her. Ralph got a look from Sam when he asked if Anne were handy. Ron laughed his socks off. Sam belted Bert and Larry into their seats while Ron and Ralph loaded the aircraft. Once they were finished loading, Ron secured the cargo door and walked forward to the cockpit.

He taxied to the fuel pumps, topped off the tanks since they hadn’t installed a fuel depot at HelpmeJack Lake yet - the fuel company refused to land at that “postage stamp” of a lake even after they saw Ron fly a perfect approach, and land with half the lake left over. If it became an issue, the Super Stallion could fly fuel bladders full of fuel from Allakaket to HelpmeJack Lake since the fuel company had no problems delivering to Allakaket. Ron thought that might be a good idea, and called BA on his sat phone. BA explained that the only reason for a fuel depot there was if the SuperGoose needed fuel, since the bush pilots had plenty of range to fly from Allakaket to any lodge or hunting area in that area of Alaska, and return to Allakaket to refuel. Ron argued that an emergency supply of fuel wouldn’t be a bad idea, since each fuel bladder

carries 500 gallons and weighs 3,400 pounds full; two bladders would fill a 1,000 gallon tank, and give him enough fuel to fill the SuperGoose twice, or around 6,000 miles of emergency fuel at max fuel-efficiency cruise speed. BA knew where there were a couple of 2,000 gallon tanks that they could bury near the new hangar they installed at the lodge. If they added 1,000 gallons of Avgas, they could re-fuel a bunch of Bush planes with that, or run the lodge's ATV's. He said he'd crunch the numbers and get back to Ron. Since the sling-load limit for the Super Stallion was 34,000 pounds, they might be able to carry the bladders and the tanks in one load. Ron flew onward to Doc's lodge, blissfully unaware of all the work he made BA do just to follow up on his harebrained schemes.

2 hours later, they landed at HelpmeJack lake, and taxied up to the new hangar. Ron stopped short, and when the props stopped spinning, he opened the cockpit door, and opened the rear door to make unloading easier. His kids swarmed in, carting off the cases and boxes, putting them in the lodge under the watchful eyes of Doc Richards. Sam was amazed to see Doc there, then remembered it was his lodge, and he should be there for the grand opening. Jake and Sarah unbuckled Bert and Larry, and carried them inside the lodge, giving Ralph and Sam time alone with Doc. Sam hugged the stuffing out of Doc, and whispered in his ear that she saw Bert, and she'd explain later. Ralph hugged Doc too, then they went inside, since Doc wanted to say hi to his grandkids. Bert and Larry were crawling around on the bearskin rug in front of the huge lodge-style stone fireplace. Everyone had a very comfortable seat in the huge main room of the lodge. This one wasn't going to have trophy heads mounted on the walls, instead, they would take pictures of the hunters and fishermen with their catch and frame them on the walls, Nancy made an appearance finally, and Sam stood up to hug her too. Once they were all settled, Ron passed around glasses of sparkling cider, and Doc made a toast to officially open the lodge.

“Friends:

To those who've come and gone, and those who will grace this place, I offer love and friendship.”

To shouts of “here, here” they drank a toast.

Later that afternoon, Sam explained what she had meant earlier, and Doc said “I know, I talk to her every night. I'm not getting any younger, and Ron tells me I'm worth \$30 million right now. If you guys want to move here, I'll give you half of it, and you can live in Allakaket. Even if you don't move, I still want to give you half of it now to keep the ##@\$# IRS from stealing it.”

“I don’t know what to tell you Doc. This blows me away, Ralph’s getting tired of the long hours, and missing our boys grow up. This would be a perfect area to raise two boys. I’ll have to ask Ralph, but right now, I want to give you another hug and a kiss on the cheek you old softie!” Samantha held Doc, then gave him a gentle motherly kiss on the cheek, then she went off to tell Ralph.

He was floored, and tempted to take him up on it. Things were really getting political at the hospital. He was more of an Administrator than a doctor lately, and he hated the paperwork. With \$15 Million, they could build a great house in Allakaket, and invest the money, and live off the interest. They both walked over to Doc, and he got another hug from Sam, and one from Ralph. They were both gushing about how nice he was until he held up his hand, and said “Don’t make me out to be so noble, part of the reason I wanted you to move was so I could see my grandsons more than once every 6 months.” At this point Ron walked in, and Doc filled him in on his plans. Ron told them about a beautiful lot that had just come on the market on the eastern edge of town, backed by 100 acres of prime timber. The owner only wanted \$50,000 for the land. Ron was going to put in an offer for it, but if they wanted it, it was theirs. Ralph turned to Doc, who said he could transfer the funds with a phone call, and Bill could put in the offer for them over the phone. Ralph thought that all he’d have to do was sell the house and quit work. There wasn’t anything else tying them to Anchorage. He asked about moving their stuff, they had 2 very well equipped vehicles they wanted to keep, plus the contents of their houses. Ron said that if necessary, they’d fly the vehicles as sling loads using the Super Stallion, and they could fly all the stuff they wanted to bring with them to Allakaket. Ralph told Ron about his radio setup, and Ron suggested bringing it all, since if there were 4 people in town with long-distance capability, at least 1 of them should be able to communicate in an emergency. Ralph told Ron he had a 100-foot tower, and a 40-foot Titan DX Multiband antenna on top. He said the installer brought it over on a large trailer in sections, so he guessed they could take it down and re-assemble it in Allakaket. Besides, it would take a couple of months to build a new house in Allakaket, and sell theirs. Ron said that BA still had the plans for their house if they wanted something similar. Ralph shook Doc’s hand and said “Doc, you’ve got a deal, call Bill, and make it happen. As soon as we get back from the lodge, I’m quitting, and we can work on building a nice house here, and selling the other one.” Ralph hugged Sam, and told her that they would be spending a whole lot more time together. She grinned and said “Do you think you can handle it, Band-aid Boy?”

Later, Doc gave them the grand tour, and Ralph made a very critical suggestion.

“Doc, I had an idea. Since we’re limited by how many caribou we can safely harvest here each year and keep a viable population, and there is really no hunting involved, the herd is either there or they aren’t, you should market this lodge as an upscale “exclusive” lodge to Doctors and professionals who don’t have the time to spend weeks tracking down a caribou, but still want the hunting experience, and would like to spend a few days on the lake fishing. Ron might even consider upgrading one of their SuperGoose to a VIP plane, and flying them direct from Anchorage to the lodge and back.”



Ron overheard the last part, and commented it would be easy to switch the el-cheapo FAA regular seats for VIP seats, and as far as direct flights go, if they could put in a small fuel depot, which they were thinking about anyway, they could do several round-trip flights per week direct from Anchorage to Doc's Lodge. He asked Doc if that was something that doctors and others would pay extra for.

Doc scratched his chin, and said "You guys might have something there!" Ron grabbed his Cell phone, and called BA, who said he was already working on it, and if they put in a 5,000 gallon tank, they could make 2 trips per week direct from Anchorage, and never have to stop in Allakaket to refuel, which would save over 2 hours of round-trip airtime. He said that while they were at it, they'd install 2,000 gallons of Avgas, since the bush planes used it, as well as the ATV's, and snowmobiles they had on the property. The Super Stallion wasn't busy, and the pilot said something like that would be relatively easy for them to do. Ron gave Doc the good news. He said they should get hold of several hunting magazines that cater to up-scale hunters, and place advertisements. They should also see about getting someone from the magazine to review the lodge. Ron was taking notes like crazy. He and BA would need to get on this ASAP since hunting season was less than 6 months away.

## Chapter 54 - The Great Move

After they spent a week at the lodge, Ralph got serious about planning the move. Bill made an offer for Ralph and the seller accepted the \$50K offer. Ralph guessed that the owners were getting a divorce, and the husband was forced to sell, so he sold the place for exactly what he owed on the property, plus \$100. Her lawyer pissed and moaned to the Judge, who rightly decided that since the husband was the sole owner of the property, it was up to him to sell it for what he thought it was worth, and since the bank loaned him \$50K based on the value of the property, then it must be worth about \$50K, and told the attorney to forget it. Ralph, Sam, Nancy, and Ron looked over their house then the plans, and made some minor changes. Since they only had 2 sons, 4 bedrooms instead of 6 would be plenty, and they could use the 4th bedroom for a study/office/computer/radio room. That would make the living room and the bathrooms bigger, especially the master bathroom. They were still going with the full basement, since Ralph wanted an underground room as a safe room. Ron offered to fly all their stuff from Anchorage for the fuel costs only. Ralph said they would like to keep both their vehicles, so they checked into transporting them, and Bear suggested they borrow a vehicle platform from Elmendorf, since they had dozens of them, and almost never used them. Gene and Bear worked out the details to get their vehicles on base at Elmendorf, and anchored securely to the vehicle platform, then flown to Allakaket. Since the Super Stallion had to fly anyway, they decided to load it full of household goods at the same time to save trips.

Ralph rented the largest U-haul trailer that would just fit inside the Super Stallion, and once they boxed stuff up, Ralph loaded the U-haul trailer, and pulled it with the Suburban to Elmendorf. While they were doing all this, Nancy volunteered to babysit Bert and Larry, since they were now weaned, and she'd forgotten all the joys of having 2 boys in diapers! The hospital reluctantly accepted Ralph's resignation, and he received over a month's salary in unpaid vacation, sick leave, and severance equivalent to his profit sharing dividend check for that year, since the disbursement hadn't been made to the 401K yet, and they couldn't legally put money in his 401K unless he was an employee. Doctor Nelson was promoted to the new Chief Resident for Emergency Services, and when he saw Ralph's house, he asked what they wanted for it. Ralph knew what he had paid for it, and asked \$50K extra. Dan agreed in a heartbeat, then asked him if he could include the radio gear, he'd pay him what he paid for the 2 radios and the tower. Ralph dug out his receipts, and added them to the figure, and the total was \$450,000.00 approximately. Dan said he had to sell his place, so he'd like to make a contingent offer of \$450 Thousand for his place, including the tower, and the 2 radios connected to it. Ralph was thanking God, because they wouldn't have to spend any cash if they could sell this place for that much, because the contractor told him they could build his place as a 4-bedroom house using logs on the property for a little over \$350 thousand. It would take Ralph 3 months to build his new house, so he asked Dan if they could close escrow in 60 days, since it would take 2 more months to finish building their house. Dan agreed, and they shook hands.

Dan told Ralph he was glad he was moving here, because they were only a mile away from his new church. When he came home the evening after Sam's surgery, his wife told him she found a new church and wanted to try it out. After he told her what had happened to him, she hugged him, and they prayed together. The next Sunday, they went to the new church, and a month later, gave their lives to Christ. Ralph said "I knew there was a reason for all this. If Sam wouldn't have been in the hospital, I would never have had a chance to talk to you."

"Ralph, I've learned there is a reason for everything. You two gave up your chance to have any more kids, but in return, you saved my wife and I, and our two kids for eternity, I'd call that a pretty fair trade!"

Dan gave Ralph a Guy hug, then they both dried their eyes. Just then Sam came in the room and Dan relayed the story. When Sam told Dan her story, he was moved to tears, and wound up in a group hug as they prayed together. Finally, Dan said he had to get home and give his wife Jean the good news. They lived in a small house in a not-to-nice neighborhood, and this place was perfect. Ralph showed him all the features, including the "Bomb shelter" as he called it. Realizing they were within 20 miles of Elmendorf, which would be a major target in the event of a nuclear war, Dan was glad that Ralph had built the place to survive a nuclear bomb hitting Elmendorf. The upper floor might be destroyed in the blast, but the basement would take anything but a direct hit. When Ralph called Ron and told him they found a buyer for their house, Ron suggested that if they needed a place to stay, they had Anne's old room that was vacant, and the family could be together while they waited for the house to be built. He asked Sam, who agreed in a heartbeat - she was missing her little boys terribly. They needed another week to finish packing, so they waited until they were all packed, and move everything out at once, and drive to Elmendorf.

Dan's house had sold, so Ralph and Dan talked, and agreed to forego the rest of the Escrow, and Dan would be over there with a Cashier's check for \$450 thousand in an hour, and Ralph would hand them the keys so they could move in. Dan and Jean drove up in a Ford F-350 Diesel truck with their 2 sons in back, and a bunch of boxes in the bed of the truck. Dan handed Ralph a cashier's check for \$450,000, and Ralph handed them the keys. They toured the house together quickly, then they had a group hug and prayed, then Ralph and Sam had to go to Elmendorf, since the Super Stallion was waiting for them. The platform they had was big enough for both vehicles, and the crew chief was experienced, and adjusted everything so the platform was balanced, and the vehicles secured firmly. A tow vehicle pushed the u-haul van into the cargo bay, and it barely fit. That left 2 seats up front for Ralph and Sam. The crew chief made sure everyone was buckled in, and tapped the pilot on the shoulder. The turbines spooled up, and the pilot carefully lifted off. He added power as the vehicles on the sling load came off the ground, then he transitioned to forward flight, dipping the nose and adding more power. The crew chief looked below and behind the chopper, and the vehicles were flying on the platform just fine. He leaned over to Ralph, and gave him a thumbs-up to let him know that everything was OK. The lightly loaded helicopter was able to maintain a 140-knot airspeed even with the 2 vehicles on a sling load. 3 hours later, they landed in Allakaket, and they disconnected the sling load,

then landed a safe distance away. Once the crew chief had released the tie-downs, they drove the vehicles off the platform, and connected the Suburban to the U-haul, and slowly pulled it out of the cabin of the CH-53E Super Stallion. They drove off to Ron and Nancy's place while the helicopter refueled, and picked up the platform to return it to Elmendorf.

Ralph and Sam showed up at Ron and Nancy's place, and Sam was grateful that Nancy had everything set up for them, then went to hold her sons. It would be crowded, but it was only for 2 weeks. Ralph parked the U-haul next to the garage, and chained it down to an anchor someone had thoughtfully provided in case someone wanted to park a trailer there. Sam spent the rest of the day spending time with her babies, and Ron suggested they take off to the shooting range to give the girls some time together. Ron's kids wanted to come, of course, so they all piled into Ron's truck. When they got out at the range, Ralph was impressed to say the least. When they got inside, Ron handed eye and ear protection out to everyone. Ralph noticed the headsets said Wolf Ears, and the eye protection was a clear version of the Gargoyle line of glasses. Ralph asked Ron "You guys go first class here?"

"No point in going Second Class when money is no object. The company is worth almost \$100 million, we're clearing over a million per year after taxes and expenses, including my salary, BA's and Bear's. We write off all expenses for the shooting range by calling it an employee benefit. Since almost everyone in town works for Allakaket Airlines in one capacity or another, the range is free for all townspeople. We have shooting leagues running all week, for everyone from the youngest kids at around 7, to a senior league. My kids are usually around the top 1 or 2 competitors on the Junior Small Caliber Rifle shooting league in their age groups. I'm usually the top shooter in the Male Open Pistol League, and Nancy is the top Female shooter in the Women's Open Pistol League, although Sally, BA's wife is giving her fits lately since she hasn't been able to practice as much since she's been babysitting. Next door we have a community pool that is heated by the left-over heat from a 40MW geothermal power plant, and behind that is a huge greenhouse and Tilapia farm that produces fresh vegetables and fish 12 months a year."

"Holy Cow, you guys have a set-up here! I should have moved here sooner!"

"Let's go use the range; I can see that some lanes just opened up. You do have your pistol on you?"

"Just like the American Express Card - never leave home without it!"

Ron picked up 4 50-round boxes of 230gr FMJ practice ammo, and a roll of B-27 targets, and walked to the range. Ralph noticed every time someone shot close by, the headset shut down for a fraction of a second.

"What's the deal with these headsets?"

“You’ll get used to them, they’re electronic noise suppression headsets, they let normal sounds through, but suppress the heck out of gunfire or any other sudden loud noises. You can hear and talk normally with them on, but I wouldn’t rely on them if you’re shooting my .44 Magnum in here since they only suppress 29 dB.”

“You shoot that hand cannon in here?”

“Got to stay in practice. Just last month a guide shot a bear that was charging from about 15 yards away, and before we opened the range to guides and pilots to shoot their .44 Magnums, they had no place to practice. Oh, the guide drilled the bear right through the heart with his first shot, and the bear died 5 yards from him.”

“I see if we stay here, I’m going to need to up-gun slightly.”

“The .45 is more than enough in town, it’s when you stay at our lodge you might want a .44 Magnum. We usually have to shoot 1 or 2 bears each year that don’t take the hint the first time. Also, don’t shoot any wolves you see around our place. They’re habituated to humans, and are no threat to us if we leave them alone. Ok, here we are. I’ll take this lane and you can take that one. Here’s a bag to hold your carry rounds.” Ron handed Ralph a plastic bag, and Ralph dumped his magazine into it, then reloaded with practice ammo. Ron suggested reloading all their mags, so they could do some “real life” practice with a club timer including reloads. Ralph was looking forward to this. He knew Ron was fast, but he had been practicing. Ron suggested they each fire a couple of mags to warm up, then they’d hold the timer for each other. Since Ralph only had 3 mags, they’d limit the contest to a 3-mag contest. All rounds at 15-yards had to be 10-ring or better, and the contest would be decided on time. Once Ralph was loaded, he waited for Ron, then gave him the “go ahead” gesture. Ron started from low ready, and brought the gun up, and fired a quick 3- round burst, brought the gun down to low ready, and repeated it 5 times, then touched the lever, and the target came in all by itself. Ralph was impressed! 10 rounds were in the Kill zone of the chest, and 5 were in the kill zone of the head. Seems somebody had been practicing!

Ralph went next, and he pulled his P-14 Limited out of his holster slowly, brought it to low ready, and repeated Ron’s “Failure to Stop” drill. Ron thought that Ralph had been practicing, because all 15 rounds were right where they belonged, and Ron thought that Ralph might be shooting a tad faster than him. They reloaded, and topped off their mags after putting a round in the chamber. Ron asked Ralph “You ready?”

By now a crowd had gathered, and the range master offered to run the timer, since they were both right handed, he would stand off to the left. He explained the rules to both participants, and told Ron he had to go first. The crowd backed up slightly to give them room, and to maneuver so they could see without getting hit by flying brass. Ralph noticed that Ron was using single-mag carriers instead of a double-mag carrier, and thought that strange. Ron told the range master he was good to go, checked that the area was clear, and raised his hands to the

surrender position. The range master pushed the Go button, and as soon as Ron heard the tone, he swung into action, and a fraction of a second later, the gun was up, and his finger was on the trigger as soon as the sights stopped right below the X-ring. Ron started shooting, and after 15 rounds, the gun locked open, so he did a combat reload, shot 14 more, and did another combat reload. Ralph could see that Ron wasn't missing, and was firing almost as fast as the gun could operate. Ron shot the second mag dry, and did a second combat reload, and kept firing, only losing a little over a second. When it was over, the crowd was standing there in awe. All 43 rounds were in the 10 ring, and when the range master checked the time, he had to check again. Including his draw and 2 reloads, Ron had fired 43 rounds at 15 yards in 31.3 seconds.

Ron smiled at Ralph, but he didn't respond. Ralph walked up to the shooting line with his Game Face on. He didn't look around, all he did was put his hands in the surrender position after running a target out to the 15-yard line. As soon as the buzzer went off, Ralph drew and fired in one motion, and kept firing until he had fired 15 rounds. His gun sounded like a subgun on full-auto he was shooting so fast, Ron was worried because he could see Ralph was in the Zone, and wasn't missing either. Ralph did his first combat reload faster than Ron, and kept shooting at a frenetic pace. He bobbled his second reload when his magazine didn't come smoothly out of the carrier, and it cost him a second. Finally he got the gun reloaded, and emptied the 15 rounds as fast as he could, and kept them in the 10-ring. When his gun locked open, he retrieved his target, and while his group was larger than Ron's, all rounds were in the 10-ring like the Range Master had said. His time, on the other hand, was 32.3 seconds. Ron knew that Ralph would have beaten him by over a second if he hadn't bobbled that second reload, and walked over to Ralph and shook his hand, and told him he would have won if he had used single-mag carriers. Ralph gave him a funny look, so Ron explained it to him like the Gunny did. When he heard that Ron routinely carried 5 loaded mags, Ralph wondered why in the world someone needed 5 loaded mags, and asked Ron, who told him what Bear had told him regarding an empty gun being an expensive club. Ralph knew better to challenge Ron to shooting rifles, Ron would clean his clock. What he did do was to ask him if they could go to Bear's range some time soon so Ron could work on his long-distance shooting skills, since he couldn't hit anything much past 300 yards with their Bushmaster HBAR Match AR-15's and a 3-9X40 Simmons scope. Ron told him that 300 yards was about the limit for an AR-15, he had a couple of M-1a target rifles he could try at 600 yards since Bear extended the range to 1,000 yards.

When they were finished, they retrieved Ron's kids. Jake was looking at the two of them with his mouth open until Ron suggested he close it before a fly decided to land on his tongue. Finally he said "I heard you two went at it for speed at 15 yards, and you both emptied 3 mags into the 10-ring in around 30 seconds?"

Ron said "So?"

Jake showed his talent for math. "43 rounds in 30 seconds equals 1.43 rounds per second, not including reloads or your draw - did either of you check the cleaners to see when your capes

were going to be done?”

Ralph laughed out loud and gave Jake an Indian Rub, just like an older brother would. “Your father and I have been practicing. Ever since Sam and my wedding, I wanted to shoot like your dad. Did he ever tell you what he did? Steve Stone broke out of prison after murdering Sam’s mom, and tracked us down. He burst into the chapel where we were getting married with an M - 4 Carbine set to full auto, intending to kill everyone there. Ron shoved me out of the way, drew his P-14 out of his concealed holster, and shot him twice in the chest, then your mom pulled her gun and shot him in the forehead. Good thing too, because automatic weapons have a funny habit of going off in dead man’s hands. When she shot him, she made sure that he couldn’t shoot as he was dying. Either one of Ron’s rounds would have killed him a few seconds later.”

“That’s why I’m always practicing a Failure to stop drill - two to the chest, and 1 to the head. Just in case someone tries to hurt us, and is wearing a vest.”

“Ron, you’re about the fastest pistol shooter I’ve seen in a long time.”

“Ralph, you’re even faster than me, if you hadn’t blown that second reload you would have beaten me by a second, your gun sounded like a subgun on full-auto. How did you do that?”

“A gunsmith that George knows did a couple of things to it to further slick up the action. The trigger is set right about 2 pounds, and I almost always naturally double-tap. My fastest run at 15-yards from low ready for a 15-round magazine is around 5 seconds.”

“No way, this I gotta see!”

“Not today Master Po, Grasshopper is tired!”

“How about if we go to Bear’s range tomorrow, and I bring the M-25’s?”

“What pray tell is a M - 25?”

“You know who Carlos Hathcock is, right? Springfield Armory took a Match Grade M-1a and pulled out all the stops. It comes with a Krieger Stainless Steel Heavy Match Barrel with a 1:10 twist and a custom low-profile muzzle brake. It’s based on the Super Match stock, and comes with a killer 6-20X50 Mil Dot BDC Scope with an illuminated reticle. It’s a tack driver for a .308 semi-auto. One slight problem is they cost almost 6 grand each including the scope!”

“Ron, if you’ve got the time, I’d love to shoot that rifle. I’ve always wanted a rifle that I could shoot farther than I could see!

Jake said “I’ve been shooting 2-3 inch groups with mine at 600 yards!”

Now it was Ralph's turn to stand there open-mouthed. He thought Ron was the only Sniper in the family!

"Ralph, Josh, Sarah, and David are shooting 3-inch groups at 300 yards with their scoped AR-15's just like yours."

Suddenly Ralph was glad he was such a good pistol shot, Ron's 13-year old son David shot groups half the size of his at 300 yards!

When they got home, Nancy already had dinner ready. It was crowded at the table, but not overly so. After dinner, Ralph asked Sam if it were OK for him to go shooting at Bear's place tomorrow. Ron was going to let him use the M - 25, and teach him how to shoot long distance. Sam told Ralph that Nancy had volunteered to teach her how to fly, and if he wanted Ron could teach him. If they wanted to be independent around here, flying was like driving elsewhere, you couldn't get around without flying. Ralph was stunned. He checked into flying lessons when he wanted to go to Louisiana, but it cost thousands of dollars he didn't have, now Ron and Nancy were offering to teach them for free. Ron dropped another bombshell on them, Northrop Grumman called the other day, and they owed Allakaket Airlines another \$600 Thousand in referral fees, and if the USCG bought every SuperGoose they had contracted for, they'd owe them another million or so next year. They offered Ron the choice of the cash or another SuperGoose. If Ralph and Sam could get their Private licenses, he'd give them a SuperGoose, so they could fly anywhere in Alaska they wanted to. Since they were doctors as well, they could work for the State part time as Flying Doctors or Paramedics.

"Let me get this straight - you're giving us a half-million dollar plane, and flying lessons?"

"Not exactly, the plane will belong to Allakaket Airlines, we'll fuel and maintain it, and we'll lease the aircraft to you for \$1 per year."

"Cool - where do we sign up?"

Nancy quipped "I wonder if Anne's Babysitting Service is still in business?"

Everyone but Ralph and Sam cracked up at the old joke, so Ron explained. Ralph asked Sam if they wanted to leave Bert and Larry with Anne and Gene, if she wanted to go shooting tomorrow. She said yes in a heartbeat, so Ron called his Mother, and as usual, she answered the phone "Anne's Babysitting Service"

Of course she said yes, so the next day they would drop the kids off at Anne and Gene's house before they took off.



## Chapter 55 - Ma Bell

The next morning, they got everyone loaded into 2 vehicles, and drove to Anne's place. Her and Gene took Bert and Larry, and told Sam not to worry, she's had a lot of experience babysitting, and she hardly dozed off at all anymore since they changed her meds. Sam realized Anne was kidding her, and gave her a hug and said "thanks" then walked back to the Suburban. When they got to the SuperGoose, Ron had a surprise for them, he asked Ralph to get in the copilot's seat, because if he wanted to learn to fly, he needed to start learning now, and he couldn't learn anything sitting in the passenger compartment. Ralph didn't have to be asked twice, and practically flew through the cockpit door. Ron showed him how to adjust the seat, attach the seatbelts, and get plugged into the intercom. Once he had his headset on, Ron told him not to worry, he had the intercom configured so Ron had control of the radio, and the only person who could hear him was Ron. Ron talked him through the pre-flight, explaining everything while he did it, and finally he called the tower for clearance. "SuperGoose 1 en route to Doc's Lodge, requesting take-off and flight clearance."

"Roger SuperGoose 1, you are clear. Have a nice flight."

"Ralph, normally you call in your tail number, but since this is the first SuperGoose produced, the Tail Number is SuperGoose 1, so I can use it as a call sign as well. Your tail number will probably be something like SG135AA, every transmission to the tower should start with your tail number, and if you're in a Terminal Control Area without a radar transponder, your altitude. I've got a huge pile of books for you two to read, so after you're done studying, this will make more sense. Ok, we're taxiing to the downwind end of the lake. You always want to take off into the wind, to increase your airspeed faster than your ground speed. With this big twin-engine turboprop, taking off at Allakaket is a walk in the park. When we land at Allakaket, if you like thrill rides; you're in for a treat. I crank the flaps all the way out, and slow to just above stall speed, and float down to the lake as if we have a parachute. The SuperGoose starts flying at 80 knots of airspeed, so to take off, we turn into the wind, adjust the flaps to 10% to increase our lift, and I've already got the trim tabs adjusted so if I take my hands off the controls, the plane should fly straight and level. Since we have a 200 foot obstruction within a mile of the lake, we have to take off more aggressively than at Anchorage, so I'm going to shove the throttles to full, and as soon as the airspeed indicator reads 80 knots, I'm going to pull back on the yoke until the artificial horizon indicator says I have a 20 degree nose-up attitude. I'll hold that until I'm 500 ft Above Ground Level, or in this case 850 feet Mean Sea Level. Then I'll reduce my rate of climb to a cruise climb rate and a 10 degree up angle until we're at 2,000 ft MSL, and I'll hold that altitude until it's time to land." Later, just before he started landing at Help Me Jack Lake, Ron remembered they were going straight to Bear's place, and re-programmed the nav computer. He told Ralph what had happened.

Ralph asked him if it were old age, lack of sleep, or a "blonde moment"?

Since Ron was a blonde, or at least that's what his pilot's license said, he said "Option 3 is the most likely, although I have been getting more forgetful lately!"

Since they didn't start their descent to land at HelpmeJack Lake, Ron made a slight turn north as indicated by the Nav system, and 30 minutes later, they were starting their descent into Bear's lake. Ralph was watching Ron like a hawk, and Ron explained everything he was doing, and why. 10 minutes later, he had lined up for approach, and slowed to landing speed, and touched down with just a little splash. They taxied up Bear's ramp, and stopped in their parking space. Ron shut the turboprops down, and when the props stopped spinning, he unlocked the doors. Jake got up and opened the air stairs, and everyone carried their cased rifles, shooting pads, and targets up to the range. Josh, Sarah, and David set up on the 300 yard line, and as soon as everyone was set up, and had targets up, Bear raised the red flag, indicating a hot range, and the 3 Amigos started shooting. Jake went off to the 600-yard range by himself, and Ron took Ralph and Sam to the far end of the 300 yard range, and set them up with the AR-15 first since the little poodle shooter was easier for a novice to shoot, and he wanted to watch them shoot first.

Ralph and Sam extended the bipods on their rifles, and went prone without any special care, and started shooting. They were doing OK if you called a 6" group at 300 yards OK. Once they had shot their first mags, Ron stopped them, and taught them how to get down into a correct Military Prone position, and had them put the bipods up on their rifles. Next he took their ammo away, and told them they were to do 20 dry fires, paying attention to where the scope was pointing as they felt the trigger break, and handed them a note pad with a large Bulls-eye stamped on it to write down where the crosshairs were when the trigger broke. It took them almost an hour to shoot 20 times, mark where the crosshairs were, pull back on the charging handle, and pull the trigger again. When they finished, Ron handed them a loaded magazine, and told them to do the same thing. Ralph was amazed at how much smaller his groups were. He went from 6 inches to a little over 3 inches based on looking through the scope. He shot a couple more mags until his groups were well-centered and averaged no bigger than 3 inches.

Ron moved him to the 600 yard line and switched him to the M -25. Ron had him go through the same procedure again, dry firing 20 times before he fired a single round. His first group was around 6 inches, not bad, but not as good as that rifle could do at that range. After another 20 rounds, Ron allowed Ralph to use the bipod, since he was getting tired. Meanwhile, Sam's groups were around 3 inches at 300 yards, and she asked Jake to show her how to shoot his gun. Ron was impressed that Jake said yes, and soon Sam was going through the same drill as Ralph, and finally started shooting live rounds. Over the afternoon, her groups shrank from 8 inches to around 6 inches. When they finished, they both had grins on their faces that would make Jimmy Carter proud. Ron reminded them that they had over \$15 million in the bank, and buying 2 of these rifles would only set them back 12 grand. When Ron told Ralph that he had their General Store set aside 2 of them for Ralph and Sam, he wanted to leave right now and get them. Ron said "Patience Grasshopper, your lessons aren't complete." They spent the rest of the afternoon shooting, with Ron and Jake switching back and forth.

Finally Jake suggested that Josh, Sarah, and Dave get to try the M-25s out, since Sam and Ralph were getting tired. Since there were only 2 rifles, they took turns, with Jake teaching his younger sister, who wasn't as big of a brat as she was a couple of years ago, and he actually got along with her. The fact that he had a crush on one of her 16 year-old friends had absolutely nothing to do with it. Sarah took to the bigger rifle like a duck to water. She liked the fact that with the higher power magnification, she could see her bullet holes, which allowed her to shoot smaller groups. Her first group was 5 inches, and by the end of the day, she was down around 4 inches, and all of the bullets were inside the 10-ring at 600 yards. Ron walked away from the shooting line for a minute, and grabbed his cell phone. His store manager was a smart lady, and made a large purchase of the M-25s when she heard that Ralph and Sam were moving to Allakaket. She had 6 complete setups in stock, and 10 cases of Match Ammo from the same lot of Lake City ammo. Ron asked Nancy if she wanted to try, and she said yes. By the time they shot up all their ammo, Ron was going to have to buy 4 more M-25's and Ralph was going to buy 2 for Sam and himself. They loaded everything back into the SuperGoose and flew back to Allakaket, then drove to the General Store. Buying the rifles was as easy as presenting their federal CCW's, and signing the forms. Ron was glad to see that the store manager put the rifles in heavily padded Pelican cases, and included 6 20-round mags each. They drove back to the house and ate dinner. Ralph asked Ron if they could go to Bear's range tomorrow and shoot their new rifles. The chorus of "please" from his kids told Ron they were going to Bear's again tomorrow.

The next morning they loaded the truck and the Suburban, and left Bert and Larry with Anne again, and drove to the airport. The kids quickly loaded the SuperGoose, and Ron asked Ralph if he wanted to fly up front again, and Ralph said "Make sure we're going to Bear's place this time before we take off." Ron started laughing, and said he'd make sure to land at the right lake. Ralph watched Ron like a hawk. When Ron asked permission to take off and fly to Bear's place this time, even the tower got into the act "Roger SuperGoose 1, are you sure you don't want to go to HelpmeJack Lake?"

"Real Funny tower, don't quit your day job. Are we cleared to take off or what?"

"Roger SuperGoose, you're clear to take off, just make sure you land at the right lake."

Ralph said over the intercom "Everyone's a Comedian!" and prepared for takeoff.

A little over an hour later, they landed at Bear's lake, and Bear was waiting for them this time with his ATV and the trailer, so they piled all the cases and stuff on the trailer, and Bear strapped them to the trailer, and drove to the range while they walked behind. Ron had put everyone's name on their case with a stencil and spray can of paint. It wasn't the prettiest job, but at least they knew whose rifle was whose, because they each shot a different zero. Bear had set 8 lanes up for 600 yard shooting, instead of the usual 4, so there was no crowding. The rest of the day, the dominant sound was the boom and crack of high-powered rifle fire. Bear watched Ron and Jake on his spotting scope. At 600 yards, Jake could just about keep up with

his dad, maybe he should expand the range so they had more thousand yard lanes. They could use the wood after all. After spending an hour or so getting their zero dialed in on their scopes, Ralph and Sam's groups started shrinking, and soon Sarah, Ralph, Josh, and Sam were neck-and-neck for the smallest group of the day out of the four of them. Ron and Jake were shooting sub-3 inch groups all day, with an almost boring regularity.

Jake was getting better at doping the wind, and was getting really good at using the mirage to estimate wind speed and direction. He wished they could set up a pop-up range so he could use the mil-dot range-finding system for unknown distance shooting. He realized his Dad was teaching him to shoot long distance because there were people in the world that wanted what they had, and were willing to lie, cheat and kill to get it. Like Bear said "Long Distance means you never have to say you're sorry!" He'd read on the Internet about the brutality of the Moslem Terrorists, including the Chechen Rebels - he loved how the Liberal Press gave titles like Rebel or Freedom Fighter to terrorists whose causes they supported, but how they called people like Randy Weaver and Timothy McVeigh "terrorists". Some of the internet sites he read were written by people who wanted to restore the Constitution to it's original meaning, and reduce the Federal Government to a manageable size. They called themselves Patriots, but the newspapers called them "Anti-Government Survivalist Nuts". He was amazed that the average American could swallow the BS the papers were printing, then Ron told him about the "Big Lie" tactic, and showed him an internet site that described Adolph Hitler's tactic of telling the same big lie over and over again until the people believed it. He understood why the Patriots on the internet called the average American "sheeple" - they would be lead like lambs to the slaughter. He wanted to make sure that didn't happen to his family. Since he was now 16, Bear had inducted him into the Allakaket Militia, and shown him some things that would prevent those who wished them ill from succeeding. He hoped he never had to use them, and was afraid for his brothers and sisters, because Bear impressed on him that no sane man wants war, because usually the first to die are innocent civilians, and there is almost no way that an army won't take casualties even fighting a defensive action. He wasn't afraid to die, because he knew he was going to Heaven when he died, he just didn't want to go just yet!

Bear watched everyone shooting, and knew if TSHTF, several of them might not make it, and he might have to send them to their deaths to defend everyone else. With the 2 Barrett's rifles, he knew that Ron and Jake were his best long-distance shooters, and Ralph and Josh were the best shooters so far with the M-25s, and could act as spotters and back-up shooters to them. He knew Sarah and Sam were just as good shooters as Ralph and Josh, but he couldn't put a man and a woman together on a sniper team, because the man might try to protect the woman, sometimes to the detriment of the mission. When Sarah got older, if Sam could still shoot, he might team them together for a 3rd team if Barretts shipped them another rifle. That was a few years off, so Bear didn't need to worry about that. For now the political situation in the US was fairly stable, but it wouldn't take much to either cause a Police State, or Anarchy.

When they finally got tired of shooting, they packed it all in, and headed home. Sam picked up her boys on the way home, and they all cleaned their rifles in the garage before putting them

back in their cases. The next day, Ralph went to check on their new house, and was amazed that they were almost finished, and there was a huge stack of firewood next to the house, and someone had even split it for them, and put the smaller pieces that would make good kindling in a huge galvanized bucket next to the pile, and covered the entire pile with a tarp. He walked inside, and the first thing he saw was the huge river stone masonry heater stove/fireplace that dominated the great room. The kitchen was fully modern, with a commercial stove and oven combination, and a huge stainless steel hood with a fire suppression system. They bought a huge side-by-side refrigerator, and a 20 cubic foot freezer. Ralph knew they had a lot of shopping to do, and Ron had suggested a furniture store in Fairbanks, which was much closer than Anchorage, and had better prices. Once they were ready to move in, Ron said he'd fly them to Fairbanks to buy new furniture.

Ralph and Sam were both grateful to Ron and Nancy for letting them stay with them, but they were glad when their house was finished. They hitched up the u-haul to the Suburban and drove down the road, and made a left instead of a right, and drove down their driveway. This was the first time Samantha had seen her new house, and it took her breath away. It looked like Ron and Nancy's house, except it didn't have the room addition attached to it that broke up the classic A-frame shape. She'd seen the fake log cabins that were just faced with split logs, then she realized the logs in her house were full-size logs cut from their property, and over a foot thick. She knew it would be warm and cozy, and Ralph knew it would stop anything short of a .50 BMG round or a RPG. They used the heavy armor plate shutters and the heavy armored door in this house too. When Sam opened the door, she realized that it looked like a wood door, but it was heavier than she was which meant that it had 2 3/8-inch armor plate steel plates inside it sandwiched between plywood and particle board. The locking hardware on the inside looked like it was meant for a bank vault, and the door frame was as heavy as the door. The door frame was welded steel 6 inches thick, and lag bolted into the logs with recessed head foot-long lag bolts. Anyone trying to break down that door could huff and puff all they wanted to. With the shutters closed and locked, it would take an RPG to get at them, then they had the full basement/ emergency shelter with a blast-resistant door that would take almost a pound of C-4 to open once the locks were engaged. They copied Ron's design exactly, and used air-powered hydraulic rams to swing the door closed under tremendous air pressure from a pressurized tank that could close the 2-ton door in less than a second if he hit the panic button. The beauty of the system was if he needed to get the door open, even if the upper floor was destroyed, by flipping a switch the rams would depressurize slowly, and the door would lower by gravity alone.

Ron, Nancy, and their kids helped them move everything in, then the next day Ron flew Ralph and Sam to Fairbanks while Nancy watched the kids. He called ahead, and had all the passenger seats removed, and the jump seat installed in the cockpit door since it was a short flight, and they wanted to maximize cargo space. Sam wisely volunteered to ride in the jump seat on the way down so she could catch a nap in the much more comfortable co-pilots' seat on the way back. Ron hailed a cab when they got to Fairbanks, and they went to the same store. Ron spotted the store manager, and introduced Ralph and Sam as a couple of friends of his that

needed to buy a houseful of furniture and stuff. While they shopped, Ron parked himself in a chair and read a paperback he was trying to finish. They showed up 2 hours later, and said that the manager had volunteered to deliver their furniture to the airport and load the aircraft for free. Sam commented that the service was exceptional there, and Ron quipped that the last time there, they had the personal attention of the manager and a stock boy to fetch stuff, and maybe even shine their shoes. Ralph started laughing, and said “Must be nice to be the king, or at least royalty!”

“Between the 4 of us, we’ve dropped almost \$40 thousand dollars here in 2 trips, that kind of cash gets their attention. Besides, I think someone tipped them off when we showed up because they were fawning all over us.”

Ron hailed another cab, and beat the delivery truck to the plane by 15 minutes. Ron lowered the ramp, and it made loading much easier. An hour later, the passenger compartment was as full as it was going to get, and they just barely got all the stuff loaded. Ron was glad he had the 6-foot longer SuperGoose instead of the TurboGoose, because it would never have fit. That jarred Ron’s memory, and made a note to himself to deliver the box of study materials to Ralph and Sam’s place that afternoon. Once they were airborne, Ron called Allakaket and had 2 baggage handlers available to unload the plane, and transfer the stuff to Ralph and Sam’s place.. He landed as gently as he could at Allakaket, and taxied to the hangar, where the 2 baggage handlers met them to unload the plane and transfer it first to Ron’s truck, then to put it in their new house. They finished just before dinner, and Ron asked if they wanted to come over for dinner. Sam said that she had some Cajun Gumbo defrosting on the counter for dinner, but thanks anyway. Sam drove over in the Suburban to pick up Bert and Larry, and Nancy had another present ready for her. Jake carried several heavy boxes out to the Suburban, and put them inside the tailgate while Nancy helped Sam belt the boys into their car seats. Nancy said the boxes were all the manuals they had to know before they could touch an aircraft. She said they had to hurry up, because the SuperGoose would be ready in 3-4 months. Ron had ordered the new SuperGoose with the VIP package, and deleted everything except the VIP leather passenger seats, the upgraded carpet, and the hidden recessed lighting, which wouldn’t get in the way of cargo. The seats were still removable for a Medevac or Cargo mission. He was going to lease SuperGoose #1 to Ralph and Sam, and fly the new VIP SuperGoose for 2 flights per week from Anchorage to Doc’s Lodge.

Their advertising campaign, and word of mouth had booked the lodge full for the season. It seemed their idea of a hunting/fishing package without all the work appealed to dozens of doctors, lawyers and other professionals who had more money than time. Doc suggested an up-scale menu, but heavy on meats and potatoes. They did provide a healthier fare on request, but it was basically very fancy “Hunting Lodge” food, heavy on game products. Their commercial kitchen could can and process their kills into canned meat and sausage in time for them to carry the meat and the skin back home with them in a much more compact package. Since they weren’t trophy hunting, the heads weren’t mounted, and the brains used to brain tan the hides. Some of the hunters wanted to keep the racks until Ron advised them how huge the racks were,

and what it would cost to ship them back home. During hunting season, Jake and Josh volunteered to act as assistant guides, and learn the ropes of guiding from one of the best guides in the area. Since they were already living in their lodge right next door, it was a short walk to Doc's Lodge. Even Sarah and David got into the act, and went out with the fishing parties. Starsky and Hutch were now full-grown, and went everywhere with Jake and Josh. Each hunting season, Jake and Josh each took a large caribou, and the guide was impressed with their shooting skills, and made them always take the animals on the far side of the clearing, a 400-yard shot, and they both always hit the animal in the neck/shoulder region, killing the animals practically instantly. Jake was very fast with his Ulu, and could skin just as fast as the guide could. Josh and Jake helped the guests skin and brain tan their kills, and properly pack the meat for the return trip. Sarah and David made themselves useful on the fishing trips, sometimes driving the boat, but usually working as the mate, baiting hooks, gaffing fish, and cleaning them. Ron knew it was good experience for his kids, because even if they were so wealthy that they didn't have to work, Ron wanted them to develop a good work ethic, and realize the value of a dollar, so when they retired, the business would be in good hands.

Ralph and Sam spent the next couple of months studying to get their Student Pilot's permit, and 3 months later, they both started flying lessons. Ralph flew right seat when Ron flew to Anchorage twice a week, and they spent another day in flying lessons. Ralph's first take-off at Allakaket was exhilarating, and when he came back and landed, he was hooked. Whenever Ron and Ralph weren't using the SuperGoose, Ralph took care of Bert and Larry while Nancy and Sam flew the same lessons Ralph did. 3 months later, Ron flew Ralph to Anchorage to get his Commercial Pilot's rating, since he needed 2/3 of it anyway to fly the SuperGoose. Dan was surprised, and then stunned to find out Ron was leasing a SuperGoose to Ralph and Sam for a dollar a year. Dan quipped "So where do I sign up for the "Friends of Ron" club?"

Ron laughed, then gave Dan the Reader's Digest version of their story. Since they were both doctors, he suggested they notify the State of Alaska, and get the SG fully equipped. Ron said it already was - he was a State Paramedic. Dan handed Ralph the test, and 3 hours later, Ralph handed it back to him. He scored 85%, which was a passing grade. The nurse checked his pulse, vision, and listened to his heart, and signed off on the medical evaluations. While he didn't have the cadaver-like pulse of Ron, or his Eagle-eye vision, Ralph was in excellent health, and had 20-20 uncorrected vision. Dan handed Ralph a temporary copy of his commercial ticket, and said he'd send the original to Allakaket. Ron told Dan that they now had PO Boxes for all the residences, since they redesigned the Mayor's office, and built a new church for the growing town. Don thought that having 4 multi-millionaires in a small town must be nice, he'd have to consider retiring to Allakaket when he retired. Ralph handled the take-off and landing, and Ron complimented him on the landing, which was as smooth as glass. The next week, Nancy and Sam made a trip to the FAA office in Anchorage, and Sam had her Commercial Ticket as well.

2 weeks later, Grumman called, and said that the SuperGoose was ready. Ron called the airport, and had them make SuperGoose ready for an over-water transit to Vancouver, then called Anne,

and asked her if She and Gene wanted to stay at their place for a couple of days, they were going to pick up the SuperGoose in Vancouver. Ron paid extra to have Grumman fly the plane to Vancouver, so they didn't have to make the really long over-water flight from Seattle to Los Angeles. Ron called Col. Sandberg, and asked him if they could spend the night at their hotel, he wanted to bring 2 very good friends of his with them to pick up a VIP SuperGoose. It turned out Col. Sandberg was now Lt. Gen. Sandberg thanks to the job he did with the SuperGoose, and said that any time they wanted to, to call him and he'd comp as many rooms as he needed for up to a week. Ron thought about that, and asked if he had a multi-room suite for him and his wife, and their kids. General Sandberg said he'd call him right back. 15 minutes later, he informed Ron that the VIP suite was available for the next 2 weeks, It encompassed the entire upper floor of the hotel, had 6 rooms plus a huge common room, and they could comp him the VIP suite for a week if he wanted it. Ron said yes in a heartbeat, thanked the General, who said he'd e-mail the conformation to him within the hour. He gave Nancy and the kids the good news, then called Ralph and Sam. They were eager to see Vancouver, especially when Ron said it was all free, all they had to do was fly their new SuperGoose home from Vancouver. He was going to loan them SuperGoose #1, and he was picking up a brand-new VIP SuperGoose in Vancouver. After Gen. Sandberg agreed to comp them the VIP suite for the whole week, they decided to make a vacation out of it. Ralph and Sam talked about it, and decided that Bert and Larry were too young to enjoy it, so they called Ron back and asked if Anne's Babysitting Service could take them for a week. Ron called Anne and asked her if she could watch Ralph and Sam's boys instead, they were taking the family to Vancouver for the week courtesy of the RCAF. Gene had picked up the extension, and thought "It's good to be the King!", and Anne said they'd love to take Sam's 2 darling little boys for a week. Ron asked if they'd rather have them at their place, or go to Ron or Ralph's place. Anne said they had plenty of room here, so they should stay at Anne's place for the week. Ron thanked his mom, and called Ralph back. When he received the confirmation e-mail, Ron replied to remind Gen. Sandberg that the 4 of them were all Federal CCW holders, and asked if he could arrange their Canadian CCW's for the week. Gen. Sandberg asked for their names, and said he'd forward the info to the RCMP office in Vancouver.

The next day they got ready to fly to Vancouver, and met at the aircraft. Ralph and Sam had dropped Bert and Larry off at Anne's, and met them at the airport. Nancy wanted to fly right seat with her husband, so Ralph and Sam rode in the back this time with the kids. Once they had their headphones on and the cabin door closed, Nancy said "Guess we have to skip the mile high club this trip?"

"Only if you don't want to shock our friends, and gross out the kids!"

Nancy gave him a kiss, and said she'd take a rain check for tonight in the Hotel instead.

They flew to Vancouver, landed at the RCAF base, and got a ride to the Hotel. They checked in, and 4 bell boys took their luggage up to the VIP suite. On the table was a note from General Sandberg saying they had exclusive use of 2 limousines for the week, and to make sure to write



their room number on the bill. They checked out their rooms, and the level of opulence staggered them. Ron was pretty sure the faucets were gold-plated, the bathrobes, sheets, and pillowcases were silk, and the towels were made out of the finest cotton. The bathrooms were bigger than most people's bedrooms, and the bedrooms were bigger than some people's houses. Everyone had their own rooms, since the suite was a 6-room suite, and they had to use their room key in the elevator just to get the elevator to stop on this floor, which opened to a privacy door and a small alcove. Ron told them that their dinner reservation was for 5:30, and they had 45 minutes to get downstairs in time for their reservation, they should all shower and change now, and they'd meet in the common room in 40 minutes. Ron hoped the building had a huge water heater, with 3 women taking showers at once.

40 minutes later, Ron was amazed at the transformation in his children. Sarah looked like a young lady, for the first time in her life she was wearing a dress with her hair down instead of jeans and a pony tail. She looked exactly like her mother, and he gave her a big hug. "Sarah, you're beautiful, I don't know if I've ever told you that before?"

"Probably not dad, I've been a tomboy 24/7 until now."

Ron decided to rectify that, and suggested she was OK to wear whatever she wanted whenever she wanted, except she still had to wear a 1-piece swimsuit at the pool that her mom would choose for her. Sarah knew her dad was just being protective, so she gave him another hug instead of arguing with him. "Thanks Dad, I love you too!" Jake and Josh showed up a minute later, and they both looked much older in their suit and tie. David even looked older, Nancy came out, and she was still a stunning woman, now he knew where Sarah got her looks. He walked over to her, and gave Nancy a big hug. She noticed the kids too, and said "I know - they're getting older, which means we are too!" Ralph and Sam made their entrance minutes later, and Ron tried hard to keep his mouth closed. If anything, having two kids made Sam even more beautiful. He was glad that Nancy was such a hottie, or he might have been envious. The two couples walked to the elevator while the kids followed along, trying to act as grown-up as possible. When they exited the elevator, they walked to the entrance to Bacchus, the hotel's famous French restaurant.

The Matre de greeted them "Monsieur Williams, Monsieur Lacombe, your table is ready."

Ralph replied in French, which amazed the Matre de, who was a French Canadian transplant from the Toronto. "Est-ce que Monsieur Lacombe, votre Français endroit l'excellent, mais de I can't l'accent, de quelle région de la France sont vous est-il ? »

"I'm un Cajun de Louisiane."

They chatted in French while they were seated, and when Ralph saw the prices on the menu he nearly choked until Ron reminded him the entire bill was comped, including meals, so they were to enjoy themselves. 4 waiters appeared, set wine glasses in front of the adults, and a nice

bottle of wine, which the headwaiter told him was “compliments of the house.” Ron refused to be impressed, because of course the dinner was comped anyway, until Ralph got a look at the bottle, and pointed out to Ron that the bottle of wine was an expensive French import that probably cost several hundred dollars a bottle. That got Ron’s attention! They all ordered the lamb as a main course, and most ordered the mushroom soup. Ron asked if they could split 3 orders of the appetizers so they would have room for the lamb. The headwaiter suggested 3 appetizers, and the cook would make enough of each so they would each get some. Ron thought that was an excellent idea, and asked the waiter to take care of it. 15 minutes later, the appetizers were served, and Ron said grace since the restaurant was basically empty except for them. Nancy thought the food was better than last time, and the soup was excellent. Finally they brought out 6 huge racks of lamb with mint jelly, and Ron was glad they hadn’t ordered full orders of appetizers or they wouldn’t be able to finish it. When they finished, Ron wrote room 1700 on the bill, and the waiter thanked them. They walked back to the elevator, and went up to the rooms. Each room had its own private balcony, where the couples had some private time before going to bed. Each one of the kids’ rooms was equipped with a video game system to keep them entertained.

They met for breakfast next morning, dressed casually for a day on the town. Ron suggested to Ralph they stop at a camera shop first and buy Ralph a new digital camera just like Ron’s, because they were going to Stanley Park, and Ralph would probably want to take a picture of everything there. Sarah was back into jeans and a pony-tail, but Ron knew that the swan would emerge for dinner again that evening. After breakfast, they walked out the front door, which was opened by a doorman in uniform, and two grey limousines awaited them. Ron told them where he wanted to go. Ron’s family piled into 1, and Ralph and Sam took the other one. Minutes later they parked in front of the Ritz Camera Shop that Ron bought his camera years ago. The same guy still owned it, but was looking much older. Ron asked if he had another camera like his in stock, and his eyes brightened when he remembered Ron. He told them he was closing the store and retiring, the city had offered to buy the building for twice what he thought it was worth, but didn’t want any of the inventory, so he was selling all his inventory at rock-bottom prices. He had a Minolta DiMAGE Z2 for sale for \$350, and if he included the 512MB memory chip, he’d sell it for \$400. Everything else in the store was 10% over cost, since he had to be out within the month. Ron asked his kids if they wanted a camera, and only Sarah wanted one. The owner said he had 4 more Z2’s in stock at that price, and if he took all 4 with 512 chips in them, he’d sell them for \$350 each. Ron said “Sold! Ralph, I’m going to buy all 4 and give you and Sam 1, leaving my wife and kids to fight over 3 cameras.” Since neither Nancy nor the boys seemed to be shutterbugs, he figured there wouldn’t be much fighting. They went through the store, and bought any accessories for the cameras that they thought they would need. The owner said he had 8 sets of 4 NiMH batteries in back on a speed charger, and he’d sell them the batteries and the charger for the cost of the batteries. Ron told him to add it to the list. Including cases, filters, tripods, cable releases, and 2 high-power flash units, the total came up to \$3,000.00 USD. Ron handed the owner his American Express card, who ran it through the machine, and Ron signed the receipt. The owner configured the 4 cameras, loaded the 512MB chips, and handed him 4 spare 16MB chips, and the 4 extra 512MB chips they

bought since the owner said the chip was the first thing to fail on the camera, and with a replacement chip stored in a static-proof case, the camera might outlast them.

Ron handed Ralph one of the cameras in it's case and handed Sam the tripod. Evidently the wives were used to being pack mules. They carried their purchases out to the limousines, and the drivers suggested they drop them off at Stanley Park and return later to pick them up, since limousine parking was almost impossible to find in the park. The driver handed Ron a cell phone with the hotel's number already loaded. He said if they ever needed the limousines to meet them somewhere, just call and they'd be there. The driver assured them their purchases would be safely transported to their room and waiting there. Ron asked if anyone else wanted a camera, because they were going to the hotel. Jake took one just in case, and Sarah had her unit. Nancy said she was already loaded as heavily as she could stand. Josh and David said they didn't want to lug a camera around, so Ron told the drivers to put the other camera and their bags in their room, and they would call them later that afternoon to pick them up. The limos dropped them off right at the main entrance to Stanley Park. Ron restrained himself this time, but Ralph made up for him, shooting a picture of nearly everything in the park. Ron was glad he had the 512MB chip, because Ralph would probably fill up one of the smaller chips the first day of their vacation. They skipped lunch at the Tea House, since they all wanted to enjoy dinner. Finally Ron called the limousines, and they drove right to his location. Ralph was confused, and the driver explained that the cell phones had a GPS chip in them, and could transmit their exact location to someone transmitting the proper code. All their cellular phones had the chip, and the emergency service dispatchers consoles all had a valid code, so if someone called 911, they knew exactly where to send help. The hotel knew about this feature, and installed a dispatch center that could use the feature. Ron was glad he wasn't paranoid, or he'd freak out if he knew that someone could monitor his every move using a cell phone.

They all ate heartily at dinner, and they managed to eat a plate of appetizers each, the soup, and an entire rack of lamb. After dinner, Sam decided she wanted to attack Ralph, and he was glad the walls were thick, or no one else would have gotten any sleep that night either. In deference to Ralph's exhausted condition, they took it easy the next day, and went sightseeing. They spent the rest of the week acting like tourists, then they checked out of the hotel, and had the limousines drive them to the RCAF base. Chief Nichols was now Master Chief Nichols, and had moved to a different base, so they were met at the gate by a new Maintenance Chief, who waved the limos through. They parked next to their old SuperGoose and the new VIP SuperGoose. They marveled at the luxury of the new VIP Goose. The seats were similar to the pilot's and co-pilot's except they were leather and they reclined fully. The entire passenger compartment only held 10 VIP seats with a huge aisle between them, and plenty of room in the back for luggage, etc. Since this was a convertible model, there was no lavatory on board, but the carpet was definitely first class, even if it was removable. Ron and Nancy piled all their stuff into the new SuperGoose while Ralph and Sam loaded their plane. Ron suggested to Ralph that they try to avoid the Mile High club on their first over-water trip. Ron had to explain that one, and Ralph turned 3 shades of red - he didn't even think of that! Besides with the seats installed, it would be cramped and awkward to try. He suggested that Ralph follow them a

couple of miles back, and stay in radio contact if they were separated visually. Ron gave him the coordinates for Allakaket, and the radio frequencies to monitor, then walked back to his plane. Nancy already had the turbines idling, and as soon as he was seated and plugged in, she asked Ron what made Ralph turn beet red. Ron laughed and said that he suggested they skip the mile high club this trip, and that Ralph didn't know what it was, and when he explained it, Ralph turned 3 shades of red. Nancy laughed her head off, and they got ready to fly home.

Ron landed first, and turned around to watch Ralph land. He made a textbook water landing, and taxied up to the hangar following the guidance of a ground crewman waving lighted batons. Ralph climbed wearily into their Suburban and drove to Anne's place to pick up their kids. Sam was glad to see them, and Ralph was just glad to get home and get some sleep for a change. The next day he downloaded the pictures to his computer, and e-mailed some of the best ones to Ron. He made sure not to e-mail a few private pictures they shot in the hotel's bedroom when they were in a silly mood.

## Chapter 56 - Honey-do's

The next morning Ralph woke up to find a long list of chores that Samantha had written out for him. She figured that since he wasn't working in the Hospital, she could get some stuff done around the house. Ralph was a smart guy and called Ron, and asked for some help. Ron didn't want to have to cut and split wood, but he'd send Jake and Josh over with the Kubota tractor to make the job easier. Half an hour later, Ralph heard the rumble of a diesel tractor coming up the drive right as he finished his coffee. Jake and Josh were towing a trailer they had built for hauling lumber that was low to the ground, and used the tractor's PTO to power the trailer-mounted winch to pull the logs on board. They also included the gas-powered chain saw, 10 gallons of pre-mixed Avgas and 2-cycle oil, the sledge and wedge for splitting the wood, and Ron's safety gear. Ralph climbed aboard, and they drove out to Ralph's stand of trees. Sam wanted the stand closest to the house cleared to use for a garden, so they not only had to chop and stack the wood, but also pull the stumps. Since Ralph hadn't used a chainsaw before, Jake got volunteered to do it this time, but he wanted Ralph to learn how, so they brought a second set of safety gear for Ralph. Jake told Ralph how things worked, and the basics of tree felling. Jake did the first 6, and then Ralph said he'd like to try it. Jake picked an easy tree that didn't look complicated, and they conferred as to how to drop the tree.

Ralph started the chainsaw on the first pull since the engine was already warmed up, and made his first cut, pulled the blade out, cut the wedge, then stepped around the tree, and made his final cut. He yanked the blade clear, released the chain brake handle which stopped the chain immediately, and he took 6 quick steps back away from the tree like Jake had taught him. The tree fell with a crash right where Jake said it would. Ralph was hooked, and insisted on doing the rest of the trees. Josh and Jake started using hatchets to limb the smaller branches off the trees while Ralph dropped more trees in an area safely away from where they were working. They made sure to keep each other in sight, and by lunchtime, they had all the trees felled and limbed. They attached a choker to the logs and hauled them aboard the trailer with the tractor's PTO winch and secured them to the trailer. Jake drove the tractor back over to the house, and Sam had lunch ready. They ate their sandwiches, and drank the iced tea, then back to work! Ralph set up the sawhorse so he wouldn't have to lift the huge logs to saw them to length. Josh helped split and stack the wood while Jake used the tractor to pull the stumps out. Right as it was getting dark, they called it quits. Jake had all the stumps pulled, and Ralph had most of the wood sawn to length and split, so Jake took the tractor back over to his place for dinner. Ralph offered to pay them, but Jake insisted that their Dad said they weren't to take Ralph's money, that they were just doing what was considered neighborly. Ralph spent the next day cutting and splitting the rest of the wood, then the day after he drove over to Bill's place to borrow the rototiller. He had covered the bare ground with sawdust and wood chips left over from the lumber milling process that built his home, and tilled it into the soil. Samantha would plant a garden starting next year.

While Ralph was busy in the yard, Sam surfed the internet, located the place that Nancy

recommended for the security cameras and the monitor. She ordered enough cameras to cover the areas the kids were in, and to watch the front and back yard. She bought special low-light capable cameras for the front and back yard, which could provide a black and white image at night using starlight if necessary. Ralph had the house wired for motion-detecting lights, even though Ron said that wild animals would be tripping the lights all the time.

Ron quickly re-equipped his VIP SuperGoose with a new SU-16, survival kit, First Aid kit, Paramedic Kit, and oxygen delivery kit. The mechanic spent about a half-hour mounting them to the bulkheads. Ron took the SU-16 to the range to confirm the zero, and was glad that this rifle shot smaller groups than his last SU-16. He got an in-vehicle cross-band repeater installed as well, and a cellular repeater. Ron called Ralph, and reminded him that he needed to get his General License and get the radio and tower up. Ralph said he'd add it to his "honey-do" list. That reminded Ron that his list was getting long, and he had to get back home and whittle it down to size. Ralph reminded Sam that they needed to finish studying for their FCC General license, and he needed to get hold of the radio dealer in Anchorage and see if he could work something out. He called Tom, who said that he figured he'd be calling back since they sold the house with the antenna tower. He said that shipping an antenna and tower to Allakaket was expensive. Ralph floored him when he said he had his commercial pilot's license, and access to a Super Goose, and if it wouldn't fit in there, they could fly it over using a CH-53E Super Stallion that could haul 36,000 pounds on a sling load. Tom said there was no way the tower would fit inside his aircraft. Ralph asked if there was any problem using a tall tree as a tower. Tom said he'd never done it before, but there was no reason why not, they'd just have to build a chain bracket to mount the antenna to the tree. They'd have to top the tree, which meant hiring a logger, because topping a live tree was dangerous.

Ralph said he'd get back to him, but he definitely wanted the Kenwood TS-480SAT, and the Titan antenna. Tom said the tower without shipping or installation was \$2,000 dollars, and he charged \$1500 to install it, and they'd need a crane to lift it up. Ralph asked if they could use a helicopter to pick up the assembled tower and drop it into place. Tom thought that the rotor wash would be bad, but they could wear protective clothing if that was all they had available. Ralph said he'd make some phone calls and get back to him. Ralph called Ron, and asked him what to do. Ron thought the tree would be easier and safer, since he knew a couple of loggers in town who could top the tree fairly easily, and it would have to be easier and safer than flying a 100-foot tower, and setting it up. Ralph asked Ron to check how much they would charge to top a 75-foot tree, and fasten an antenna to it. Ron made a couple of phone calls and a couple of loggers who were between jobs said that they'd do it for \$500. Ron called Ralph, who called Tom, who said he located the appropriate connector, and he thought using a tree was a novel idea, but it would work. Ralph told him to order all the parts, and call him when they were in to arrange everything. Ralph told Tom that the loggers were going to attach the antenna to the tree, and all he had to do was attach the coax cable to the antenna so they could haul it up the tree.

Ralph had a nice lodge pole pine in mind, the top was at least 75 feet up, and it was 100 feet from the house. He ordered enough 10-foot lengths of ABS plastic burial conduit with connectors to do the job with 2 spares, and told the company that he'd need it delivered to the Commercial delivery terminal at Anchorage International. 2 weeks later, Tom called, and the radio was in, and he had the chain brackets, 200 feet of 50 ohm coax just to be on the safe side, the connectors, some wood screw eye hooks for the guy wires, 600 feet of guy wire, and some guy anchors for the ground. Ralph never heard of guying a tree, but he realized that it wouldn't hurt, since the tree was essentially dead once it was topped. Ralph called the loggers, who said they could top the tree one day, and install the antenna the next, since they probably wanted the tree top out of the way. He asked them what they would charge to install a chain bracket to the top of the tree, haul a 40-pound, 40 foot antenna up the tree, and install it on that bracket. Ralph heard their laughter over the phone. "We'll only charge you \$100 to install the antenna, and anything else you need done while we're up there. I'll install a pulley onto the top of the tree after we cut the top off, and we can use that to haul the antenna up. The two of us can muscle it into place on the tree from there. Make sure you ask the guy who's selling you this if it has to be right on top of the tree, or how much of the antenna has to be above the top of the tree."

Ralph called Tom back, who told him the lower 6 feet was designed to mount the antenna, and only the top 30 feet have to be above the tree. Ralph called the loggers back, and gave them the good news. They said they could do that easily. They'd come over tomorrow to top the tree, then they could install the antenna the next day. Ralph called Tom back, and said the loggers were going to top the tree tomorrow, and they would be ready to install the tree in 2 days. Tom asked Ralph if he could meet him in Anchorage at 0800 in 2 days. Ralph said he'd be flying a SuperGoose amphibian, and to ask the Ground Crew supervisor, or the gate guard where to park for the Commercial Delivery Terminal. Ralph went out and started digging a trench from the house to the tree, and was finished shortly after dark. The next day the loggers showed up, scampered up the tree like tree squirrels, and 15 minutes later the top of the tree came crashing to earth. They drove a spike into the top of the tree, and attached a pulley and a 200 ft. piece of rope with a clip on it, and deployed the rope as they came down the tree.

The next morning Ralph flew to Anchorage, picked up Tom and several boxes full of stuff including the antenna, which came in 5 boxes semi-assembled with directions written in Taiwanese according to Tom. Luckily he had assembled so many of them he could do it in his sleep. They landed in Allakaket, and Ralph loaded the Suburban until it was stuffed. Everything just barely fit, and they drove to Ralph's house. Tom needed a couple of hours to assemble the antenna, so he told Ralph to have the lumberjacks ready to go at noon. He called them, and they said they'd be there. At 11:45, the lumberjacks' truck pulled up, and they unloaded their gear and got ready to climb the tree. They said if Ralph and Tom could haul the rope up while they climbed, they could keep it from banging into the tree. The more experienced climber took the lead, and carried a tool belt with the wrenches needed to tighten all the connections on 6-foot leaders connected to his belt to keep Ralph and Tom from getting brained in case he dropped one, and he didn't feel like having to climb the tree more than once today. They put on their safety belts and their climbing spikes and started up.

The lead climber held the tower with one hand, and climbed with the other, and the lower climber stayed on the ground until the lead climber was 30 feet in the air, and climbed up after him holding the lower section. Without the use of both hands, it was a slow climb, but they made it. Since the upper climber made it to where he needed to mount the clamps, he let the lower climber steady the antenna while he attached the chain brackets to the tree. Once they were secured, Ralph and Tom slowly hauled the rope until it was high enough to manhandle into place. The lead lumberjack was glad they had picked a calm day, or this could be a real dangerous job. Tom had connected the coax cable to the antenna, and all they had to do was mount the antenna to the clamps with u-bolts and torque the U-bolts. Once the antenna was mounted, they disconnected the rope, and Tom lowered it to the ground while they climbed down 10 feet and started screwing eye screws into the tree. They put 3 8" eye bolts into the tree 120 degrees apart while Tom and Ralph hauled the guy wires aloft. The climbers attached the guy wires to the eye bolts by twisting it several times, then slipping a small u-bolt clamp over the wire they had twisted into an eye, and clamped down on the wire. Once they had all 3 done, they started paying out guy wire while they descended. The lead climber stopped briefly every 6 feet and used an insulated staple to carefully attach the coax cable to the tree since Ralph had impressed on him that if the coax cable was damaged, the whole job was useless. They were on the ground an hour later, and they were tired. Ralph gave the lead climber a check for \$1,000.00 which was twice what he had requested. Ralph said they had earned it. Since they could use the money, they didn't argue, and shook Ralph's hand and headed back to the truck. They'd split a pitcher of beer before heading home with 2 months worth of rent and food money each, which would make their wives very happy.

Ralph and Tom took care of connecting the guy wires to the anchors, which were simply augured into the ground, since Tom wanted the tree to flex, just not too much. Tom saw the pile of conduit, and the trench, and was glad Ralph thought ahead, and started feeding the coax through the conduit, gluing the connectors on at the end of every 10-foot section, and connected the sections until they had reached the house. Ralph took a wood-boring drill, and drilled a 1" hole through the wall where he wanted the cable to go. When he got to the wall, Tom drove a 8-foot grounding rod into the ground and connected a grounding wire to it. Next he fed the cable and the grounding wire through the hole, then they went inside to install the radio. Tom brought a 2-position switch to connect the antenna to a grounding path just in case a lightning strike hit the tree or the antenna.

Tom told Ralph that he could handle installing his own 2-meter antenna if he decided to get a base station for the 2-meter by driving a 12 foot pole 2 feet into the ground 10 feet from the house, and putting a commercial 1/4-wave omni ground-plane 2-meter antenna on it, or building his own, there were tons of designs on the internet for 2-meter antennas. Ralph asked if Tom could run 30 feet of coax through the wall, then seal the wall. Tom said he could put PL-259 connectors on each end, and seal the outdoor end with a cap and duct tape to keep it weathertight then coil it up outside the house, and hang it on a nail to keep it out of the snow. Ralph thanked Tom, and helped him finish the connections, including connecting the back-up battery to the battery bank with a large diode just like last time. Once they were finished, Ralph



said he could fly Tom back to Anchorage, or he could stay overnight, either at their place, or at the inn. It was only 2 o'clock, and they had at least 4 hours to darkness, and it would take Ralph right around 4 hours to fly there and back. Tom said that if they could give him a lift into town, he wanted to stop at the Moose Café and have a beer, then he'd stay overnight at the inn if Ralph could fly him back to Anchorage tomorrow. Ralph handed him a check for the job, and an extra \$50 to cover the room, dinner, and a short pitcher of beer. Tom asked him if he wanted to join him, but Ralph said he didn't drink. Ralph dropped Tom off, and went straight back home to Sam.

Ralph must have had his thinking cap on, because when he got home, he asked Sam if she were ready to take her General test, since he had to fly Tom back to Anchorage tomorrow anyway. Sam said she'd been ready for weeks. He called Virgil, and explained the situation. Since there were only 3 VE's in the club, and they were all Extras, Virgil said he'd call Ralph right back. An hour later, he said that it was irregular, but under the circumstances, the 3 of them were available tomorrow, so they could give a General testing session tomorrow for the 2 of them. They had to meet at Virgil's house since they didn't have time to book their usual testing room. Sam asked Ralph to make sure that Marge was available to babysit. Ralph offered a \$100 donation to the club if they could take the test tomorrow morning, and Marge could babysit. Since the test fee was \$12.00 each, that meant they were donating \$76.00 to the club, so Virgil said OK. He called up the Volunteer Examiner Coordinator, and explained the situation. He approved it since they lived over 300 miles away, and it wasn't a good idea to make them make a special trip, since Virgil said the other VE's were available. Virgil called Ralph back, and said they could do the General test tomorrow. Ralph asked how to get to Virgil's house. He was tempted to suggest they take a cab, then asked where he could meet them. Ralph said they were dropping Tom off after he installed his new antenna and multi-band transceiver. His truck was parked at the Anchorage International Commercial Delivery area. Virgil said he could meet them there. Ralph said they would be landing around 10:00 tomorrow morning. Virgil said he'd see them then and hung up.

They picked up Tom the next morning, and drove to the SuperGoose. The 3 of them loaded the plane, and Sam belted Bert and Larry into their seats, then sat next to them. Ralph would have to fly the plane by himself because she knew they'd cry all the way there if she weren't near them. 2 hours later, they arrived at Anchorage, and helped Tom unload his stuff. Virgil drove up right as they finished, and he helped. They all piled into Virgil's F-450 for the drive out to his house. When they got close, they realized that Virgil's house was a little more than a house, and he had maybe 20 acres including a huge garden, and numerous small livestock. A huge dog ran out to greet them that made Moose look like a runt. Virgil got out first, and the dog ran over to him. "Easy Bear, they're friends, and they're not here to play with you, so go lay down."

Bear trotted off and laid down on the porch. Ralph asked "What kind of dog is that?"

"Near as we can tell, it's a cross between a Bull Mastiff and a Rhodesian Ridgeback. You can

see why we call him Bear!”

“He makes Ron’s dog Moose look like a Toy Poodle. How much does he weigh anyway?”

“Last time we got him on a scale, he weighed 170 pounds.”

“Did he ever have any puppies?”

“Nope, all the female dogs around here are afraid of him.”

They went inside, and met the testing team. Virgil introduced Slim, Elmer, and Bob. They looked older than dirt, and probably helped Samuel Morse write the original Morse code back in 1835.

Virgil said “Now that we’ve got the introductions over, let’s get down to business. Here’s a legal pad and pencil. We need to go into the other room that’s set up with booths and headsets for the code part of the test. All you need to do is copy 5wpm. When we’re ready to start, we’ll blink the light, then start the tape. There’s a 30-second introduction, then the test.”

Ralph and Sam sat down and got ready. When the light blinked, they were ready to go. 5 minutes later, they turned their test sheets and paper in. Half an hour later, Virgil said “You both passed. Now for the 35-question exam.” He handed them the testing materials, then told them to proceed. They both finished half an hour later, and gave their test booklets to Virgil, then sat down and waited. 10 minutes later Virgil came out. “You both passed, but I can’t understand that you each only missed one question. Hardly anyone only misses 1 question.”

“We’re both doctors, and frankly studying for the FCC license was a walk in the park compared to medical school. We had to memorize all the bones in the body, and where they were, so we’re used to memorizing stuff.”

“Ok, here’s your certificates, your updated licenses should arrive in the mail from the FCC in a couple of weeks. You can go ahead and start transmitting as soon as you get home, just use your old call signs, since you’re not getting new ones. Just carry the General upgrade next to your FCC license, and post it next to your FCC shack license.” They walked out to the truck, and Marge handed the boys back. On the ride back to the plane, Ron told Virgil that they probably would never see each other again, but thanks for everything. Virgil told them to go ahead and use their 2- meter HT’s on their repeaters any time they were in Anchorage. Doc Nelson had applied for his own membership, so since they weren’t going to be using it much, they’d consider their 25 dollar fee a lifetime membership unless they moved back to Anchorage, and started using the repeaters a lot. He looked forward to talking to them on the radio. Once they got to the airport, Ralph and Sam shook Virgil’s hand, then they boarded the aircraft and flew back to Allakaket.

## Chapter 57 - Changes

Ron thought about the situation with 4 shooters and only 1 M -200, and called Gene, who e-mailed Ronnie Barrett, who replied that they were sitting on 5 unsold M-200s that they were going to take a loss on anyway. They could ship them to Allakaket Airlines as part of their on-going T&E contract (CYA) with a 10,000 round shipping crate full of the last of that particular lot of Lake City Ammo. Gene asked Ron if he had any of the new Night Vision scopes for the M -200, and he just happened to have 5 daylight and 5 night vision scopes with them, since they were sold as a set, along with 5 spare magazines each. Gene suggested they ship them to Anchorage, and they'd pick them up. Ronnie said they'd have to go to Elmendorf for security reasons. Actually Ronnie didn't want to mess with shipping them commercial, and knew the CO of the local airbase, who would fly them via MAC to Elmendorf and call it a training mission, saving them thousands of dollars in shipping costs, and a weeks worth of headaches. Gene knew they couldn't be picky, so he said Elmendorf would be fine.

2 weeks later, Gene got a call from the CO of Elmendorf that several very heavy packages had shown up at Elmendorf, and could he send someone over to pick them up, they were in the way. Gene called Ron, said the packages were at Elmendorf, and would he be so kind to go pick them up. Ron called the airport, and had them prep a SuperGoose for a heavy cargo flight to Elmendorf. Half an hour later, he was at the airport, the seats and carpeting were removed, and the turbines were idling. He climbed aboard, set the plane up for take-off, entered Elmendorf's coordinates into the nav system, and received permission to take off. As soon as he was within range, he called Elmendorf, and received landing permission. As usual, he'd follow a "follow-me" truck that would be waiting for him. When he landed, he was escorted to a secure igloo with his stuff in it. The MP guarding it asked for Ron's ID. He remembered to hand him his TS ID instead of his Federal CCW. The guard thanked him, and handed him a manifest for the shipment, then a forklift loaded the plane from the rear. It was a tight clearance, but he could drive far enough up the rear ramp to load the rifle cases first (still in shipping crates) then the ammo so the load would be as close to balanced as possible. Ron saw that the security tags on the boxes hadn't been touched, thanked the MP and the loader, and climbed back aboard, lifted the tail ramp and secured the doors, then taxied back to the runway. He received clearance right as he reached the runway, and took off in ground effect since he was heavy. He slowly climbed to 2,000 feet and landed very gently in Allakaket. He called ahead and suggested they get their small forklift to unload the plane. Ron called Bear and asked him what they should do with the rifles and ammo. Bear said there was room in the armory now that they shot off some of the .223 in practice, so they could stick them there. Ron asked the forklift driver to take the crates to the armory, which was right around the corner anyway. They set the crated ammo down with the crated rifles next to it. Ron counted boxes, and came up with 5 rifle crates, and a crate marked Lake City, BMG 50 Match, and the lot number that matched his original lot of Lake City Ammo. He realized the crate was full of 10,000 rounds of Lake City BMG 50 Match ammo, and that someone either was being really nice, or expected him to practice a lot! When he got home, he called Gene, and told him the ammo and the rifles were in the armory, and he

was going to call Ron Barrett personally and thank him.

5 minutes later “Ronnie Barrett, Hi this is Ron Williams. I just got the shipment, and I wanted to thank you personally.”

“Ron, we were going to write it off anyway, some Liberal Idiot in Congress objected to us selling “Sniper Rifles” to the Army, so they shit-canned the contract to buy 200 units. The USMC took advantage of the Army’s screw-up and bought 195 of them. They would have taken the whole 200, but they didn’t have that many sniper teams. We might be able to do it next year, because I heard that this yo-yo is up for re-election, and the guy the Republicans are running against him has a substantial lead so far. Thanks for taking us up to your place in Alaska, We all had fun. I heard Doc opened a lodge right behind you. I tried to book it for a week, but they were booked solid.”

“Ronnie, any time you want to go hunting up here, just give me a call or an e-mail, and I’ll set it up for you.”

“Thanks Ron, I’ll do that - I got to go, I’ve got a meeting in 5 minutes.”

Ronnie Barretts had just given them at least \$60 thousand worth of rifles, and another \$20 thousand worth of ammo. Any time he wanted to come up and go hunting, Ron would put them up in his own lodge if he had to. Ron was going to be busy flying hunters back and forth to Doc’s Lodge, and he had an idea. He checked with BA, and Steve was busier than a 1-armed paper hanger, flying grocery runs twice a week, and flying back and forth to Fairbanks the other 3. Ron asked if Steve were transferred to Fairbanks for the season, would it make things easier.

“Not only easier, but way more profitable. Who’s going to fly the grocery run?”

“I was going to ask Ralph Lacombe, we’re loaning them the SuperGoose anyway.”

“OK, go ahead and ask him, but be nice!”

“Right BA - I’m always nice!”

Ron called Ralph, and asked if he could come over. Ralph said OK, so Ron drove over there. 10 minutes later, they were talking on the porch. “Ron, this Retirement thing Sucks! I’ve got my Honey-do’s all caught up, and I’m running out of things to do.”

“Talk about an answer to a prayer. I need someone to fly the SuperGoose 2 trips a week to Anchorage for the grocery run to keep the General Store stocked. You’re just flying, we have handlers on both ends that load and unload the plane, you don’t even need to check the manifest, since it’s all coming here anyway, and we check it on this end.”

“Great Ron, where do I sign up?”

“Thanks Ralph, you’re next flight is tomorrow morning. You need to be to the airport at 0745 to pre-flight the aircraft, since you need to be in Anchorage by 1000. The plane will be fueled and the turbines idling when you get there, so you don’t have to take care of that.”

“Ron, this is perfect, I love flying - I’d even do it for free!”

“Great because we’re not paying you for it, instead we’ll pick up all the costs of maintaining and fueling the craft for your personal use.”

“I kind of figured this would happen, I guess it beats splitting wood. OK, I’ll be there bright and early tomorrow.”

As Ron walked back to his truck, he hoped he wasn’t taking advantage of his friend. He was going to walk back and tell him to forget it, but Ralph was a big boy, and if he didn’t want to do it, all he had to do was say so. The fuel and maintenance costs of flying a SuperGoose could amount to a whole bunch of money, and he guessed that was how Ralph saw it. Besides now he really was an employee of the airlines, so that would make all their arrangements to use the Range and the General Store Kosher.

Ralph walked back in and gave Sam the good news.

“What do you mean you’re flying two trips a week to Anchorage for free!”

“Sam, first of all, I’m going nuts around here with nothing to do, second of all, Ron’s paying for all the fuel and maintenance costs of us using the SuperGoose. That’s a bunch of money! Aircraft Mechanics charge a couple of hundred dollars per hour, and turboprops are maintenance hogs, plus his fuel costs are going up.”

“Ok, since you put it that way. But you’re only going to be gone 2 days a week, right!”

“Yeah, and I’ll even be home by noon.”

“Ok Raphael Lacombe, but make sure you keep up with your chores, and spend time with the boys.”

Ralph walked up to Sam, and said “You know I love you and the boys more than anything. I just need something to do each week besides chores.”

The next morning, Ralph was up at 0700, and was out the door at 0730 with a thermos full of coffee and a bag full of muffins. He made it to the airport at 0745, and was airborne by 0800. Everything went according to plan until he was flying back to Allakaket, when he saw

something streak up at the aircraft from the ground. He felt a bang, and grabbed the microphone “Mayday...Mayday..Mayday. This is SuperGoose 1, I’ve been hit by ground fire, and I need emergency clearance to Allakaket.

“SuperGoose the pattern is clear, we’ll have fire and ambulance rolling. Good luck!”

Ralph concentrated on getting his wounded bird down in 1 piece. The controls felt mushy, but they still responded, so he made a normal approach, and landed faster than normal, and used the reversible props to stop before he reached the end of the lake. He turned and taxied back to the ramp, deployed his landing gear, and carefully drove up to terra firma. As soon as the plane was safely parked, he shut it down as fast as possible, and threw the battery switch just in case. Ron and BA looked at the aircraft, and the only damage was some shrapnel damage to the rudder and rear elevators. Ron told Ralph he might have gotten lucky, he just got his feathers singed. Ron called Bear, who flew down in the 007, and was on the phone to Gene and the FAA on the way down. The FAA declared a local Air Emergency, and grounded all flights for the duration. No one wanted to be flying anyhow if someone on the ground was shooting at them. The Allakaket tower called Bear, and said they got a weak return headed from just west of Allakaket southbound to Fairbanks. It was only moving at 50mph, so it would take a while to make Fairbanks. Gene drove up, and talked to Bear. They got both 007’s airborne in pursuit, since it would take too long to configure the CH-53E Super Stallion as a gunship, and if they were flying ultra lights, the GE Minigun would cause a fatal crash, and Bear wanted these guys alive. The Allakaket military radar got a better fix on them, and vectored them to the aircraft. It was an ultra-light 2-seater. Bear and Gene conferred on the radio, and talked to Don, who told them they should force the aircraft down, since they might have a pickup point before Fairbanks, and they’d loose them. That was all the encouragement Bear needed. He told the pilot of his 007 to motor out the weapons pods, and try to force the guy down gently. The pilot used his rotor wash to upset the aircraft, and when he fired a Zuni rocket ahead of his flight path, he got the hint, and chopped his throttle, and landed on a strip of beach. Bear had his M - 4 out and pointed at the aircraft as they stopped rolling.

“Ok, you two, come out with your hands up!”

The pilot and copilot threw out their personal weapons, because right at that moment, Gene’s 007 had them in a cross-fire, with his nose pointed right at them and his weapons pods out. They climbed out onto the beach, and laid face down in the sand spread-eagled just like Bear ordered. He searched them both thoroughly, then bound and gagged them with a roll of duct tape, and dumped them in the back of the 007. They flew to Allakaket with Bear pointing his M - 4 at them all the time. Gene radioed ahead that they were en route to Allakaket with 2 prisoners. Bear took them to an abandoned hangar, and by the time the Marshals arrived to take custody of them, he had the whole story. There wasn’t a mark on either one of them, so the Marshals took yes for an answer, and had them repeat their statements. It seems they were members of ELF - Earth Liberation Force, and they were sent there to kill Ron Williams, since his gold mine was helping to rape the land, and they were logging on his property as well.

Since they attacked a Commercial Aircraft, and there were conspiracy elements they charged them with Terrorism and a bunch of other crimes under the Patriot Act. Later that day, the President was notified, and he saw a golden opportunity to destroy the Democratic Party by shaking up their main contributors, and indicting some for aiding and abetting Terrorism by their huge donations to ELF. He ordered his Attorney General to form a task force to investigate contributions from famous liberals to ELF and other terrorist organizations. His AG wasn't born yesterday, and knew exactly what the President wanted to do. Even if all they did was indict them, the Court of Public Opinion would crucify them, and donations to all Liberal causes would dry up overnight, including the Democratic National Committee. He was still steamed over the election. There were numerous incidents of Voter Fraud, but he knew he couldn't prove it, and the media would say it was politically motivated.

Ron talked to Ralph, who explained that the ELF terrorists were after him, and since Ralph was flying SuperGoose #1, they assumed it was him. Ron wouldn't blame Ralph if he didn't want to fly again, but Ralph said he wanted to go back up, but this time, they'd fly Ron's plane. They climbed aboard Ron's VIP SuperGoose against Bear's advice, but they guessed correctly that there was only 1 team after him, and the coast was clear. They took off from Allakaket, and Ron turned the controls over to Ralph, who flew the plane for hours, and relaxed. Ron let him handle the landing, which was smooth as silk. Ron found out that the damage to Ralph's plane was cosmetic, and they had already patched up the plane. Since the SuperGoose had an aluminum skin, it was easy to fix, and the repairs were barely noticeable. Bear theorized that ELF had gotten hold of an old 1980's technology Stinger missile without the all-aspect infrared seeker head. The older missiles needed a hot jet exhaust to home in on, and probably never got a good lock on the SuperGoose's much cooler exhaust, so it detonated safely behind it.

Later that day, Bear realized that Ron was probably right, and called Don at the Anchorage FAA office, who lifted the flight restriction. The next day, flights returned to normal. Gene was furious when he found out the Allakaket operators had shut down the Military radar, since they claimed it interfered with their FAA radar. He called Elmendorf, and they sent a radar technician over, and tuned the radar so it wouldn't interfere. Gene left strict instructions that the military search radar was to be running and manned 24/7, and Ron, BA, or himself needed to be notified ASAP if it wasn't working properly. Ron and BA hired another operator to ensure that the radar set would be manned 24/7. 2 days later Ralph made another grocery run to Anchorage, which was totally uneventful. Ralph realized he had dodged a bullet, and if his number came up, there wasn't a lot he could do about it. One thing he did do was make sure his will was current, and he had enough life insurance. Of the 4 of them Nancy took it the hardest, because people were still trying to kill her husband. Short of mounting military flare and chaff dispensing hardware on all their aircraft, they'd just have to rely on the military radar to detect incoming threats. Ron knew the military radar would have detected even the ultra-light, since it had a large wingspan, and the main members were steel or aluminum, which reflected radar very well; and the flare and chaff dispensers weren't really an option, because they were obvious, and might scare customers away.

They flew to Bear's range to get some practice in. Ron had loaded the 5 M - 200 rifles and ammo on board and throughout the day everyone tried shooting it. Ron wasn't surprised to learn that after him and Jake, Sarah and Samantha were the next best shots with the Barrett M - 200. They weren't shooting sub-moa groups yet, but given time and practice they could. Bear wanted to include his sons Tom and Gary in the Militia, and teach them long distance shooting, but they were a bunch of Squirrels. They were doing OK with their AR-15's, but couldn't concentrate enough to shoot either the M -25 or the Barrett M -200. Ron talked with Bear, and he agreed that Ron and Jake would be their primary long-distance shooters, backed up by Ralph and Josh respectively, and Sarah and Sam would make a 3rd team if needed. Each one of the M -200 sniper teams could command a mile of terrain around them if they got to a good location. The assistant sniper, for lack of a better word, would be equipped with a Springfield Armory M - 25, and they could all shoot 3-inch or smaller groups at 600 yards with that rifle, and they had more firepower on tap with a 20-round magazine. David, Tom, and Gary were coming along, but needed some more maturity before they would be useful shooters. Nancy was a good shooter, but Bear realized that she didn't have what it took to take another life at long distance, and would be more useful running the shelter, and organizing the women and children into a self-defense force for a last-ditch defense of the shelter, and the children. Bear and Gene had organized the town and surrounding area into several self-defense forces, and when the news of the ELF attack spread, they started taking their duties seriously again. Before then, the chance of the town getting attacked was a remote possibility in their minds, and the militia was a nice excuse to get out and shoot full-auto weapons and grenade launchers once a month.

Ralph started experimenting with the DX capabilities of his new radio, and found out that if he listened during certain times of the evening, he could hear broadcasts in CW with foreign call signs. He did some internet research, and found out that there were certain times of the day, and other factors that affected the ionosphere that allowed the 10-meter frequencies to travel around the world. He called Virgil on the radio, and he e-mailed him several pages of information the local Elmers had collected over the years about ionic propagation. He printed it, and put it in a folder next to his radio, and started a log book like Virgil suggested, which had the date, time, call sign, and strength of the signal. Slowly Ralph realized he needed to practice, so a couple of hours every week, he started DX'ing and collecting QSO cards. His farthest contact so far was from South Africa on a freak bounce. He called Virgil and told him about it. Virgil was seriously impressed, the furthest DX he had so far was a guy in Australia. Ralph's CW rate increased as he got better. Sometimes he'd establish contact via hand-keyed CW, then when he found another ham that was machine CW capable, they'd switch to packet or RTTY, so they could talk faster. He could type 40wpm, but only key CW at 10 wpm. He located several commercial SW broadcasts, and he wrote down the frequencies in his log book for future reference. BBC and the other big commercial broadcasts might come in handy later. The more he used the radio, the more things he realized it could do. This radio was way more capable than he thought, but when he bought it, he only knew it was one of the highest rated multi-band transceivers in the Kenwood line. Tom had done an excellent job recommending the Titan antenna, because he rarely needed to use the antenna tuner. The only thing he wished he had was a Yagi antenna with a rotator, so he could selectively listen in certain directions, because



sometimes the reception was better west to east, and sometimes east to west. He'd have to install 2 Yagis to do that, and didn't want to add the extra sail area to his antenna system they'd require.

Sam was glad that Ralph was taking this survival preparedness seriously, because she was reading some alarming stuff on the internet about the US and World economy, especially the oil shortage, and the chance that this winter would be one of the worst on record. She sent Ralph out to double their store of wood. He got Jake and Josh to volunteer, and soon had their wood supply doubled like Sam requested. Sam and Ralph had a huge garden that summer, and she spent a lot of time later that summer and fall canning like crazy. Ralph was flying plane loads of canning jars and lids from Anchorage for the next two flights, since the lodges were almost finished with hunting season, and had plenty of food in stock. Once the hunters went home, Sam and Ralph flew up to Doc's Lodge, shot 2 caribou, and the people at the lodge were nice enough to can the meat and make 100 pounds of sausage. Sam was glad that they'd do that for them, and gave them a \$50 tip each. Ralph brain tanned the skins, and they added to their collection of skins. The snow started early that winter, and didn't let up much.

## Chapter 58 - Baby it's Cold Outside

The winter turned out to be one of the worst in recent history. Ralph and Sam were among the people who were prepared, but several older couples were caught short, not by funds, but by storage, and as soon as a break occurred in the storm, Ron organized a delivery service using snowmobiles and sleds to get emergency supplies to the families that were caught short. Ron and Nancy, BA and Sally drove their snowmobiles to the General Store, where they were loaded up and drove to several houses of elderly people in Allakaket. Ron decided that they needed to buy either a couple of snowmobiles or a snow cat for next year.

Ralph couldn't stand it any longer, and decided to start on a dream project. He had enough room in his garage for 4 vehicles, so they had plenty of room for him to turn it into a shop. At one time, Ralph was a Certified Welder before he entered medical school. He explained to Sam that he wanted a trade in case he couldn't complete Medical School, so he got all the training and got certified as a Journeyman welder, and while he was at it, he took classes in design and fabrication. One of his class projects was to design a tubular-frame dune buggy, and the entire class built it. He did some internet research, and except for the shipping, the materials weren't too expensive.

“What do you want with a Dune Buggy out here?”

“How about a 4-seater snowmobile with a 1600cc VW motor?”

“That's almost as nuts, but go ahead if you have to.”

Ralph took that for a “Yes” and started ordering supplies and equipment. He made several trips to Anchorage that winter. Flying the SuperGoose with skis on it was an experience! He ordered a MIG welding set, an oxy-acetylene welding setup and a set of frame welding jigs. He almost forgot to order a copy of AutoCAD, and was stunned to learn that the stupid software cost more than most of his parts. Since he had to have it, he bought it, and hoped he could use it again. While the parts were arriving, he got his basic tubular 4-seater chassis design down in the machine, and printed up a parts list that called out tube type, diameter, bends, etc. and contacted a company in Fairbanks that did tube bending. Ralph thought they should be handing out Vaseline with their quotes, but didn't have the know-how to bend the tubing right the first time, or the expensive equipment, so he approved the quote. They called him when all his tubes were cut to length and bent according to his design. Now all he'd have to do was fly down to Fairbanks, pick it up, and start welding. The 1600cc VW motor and transmission had shown up from the VW Store in St. Johns, PA. They were confused about his request to set it up to run on Avgas, until he explained that up in Allakaket Alaska, you either ran a motor on Avgas, Diesel, or JP-5, because that was all they had. He wanted them to build the motor for reliability and horsepower. They said that would cost extra, and would come in between \$1500 and \$2,000. If he wanted it balanced and blueprinted, that would add another \$500, bringing his total to \$2500.

He approved the \$2500, because he didn't want to have to rebuild this motor any time soon. The engine and transmission arrived in separate crates, and he was glad that they had a forklift to get it in and out of the SuperGoose. They weren't that heavy, just heavy enough to use the forklift.

The rest of his parts came in separate crates, and he was quickly running out of room. He decided to move his IH Traveler outside for the winter, since they only drove the Suburban now. He put a tarp over it, and drained all the fluids to keep them from freezing. Now he had enough room to work. He started assembling the tubing sections for the roll cage frame, and once he had them aligned, he locked the jig and started welding the tubing with his MIG welder. Several weeks later, the frame was together, and he started bolting parts onto it. He installed the engine and transmission in the conventional position, and mounted his upper and lower control arms, and the VW front suspension. He modified the front axle and designed a mount out of billet aluminum to carry a rough-water Slalom ski, which he hoped would be enough to carry the weight up front. Ralph had the part fabricated at the machine shop, and installed a flat-wound coil spring inside it to keep the ski tips up if the front end unloaded for any reason. He ordered a set of Hella Motorcycle lights, and a set of conventional fog/driving lights since he had dual Mitsubishi 60-amp alternators running off the engine, and a dual battery set-up up front. The body was made out of sheet metal, attached to the frame with Dzus fittings so he could replace damaged sections. There were cut-outs in the sheet metal for the headlights and fog lights, which were recess mounted and covered by pieces of Lexan. He had enough room up front for a 10-gallon fuel cell and 2 Interstate AGM batteries with an isolator. He ordered another Kenwood mobile radio, installed it on the passenger side, and mounted the antenna on the roof. With the roll cage, he installed 4-point racing belts and 4 racing bucket seats. Ralph replaced the stock emergency brake with a cutting brake, which was the best way to turn the snowmobile, since if he braked the inner track, the outer one would keep spinning, and would propel the vehicle in the direction of the braked track. The front end still steered, but a cutting brake worked better and quicker. The other controls were conventional: gas, clutch, and brake. The floor brake activated both tracks to stop the vehicle.

Instead of conventional doors, he cut the tubes, installed pivot pins on the bottom and spring-loaded locking pins on the top, and had the doors flop down to enter. They were skinned with lightweight diamond plate on both sides so you could safely step on them. Ralph was bummed that he finished building it too late to do anything more than run it in the slush to make sure it worked. He bought all the parts from a snowmobile dealer to replicate the suspension and track of a snowmobile, and used an adjustable coil-over shock to the rear pulleys to attach the back of the track to the vehicle so he could adjust the ride height for 2 or 4 people. Ralph thought his idea was pretty ingenious, and couldn't wait for next winter to check it out. Sam took one look at it, and called it the Snow Bug. Ralph went with the idea, and painted it June bug green. When Ralph told her the Snow Bug was heated, she got a little more enthusiastic about riding in it. He had a full Lexan windshield with electric wipers and a washer system, and a sheet metal roof over the roll cage to keep the snow off their heads. The sides were open, but they were going to be wearing snowmobile suits and helmets anyway.

Ralph guessed the Snow Bug could hit 100 mph if he could find a place flat enough and long enough, and if he had the nerve. Ralph installed a continuous skid plate underneath, and added Teflon sliders so if the vehicle grounded or high-centered, it would slide on the long strips of Teflon running from the front to the rear of the bug. When Ron got a good look at it, first he laughed his socks off, and then he was intrigued. He suggested attaching a pintle-type towing hitch to the rear, and mounting fenders and mud flaps to the rear so if they were towing something they wouldn't get buried in snow. Ron said if the prototype worked, Ralph might be busy building some more. He asked how much the cost, and Ralph said the parts came in around \$8-10 Thousand, but a lot of that was prototyping expenses for the machined parts. He guessed that he could build copies for \$15-20 thousand each and give himself a decent amount of money for his labor without gouging his friends. If he were to build them for anyone else, they'd cost over \$20 thousand each unless he sold the design to someone who could make them on an assembly line, then the per-unit cost would drop back to around \$10 thousand, including mark-up for the seller. Retail might be \$12-15 Thousand with dealer and distributor mark-ups.

Finally spring arrived, and Ron flew up to their lodge to check on it, and heard scratching at his lodge door. He opened the door, and a female wolf was sitting there holding a small runt in her mouth, and set him down in front of Ron. He knelt down, and told her "Ok girl, I understand. We'll take care of him, so don't worry." She laid down, licked her pup, and Ron petted her, then she turned and walked away. Ron rummaged around and found a hot water bottle, put the pup on the bearskin rug, and made some formula from memory. He called Nancy, who said they couldn't keep it, because they already had Starsky and Hutch. Ron called Ralph, and told him that the runt needed to be adopted or it would die. Ralph said to bring it over, and Ron bundled the pup in a caribou skin blanket after he fed it, and tucked a fresh hot water bottle in the blanket, then ran out to the plane, put the pup on the floor next to him, turned the heater on, and flew home. He drove to Ralph's place, and dropped off the wolf cub. Ron told Ralph everything he needed to know to successfully raise the pup. Sam wasn't very happy at all, then remembered what Anne said about them raising Oliver. The pup was a dead-ringer for Oliver according to Ron, so Ralph thought that they might call him Oliver. Once Sam saw Oliver, all her objections vanished, she thought he was too cute for his own good. Ron dropped off a case of evaporated milk and Karo syrup, disposable bottles, hot water bottles, and the caribou skin along with Oliver, so they were set.

Bert and Larry were both crawling, and Ralph followed Ron's advice and put them together on the bearskin rug at naptime. The 3 of them curled up together, and were fast asleep. When they woke up, Ralph had a bottle of wolf formula ready to go, then he took Oliver outside to do his business. He rubbed Oliver's butt with a dampened piece of cotton ball, and he squatted and pooped right there. When he was finished, Ralph praised him, took him back inside, and he sacked out with Bert and Larry. Sam was starting to appreciate Oliver, because Bert and Larry didn't tend to wander off and get into mischief when they had Oliver to keep them company. Ralph made sure that he and Sam imprinted on the cub as well, because the safest wolf was a thoroughly imprinted and socialized wolf. Anne called up and asked if she and Gene could come over to see the new wolf, Ron had blabbed and told her how much this runt resembled

Oliver. They came over later that afternoon, and Anne started crying almost immediately. This wolf cub was a dead ringer for Oliver, which brought back all kinds of memories. Gene held her for a while, then she petted Oliver for a while, then they had to go. Ralph didn't understand, he had hoped the puppy would make Anne happy. He'd have to talk to Ron later.

Once the weather warmed up, Bear said his range was open again, and they made up for lost time. Ron and Jake shot their M-200s and everyone else shot their M-25s. Jake knew he was rusty when his first group of the season at the 1,000 yard line measured out at 12 inches. Ron wasn't a happy camper either. His first group was 10 inches, and he hadn't shot that badly since he was a little kid. Ron examined the range carefully through his scope, checking mirage. Suddenly he spotted it - there was a localized breeze flowing through the draw between their shooting position and the target, and it seemed to be a variable breeze. That could account for part of it, but he was sure that he was rusty too, since the last time he shot his M -200 was when he was training Delta shooters last year at Bear's place. Even though the Army couldn't buy the Barrett M -200, that didn't stop the new JSOC, and based on General Shepard's recommendation, he equipped all his SF snipers with M-200's as well as their usual 30-caliber rifles. Delta was the last group to filter through Bear's school, since they were busy doing something that even Bear and Ron couldn't know about.

By the end of the day, Ron's groups were back under 8 inches. Not as good as he'd ever done, but pretty good considering this was the first time he shot the rifle in 6 months. Jake showed up his dad by shooting a 7.5 inch group that was just smaller than his Dad's. By the end of the day, everyone who was shooting an M -25 was shooting a group smaller than 6 inches at 600 yards, which was good enough for government work. Ralph wanted to get back to check on Oliver, and Sam wanted to see her kids, so they knocked off early, and they flew back to Allakaket. Over the winter, they had replaced the damaged control surfaces on Ralph's plane when Grumman offered to replace them for free in exchange for the damaged parts. They wanted to examine the control surfaces to see how well they survived a near-miss by a man-portable missile since there weren't too many cases of near-misses - the Stinger missile usually either totally missed or scored.

When they got home, Anne was petting Oliver, and feeling much better. Bert and Larry were asleep on the rug. Gene had gone to the range to practice, and would be back soon. Ralph sat down and talked to Anne. "I don't understand, last time you were crying when you saw Oliver, and today you seem fine?"

"I realized this beautiful puppy might look like Oliver, but he's not Oliver, so I decided to treat him just like a new puppy, and my memories of Oliver and Roy didn't bother me anymore."

"Sorry Anne, if I would have known, we would have called him something else."

"Don't worry about me, Oliver Junior is a beautiful wolf. Thanks for letting me spend time with him."

They picked up the boys and Oliver and went home. Ralph made dinner since Sam was tired, then he checked to see if anything new was going on with the radio. A couple of Elmers were just chewing the rag on the 440 band since it was too early for the HF bands to open up for DX communications. Ralph shut the radio down and helped Sam give the boys a bath. Once they were down for the night, Ralph and Sam took a shower, and went to bed early. Ralph was concerned because Sam was acting lethargic, and asked her what was up. She said she didn't know, but she wasn't running a fever or anything. Ralph asked if she wanted to go to Anchorage tomorrow and have some blood work done to make sure her hormone levels were ok. Thanks to her miscarriage and hysterectomy, she was on hormone replacement therapy, and Ralph was concerned that they needed to adjust her dosage. She said that Doc Miller could draw the blood, but Ralph said that he still needed to send it to Anchorage Regional for testing, so she might as well be seen at Anchorage. He called Anne, and explained the situation, and she said that she'd watch Bert, Larry, and Oliver for them tomorrow, and Sam should definitely go to Anchorage Regional, because Doc Miller was pretty weak on OB/GYN unless it was either pregnancy or delivery. That settled it in Ralph's mind, and he called the airport, and asked that SuperGoose #1 be ready for flight at 0800 tomorrow.

The next morning, Sam was even weaker, so Ralph took care of everything, got the boys and Oliver in the Suburban, then helped Sam into the passenger seat. He checked her temperature while he helped her in, and he thought she might be a little warm, but not feverish. He dropped the boys and Oliver off at Anne's and helped Sam into the SuperGoose, and had her sit up front where he could keep an eye on her. 2 hours later they arrived at Anchorage Regional. Doc Nelson was on, and took her in immediately after talking to Ralph. They ran the blood work Stat, and her hormones were out of whack, but her blood sugar was low too, which surprised everyone. Doctor Nelson guessed the hormone problems might have been masking her hypoglycemia. Instead of starting an IV, he ordered a glass of orange juice from the cafeteria. Once she drank that, she felt better. Doc Nelson handed her a bunch of paperwork about Hypoglycemia, and a different prescription for her hormone drugs. Since Ralph and Sam were both doctors, he knew that they would make sure that Sam took care of herself, since they both knew how dangerous hypoglycemia was. Sam picked up a glucose monitor and a 3-month supply of test strips, lancets, a lancet gun, and boxes of alcohol preps at the hospital pharmacy on the way out. She bought the new type that could read accurately anywhere on her body so she wouldn't damage her fingers, since she was still a qualified surgeon and her hands were her livelihood.

They flew back to Allakaket, and Sam told Anne what had happened. She hugged Sam, and said that if she hadn't gone to Anchorage, she might not have lived much longer, because Doc Miller would never have run the entire battery of blood tests like an ER would automatically, and he might have missed the hypoglycemia. They drove home, and after putting the boys and Oliver down for a nap, Sam checked out the WebMD website since they had bought out MedLine, and used her password to access the database, and got more information on Hypoglycemia than she needed or wanted. She inserted a couple of extra words and Boolean operators to limit the search, and she struck pay dirt, and bookmarked the page so she could

come back and read the articles at her leisure. She spent the rest of the afternoon reading the doctor's paperwork, which probably was copied from the same source, since it listed most of the same articles. She found out how to regulate her blood sugar, and found out that careful monitoring of her blood sugar was the critical element, so she was glad she bought the glucose monitor. Ralph was glad his wife was OK, but realized how dangerous hypoglycemia was, and knew the only thing he could do for her he wasn't already was to pray. They could monitor her blood sugar, and modify her lifestyle, but she really couldn't go anywhere without her glucose monitor and kit, and some glucose tabs and gel for emergencies, since if her blood sugar got too low, she could go into a coma.

## Chapter 59 Snow Bugs

Allakaket Airlines had another good year, and Oliver grew up with Bert and Larry. They were now inseparable. Nancy warned Sam about the kids trying to drink out of the dog's bowl, so she kept the kids away from Oliver's food and water bowls. As they grew older, their play got more physical, but neither Bert nor Larry was really hurt when Oliver pushed them over. The first time he did it and started licking Bert's face, Sam almost lost it then and there. Ralph came running in, and calmed Sam down. She was ok when she saw that they were just playing, and Bert was giggling like he did when Sam tickled him. Sam had gotten her hypoglycemia under control, and wasn't symptomatic, but only because she religiously checked her blood sugar at least 4 times a day, and watched her diet. Doc's Lodge was booked solid again this year, and Doc realized he would have been less busy if he had kept practicing medicine.

Sam and Ralph got together with Bear and started training up the Militia's Medics into Paramedics, and Bear issued the military surplus gear he got from General Gene Shepard before he retired. The stuff that needed replacing on a regular basis they got from the state when they took their State Paramedic tests. The 2 weeks at Anchorage Regional was a walk in the park compared to studying under Sam and Ralph, who were perfectionists. "There is only 1 way to do this, the right way!" was a phrase they had heard hundreds of times. A visiting Special Forces PJ/Medic spent an extra day talking to the newly minted paramedics about field expedient techniques, and they took extensive notes, as well as Bear getting the whole session on videotape. While they lacked the combat experience, Bear said that their training was as good as it could get without sending them to a war zone, and none of them wanted to volunteer for that. Since they were irregular forces, no one wore anything that would identify them as medics as long as they were wearing the woodland cammo that the militia wore on their exercises. Every militia member carried a battle dressing and a couple of other items in their right thigh cargo pocket of their BDU's, so if they were shot, the medic would know where to look, or they could treat each other for a gunshot by reaching for their wounded team member's right thigh pocket, and it would always be there.

All the militia members practiced 1 weekend every 6 months, which included 1 day of target practice, 1 day of field techniques, and a classroom day covering tactics, escape and evasion and Psyops. Bear felt the psychological aspects of Guerrilla warfare had been ignored since Vietnam, to the detriment of all branches of the Military, except Special Forces. He dispelled the "Murder Inc." fallacy that regular infantry sometimes felt about their own snipers, and explained they were there for 2 reasons. They could either kill troops that were attacking them while they were still out of range, or they could demoralize the enemy by killing their commanders, radio operators, and other targets of opportunity. One sergeant said that he was damn glad they had snipers, because that meant the bad guys would have a tougher time getting to his wife and kids. Their only fire support was either indirect fire support from their light mortars, or direct fire support from the armed choppers, Bradleys, Hummers, and the GE Mini-guns on their Vulcan Systems.



Every member of the militia was equipped with either a Bushmaster AR-15, or an M-16/M -203 of some variant. They really liked the M-203s since they were short on mortars, and had no long-range cannons. They had hand grenades, and anti-personnel mines for ambushes. Bear and Hunter had supervised the distribution and hiding of caches all over the area for resupply, or for use if they had to E&E. Most of them were simple 5-gallon buckets or PVC pipe buried in the ground, but some were more complex and bigger. They were so well hidden that unless you knew where it was, you'd never find it, and the only people who knew where they all were could be counted on 1 hand. Each team was responsible for an area, and only knew about the caches in their area, and 1 emergency cache. Bear was utilizing some of the aspects of the Viet Cong Guerilla tactics, and compartmentalized information, so if a team were compromised, they couldn't give away much.

Bear spent all the time he could with his #1 and #2 sniper teams training them in field craft and everything else they needed to know. Gene got a copy of the latest Marine Field Manual about Scout Sniper training, and gave it to Bear, who adapted it to their situation. Once they had been training a while, he realized he needed to switch team members around. Ron and Jake were still his designated shooters, but he teamed up Ron and Ralph, and Jake and Josh instead of the other way around. Jake was the older brother, so Josh didn't have a problem with taking orders from him, where Ralph resented taking orders from Jake, and Ron was too busy thinking about Josh to concentrate on the mission. One benefit he didn't realize until the switch, was Josh and Jake's zeros were close enough that they could use each other's weapons, and Ralph wasn't a good enough shot with the M -200 to matter. If he used Ron's Zero, he was close enough to hit a man-sized target at almost 1,000 yards, whereas Ron or Jake could pick which eyeball they wanted to shoot him in. Each sniper team was issued an M - 200 with 200 rounds of ammo and an M -25 with 1200 rounds, splitting the load between them. They each carried their personal sidearm, which for the 4 of them was their P-14 Limited with 4 mags plus 100 rounds and they each carried a suppressed Ruger 22/45 with 2 loaded mags and 100 rounds to spare. They carried their water in a Camelback, and minimal food. If they were out for any time, they could carry extra or raid a food cache near their hide if necessary. The assistant also carried a spotting scope or range-finding binoculars and a radio.

Once they were fully trained, Bear talked to Ron and Ralph, and got their reluctant permission to train Sarah and Sam into a 3rd team for backup. Sarah shot as well as her older brother, and if she wasn't a girl, Bear would have made her his 2nd sniper. Sam was progressing nicely with the M -25, and was routinely shooting 3-5 inch groups at 600 yards. Bear didn't load them up with ammo like he did with his first 2 teams, since they would stay closer to home, and would be easier to resupply. If enemy forces made it into Allakaket, they would take positions on the best vantage point and take out the leadership and heavy weapons with their first shots, then take out targets of opportunity after that. Sarah was disappointed in being Bear's #3 pick, until he sat her down and explained the facts of life to her, and what would happen to her if she were caught. Suddenly she saw the wisdom of not being at or ahead of the Forward Edge of Battle, and was perfectly willing to assume a more defensive role. By the end of the summer, they were ready to field 3 sniper teams if necessary. They were tired of constantly training, and

thought that Bear would give them the winter off. He told them “Fat Chance, what if they decided to attack in the winter?” so they spent several weekends freezing their butts off, and learning how to cross-country ski. Ron was glad he already knew how, and wound up as Bear’s assistant teacher. Bear was no dummy, and stayed at home where it was warm while Ron skied back and forth with the sniper teams, set up bivouacs and hides, and generally froze their butts off. Finally when it reached 40 below, Ron called a halt to the winter training. He wasn’t going to kill a team in training. Bear agreed, and magnanimously gave them the rest of the winter off.

Ralph and Sam went home and spent the next week sitting in front of the fireplace warming up. Finally the snow let up, and Ralph was getting cabin fever when he remembered the Snow Bug. Sam suggested he take the first test drive by himself, so he didn’t take her out with him, so he suited up, filled up the gas and oil tanks, took the batteries off the trickle charger, and fired up the motor. After letting it idle for a while, he backed it up, turned it around, and drove down the driveway. Steering by using the cutting brakes was a new experience to him, and he narrowly missed several large trees before he figured it out. The front skis were just about useless for turning the Snow Bug, and were only useful for keeping it on the trail. Any serious steering was done with the cutting brake. With just one passenger, it accelerated like a dragster, so he learned to go easy on the throttle. VW parts had shipped several sets of speedometer gears, and after he bought the main drive pulleys, he selected the set recommended for that diameter pulley. He found out he could only go 10 mph in first gear, but it was a really low gear, so he could normally take off in second gear, which was ok to about 30mph. Third gear was good from about 20-50mph on flat ground, and forth gear went faster than he wanted to right now.

Once he got the hang of driving the Snow Bug, Ralph drove up to Ron’s place and asked if he wanted to go for a ride. Ron put on his snowmobile suit, boots and jacket, then Ralph handed him a funny looking helmet. He explained it was the latest and greatest in Off-Road helmets with an inflatable collar that protected your neck from whiplash and other injuries. Once he had the helmet on and inflated, he stepped into the passengers’ seat of the Snow Bug, raised and locked the door, and belted into the 4-point harness. Ralph checked Ron’s harness, then secured his door, plugged their helmets into the intercom and belted himself in. The last thing he did was put on his gloves. Suddenly Nancy came running out with a daybag. Ralph thought it was a good idea, and had had her secure it to the seat in the back, then he started the VW motor and drove down to the fuel depot and topped off the tank with Avgas, and re-started the motor. After cruising around town for a while, Ron suggested they head for the lake, since the ice was several feet thick, and there was 4-6 feet of snow on top of that. Ralph called the tower and told them he was going to go driving out on the lake, and to call him if there were any planes approaching so he could get out of the way. The tower said that no one was scheduled to land until tomorrow’s flight, so they were all clear, and to contact the tower when they came back off the lake. Ralph thanked the tower, and drove down the ramp to the lake, and motored around for a while. He got tired of that, and asked Ron if he wanted to catch some air. Ron turned his head, and shrugged, so Ralph handed him a brand-new mouthpiece and told him to use it so he wouldn’t chip his teeth or bite his tongue. Suddenly Ron didn’t think this was such a great idea. Ralph had spotted a small ridge he wanted to try, and once Ron said he was OK,

he gunned the throttle, and hit the 2-foot ridge at 40mph. It was enough to briefly lift the whole Snow Bug off the snow and fully unload the suspension. It set down safely 10 feet on the other side of the ridge without a bounce. Ralph knew he had the suspension dialed in, since he had ordered the Baja Championship suspension kit with dual long-travel coil-over shocks on the back and single coil-overs in the front. After they landed, Ralph flipped up his visor, pulled out his mouthpiece, and let out a Rebel Yell that scared the caribou in Fairbanks, not realizing that he was on hot mike. Luckily the intercom had a limiting filter, or Ron might have taken out his P-14 and shot him. Ralph heard a few words from Ron he'd never heard before. Finally when Ron calmed down, Ralph apologized, and said the next time he did that, he'd unplug from the intercom. Ron's hearing slowly returned again, and Ralph was asking him if he wanted to do it again. Ron said "As long as there's no yelling when you land!"

This time Ralph hit a 4-foot ridge at 40 mph, and flew almost 50 feet and almost 10 feet in the air. Once he was able to breathe again, Ron told Ralph that if he wanted to do any more flying with him, it was going to be in a plane. Ralph promised his flying days were over, since the Snow Bug started to get squirrely in the air, and landed less elegantly than last time. Luckily since it was a rear-engine vehicle, the back came down first, and he rode a wheelie for 20 feet until the front end sat down. He was just enough out of shape that he didn't know what to do to recover, so he just held on until the Snow Bug got down on all 4 corners again. If Ralph had some Motocross experience, he would have known what to do. Fortunately they had over a mile of smooth snow to get it back under control. Ron decided he had enough and suggested they take it back to the barn. Ron suggested that Ralph didn't try flying with Sam in the passenger seat, since he didn't want to have to raise their kids because he did something foolhardy. Ralph swore his snowmobile flying days were over, he just wanted to do it once, because he saw a picture of a Championship buggy flying in Baja, and it looked fun. Ralph drove Ron home, then parked the Snow bug in his garage. He wanted to wait for the snow to melt off it before he checked the frame and shocks for damage.

The next day, Ralph looked as carefully as he could, and his first, last and only attempt at flying hadn't caused any obvious damage. He asked Samantha if they wanted to go for a ride. She was bored out of her gourd, so they bundled up the kids, strapped them into the back seats, and dropped them off at Anne's place. She now had a nice big sign over the door saying Anne's Babysitting Service. Ralph cracked up when he saw the sign, and told Anne they'd be back in a couple of hours. They cruised around town, and when they heard a helicopter coming in for a landing, Ralph decided to check it out. Bear climbed out and flagged them down. Ralph lifted his visor so he could hear Bear, and shut down the motor.

"What the heck is this?"

"It's a Snow Bug, Bear. I took a basic VW dune buggy design and converted it to a snowmobile."

"How fast does it go?"

“I don’t know, I chickened out at 50mph, but it had plenty of throttle left. If you were crazy enough, it could do between 80 and 100 on flat smooth snow.”

“Do you think you could mount a machine gun on it?”

“I don’t see why not, Chenowith built the prototype of the FAV, and this frame is similar.”

“Cool, let me talk to Ron, this might be an answer to prayer.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The Bradleys and Hummers don’t do so hot in deep snow, and your Snow Bug as you call it could solve that problem. If you mounted a M - 60 in front of Sam’s seat, and a Ma Deuce right where your antenna is, you’d have the same firepower as a Fast Attack Vehicle, and it would be about as fast and maneuverable. Bradley’s can’t safely travel faster than 20mph in deep snow, and the Hummers are stuck if the snow gets more than 4 feet thick and powdery. Once it’s packed, they do OK, but in fresh deep snow they bog down and become sitting ducks.”

“Ok, I get it; you want an armed snowmobile in case we get attacked. There’s no ballistic protection on this, and if you added armor, it would weight a ton, and probably wouldn’t be any better than a Hummer in deep snow.”

“How about Kevlar panels?”

“We could put Kevlar panels in the doors and up front. I’d have to re-design the rear end to cover the motor compartment, or 1 shot would put us out of action if it nailed a critical part of the motor, or the gas tank.”

“Great, you and Ron work on it. If you can make it bullet resistant, let’s say up to 30 caliber fire, it would be worth having about a half-dozen of them.”

“Ok, but with all the Kevlar and other stuff, you’re talking about \$30K per copy.”

“I think we could afford that out of petty cash!”

Ralph turned to Sam and said “Looks like I’ve got my winter project!”

Bear shuffled back to the helicopter and flew back home. Ralph and Sam drove over to Ron’s house. Nancy opened the door holding onto Starsky and Hutch’s collars. “Come on in, Ron’s expecting you.”

Ralph knew Bear had called ahead, so they went on in. Ron was in his office working on the computer. “Bear talked to me, and said your flying machine would make a perfect Fast Attack

Vehicle for the winter months.”

“That’s what he told me too. So where we gonna get the Kevlar and stuff?”

“Gene gave me some suggestions, and I’ve been searching the internet. Several companies make Kevlar panels for armored vehicles that would more than meet our needs. All they need are the dimensions of the door panels, engine compartment, and your nosepiece. They can make custom panels and ship them to us for installation.”

I wonder if The VW Store would give me a discount if we ordered 6 engines and transmissions at once?”

“There’s only 1 way to find out - ask!”

“I’ve got a line on some fuel cells that would be more bullet-resistant than the current fuel cell, and it only holds 1 gallon less. How different is your frame from the Chenowith 4-seater frame?”

“It’s almost identical, why?”

“If we ordered 6 cut and bent frames from Chenowith and assembled them ourselves, it wouldn’t take so long to build it, would it?”

“Not hardly. Why don’t we order completed frames?”

“Too big to ship cheaply, they’d charge us more for shipping than the frame costs.”

“Not exactly, they’re in California, and could ship by boat to Alaska, and the frames are light, so the Super Stallion could pick them up and sling load them here.”

“If you’re sure, I’d rather do it your way - it took me forever to weld up those frames.”

Ron looked up Chenowith Racing Products on the internet, and they found a 2-seater frame that would be perfect for an armed snowmobile setup, the 4LWD frame with the XO-103 off-road kit. They could fabricate a seat mount on top of the gas tank, or relocate it, and the Ma Deuce gunner would be sitting up high enough to have a 180 degree field of fire while the M -60 gunner could sweep a 120-160 degree area ahead of him. Adding Kevlar panels to the design would be easy. The frames only cost less than \$2,000 each, If Ralph could get a deal from the VW Store for 6 1600cc engines and transmissions, they’d be way ahead of the game, since Ralph’s estimate was \$10-15 thousand to build a copy, and they’d have a complete vehicle for less than \$8 thousand each plus shipping. Ralph wanted to add panels to the sides that covered more of the driver and passenger, and make them flip down like his doors did. That way they could protect the driver and passenger up to the shoulders with Kevlar panels.

The Ma Deuce Gunner would have to rely on his body armor, since he was sitting too high to be protected by the panels. If he added a roll cage to protect the gunner, he could at least add Kevlar panels to the sides and rear of the roll cage to protect the gunner, since couldn't swing the barrel of the Ma Deuce that far. The vehicle he had in mind would look pretty close to the FAV, except instead of off-road tires, it would have 2 huge Snowmobile tracks out back, and skis up front.

Ron e-mailed Chenowith, and they made him a pretty reasonable offer to ship 6 frames to Alaska with all the tabs and everything already installed. They even had a bracket to mount a seat over the gas tank, but could only sell it to the Military. General Shepard sent them an e-mail, and that took care of it. With General Shepard's e-mail, the owner of Chenowith Racing Products authorized shipment of special frames to Allakaket Airlines, Inc. for purposes of defense of a Government Contractor. When they received the frames 2 weeks later, they were all ready to go, including the bracket for the extra seat, the FAV roll cage, and the pintle mounts for the Ma Deuce and the M -60. Once Ralph got the parts from The VW Store, they were ready to assemble the vehicles. He e-mailed the Kevlar armor manufacturer the sizes of the panels he needed, and they were shipped to Alaska with installation instructions. Ron, Ralph and a couple of Allakaket Airlines mechanics spent the rest of the winter assembling the Snow Fox, since they couldn't call an armed vehicle a Bug. When they were finished, Ron e-mailed Chenowith Racing Products several photos of the Snow Bug and the Snow Fox. He got an e-mail back from the head of Chenowith's R&D department, asking if they could build more Snow Bug frames for other customers. If they sold well, Chenowith would pay Allakaket Airlines a licensing fee for each Snow Bug frame sold. Since the main difference was welding 2 brackets to the back of the Chenowith 4LWD frame to carry a dual coil-over shock setup, and mounting snowmobile tracks instead of wheels, Ron didn't expect the licensing fee to amount to much, so he said OK. Ron didn't realize how many frames Chenowith Racing Products sold each year, and when the new design hit their website, orders came piling in from people who wanted a convertible dunebuggy/snowmobile that could carry 4 passengers. Chenowith did something very smart, and contacted the distributor for the snowmobile parts needed to make the bug a snowmobile, and had them package the parts as a kit, and sell the kit through Chenowith's website. Chenowith not only sold the frames, but the conversion kit as well, and frames were flying out the door as fast as they could be made. Ron was surprised when he got a check from Chenowith Racing Products for \$10,000 dollars for 1 year's licensing fee. He gave the money to Ralph since it was his design.

## Chapter 60 - Mix-up

When BA got a look at the Snow Fox, he tracked down Ron and told him “Ron, you got to replace those seats and belts right now, don’t you know those 4-points can get you killed?”

“How’s that?”

“If you get in a high-speed head-on collision, you’ll slide under the belts, and kill yourself. NASCAR and Trans-Am banned the 4-way belts years ago. Now all they allow are 5 or 6-point restraints, and the preferred one is the 6-point restraint.”

“Isn’t replacing all these seats and belts going to be expensive?”

“It’s better than going to someone’s funeral.”

“Ok BA, since you’re the expert here, you order them!”

Ron did some checking on the internet, and realized that the 5-point or 6-point harnesses were mostly used for circle-track racing or high-speed road racing on closed courses where a high-speed collision with a fixed object was likely. He called Chenowith Racing Products, who assured him the 4-point seat belts would be perfectly safe below 100 mph, and 99% of Baja 1000 racers still ran the 4-point system. Several of the Top Truck class racers with big bucks opted for the greater safety of the 6-point, but they had almost as much sponsorship money as a Winston Cup Racing team. Ron called BA, gave him the information he had learned right from the horse’s mouth so to speak, and BA dropped it. He had a valid point, but realized that if Chenowith shipped their dune buggies to racing teams with 4-point seat belt mounts, they must know what they were talking about, because the downside would be a huge liability lawsuit.

Ron got an idea, and ordered rims and tires from a dealer including sand paddle rear tires and knobbies for front and rear. Ron didn’t want to have to wait to winter to check the Snow/Sand Fox out, besides the mud during spring made the paddles pretty useful. Bear supervised mounting the M - 60 and the Ma Deuce to the Foxes, then had them airlifted to Alaska Survival for an extended testing and training session. They found that the M - 60 gunner could shoot while they were moving at high-speed, but shooting the Ma Deuce at any speed greater than 10 mph at anything more than a ¼ mile away would probably be wasting ammo. If the driver stopped long enough for the Ma Deuce Gunner to get set, he could hit stuff from about ¼ to ½ mile away depending on how big it was, and where the gunner needed to hit it. The vulnerable targets on a Tank, APC, Bradley, or Hummer were awfully small. The good news was they had the ability to go toe to toe with any chopper except the Apache or Kiowa Warrior and have a decent chance of survival if they shot from a hidden spot, and got the first shot. Russian Hinds could absorb a lot of punishment, but there weren’t a lot of them left, and they really didn’t have the legs to fly far enough to be a threat in Alaska. Bear wisely added 4 Stinger launch

tubes to their arsenal to give them a chance against an armed and armored chopper, and 4 LAWS rockets in case they ran into something the Ma Deuce couldn't handle. Bear checked one of the Kevlar panels (they ordered spares for testing) and it stopped 30 caliber fire, even 7.62 AP rounds, but the BMG 50 rounds usually penetrated, so he told the Fox crews that the panels would hold up to small arms fire, but not a BMG-50 or bigger, and probably not against any RPG either. The Ma Deuce gunner in the crow's nest, as they called it, was eternally grateful for the Kevlar and sheet metal panels that surrounded his perch, but it took longer to get in and out, since the side panels hinged and locked, and they had to be secured before the vehicle could move, or the panel would self-destruct from getting slammed around.

With the testing session ended, Bear shipped half the foxes back to Allakaket, and stored them next to the Vulcan guns. Since it only took a couple of minutes to mount or dismount the weapons, and Ralph had welded on a pintle hitch to the rear of the Fox's frames, they could be used during the winter for hauling stuff. Ron located a supplier of Fiberglass/Aluminum snow sleds that should be able to haul a ton of stuff over packed snow. There were the same sleds used by Arctic expeditions, and were basically bulletproof. With 3 Snow Foxes, they could either transport emergency supplies to snowed-in families, or act as Medevac vehicles, since they didn't have ambulances. When the sleds arrived, Ralph designed and installed a canvas snow cover that prevented thrown snow from piling up on the sled, which was wide enough for a stretcher case and a paramedic to ride comfortably in.

Ralph dreaded the coming of good weather, because he got a look at Sam's Honey-do list. It was 3 pages long, and she was still writing. As soon as the weather was good enough to go logging, he borrowed Ron's tractor, Jake and Josh, and cut enough wood to last a year. Hauling it back to the house with the tractor made the work much easier. Ralph had gotten smarter and lazier in his old age, and built a hydraulic log splitter, so all he had to do was cut the logs to length, and the splitter would do the rest. He mounted it on a trailer, because he knew Ron and BA would want to borrow it. He bought a small diesel motor, hooked the output to a hydraulic pump, and the pump to a hydraulic ram using all the necessary valves and gizmos. The foot of the ram held a tool-steel wedge, and the ram had a 16-inch throw, so he could saw his logs to 12" lengths. When he ran the pump at high speed, he could split wood faster than he could with a wedge and sledge, and it was much less work. When he finished, Josh and Jake helped him stack the wood, and trailered the splitter to their house so they could cut wood at their place. Ralph had just scratched the surface of the honey-do list, so Ron said he'd excuse him from wood-cutting at his place to keep Samantha on his good side.

When he finished cutting and splitting the wood, Ralph made some phone calls to hardware and tool stores in Fairbanks. He located everything he needed for his next projects, and it could fit inside his SuperGoose. He called the stores back, placed an order for the items, and said he'd fly down to Fairbanks tomorrow to pick it all up. He called BA, who suggested he borrow the company F-450 diesel pickup in Fairbanks and load his stuff instead of paying a delivery company. The next morning, he flew the SuperGoose to Fairbanks, stopped at 2 hardware and 1 tool store, picked up some lumber, paint, painting supplies, hardware, a rotary floor



buffer/sander, a 5-gallon bucket of spar varnish and rollers to spread it. The buffer/sander weighed a ton, but he got it in the truck when one of the guys at the tool store sold him a set of planks with steel brackets that attached to the tailgate, and he rolled it up and in. He reversed the process getting into the SuperGoose, and used the tail ramp to make things easy. He flew back to Allakaket, unloaded, and used the ramps again to get it into his Suburban since it had a bigger bed with the seats folded down. When he got home, he unloaded the truck, walked into the house and collapsed on the couch.

The next day he started on the interior painting, since he knew that even with drop cloths he would still get some paint on the floor. Luckily Sam wasn't picky about paint, so he got a shade of white indoor latex, and got enough to do the whole interior of the house. He went from room to room, cleaning and painting walls. A month later, he was ready to start sanding and refinishing the floors. Bert, Larry, and Oliver Jr. had managed to leave several scratches in the wood, so he needed to give it a light sanding, then re-varnish it. Sanding and varnishing the floors didn't take as long as painting, so he had some time left to build a jungle gym and sandbox for the boys. He got a plan off the internet for a kid-proof jungle gym, and he needed to build a frame to hold the sand in. He cut down 2 suitable trees, and made a 12 x 12 foot sandbox, then had enough sand delivered to fill it 8 inches deep, which would be sufficient to break a short fall without breaking anything important. He built an A-frame out of 6x6 lumber, bolted it together with 10" lag bolts, and attached a plastic slide, 2 safety swings, and a climbing rope. Sam came out and supervised periodically, and when it was finished, Bert and Larry gave it their seal of approval. Soon the sandbox was populated by Tonka Trucks, and they learned basic earthmoving skills, like how to make diesel noises; and basic driving skills like accelerating right before a head-on crash, with extra sound effects. Oliver was banned from the sandbox when he tried to use it for a litter box. Oliver's favorite game was Tug of War, which he always won (you didn't argue too much with a wolf) and his second favorite game Fetch, or as Oliver thought of it "Keep Away". He'd go get the sticks, but hadn't figured the "bring it here" part out too well. Nap time was always spent with the 3 Amigos curled up on Oliver's bearskin rug. Sam realized that Oliver was tightly bonded to Bert and Larry, and treated them as litter mates, and Ralph and Sam as the Alpha Male and Female of his pack. He got housebroken quickly, and rarely had an indoor accident. Bert and Larry were learning responsibility from caring for Oliver.

With Ralph busy between Honey-do's and flying the SuperGoose twice a week to Anchorage for Grocery runs, Sam realized the garden was her job, and enlisted Bert and Larry's help. Oliver supervised, and chased off the occasional rabbit. Since he never learned to hunt, he just chased them instead of killing and eating them, to Sam's relief. Luckily Oliver never went out of sight, and always returned when Sam or Ralph whistled for him. One day one of the neighborhood dogs got loose when Sam and the kids were in the back yard, and Ralph was flying the SuperGoose. Before Sam could draw her .45, Oliver had stood up to the much bigger dog, and chased it off, snapping at its hindquarters. When Oliver returned, Sam gave him a big hug, and said "Thanks Oliver!" When Ralph got home, he heard the story, and gave Oliver a big hug too, then called Bill, and described the dog. Bill told him if the dog came into their

yard again, and Sam felt like it was threatening her or the kids, she had his permission to shoot the dog, and he'd deal with the owners. Bill guessed which dog it was, and on his way home stopped at the owner's house and had a word with them about keeping their dog in their yard. They promised to try harder, but he had broken every rope they put him on. Bill suggested a large chain-link fence kennel with a chain-link roof that would be escape-proof, and they could put his dog house inside it for shelter. When the owner said he didn't have the money, Bill handed him a \$50 bill, and said that would cover it, but he wanted to see a nice large kennel up within the week, and the dog inside it.

Ron was glad he had semi-retired, and was only flying clients back and forth to Doc's lodge. BA was working 40-60 hours a week trying to keep up with everything, and finally had to hire an assistant. Since the kids were grown, Sally volunteered to work with BA 3 days a week. The extra 24 hours of help made BA's work load easier, and improved BA's attitude, which was what Sally was hoping for. Ron's 4 kids, and BA's 2 still flew the 007 to "Uncle Bear's" place several times a week for shooting practice. Since Jake, Josh, Sarah, Mike and Jill were all in the Militia, and David would be in another year; Bear took time while they were up there to teach them tactics and survival techniques. Basically they got an advanced version of the curriculum taught at the Survival School, including a bunch of stuff that was probably still classified, but Bear realized that these kids might be the only defenders of the village in another 20-30 years. He included his two sons Tom and Gary, who had de-squirrelified and settled down. Hunter's 4 kids were also in the program, and were the best trackers of the bunch. Ralph and Sam came up to cross-train the kids in First Aid, and slowly progressed from First Responder training up to EMT I and II over the years. Several of the kids wound up becoming Combat Medics, and eventually got certified as Alaska State Paramedics on their 18th Birthday.

Jake and Josh both showed an interest in learning to fly, so Ron spent 1 day a week with each of them after they spent months studying for their FAA Student Pilot's license. Jake got his Private Pilot license a year later, just after his 18th birthday and kept studying for his Commercial ticket. When he was confident of Jake's flying skills, Ron ordered another SuperGoose, and told his sons they had 6 months to earn their commercial ticket. Jake flew right seat with his Dad every time he flew, and Josh flew right seat every time Ralph flew. By the time the SuperGoose was finished, they had enough hours to get their Commercial Ticket, so they could fly the SuperGoose. Ron had no intention of letting them fly paying customers, but they needed  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a Commercial Ticket to fly a twin-engine turboprop amphibian. Dan just shook his head when they both passed the Commercial test with flying colors. Ron certified them himself for their type rating, since they learned to fly in the SuperGoose. Ron bought another multi-purpose SuperGoose for Jake and Josh to fly the rest of the kids back and forth to Bear's place, and to Anchorage and Fairbanks for selected social events. Several Christian Bands had scheduled stops in Anchorage en route to Russia, so the kids that wanted to go to the concert piled in the SuperGoose, and Jake flew them there and back. Jake was an even more careful pilot than Ron was at his age, basically because his Dad accidentally scared the crap out of him showing him a stall recovery.

Ron and Ralph made the time once a week to go shooting at Bear's place, since shooting at the indoor range wasn't as fun as shooting the M -25 at 600 yards, or the M -200 at 1,000 yards. Since Ron and Ralph went, their wives decided to attend as well. With intensive coaching (and some very personal motivational techniques) their wives were soon shooting sub-moa groups with their M-25's at the 600-yard range. Ron, Jake, and Sarah were all shooting their M-200's on the 1,000 yard line, and Jake was starting to give his dad fits, because some days first and second place would be decided by 1 round out of 20, and none of their rounds strayed much out of the X-ring. Sarah's groups were slowly getting smaller and smaller as she got more experience. Bear came up with an excellent idea, and told everyone to bring a sleeping bag next week, because they were going to practice shooting their night scopes. The shooters with the M-25s were complaining that they didn't have night scopes for their rifles. Bear said that they had plenty of AN/PVS-10 night vision scopes in inventory, and all he had to do was mount and boresight them, but they'd have to re-zero their daytime scopes after removing and re-mounting them. That brought a chorus of groans until Bear quoted Marcinko's 6th rule of Spec War: "Thou has not to like it - thou hast just to do it." Ralph and Sam remembered the training George had given them, and thought how long it had been since they lived in Atlanta, maybe 6-7 years ago? Ralph wondered how George was doing.

1 week later, they flew back to Bear's place in the late afternoon. Bear had mounted the AN/PVS-10 on each of their M -25 rifles, and the special Swarovski Night Vision scopes on the M-200s. As it was growing dark, he took them out to the 100 yard range to zero the scopes, then moved them progressively over to the 300, 600 and 1,000 yard ranges as their accuracy improved. All the M -200 shooters were on the 1,000 yard line by midnight, and everyone but David and Jill were shooting their M-25's on the 600 yard line. David and Jill were shooting their AR-15's on the 300-yard line, and doing ok for the first time shooting a scope that could see in the dark. At midnight, Bear called a halt to shooting and told everyone to case up their rifles and head to the lodge. Since he didn't have enough rooms for the parents to have their own rooms, he had set up bunk beds in the two rooms, and it was boys on one side, and girls on the other. The next morning, they ate a hearty breakfast, and back to the shooting range to re-zero their daylight scopes. Everyone wrote down the zero settings for their day and night scopes, and taped the paper to the stock. When everyone was satisfied with their zero, Bear told them to get back into the lodge, and clean their rifles, then he was going to give them a brief lecture about night firing. They finished around noon, and flew back to Allakaket.

The rest of the summer, Jake and Josh worked as Assistant Guides at Doc's Lodge, and David and Sarah helped out with the fishing boats. Jake wanted to become a registered guide, and the guide he was working with said he was just about ready. With a plane and his State Guiding license, he could make a good living as a guide. Jake asked his Dad, who was tempted to say no, but realized that none of his kids wanted to be members of the idle rich. He thought the SuperGoose was a little much for a guide plane, but realized it would be safer than a small Cessna, since it could stop quicker and take off faster. He asked Jake if he wanted to fly the SuperGoose when he was guiding, or if he wanted another plane. Jake admitted he was hooked on the Goose, and all the other amphibious planes on the market weren't even in the same class.

Ron agreed, and told Jake he could use the SuperGoose to fly guiding clients once he got his State license as a registered guide. Jake was ready for this, and had the application in hand, the next test date, and the study guide. Ron felt like he had been snookered (he had) but knew he could afford to buy each of his kids a SuperGoose and not even touch any of the money he had invested. Jake was still dating the girl he had a crush on years ago, and Ron knew things could get serious if Jake had a good job and a plane, so he sat Jake down and talked to him.

“Jake, I know you’re still dating Diane, how are things doing?”

“Actually I need your advice, I knew you got married early, and had us while you were still young. I don’t know if I want to wait or start having a family.”

“How were you planning on supporting them?”

“Well, if I pass the State Registered Guide test, I could fly and guide hunters.”

“Jake, that’s barely a living.”

“I know, that’s the problem. I was going to ask you for a job since I have my commercial ticket, but you seem to be full up on pilots.”

“Son, actually Steve’s wanted to leave for almost a year, and he accepted an offer from an oil company to fly for them. If we could work out the scheduling, you could fly for Allakaket Airlines as a relief pilot when you’re not out guiding. I could pay you \$30,000 per year as a relief pilot, which would be enough to comfortably raise a family up here, then you could do whatever you wanted with the guiding money. I’d suggest investing in your own business like I did, that way your money grows faster. If you wanted, I could set you up with the same deal as Ralph and Sam, where I lease the plane to you for \$1 per year, and we take care of the fuel and maintenance if you agree to fly the plane as a relief plane for Allakaket Airlines when you’re not guiding.”

“Thanks Dad, that’s what I hoped you’d say. Would it be OK with you if I proposed to Diane?”

“Son, you’re 18 and a man now, you can do what you want, but to answer your unasked question, yes you have my blessing!”

Jake gave his Dad a hug, and flew out the door to spring the news on Diane. Unknown to Ron, Jake had been saving all the money he made as an Assistant guide, and already had the ring in his pocket when he talked to his dad. Diane, who had just turned 18, was half-Inuit, with beautiful long black hair and deep emerald green eyes. They had basically been dating since Jake turned 16, and now that Jake turned 18, things had gotten serious, and Jake saved all his money for a ring. He drove over to Diane’s house, and met her Dad at the door. He followed the old Inuit custom of asking the father first if he could marry his daughter. Since Kevin was

from Wisconsin, he thought it was strange until he remembered he had to ask Alexandra's father first. Kevin went through the same ritual as Alexandra's father went through with him. "Jake, how are you going to support my daughter and your children?"

"Sir, I've got a commercial pilot's license, and I'm applying for a registered guide license. My dad offered me a job flying as a relief pilot for Allakaket Airlines when I'm not guiding that pays \$30 thousand a year, and he gave me the use of a SuperGoose for personal and business use. I've got \$5,000 in savings, plus a trust fund that's worth at least \$5 Million."

"Have you provided a Kill?"

Jake showed Kevin a Caribou skin from a caribou he killed that season, which satisfied the ritual.

"Very well, if my daughter agrees, you have my blessing."

"Thank you Father."

Ron walked to the living and called Diane. When he saw her, she was wearing native garb, so evidently they were doing this the traditional way. He laid the caribou skin at her feet, and the ring box, then broke with tradition by getting down on one knee and asking Diane to marry him. When she said yes, he picked up the ring box, stood, and slipped the ring on her right ring finger, and handed her the caribou skin. She jumped into his arms and gave him a big kiss right in front of her parents.

"So when do you want to get married?"

"How about the Winter Solstice at high noon?"

"Where do you want to get married?"

"In the church silly!"

"So I guess this means I'll need a tux?"

Jake pulled out his cell phone, and found out his Mom and Dad were at home waiting for the news. When Jake told them, Nancy asked if they could come over for dinner that evening. Diane just smiled, so Jake took that as a yes. Nancy told Jake that they could come on over. Jake and Diane got in Jake's truck and drove over to his parent's house. Diane sat on the bench seat right next to him, and he drove 1 handed with his arm around his fiancé. When they stopped the truck in front of his parent's house, Diane gave him a big kiss. "Jake Williams, I love you!"

“I love you too Diane, and I can’t wait for the wedding day.”

“One last requirement is you have to have our house ready before the wedding, so you need to get busy!”

“Yikes, I forgot about that! I hope you like living in a Teepee!”

“Jake, that was not funny!”

Diane gave Jake another kiss anyway, and they walked in the door holding hands. Nancy and Ron were there to greet the couple, and hugs were exchanged, then they sat down on the sofas and talked. Jake told his dad he had just about 90 days to build their house. Ron was confused until Diane explained she was half-Inuit, and it was her people’s tradition. Ron picked up his phone and called Bill.

“Bill, its Ron. Jake’s getting married, and needs to build a house. Any ideas for where to build?”

“Ron, I’ve got 5,000 acres of good land behind the inn.”

“Bill, there’s a hill on the other side of your inn!”

“The land’s on the other side of the hill. I always wanted to expand Allakaket into that area, but no one’s had the money to pay to build a road. If Jake wants to buy 100 acres and pay to cut the road to his property, I can sell it for \$500 an acre.”

“Bill, if he pays to have the road cut, he’ll do the most expensive part, and you’ll make out like a bandit selling the other properties. How about we split the costs, and you sell the property for \$500 an acre?”

“Sounds like a Deal Ron.”

“Jake, Bill’s got a lot available, but it’s on the other side of the hill behind his lodge. He’ll sell you 100 acres for \$500 an acre, and split the costs of building a road to it.”

“Dad, can I have the phone?”

Ron handed Jake the phone.

“Bill, it’s Jake, I’m interested, but I wanted any usable wood from the logging operation to make the road, and I’ll have dad rent the bulldozer and fly it in with the Super Stallion assuming it weighs less than 36,000 pounds. I’ll help build the road and my house.”

“OK, Jake, everything sounds OK, just come over to my office and sign the contract tomorrow.”

“Thanks Bill.”

“Dad, can we borrow 007 tomorrow to check out the land on the other side of the hill. I don’t want to buy something sight unseen.”

Ron got on the phone and reserved 007 for 0900 tomorrow.

“Dad, it’s going to be expensive building a house back there. I might need to take some money out of my trust fund.”

“We were going to give you two a wedding present anyway, how about if we pay for the costs of building the road and clearing your lot. If we run it through the business, it’s probably a write-off anyway!”

Jake knew it would cost between \$10 and \$50 thousand to build a road over the hill and clear his lot. He turned to Diane and asked her how big of a house she wanted.

“We’ve talked about this before, and I think a 4-bedroom house with a full basement would be plenty big enough since we only want two kids.”

Nancy asked “So what’s the 4th bedroom for?”

Jake replied “For an office, storage, or in case we have an Oops!”

“Huh?”

“Oops, as in Kid #3.”

Ron joked with Jake, “Well if you go to the doctor after #2, I can pretty much assure you Kid #3 would constitute a miracle.”

Jake crossed his knees and groaned “Oow!”

Nancy and Diane laughed themselves silly - compared to pregnancy and delivery, getting fixed was a walk in the park.

Nancy said that Dinner was ready, and they got mobbed by Jake’s siblings, also by Starsky and Hutch. Sarah and Diane were good friends, so she gave Diane a hug. David and Josh both asked Jake if they could have his room. Jake answered by punching them both in the shoulder. They sat down at the dinner table to a lovely Italian dinner. Ron said grace, and they all started

passing food. Later that night, Jake drove Diane back home, and the goodnight kiss she gave him made him wish the wedding was tomorrow. He tried and failed miserably to concentrate on his driving on the way home, but didn't hit anything.



## Chapter 61 - The Big Expansion

Ron did some checking, and a Cat D-5N weighed around 28 thousand pounds fully loaded, which was well within the weight limit of the Super Stallion. With 121 horsepower and a 10-foot blade, it would make short work of building the new road. He called around Anchorage, and found out that Elmendorf had a D-5 that was just sitting there collecting rust. He had Gene call the CO of Elmendorf and see if they could “borrow” it. Gene called him back, and the Air Force had just listed it as Surplus, and if they wanted it, they could buy it for \$10 thousand. Ron said it was worth \$50 to \$100 Thousand. Gene explained that the government basically gave surplus equipment away to get rid of it. Ron told Gene to make it happen. 2 hours later, Gene called back and said it was theirs, but they had to come over and pick it up. Ron called the airport and told them they needed to fly the Super Stallion to Elmendorf and pick up a Caterpillar D-5N tractor with a 10-foot dozer blade, and a 3-shank ripper. He told them it weighed around 28 thousand pounds, so unless they were shipping it with 8 thousand pounds of accessories they didn’t tell him about, it should be fine. The next day, the Super Stallion flew to Elmendorf, picked up the Cat D-5 and flew it back to Allakaket. Ron wire transferred the \$10 thousand per the surplus sales instructions. When they landed and unhooked the Caterpillar, their diesel mechanic was crawling all over it. He said that once they replaced the hydraulic fluid, and serviced it, they should be good to go.

Meanwhile Jake, Diane, and Bill flew over the land with the 007, and it was nice and flat and heavily wooded. Their property came right down to the lake, which meant they had fishing rights to the lake if they wanted to go fishing. They flew back to Allakaket, and Jake signed the purchase contract. Ron had authorized him to transfer any needed funds out of his Trust fund, so Bill transferred \$5 thousand out of Jake’s account into his personal account, and Jake owned 100 acres of lakefront property. Bear contacted one of the heavy equipment operators at the mine, who agreed in a heartbeat to working the Cat 5N and building a road. He used to work for the Alaska Department of Transportation, and that’s how the ADT built roads, they used large bulldozers to knock the trees down. 2 weeks later, a regulation-width road ran from the main street of Allakaket over the hill, and past Jake’s property. A bunch of loggers came in and cleared the trees off his building site and moved the logs off to 1 side. The dozer ripped the stumps out, then Hunter came over and set some ANFO charges to loosen the soil for their basement, and the D-5 finished the job. Now all he had to do was get the house built. The Super Stallion flew the D-5 over to the mine, since they could use it there, so Ron got the road built basically for free. Bill paid Ron \$500 to cover his half of the road building costs, and Ron put the money in Jake’s account.

Jake hired the same contractor his Dad and BA had, and they went over the plans. Since he already had 2 acres worth of good wood logged, the contractor adjusted his price to reflect the lower cost. Jake’s house would be about 2,000 square feet, with a 2,000 square foot, 12 foot deep basement. The contractor said it would cost \$100 thousand to build it including an AE system like the one his Dad had, and a garage/shop, plus another building to store a large

propane tank, and 500 gallons of Avgas. Jake had already put in an order for a Snow Bug, and Ralph said he'd help him build it to pay him back for all the wood he cut over the years, all Jake had to buy was the parts. Two weeks before the wedding, the house was complete, and Jake showed it to Diane. They flew to Fairbanks and did some shopping. By now the furniture store manager in Fairbanks loved to hear that someone from Allakaket wanted to shop at his store, because it usually meant that they wanted to drop over 10 grand in cash at his store. They flew back with a plane load of furniture, and made a second trip the next day to pick up the rest. Diane liked flying right seat with Jake, and he didn't seem to mind either. They finally had the house furnished and ready to go 1 week before the wedding. Bill met them for Marriage Counseling several times before the wedding. Jake decided to make Josh his best man, so Diane picked Sarah, or was it the other way around. Either way, it was like the "Sly and the Family Stone" song "A Family Affair" - Jake's whole family was in the wedding in one way or another. Diane didn't have much family, just her mother and father, but most of the town was invited. Good thing they had built the new church years ago, since they needed all the seating capacity to handle the crowd. Jake and Diane had requested a special ceremony with Bill performing the Christian and Legal ceremony, and the Village Shaman blessing the union so that their marriage would be recognized by the Inuit tribe. Since Diane was half-Inuit, their kids would still be members of the tribe if they so desired, and the Federal Government was throwing tons of money to the Native Americans as compensation for stealing their land. Not that their kids would need it, but if worse came to worse, and something happened to Jake, the tribe would protect and take care of Diane and the kids if their marriage was recognized by the tribe.

Finally the day of the wedding arrived. Jake had rented a grey tux, and everyone else wore basic black tuxes, including Bill, the Minister. Carl, the village Shaman, was wearing a caribou skin robe decorated with wolf and bear skin over his tux. The robe had been passed down through generations of Shaman, and was transferred to the new shaman in an elaborate ceremony. Bill and Carl saw eye to eye on most things, since Carl was a Christian too, and wove Inuit beliefs and folklore into their Christianity as a bridge between the two cultures. Bill liked that, and had formed a friendship with Carl over the years, since they were in the same business, so to speak. The organist was playing selections from J.S. Bach while the crowd took their seats. At 5 minutes to noon, Bill, Carl, Jake, and Josh walked out to the area in front of the altar. 3 minutes later, Sarah marched down the aisle by herself. Jake and Josh were taken aback by how pretty their tomboy sister looked in a dress. At exactly 12:00 noon of the winter solstice, the strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March were heard from the organ. The Church doors opened, and there stood Diane in a stunning long white wedding dress with a full-length train and a finger-tip veil. Her raven-black hair gleamed in the sunlight, her eyes were like green lasers, and her lips were painted bright red. This was the first time Jake had seen his fiancé all dolled up, and she was even more beautiful than he imagined. She walked slowly down the aisle on her father's arm, and when they got to the front of the church, Bill asked "Who gives this woman in marriage?"

Kevin answered "Her Mother and I do" then handed Diane off to Jake and got a kiss on the

cheek from his daughter before he sat back down. The foursome then turned and faced the altar. Bill started with the immortal words “Dearly Beloved...” The rest of the ceremony was a blur to Jake, except he was entranced by the beauty of his bride to be. He finally snapped out of it when they came to the vows. Jake answered “I do” at the appropriate time in a clear voice, and 2 minutes later, Diane answered “I do” as well. Nancy flashed back to Ralph and Sam’s wedding, and what she had joked with Ron about the night before. They were laying in bed, and Nancy just blurted out “You remember what happened last time the 4 of us were at a wedding?” Ron nodded but didn’t say anything so Nancy continued “You think maybe we should station Bear outside the front door with an H&K MP-5/10SD?”

Ron started laughing out loud at the image of Bear standing guard at the entrance to the church with a submachine gun. Ron said “I’m pretty sure the 4 of us will be packing tomorrow, and there will be 12 bullets in anyone that attempts to interrupt the wedding.”

“I guess this means we had better warn the town drunk not to try and crash the wedding!”

They both laughed their heads off, which eased the strain and stress that had been building over their son’s wedding. They soon fell asleep in each other’s arms.

Finally they got to the end of the wedding, and due to the outcome of a coin flip, Carl went first. He walked up to the couple, and spoke to them in Inuktitut, the language of the Inuit peoples. Jake only understood a few words, but Diane and all the Inuit villagers understood clearly. When he finished, he lifted the corners of his great robe, and covered the 3 of them with the robe. Then he stepped back and Bill said “With the exchange of rings and vows in front of God and these witnesses, I declare you married before God and according to the State of Alaska. What God has joined, let no man separate. Jake you may kiss your bride.” Knowing that the Williams family were notorious big kissers, he waited until the couple came up for air, then turned them and faced the audience “It’s my pleasure to present Jake and Diane Williams.” The congregation stood as one and applauded, and then after the couple walked out of the church, the townspeople formed a line and pelted the couple with rice. Jake and Diane drove back to Ron and Nancy’s house for the reception, and later that evening, drove to their new home. When they opened the garage door to park Jake’s truck, they were in for a surprise. Inside were a brand-new Ford F-450 4x4 diesel pick-up truck, and a brand-new Snow Bug, painted June Bug green with a blue racing stripe to differentiate it from Ralph’s all-green Snow Bug. There was a note on each vehicle. The note on the truck said: “Congratulations, this truck, and a 500-gallon tank of diesel we had installed and connected to the 10KW diesel generator in your basement is the balance of our wedding present to you. Love, Mom & Dad”

The note on the snow bug simply said “Jake and Diane: I had a choice of building your Snow Bug now, and getting out of the rest of my Honey-do list, or building it this winter, and having to do the rest of my list. We decided to give you the parts as a wedding present, so you got your Snow Bug early.” Jake looked into the Snow bug and was confused by the new belt system. There were 5 belts where there were 4, so he called up Ralph. “Ralph, what Gives?”

“I talked to the Corporate Lawyer, he’s a real crusty old Curmudgeon, and he insisted that all further Snow Bugs be equipped with 5- point harnesses, just in case you crash, and your estate decided to sue.”

“Ralph, what would I sue for, in a few years, I’ll have as much money as you!”

“That’s what I told the old Coot, but he insisted.”

“Ok Ralph, Diane’s giving me the look - I better get on with the honeymoon!”

“Enjoy it while you can - once they discover the “Honey-do List”, you’re Doomed!”

Jake laughed his head off as he hung up, then picked up Diane and carried her to their bedroom.

## Chapter 62 - Snowbound

2 days later, the worst blizzard in the last 10 years hit Allakaket. Jake and Diane took it as an omen, and stayed in bed. When the blizzard finally broke days later, Allakaket was under 6-12 feet of snow, plus the 3 feet that were already on the ground. Bill and BA got on the radio and declared a snow emergency, and checked on several older people in town. Several needed assistance, and Ralph volunteered his Snow bug, and the militia said they could use their 3 Snow Foxes, since they had already been reconfigured as snowmobiles. They quickly attached their sleds, and after getting a list of needed supplies, they spent the rest of the day delivering supplies, and helping several people dig out. Their doorways were so thoroughly buried in snow that even if they could get their doors open, they couldn't get out. Ralph dug one of his neighbors out, then handed them several bags of groceries. The old lady offered him some tea, and thanked him for digging them out, since they were in no condition to do it themselves. Jake and Diane never bothered checking whether or not they could get out, and didn't really care. They had 2 weeks worth of wood stacked next to the fireplace, and enough food for a year in the basement. The 1,000 gallon propane and 500 gallon diesel tanks had been filled and they had plenty of time to kill. When they finally got outside, it was a winter wonderland; all the trees were covered with snow. Jake turned to Diane and asked "Want to go for a ride?"

"Haven't you had enough all ready?"

"No in the Snow Bug?"

"Are you getting kinky on me?"

"No, I wanted to go cruising around in the snow bug. If you want to get naked and freeze your butt off out here, you're doing it solo!"

"Well why didn't you say so?"

"I tried to, but lately you've had a 1 track mind!"

"OK, but what's wrong with that!"

"Nothing when we're indoors and warm, not standing outside when it's 40 below!"

They ran back in the house and got dressed in their snowmobile suits, then Jake got the engine warmed up, and they put their helmets on, figured out how to get into the 5-point belts, then put their gloves on. Jake had called ahead, and Ron and Nancy said they'd love to see them. It took Jake a while to figure out how to steer, then he remembered Ralph talking about using the cutting brake to steer, and pulled on the left lever, and they turned left. Now he had it figured out, and they made better time. The Supertrap exhaust on the VW motor was so quiet that Ron

didn't hear them come up the driveway, and until they tripped the infrared sensor, he didn't know they were even there. Since he was dressed for the weather, he went out to greet them. "Seems Ralph gave you your Snow Bug early!"

"Ralph explained that it got him out of 2 months worth of Honey-do's, so it was worth it."

"Your Snow Bug is much quieter than Ralph's - how come?"

"The Supertrap comes with different baffle sets, so I just had Ralph put in the quiet set."

"By the way Dad, thanks for the new truck. I was getting tired of driving that old beat-up truck you gave me when I turned 16!"

"You realize now that I was going to give you a new truck all along, I just didn't want you beating up a \$50 thousand dollar truck while you were learning to drive. Let's go inside and say hi to your mom."

They walked inside, and the first thing out of Nancy's mouth was "So am I a grandma yet?"

Diane realized that Nancy was kidding her, so she played along "Not yet, we couldn't figure out where everything goes, would you mind showing us?"

Ron and Nancy started laughing their heads off - evidently their new daughter-in-law could have been a comedienne.

They looked at Jake, who was turning a very bright shade of red. In deference to their son's acute embarrassment, they changed the subject.

"So what are we going to get first, grandkids or grand puppies?"

Jake saw his chance to get even with Diane and said "I guess grandkids Mom, I can't get Diane to roll over yet!"

Ron and Nancy were laughing hysterically, while Diane was looking for something to throw at Jake. He looked at her, blew her a kiss, and said "Now we're even!"

They spent the rest of the afternoon laughing and talking. Jake asked where his brothers and sister were, and Ron said they were at the range, since this was the first day they could drive to the range with their truck.

"You know Dad, those Snow Bugs of Ralph's are a really good idea. He told me when you guys were snowed in last week, they took the Snow bug and the Snow foxes out and delivered food and supplies to some elderly people who couldn't get out. He said the Bug is even more

stable than a snowmobile in deep snow, and had like 3 times the torque and horsepower. When he was pulling the sled, he had to take off in 2nd gear to keep the tracks from burying it. If you bought 2 snow bugs, you guys could go anywhere you wanted to in town during the winter. The cab is heated, and you're almost too warm in the snowmobile suits with the heater on high."

Ron thought that was a good idea, so he said he'd ask Ralph about it. It was getting late, and they wanted to get back to their own house, so Jake and Diane said goodnight and drove back home. Once they were inside the house, Diane lowered the boom on Jake.

"Jake Williams, that crack about the grand puppies wasn't funny at all!"

"Well neither was your crack about needing a road map!"

Diane realized she had hurt Jake with her comment, so she walked over to Jake and said, "I'm sorry dear, I wasn't trying to hurt you, will you forgive me?"

"Only if we can play Cowboys and Indians tonight!"

Diane started laughing and giggling as they made their way to the bedroom.

The next morning they awoke to the phone ringing.

"Who the heck would be calling us at 0800?"

"Hello?"

"Jake, if you two lovebirds can get dressed and up to Alaskan Survival, you two need to review your winter survival skills. I don't know how much Diane knows, so we need to find out and get her up to speed if necessary! I'll send 007 down for you. Bring your M - 25 and some ammo. The bird will be on the Allakaket pad at 0900!"

"Aye Aye Sir!"

"Jake, that smart-alec crack will cost you! See you at the pad at 0900!"

Jake realized he stepped on it pretty bad, and told Diane they needed to get dressed and meet the helicopter at the pad at 0900, and to wear her heavy duty winter gear and bring her militia pack with the winter cammo, they were going for some winter training at Bear's place. They got dressed, and drove the Snow Bug to the pad and parked it in a vacant hangar. 5 minutes later the 007 came in for a landing, and Bear stepped out with steam coming out of his ears. He got right in Jake's face and yelled "Don't ever call me Sir! I work for a living! That will cost you 20 push ups, right here and now!"

Jake got down in the slushy snow and snapped off 20 perfect Military pushups, counting on every up. When he got back to his feet, he said “Sorry Bear, that won’t happen again!”

“Better not, or the next time you’ll do them wearing your pack!”

Jake knew that Bear was serious, and the pack weighed almost 50 pounds fully loaded.

They climbed into the helicopter and flew to Alaska Survival.

When they arrived, Bear made them put on snowshoes for the walk to the lodge. Once inside, they took off all their outer layers down to their BDU shirt and pants, since it was hot in there with the fireplace lit. Bear rolled out a huge white board and markers. In the upper left corner he wrote “Winter Survival 101”.

Diane’s hand shot up. “No disrespect Bear, but we can probably skip the basics, I spent several years in an Inuit village way up north, and can say that I’ve got the basics down cold, to excuse a bad pun.”

“Ok, Diane, I guess we’ll jump to the advanced techniques. Did they ever show you how to build an igloo or snow cave?”

“We built one every year when we went Walrus hunting on the pack ice. Snow caves are a walk in the park in comparison.”

“Ok, if you’ve hunted wild game in the winter, you know something about winter stealth. What are your shooting skills like?”

“Pretty lousy, until we moved to Allakaket, only the men did the actual shooting on a hunt. I can shoot a 3-4” group at 100 yards with the AR-15 at the indoor range. My pistol skills are about the same.”

“How’d you like to cut those groups way down? Jake here is my #2 Sniper, and a really good shooting coach, especially with rifles. Jake, how’d you like to teach your wife to shoot really long distance. I know it’s freezing out, but it’s good practice for you to learn to shoot when it’s 40 below, because I can guarantee your enemies will! Just remember with the extreme low temperatures, don’t touch bare metal with a bare hand, and your velocity will be significantly lower, so your bullets will strike lower, so you might want to log your shots, including temperature, wind speed, and humidity, which today is around 20%. I’ll get all the stuff you need. You guys get back in your winter gear, and you’re going to spend the rest of the day shooting. Jake, make sure you bring your Coleman stove with you, the propane or butane stoves don’t work worth a crap in this kind of cold. Also, bring a tube of instant heat; you’ll need it to prime the stove.”



While they got dressed, Bear installed a Simmons 3x9x40 scope on a Bushmaster AR-15 HBAR with the white cammo treatment. It had already been prepped for extreme cold, and all the warm weather lubricants had been replaced. He used the laser to boresight the scope, and decided to let Jake teach her how to zero the weapon. Just in case, he grabbed 2 pairs of shooting mittens, and polypropylene shooting liners that were light and thin enough not to affect their ability to shoot, but would keep their hands warm. The last thing he needed was for his #2 Sniper to freeze his trigger finger off. When Bear got to the range, Jake had prepared 2 shooting positions on the 100, 300, and 600 yard lines. He put a huge blue poly tarp on the bottom, a sportsman's Mylar tarp on top, and an ensolite shooting pad on top of that. Instead of setting the spotting scope on the bench, he set up next to his wife, on her left so he wouldn't get nailed by the ejected cases. Since they were wearing parkas, they used ear plugs instead of their usual Wolf Ears headsets. Bear handed Diane the Bushmaster, and was taken aback by the reverence she held it with. Finally they got down into a good prone position, and instead of letting her shoot from a bad position and waste time, since it was freezing out there, Jake decided to take a more active approach, and helped her get into a perfect Military prone position. Once she was set, with the bipod down, she was amazed that the scope only moved up and down when she breathed. He taught her to take 3 deep breaths, blow half the 3rd one out, and as the scope stopped right over the X-ring, to hold her breath and squeeze the trigger. Her first 5 shots gave her the scope's zero, which Jake wrote down in her log book, including the serial number of the rifle, the date, time, temperature, wind, and humidity. Once she had her zero, Jake showed her how to adjust her scope, and the next 5 rounds all hit the X-ring, meaning she shot a 2-inch group at 100 yards. They kept at it until her groups on the 100-yard range averaged 1 inch and were all in the x-ring, then they moved her to the 300 yard range.

“Diane, this range with this weapon will be harder than shooting the Springfield Armory M - 25 at 600 yards. 300 yards is about the maximum range for precision shooting with an AR-15 with a 3x9 scope. If you had a bigger scope, let's say a 12x magnification, you could push that to maybe 400 yards; but at 300 yards your bullet drop really starts to accelerate, because the bullet is slowing down, and moving through the trans-sonic range. I know that's probably over your head right now, but that's why it's so hard to shoot the AR-15 at 300 yards. Let's get you set up, and establish a new zero for the new range. Don't be surprised if you have to add a whole bunch of clicks of elevation, like more than 3 times what you normally would for the increased distance. Let's start off adding 9 clicks just to make sure you're on the paper.”

Diane added 9 ¼-MOA clicks to the elevation knob on her scope, which should have raised her point of impact 2 inches at 100 yards, and 6 inches at 300. She had a hard time believing that the bullet could drop over 6 inches from her 100 yard zero, but once she started shooting, she realized the bullets were still 2.5 inches low, so he had her add 3 more clicks. Her next round landed just to the right of the x-ring, and the overall group was a disappointing 7 inches. Jake talked to her, and explained that shooting at long distance gets more complicated as the range increased, because the wind has a longer time to act on the bullet, as well as gravity. That's why all long-distance shooters keep a log book with all the data so they could review it. Jake spent the next half hour teaching her how to use her scope to dope the wind by looking for

mirage as she adjusted the focus of the scope  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  turn out of focus. She should see waves in front of the object that indicated the strength and direction of the wind. Jake said she could read his Marine Scout/Sniper handbook later for how to dope the wind, but for right now he suggested she add 3 clicks left since the wind was gently blowing from left to right. She got back into the prone position, shot five more rounds, and when Jake checked her group, the first round was in the x-ring, and the rest of the group was down to 6 inches. He told her she had already reduced her group size by an inch, and to keep practicing. She said it was a lot tougher at 300 yards, since she could no longer see her bullet holes, since the sun was directly overhead. Jake said he could spot for her, but they'd have to put on headphones so he could talk to her. He called Bear on his cell phone, and asked if he could bring out a set of headphones so he could spot for Diane. They barely fit under their hoods, and Jake kept the push-to-talk button in his hand. Diane had the other button fixed to the forend of her AR-15 with a Velcro strap. They started talking before she shot, and he told her how he would describe her shots. He would call the vertical offset from the center of the x-ring in inches, then the horizontal offset, so he'd call "up 3 and left 2" that meant that her shot was 3 inches above the center of the target, and 2 inches left, so in order to hit the bullseye with her next shot, she needed to change her point of aim down 3 and right 2 inches. He explained that this was not good sharp shooting technique, but was the best way for a sniper to hit an unseen target or to adjust fire to hit a group of targets when only 1 was visible in the sniper's scope.

Once she got set, Jake was quiet until her first round hit "Up 2 right 1."

Diane then knew that her first round wasn't in the X-ring, and where she missed. She moved her point of aim down 2 inches, and left 1, then fired. "Bullseye"

Now that she knew where to aim, she was able to put the rest of her rounds into that area, and shot a 3.5 inch group. Once she was finished, Jake suggested a scope adjustment for her. She should keep this setting in her log book, and add this other setting as an optional cold-weather 300-yard setting. He suggested 3 clicks down, and 1 click left. He said that the click adjustment for windage wouldn't be exactly right, but close enough for now. She wrote down the new settings, and spent the rest of the morning shooting on the 300 yard line. Once she got her groups down under 3 inches, Jake suggested a switch to the M -25 and the 600-yard line. Diane said "Are you nuts - I'm barely holding 3 inches at 300 yards now!"

"Trust me, this will be way easier, the scope is huge, and the rifle is a tack driver. Basically if you don't shoot x-ring groups with this rifle/scope combination either your stock isn't adjusted properly, or you're not set up right, or you're doing something wrong."

They put up the Bushmaster, and uncased Jake's M -25. When she saw the white feather painted on the stock, she asked Jake the significance of it.

"The White Feather is associated with the greatest Marine Sniper ever, Carlos Hathcock. In Vietnam, he had 93 confirmed kills, and hundreds of "unconfirmed" kills due to the lack of a

witness, usually an officer or a NCO. The North Vietnamese Government put a bounty on his head in excess of a year's wages. He used to wear a single white feather in his bush hat. The Vietcong learned to dread the name "Long Tr'ang" or "White Feather" because it meant someone was about to die. The M -25 was a collaborative effort between Carlos and Springfield Armory to produce the best .308 sniper rifle available at the time. A couple of years ago, my dad bought each of us one, and I've learned to shoot a 2-inch group at 600 yards with it after shooting hundreds of rounds through it. Last year, we got some more M -200 50 caliber sniper rifles from Ronnie Barrett. Years ago, my dad did a testing and evaluation session for Barretts for several rifles, and saved them millions in R&D costs. Ronnie gave him several rifles as well as some serious money in gratitude. We've been shooting our M-200s on the 1000-yard line and are averaging 5-6 inch groups."

"Holy Cow - 5-6 inches at 1,000 yards! Where did you say your cape was?"

Jake started laughing, remembering how many times he'd heard that line in reference to his father.

"Diane, it's a gift from God really. For some freakish reason, my Dad and I can shoot tiny groups at huge distances. I remember my Dad telling me my Grandma Anne used to be a crack shot in her day. She's getting older, and doesn't like shooting past 600 yards anymore, but I remember when my Dad told me he took her to the 1,000 yard range at Elmendorf Air Force Base, and she shot an 8-inch group at 1,000 yards with the M -200 when she was in her mid-50's. My great-uncle Ron was a sniper in Vietnam, and taught Anne how to shoot. She met and married my grandfather Roy Williams when her brother Ron's plane crashed at HelpmeJack Lake when he and Roy were out hunting. Their son, Ron Williams learned how to shoot long distance at a tender age, and his uncle Steve introduced him to Gene Shepard, who was an Air Force General at the time in charge of the Special Operations command at MacDill AFB. My dad's shooting impressed the General so much that he got an appointment to the Air Force Academy when he was still 13 years old.. He was going to be one of the best shooters on their shooting team. . By the time he was ready to enlist at 18 those SOB's in Congress gutted the military and did away with the Air Force. Ron inherited a ton of money, opened his own airline, and the rest is history!"

"Ok, so I married a freak - anything else I need to know?"

"I can teach you most of what I can do, but some of it has to come from you. My resting BP and pulse are so low that the docs have to check it twice. The last time they checked my vision, the docs were amazed, it was better than 20/15. "Ok, now that we've got that out of the way, how about I teach you to shoot the M -25 on the 600 yard line. First let's do some calisthenics to warm up. You look like you're freezing."

5 minutes later, they were good and warmed up. Jake made sure they didn't overheat, because that would be disastrous in this brutally cold weather. They got set up on the 600 yard line, and

Jake showed her how to adjust the rifle to fit her. Once they had the stock fitted, and adjusted the bipod, Diane looked through the scope and the image was pretty steady, and only moved up and down with her breathing. She was careful not to breathe on the scope, because it would freeze and fog the scope. Jake had her dry fire 10 times to get used to the trigger break, then handed her a loaded magazine. They were still wearing the headsets in case she needed Jake to spot for her. Her first group was high and right, and she called the trigger break in the x-ring, so Jake had her make a scope adjustment. The next group was much closer to the x-ring, so he had her make a 2nd adjustment. The first round of her 3rd group struck the bulls-eye, but the rest wandered out of the x-ring. He told her to use that setting as a cold-weather zero for her, so she wrote it down. They spent the rest of the afternoon getting her group size down, and by the time she was finished, they'd put several hundred rounds downrange, and her group sizes were about the size of Josh's. They packed it in, and Jake went in to tell Bear the good news. Bear had an idea, but decided to wait to later to see if he should switch the sniper groups around. He wondered how Jake would react to taking his wife out on a sniper mission, especially if they had kids. Her field craft skills were as good as Jake's, and she could shoot better than Josh, who was going to be Jake's assistant. Bear had a lot to think about.

## Chapter 63 - Hitting the Books

When they got home, Jake and Diane had soup for dinner, they were freezing! They curled up in front of the fire and fell asleep. The next morning, Jake handed Diane his copy of the USMC Scout/Sniper syllabus, and explained the document itself was classified, but Gene had gotten permission for limited distribution to the sniper teams that were defending his Classified DOD Contractor. Diane looked puzzled, so Jake gave her a brief explanation.

“Gene Shepard had designated Allakaket Airlines a DOD contractor to cover Ron and certain military weapons systems he shipped here while he was JSOC. Bear used to be a Master Chief in the US Navy, and a SEAL. He saved Gene’s life in Vietnam when Gene got shot down behind enemy lines, and Bear rescued him. They’ve been friends ever since. Ron met Bear at MacDill during his T&E sessions, and offered him a job running the Survival school here when he retired. Gene and Steve joined him as soon as they retired. The DOD contractor designation is a cute subterfuge to bypass a whole bunch of civilian laws that would get us thrown in Prison for about 100 years for all the military hardware we have on hand to defend Allakaket.”

“Why do they need to defend Allakaket?”

“My Dad’s been the target of at least 2 attempts to kill him, and Gene wanted to make sure there wasn’t a third. The first one ended with the militia shooting down a helicopter carrying an ex-general and a hit team sent to kill Ron.”

“Ok, so besides the gold mine, Ron himself is a target - that explains a lot.”

“Diane, I have a sneaky feeling Bear is going to switch the sniper teams around now that we’re married, and you’re such a good shot. You need to read this manual and know it cold. If you have any questions, please ask me. I need to study for my Registered Guide test that’s coming up soon.”

Diane sat down on the couch and started reading at the start. The more she read the manual, the more she didn’t like what she was reading, especially after Jake said something about switching the Sniper teams around. Finally she asked Jake “What did you mean about Bear switching the Sniper Teams around?”

“You know most of the villagers are members of the Militia. It’s a defensive organization to defend our homes and families in the event of an attack. Bear decided to take advantage of my Dad and mine’s exceptional shooting abilities, and form 2 sniper teams around us. Sarah and Sam are the 3rd team, to stay in town as an emergency backup to us. Ron and Ralph were going to be 1 team, and Josh and I were going to be the other. With us married and you such a good shot, it makes sense to switch the teams around.”

“But what if we have kids? I don’t want to leave them orphans!”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get there. If we both die on a mission, it means we’ve been overwhelmed by a superior force, and their chances of survival aren’t too good anyway. The shelter under the armory won’t stand up indefinitely against a direct attack, especially if they have high explosives. Our job is to keep them from getting there. We’re not the only ones out on the sharp end of the spear. We’ve got 2 Robo-gun equipped Bradleys, 4 Vulcan-equipped M113’s, 2 Chaparral anti-air weapons systems, several TOW equipped Hummers, the Snow Foxes, and a whole bunch of armed Militia members. We will be out on the forward edge where we’ll be most effective, but the M-200’s can wreck an APC at over a mile, or kill a general or other strategic target out to 1,000 yards. Your job would be to spot, and back me up with the M -25 so they can’t get close enough to hurt us. The M -200 has a suppressor on it, so if we hide well, they’ll have a very tough time finding us, so we shouldn’t be in any more danger than any other militia member.”

“Well that makes me feel MUCH better, we’re set up to fight WWIII here, and you’re suggesting we go out on the front lines!”

“It’s not going to be much safer in town if the Chinese or Russians invade. We’ll be all that stands between the town and total destruction. Just be glad we have all this hardware. 99% of all Americans are lucky to own a plain-jane AR-15, or an SKS for self-defense. Their chances of survival in a WWIII invasion scenario are on the same level as a snowball in hell, unless they can get out of the way, or get some serious military hardware and hook up with a militia.”

“Jake, you’re such an optimist.”

“No Diane, just a realist - look around you, the world’s going to Hell in a handbasket! Something’s got to give.”

“Then why are we having kids?”

“Just in case I’m wrong, and the upcoming turmoil is survivable. Besides, you’ve heard the Mike and the Mechanics song “Silent Running” - If we can’t defeat the invaders, perhaps if we teach our children well, they can rise up and stand against them.”

Diane gave Jake a big hug and cried, she didn’t want to have to face that scenario. She remembered the stories from the Elders of how the US treated the tribes to the south of them. They coveted the Indian land, and drove them onto reservations, starved them, and gave them smallpox infected blankets to kill more of them off. Millions of the southern tribes died in the great trials. Some whole tribes were wiped out. She knew if the Russians, Chinese, or even the UN were to attack with sufficient forces, they’d face a similar situation. They’d be killed outright, or driven from their lands, starved, and worse.

Finally, she realized that it was up to them to defend the rest of the tribe, as she thought of it, and if they died in the process, someone would take care of their kids. She had always wondered why Nancy and Sally tried so hard on the pistol range, then realized the ferocity of a mother bear with cubs could be several times that of any other bear. She realized that if someone threatened her kids, she'd respond with the same ferocity. She didn't understand the feeling, she just knew it on a visceral level she had never felt before. Jake was watching his wife turn from an ex-sheeple into a Valkyrie before his eyes. He remembered when his Mom first started shooting, and years later he asked his dad about the level of intensity she displayed on the range.

"Instinctually, a mother defending her children has a tremendous level of ferocity. Some women can tap into that emotion even when their children aren't in immediate danger, so they can practice just in case. The Vikings had a term for their Warrior Goddesses, they called them Valkyries, and Wagner wrote a song that was part of a famous opera, and the song is now more famous than the original opera. The song is called "Ride of the Valkyries" - look it up sometime."

Jake played the song on the internet once, and the song was so stirring that he bought a copy of it. When he read the liner notes that came with it, they described the legends of the Valkyries which took noble fallen warriors to Valhalla, the Norse version of Heaven. The Valkyries themselves were described like the Avenging Angels he had read in the Bible. The look on Diane's face definitely reminded him of that image. He asked Diane to come with him, and he loaded the MP-3 file he had downloaded, along with the liner notes. She was moved to tears when she heard the song, and really lost it when she read the liner notes describing the legend of the Valkyries. She understood her feelings better after listening to the song and reading the liner notes. Jake told her of the use of the song as a battle call in "Apocalypse Now" when the Air Cavalry was attacking the NVA at dawn. She admitted that song really got her pumped up, and would probably scare the crap out of the enemy! She finally told Jake she was OK with this, but wasn't looking forward to dying in battle. Jake held her, and said "Me neither - this is just precautionary, and hopefully never needed, but we need to practice as if it were needed."

Diane returned to her studies with a new-found intensity. She needed to know this stuff cold! Jake went back to studying for his Registered Guide test, and made dinner later that afternoon since Diane was still studying.

The next day Diane asked if they could go to the range again. She wanted to shoot the M -25, and she suggested that Jake work on the M -200 since he didn't fire it last time. The weather had warmed up to -20 Fahrenheit, so Jake thought they'd be more comfortable. He called Bear, and he said "come on up, the weather's fine." Since he had the skis mounted on the SuperGoose, and it was available, Jake flew them to Alaskan Survival, and landed at Bear's lake, which was covered with 6 feet of ice, and 4 feet of snow. The taxi off the lake was bumpy to say the least, and when they were on terra firma, he shut down the SuperGoose and lowered the ramp. They backed the Snow Bug with their rifles and ammo out of the SuperGoose, raised

the ramp, and drove to the range. Bear was laughing his head off, but thought they were smart. Instead of trudging through 4 feet of snow for a mile or so, the Snow Bug made an easy trip out of it. Jake dropped Diane off at the 600 yard line with all her gear, then drove over to the 1,000 yard line and set up.

As soon as he had his earplugs in, he waved to Diane, so she would know it was OK to start shooting. Once he had the M -200 set up, he loaded several magazines full of Lake City BMG 50 Match ammo, and got ready to shoot. His first round was vertically centered, but 3 inches low. Checking the hole in the target, he used the moa grid in the sight, and decided to add 1 click of up on the elevation turret. His next round was just slightly high of the bullseye, but in the x-ring. He decided to write down the new cold weather zero and all the data in his log book. He didn't need any windage compensation because for once the wind was practically still. When he was done writing, he fired 3 more rounds, and he shot a 6 inch group. Not his best, but pretty good under the circumstances. He loaded another magazine, and his second group was smaller than the first, probably right around 5 inches. He shot 20 more rounds, then left the rifle where it was, and drove over to ask Diane if she wanted to try her hand at the M -200. She practically jumped up and hugged him "Heck Yeah - let's go!"

They drove the snow bug down to the targets, and put some fresh paper on his target. Diane was staring unbelievably at his groups. "I guess you guys really are special. You just shot the same size group at 1,000 yards that I did at 600!"

"You shot a 5-inch group at 600 yards in these conditions - that's fantastic!"

"What do you mean - That's barely a sub-moa group?"

"Yeah, but it's 20 below and it's way tougher to shoot well when you're shivering cold and you have to be extra careful not to freeze your hand to the rifle. Wait until spring and your groups should drop down to 3-4 inches when you're more comfortable."

They finally reached Jake's shooting position, and he decided to let her use his position, and he set up a spot off to her left with a tarp, a sportsman's tarp, and an ensolite shooting mat. Once he was set, he set up the tripod on the spotting scope, and switched his earplugs for the headset and microphone they were using yesterday. He walked over to her, and helped her adjust the stock, bipod, and monopod to fit her. He was happy that her shooting position was so good that he didn't have to fix anything besides her fit to the stock and the bipod/monopod settings. She looked through the scope, and the image was rock steady. Jake had her do 10 dry fires and call where the trigger broke, then gave her a loaded magazine, and moved back to the spotting scope. When he was ready to go, he gave her a thumbs-up, and she pulled back the bolt and let it fly forward, chambering a live round. Looking through the scope, she could see the image wiggling in the sights now that she had a firing grip on the weapon, and she knew the wiggle was because of her. She told Jake the scope was wiggling all over the place, and he said she needed to settle down, that target was  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile away, and the only reason she could even see



it was because of the terrific scope. He suggested reciting the 23rd Psalm. He started it, and she caught on quick. By the end, she said her scope was just hovering around the x-ring. Jake said that's exactly where it was supposed to be. He told her that at this range, she needed to anticipate her trigger break, because lock time entered into the equation at this range. The time between when she pulled the trigger and the hammer struck the primer was a finite amount of time, then it took another fraction of a second for the bullet to exit the barrel. During that whole period, she could influence the path of the bullet, so she needed to squeeze the trigger when the sights were on their way inside the x-ring instead of on the way out. Experience would teach her exactly when to trigger the rifle.

She asked if he were done, she was falling asleep behind the scope. He laughed and told her to go ahead. She must have been listening, because her first round went right through the bullseye. He didn't say anything, and she shot 4 more times before the rifle locked open on an empty magazine. He checked her group, and it was hovering right at 10 inches, not terrific, but pretty darn good for the first time shooting the rifle, and in freezing conditions. He walked over to her, picked her up, and gave her a big hug and a kiss. She was grinning from ear to ear when he told her she shot a 10-inch group, which was better than Josh's best group, even when it was warm out. That cinched it in Jake's mind, she could shoot his zero with the M -200, and the first round, which was the critical round, was right on target. Since she was freezing, he suggested they pack it in and go talk to Bear. They packed the gear up, and drove the Snow Bug to the lodge. Jake told Bear that Diane shot a 10-inch group the first time out with the M -200, and she could shoot his zero, since the first round went through the bullseye. Their zero on the M -25 was different, but not enough to matter.

They sat down in the classroom and Bear told them what he had on his mind, and Diane said that they were way ahead of him, that Jake had already given her his Scout/Sniper manual, and she was OK with being Jake's Sniper team partner. Bear tried to talk her out of it, but could see that her mind was made up, so he went with it. He hoped that Josh could marry someone who was a good shooter, or they'd have to find another job in the Militia for Josh. He thought about pairing him up with his sister, but she was a better shot with the M -200 than he was, and that might be hard on his ego. For now Jake and Diane would become his #2 Sniper team, with Josh as a backup in case Diane was 9 months pregnant when TSHTF. He could deal with Josh if and when the time came. With that out of the way, he spent the rest of the day talking about field craft. Between her Inuit background and what she read out of Jake's manual, Diane's knowledge of field craft was the equal of Jake's. When it got warmer this spring, he decided to send the two of them out on a field exercise and find out how good they really were. He gave them some more study guides, and told them to go home and get warm. He grinned when they had left, thinking he might have phrased that differently.

They got back into their snowmobile suits, drove the Snow Bug back to the SuperGoose. Jake climbed out and opened the cockpit door, and flipped the switch that opened the rear ramp, and trudged back to the Snow bug and drove it up the ramp. Diane hit the switch that raised the ramp as Jake shut down the engine, so they wouldn't get carbon monoxide poisoning or freeze

their butts off. Once the door was up, Diane connected and tightened the tie-downs to anchor the snow bug into place, then walked forward to the cockpit and climbed in the co-pilot's seat. Jake was ready to take off by the time she got belted in. He left the left engine at idle, and spun up the right one, which turned the plane to the left. Once they were facing the lake, he slowed the right engine to idle, and advanced both throttles to taxi. The ride to the downwind end of the lake was bumpy, but it was worth it to be able to bring the snow bug with them. They finally reached the end of the lake, and he turned into the wind to take off, then advanced both throttles to full, and was soon doing 85 knots, at which point he pulled back on the yoke, and held a 20 degree nose-up attitude until he was above 500 feet AGL, at which point he eased off his climb to 2,000 feet. He called Ron while he was in the air, and told him that the SuperGoose not only could hold a Snow Bug comfortably with 8 seats in, but it didn't really affect the flight characteristics that much, since they were pretty light. Ron said he had already ordered 3 Snow Bugs from Ralph, and he'd get them in a month or two. Jake thought if this kept up, Ralph should just open a shop and build Snow bugs.

They landed at Allakaket and reversed the process, backing the Snow Bug out of the ramp, then closing it back up. They drove home and spent the rest of the day studying.

A couple of months later, Jake flew to Anchorage to take the state test for a Registered guide. Unknown to Jake, the Registered guide at Doc's had decided to retire, and had sent a glowing letter of recommendation to the state along with the required paperwork. He had all his applications filed and fees paid for the January 28th test date. The registered guide told Jake that the test would be a walk in the park for him, and the only sections he needed to study would be the Alaska Game Regulations, since he was already a State Paramedic, and knew more about guns and stuff than he did, and had dressed and skinned more animals in the 5 years he worked for him than he had done while he was an assistant guide. On the morning of the 28th, he flew to Anchorage, drove to the test site, and an hour later, he walked out with his temporary license. He passed with a score of 95%, since he missed 2 questions on the 50-question test, he guessed they were both on the state regulations, which could be seriously confusing. He called Doc when he got home, and Doc gave him the news that their Registered Guide wanted to retire, and they wanted Jake to fly the customers to the lodge and guide them for \$50 thousand per year. Jake practically jumped up and danced after he told Doc "Sure" and hung up the phone. Diane wondered what he was so excited about until he explained that Doc's Lodge wanted to hire him to fly clients back and forth, and guide them for \$50 thousand for a 5-month season. When he wasn't guiding for Doc's, his Dad wanted to pay him another \$30 thousand as a relief pilot. He was only 18, and he was getting offered a combined salary of \$80 thousand per year, and their house was paid for. This meant they could open their own lodge and guiding service sooner than he had planned. He kissed her and hugged the stuffing out of her, then they settled down.

"This means I'm not going to be home much during hunting season, are you sure you're OK with this?"

"I'm more OK with you working out of Doc's lodge than trying to scrounge up customers on

your own. They're paying you a salary which means you get paid whether you're guiding or not! This is an answer to my prayers!"

Jake called his Dad up and gave him the good news. Ron told him he already knew since Larry had given his notice the end of last season, and recommended Jake as his replacement, assuming he got his Registered Guide license, since he was already a Commercial Pilot. It would be a perfect situation for the lodge, they got a guide and a pilot all in the same person, which would save the lodge tons of money since they wouldn't have to hire a guide and a pilot. Jake was jazzed, because he was planning on not making near that much money for the first 5-10 years as an independent Registered guide, and he'd have to hunt way away from home to guarantee his clients could get a tag. He already knew the staff at the lodge, and got along great with everyone. With an \$80 thousand dollar salary, he was halfway tempted to keep working for the lodge instead of hassling with opening his own guiding business, and putting the money in the bank or investing it.

## Chapter 64 - Preparations

They spent the rest of the winter practicing their shooting skills and training in the lodge's classroom with Bear, or goofing off and shooting at the indoor range and the swimming pool. Nancy thought they made a cute couple at the pool, and was slightly envious of Diane's 18-yr old figure. Jake reminded her of Ron at his age, like a leopard - grace and power under subtle control. She wasn't sad though, they had done an excellent job raising their 4 kids. Josh, Sarah, and David were still living at home, but making preparations to live on their own. Sarah had a steady boyfriend, and Josh was dating several girls, seeming not to be in any hurry to settle down. He took the news of getting replaced by Diane as Jake's assistant pretty well, and decided to join the combat medic teams. He wanted to take after his Great-uncle Steve, and see if he could join the military as a Para-rescue Jumper. First he'd have to join the Army, get selected for Special Forces, and then get selected for the Pararescue Jumper program. Steve and Gene said they'd do what they could, but they weren't selecting many applicants anymore. For some reason, they were phasing out the PJ program. Steve suggested if he wanted to do something similar, the Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer System was still in full swing. Josh wasn't too interested in the rescue swimmer program, since they didn't shoot people. Steve tried to talk some sense into Josh, telling him that if a PJ did his job right he didn't shoot people either, it was only when the mission went totally FUBAR did you end up shooting people. In all the missions he did, he only fired his weapon 3 times, and he wasn't even sure he hit anything; he was shooting to suppress fire coming too damn close to his patient. Steve hoped Josh would grow up and realize that no one enjoyed shooting someone else.

Ralph and Sam were busy raising Bert and Larry, while Oliver provided the Comic Relief. By now, their two sons were between the terrible twos, and impossible 5's. Oliver was big enough that they played with him, and he knocked them over. Just like his namesake, he was a chow hound, and could always hear the sound of the can opener, even from the other side of the yard. Ralph spent most of the winter building 3 Snow Bugs for Ron. He was seriously considering building them as a small business, since the liability issue had been settled with the 5-point restraint systems being installed in all new Snow Bugs. All the frames that Chenoweth shipped him had the extra tab for the anti-submarine belt. Since he was ordering more frames at once, they started offering him better pricing. Ralph developed a website to advertise and sell the Snow Bugs, and had gotten several inquiries, but no firm orders. He guessed the \$10K price scared any potential buyers away. The only way he could cut that price was if he was building them on an assembly line 10 at a time or more. The thing that really killed him was the shipping of the parts to Alaska. If he lived in the lower 48, he could sell them for \$8K right now, and \$6-7K if he were making 10 at a time or more.

Once a month, Ralph and Ron squared off for the Open pistol shooting competition. Usually the match was decided by a single round, or a fraction of a second. Ralph's long distance shooting improved with practice since both He and Sam had their own M-25's. Nancy, Sam, and Sally were always the top 3 shooters in the Women's open pistol shooting, and the order of

finish depended on how much practice they'd gotten the previous month. Ordinarily your 55th birthday was something to dread, but in BA's case, it was a mixed blessing, since he no longer had to compete against Ron in the open class. Since he had been competing against Ron for so long, Gene, Bear, and Steve were soundly beaten at the first Senior Pistol competition after BA turned 55. They vowed to never let that happen again, and spent several days a week at the range for the next couple of months until they caught up to BA. The three military men were livid that a "cake-eating civilian" had beaten them at pistol shooting, something all military officers pride themselves in. It took them several months to finally beat BA, but Ron thought it was because BA slacked off on the practice since he no longer had to shoot against him. All the senior men swam laps in the pool to stay in shape, especially when one of the Inuit men threatened to come in there with a harpoon. Gene wasn't amused, he was in pretty good shape for a guy in his 60's. Bear threatened to show him where he could stick that harpoon, and he beat a hasty retreat.

When he got home that night, he complained to Mary, who very diplomatically told him he had been putting on weight, and was getting soft in his old age. Instead of getting mad, he realized she was right, and spent more time at the pool. What they really needed was a gym and a weight room. He asked Ron about it, and several of the moms had told him and BA they would like an aerobics program for the winter to stay in shape. They found out how much it would cost, and told everyone they'd start construction in the spring on an addition to the pool for a weight and exercise room. Since the pool was 25 yards long by 50 feet wide, the building was 75 feet wide, so they bought another 75 foot wide by 100 foot addition that could connect directly to the existing building, saving the cost of the 4th wall. Ron was amazed at how well the steel buildings were holding up to the Alaskan winters. With the excess heat from the Geothermal power plant not only heating the Jacuzzi, pool, and greenhouse, but providing room heat for the shooting range, pool and the General Store, the company didn't have many expenses for heat or light, so they could easily add more buildings as long as they had the power. The geothermal steam generators were producing 40MW peak power, and had plenty of reserve left, since they normally only needed 3 of the 4 10MW turbogenerators. During the winter they used more power, since Ron, Ralph, Jake, and BA's houses, the hotel, and their other buildings weren't producing hardly any solar power, still they had plenty in reserve.

Bear had talked to Steve, and decided that Josh needed to talk to him, so he sent the 007 for him, and when he got there, Bear sat Josh down and told him that Steve said that Josh wanted to join the PJs instead of the Coast Guard because the Coast Guard didn't shoot people. "Josh, the PJ program wouldn't take you with an attitude like that, and neither would Special Forces accept you. We aren't looking for Rambo out for blood, we want men who are willing to complete the mission, no matter what. You need to get your head screwed on straight. War isn't like those video games you've been playing. I know, I was there, and I still carry the scars. In war, it's kill or be killed, but we don't go looking for people to kill. In the Teams, when we do everything right, no one fires a shot, we accomplish the mission without them knowing we were even there. If we start shooting, it means someone screwed up, and maybe a team member is going to die! If you want to join the military, great, but if you just want to shoot someone,

I'll kick you out of the Militia so fast your head will have to catch up with your butt! Now Grow UP!"

Bear stomped away, hoping to God that Josh had gotten the message. He was a good kid, it's just that some kids developed a warped sense of violence from the video games, and needed a serious reality check.

15 minutes later, Josh knocked on Bear's door. "Enter"

Josh stood at attention in front of Bear until Bear said "be seated"

"Bear, I'm sorry. I guess I've got some growing up to do."

"First of all, I'd toss those video games, and start reading some good books. Video games warp your sense of reality. I hate war, I've lost too many good friends in the teams to ever want to go to war again. If it comes, we'll be ready, but we don't go looking for trouble. In the Combat Medics, your job is to save lives, not take them. I thought that's what you wanted. Was I wrong in that assumption?"

"No Bear, you weren't."

"Do you still want to join the military?"

"I'd like to try, except if what Steve said was true about the DOD phasing out the Para-rescue jumper program, I might be better off applying for the Coast Guard rescue swimmer program. Hopefully by my 18th birthday, I'll have my Paramedic certificate, and that would put me ahead of several applicants for the Rescue Swimmer program."

"Josh, if you're serious, you'll have to become a much better swimmer, and a lot stronger. If you're serious, I'll start working out with you in the pool and weight room so when you're ready to enlist, you'll have a better chance of qualifying."

"Thanks Bear, I'd like that! I'm sorry if I've caused any problems."

"Nothing that couldn't be solved. Dismissed."

The 007 flew a much more contrite Josh back to Allakaket, and the next week, he started working out with Bear in the pool. First he started swimming laps, then more laps, then finally a mile at a time. They spent time in the deep end of the pool learning to swim underwater. Bear was still a certified PADI instructor, and wanted to give Josh scuba lessons, but the pool didn't have a diving board, so it was only 10 feet deep, and the surrounding lakes were too cold and murky. Instead Bear gave him all the book knowledge he needed to get his PADI cert, and had him practice with a mask, snorkel, and fins in the pool. Later that spring, when the weight

room was completed, they both started a weight training program. Bear started on light weight, high repetition; and he got Josh started on light weights, and gradually increased the weights as his strength increased. A Rescue Swimmer needed a lot of strength to complete the mission. Once Josh had made the decision to join the Coast Guard rescue swimmer program, Gene and Steve started checking things out for him. The news wasn't good. It was almost easier to get into the SEALs than the rescue swimmer program. When they told Josh that, he thought, "I'd never considered the SEALs, they needed medics too, and I'd get to carry a gun." He talked to Bear, and when he told him he was considering the SEALs, Bear almost started crying. Josh said "What's wrong?"

"When I first met your dad, he was only 13 and he really impressed me. We tried every trick in the book to impress him and get him to change his mind from going to the Air Force Academy, but your uncle Steve had the wheels greased and Gene behind the cart pushing. Your dad would have gone to the Air Force Academy on his 18th birthday if it weren't for those idiots in Congress dissolving the Air Force. Anyway, when we were out diving in Florida, he said some things that made me very proud of him. He said that if he weren't going to the Air Force, he would have considered the SEALs. If you're serious, I'd talk it over with your mom and dad before you breathe a word of it to Gene or Steve, because they can open doors for you, and give you a good shot of making the Teams if you do your part. I'm not going to lie to you, BUDS is everything it's cracked up to be. It's designed to weed out those that don't belong, who don't have the motivation to never quit until they're dead, and who won't put the team, their swim buddy, and the mission first above everything else. If you're serious, we need to change your workout regiment so you'll be in peak shape by your 18th birthday."

"Thanks Bear. Let's keep this between us for now until I ask my Mom and Dad."

"Ok, Josh, I just wanted you to know you made me proud back then, so whatever your decision, I'm still proud of you!"

That night, Josh took his mom and dad aside after dinner.

"Mom, Dad, I need your advice, and I have some questions. I was thinking about joining the military as a PJ like uncle Steve, when Steve told me the military was phasing out the PJ program. They suggested going into the Coast Guard as a Rescue Swimmer, but when they checked, it was easier to get into the SEALs than the Coast Guard's Rescue Swimmer program. I'd never considered the SEALs before, and I asked Bear about it, and he started crying, and explained when he first met Dad when he was 13 years old. I don't know what to do. I'd like to try out for the SEALs, but I wanted your advice first."

"Ok Josh, why would you want to join the SEALs?"

"I wanted to be in an elite unit as a combat medic, so my first idea was the PJs. Steve mentioned the Coast Guard, but found out the Rescue Swimmer program is full, and they're

really not recruiting any new trainees. It turns out the SEALs need medics that are SEAL trained, since they've gotten by with Navy Hospital Corpsman, but they really wanted people who had been through BUDS, and were an integral part of the team. Bear said I needed to talk to you guys first, because if I mentioned it to Gene or Steve, they'd get the ball rolling, and once it was rolling, getting it stopped would be difficult. You know what I mean Dad, Bear told me that Steve greased the wheels for you to go to the Academy, and Gene was behind the cart pushing."

Ron laughed "That's a pretty accurate description of what was going on. The only way I wound up not going to the Air Force Academy was when Congress basically disbanded the Air Force right before my 18th birthday. Bear really impressed me, as did the rest of the SEALs. If you had to go in the military, you could do a lot worse."

Nancy knew how dangerous the military was, but knew that Josh really wanted to go. She gave him a big hug and told him to follow his heart, and they'd back his decision. Josh took that for a yes, and gave his mom and dad a big hug, and said he needed to call Bear.

The next morning, Josh met Bear at the pool, and Bear told him to swim as long as he could, as fast as he could, and keep doing it for the next couple of weeks. If he could do that, he'd be just starting to get an idea of how tough it was to get through BUDS and become a SEAL. Josh followed Bear's instructions to the letter, and started swimming a mile or more at his quarter-mile pace. He practically drowned several times, but he didn't quit. Bear was impressed. When the weather warmed up they started jogging farther and farther. Josh was getting in great shape, and it helped Bear get back in fighting trim too. When he wasn't running or swimming, he was hitting the weight pile.

During the spring, Bear found time to run Jake and Diane through a field exercise that involved a long stalk, and a target location and identification drill just like the Marines did. He knew their shooting skills were excellent, so they didn't have to do the shoot part of the field ex. Bear was scanning the field with his binoculars, and was amazed that he couldn't find the two of them. Finally he had them stand up, and they were no more than 100 yards away, dressed in a very interesting Ghillie suit that looked like nothing he had seen before. He asked them about it, and Diane said that she had added Inuit elements to the basic Ghillie, so it didn't look like a Ghillie, but hid them very well. As far as Bear was concerned, they passed. He called the exercise short, because he had to get back to Josh's training. Jake and Diane spent the rest of the day shooting at the range, and soon Diane's groups were right down where Jake said they would be. Her 600 yard groups were less than 4 inches, and her 1,000 yard groups were averaging 8 inches, which was good enough for their purposes. During the week when he wasn't flying they worked out at the pistol range, swam in the pool, and hit the weight room. Jake was amazed at how big his little brother was getting. The little pipsqueak was up to bench pressing 200 pounds, and he only weighed 180 soaking wet. Jake decided to hit the weight pile too, and while he didn't go to the extremes his younger brother did, Diane liked the results. She went to an aerobics class while the boys hit the weight pile. Josh asked Jake if he wanted to



start running with him, suggesting that if he could outrun the hunter he was with, he might have a better chance of surviving a bear attack. Jake agreed, and went running with him several times a week when he wasn't flying, and started practicing with his Colt Anaconda. Jake and Josh spent their free time working out together, and Josh even got Jake to start swimming laps instead of splashing around in the pool. He wasn't the fastest swimmer, but like he said, he wasn't going to get chased by a great white any time soon.

His shooting with his Colt Anaconda was pretty darn good, but not as good as his Dad. Still, any bears in the neighborhood that picked a fight with him had better make sure their life insurance was paid up first. He wore his double-shoulder holster with the 22/45 and the Colt Anaconda whenever he flew, and especially when he was guiding or flying to the lodge. He bought an SU-16 for a plane gun, and installed all the survival gear his dad recommended. Since he was already a State Paramedic, he had a complete medical kit, including the liquid oxygen delivery equipment with the plane. He carried a 2-meter handy-talkie that connected to the cross-band repeater in his plane, as well as a cell phone with a cellular repeater in the plane as well. Jake was starting to fly for Allakaket Airlines first, since Hunting Season didn't start for another month. First he was flying 2-3 times a week flying the "grocery run" to keep the General Store stocked, and to stock up for the orders the lodges would be placing in another couple of weeks. Soon he was flying passengers as well, from both Anchorage and Fairbanks. He was glad for the practice, because he needed to develop confidence and smoothness flying paying passengers. His dad had told him about how nervous he was when he first started flying paying passengers, Jake decided to use the "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech as well, except, in this case it was true. Allakaket Airlines had their logo, and the Alaska Airlines as well painted on all SuperGoose owned by Allakaket Airlines. Alaska Airlines was nice enough to pay for the logos. Ron thought it was awfully white of them, especially since it was free advertising for Alaska Airlines. The first time he used it, Jake was wearing an Allakaket Airlines ball cap and shirt. He picked up several passengers from Fairbanks who were returning to Allakaket, helped them get seated, made sure their luggage was secure, then started the preflight, then he flipped his headset to PA.

"This is your pilot, Jake Williams, and I'd like to welcome you to Allakaket Airlines. We'll be flying at 2,000 feet, and be landing in Allakaket in a little over an hour. Please make sure your seatbelts are fastened and your seats are in the upright and locked position in preparation for take-off. Thank you for flying Allakaket Airlines."

He could hear laughter through the bulkhead, and knew he had struck the right chord. He took off smoothly; cruise climbed to 2,000 feet, and made a perfect landing an hour and a half later at Allakaket. He touched down with barely a splash, and taxied to the ramp. When he was at the passenger loading zone, he shut down and once the props had stopped spinning, he walked back into the passenger cabin, and unlocked the cabin door and extended the air stairs. "Watch your Step, and thank you for flying Allakaket Airlines." One elderly lady stopped in the aisle, and told him that she was one of Ron's first paying customers. He was good, but not as funny as his dad. He thanked her, and hustled outside to help her down the air stairs. "Thank you

young man - I've got it from here." Ron waited while the baggage handlers unloaded the aircraft, and he taxied to the fuel depot and filled up the tanks, then checked his schedule. He was finished flying for the day, so he taxied to the hangar. The maintenance supervisor handed Jake a note. He had an unscheduled flight to Anchorage with passengers, and he was the only available pilot. Jake shrugged and said "No rest for the weary!" He taxied back out to the loading area and was surprised to see Doc and Nelson, and Anne and Gene getting aboard. Doc explained that there was a new Gerontologist at Anchorage Regional and they had scheduled appointments at the last minute since he had the time, and wanted to get baselines on them. Doc said that they could either catch a flight back tomorrow, or he could wait for them in Anchorage later that evening. Since Doc was his boss, and Anne his grandma, he told Doc he'd wait for them, and gave him his cellular number. Once he had everyone seated, Jake gave his "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech. He heard scattered laughter, and once they were airborne, he called Anchorage Regional for permission to land on their runway. The operations manager said to go ahead, they didn't have any emergency status flights right now, but they should consider Anchorage commercial as an alternate if he had to divert them.

"Roger Regional. I've got another hour before I'm committed. If you need to divert me to Commercial, just call me anytime in the next hour, and I can divert. I'll call back on approach."

"Roger Allakaket Airlines thanks. Regional Clear."

An hour later, Jake called on approach. "Regional this is Allakaket Airlines on Approach, do I have clearance to land."

"Roger Allakaket, clear to land, come straight in on 19."

"Roger, Regional, on final for 19, and thanks."

Jake chopped his throttle as soon as he was over the runway threshold, and the plane sank to the ground, and made a nice soft wheeled landing. He was getting pretty good at landing the big amphibian on its wheels. He coasted up to the main entrance, shut down, and opened the air stairs from the outside, in case anyone needed any assistance getting down. Every time someone stepped onto the tarmac, he said "Thanks for Flying Allakaket Airlines, have a nice day."

Doc was the last person off, and told Jake that when Ron first gave the "welcome to Allakaket Airlines" speech, it was a lot funnier; then again he was flying a DeHaviland bush plane. "Jake, if you do this good flying hunters, you'll be really popular. Your dad made a pile of money at your age, and the main reason he was so busy was because he was so popular, and treated the customers like friends. Eventually Allakaket Airlines took over flying for all the lodges, and that's when your Dad decided to buy his first TurboGoose, and the rest you say, is history. Thanks for the flight, that was fun. See you later this afternoon. It's going to take most of the afternoon for them to get finished poking and prodding us I'm afraid. I've got your cellular

number. Ron said there was a really good sporting goods store in town he liked, here's the name of it. If you fly to Alaska Airline's VIP terminal, they might let you borrow a pickup for the afternoon."

Jake thanked Doc, and grabbed his cellular phone. "Dad, I'm in Anchorage, and Doc said it would take the rest of the afternoon to get done with their doctor's appointments, so he suggested I check out the Sporting Goods store. He said that if I park at Alaska Airlines VIP terminal, they might loan me a truck. You'll take care of it, thanks Dad!"

Jake walked over to the cabin door of the SuperGoose, climbed the stairs, secured the door, and walked forward to the pilot's seat. He started the engines, and once he was ready to fly, he called Anchorage Commercial, and requested permission to transit from Anchorage Regional. "Commercial, this is Allakaket Airlines SG13645 requesting permission to transit from Regional to Commercial."

"Roger Allakaket, we just received notice, and you're clear to land and taxi to the Alaska Airlines VIP terminal. Ground crew will show you your parking space."

"Roger Commercial, which way do I turn for the VIP terminal?"

"Make a left at the end of the runway, and follow the taxiway to its end. Big white building on the right that says Alaska Airlines. Follow signs for VIP terminal."

"Thanks Commercial, taking off now!"

Jake advanced the throttles, took off, and climbed to 500 feet while turning to enter the pattern at Anchorage Commercial Airport. 20 minutes later, he taxied up to the VIP terminal where a ground crewman directed him to a parking spot. Once he shut down, the crewman handed him a note and a set of keys.

"Jake, your dad called - I'm in the middle of some meetings or I'd come down and greet you personally. Nice to have another Williams flying for Allakaket Airlines. Bradley"

Next to the plane was a nice clean white diesel F-350 4x4 crew cab, so Jake opened the door and started the motor, then he went back to his plane, took off the shoulder holsters and secured the plane. He found a Thomas Guide in the glove box, and located the Sporting goods store. Half an hour later, he parked in front and walked in. When he found a salesman, he asked if Larry was still there. "I'm sorry, he died a couple of years ago, how may I help you."

"I'm Jake Williams, and my Dad told me to ask for Larry."

"Did you say Jake Williams - I'm Dave, the salesman that helped him when he first came here. Larry died suddenly, and they offered me the management job."

“Ok, does this mean I can get the family 20% discount?”

“Yes sir - the kind of money your dad spent definitely entitles any member of his family to the same discount.”

“Do you guys still have that Laser Tag room in back?”

“If you’re half as good as your dad, I’m in serious trouble.”

They spent the rest of the afternoon playing Laser Tag since business was slow. When they finished, Jake called it a draw, since they had basically won the same number of games. Dave told Jake he had something to show him, and they walked over to a counter display that had several GPS units on it. Dave picked one up and explained to Jake that it was a combination PDA and GPS unit. Jake didn’t see the use for the PDA feature, but was seriously interested in a color GPS he saw. It was the Magellan Meridian Color GPS. Dave said he’d sell him the upgrade kit with the US Topo CD, interface cable, and manual on CD for \$380, and he’d throw in the \$15 neoprene waterproof case and the cigarette lighter adapter if he bought the NiMh upgrade kit that included a wall charger for \$28, then he could take his 20% off that. Jake figured it out: \$408 less 20% was 326.40 plus tax. He told Dave that the amount was \$326.40 plus tax. Dave said that his father could do math like that in his head too. Jake asked if the 16mb chip would be enough to download the US Topo CD. Dave said he’d be lucky to be able to store the local area with a 16mb chip. For an extra 42 dollars, he’d suggest the 64mb chip instead, the cost for the 16mb chip was \$5, so he’d charge him the difference. Jake thought “380 plus 28 plus 37 equals \$445, minus 20% equals \$356.” He told Dave that would be \$356 plus tax, and for 30 dollars extra, it would be a good idea. He asked Dave if he could throw in a spare set of 4 AA NiMh batteries since they lived in Allakaket. Dave said he’d charge him cost, which was \$5 for the set of 4. Jake decided against it when he remembered that the General Store carried NiMh batteries, and they should be about the same. Dave went ahead and wrote up the sale, and Jake handed him his AMEX, signed the slip, then Dave bagged the order and handed Jake everything. Jake thanked Dave and walked out to the truck. Just then his cell phone rang. “Hello this is Jake.”

“Jake, it’s Doc. We just finished up at the hospital. We’re ready to go home.”

Jake saw that he was driving a crew cab truck, which should have plenty of room for everyone. “Doc, Alaska Airlines loaned me one of their crew-cab trucks. If everyone thinks it’s OK, it would be quicker to drive over there and pick you up instead of driving to the airport and flying there to pick you up.”

“Ok Jake, sounds good to me. See you out front in about 15 minutes.”

Jake opened the trusty Thomas Guide, and found out how to get to the hospital. He made it to the front entrance in 17 minutes, got out, and opened both passenger side doors. Gene helped

Anne up, and Nelson offered his arm to Doc, and they all got in ok. He drove back to the VIP terminal, and he parked next to the SuperGoose. Jake thought the plane looked cleaner than when he arrived, and a note on the cockpit door explained it all. Bradley had the plane washed while it was parked there since they were washing the other planes anyway - no charge. Jake thought that was nice, and opened the cabin door and helped everyone aboard, then made sure his bag was aboard with his new GPS. Doc asked if he could ride up front, and Jake said Yes, remembering that Doc held his private pilot's license, even though he hadn't flown in years. Doc sat in the co-pilot's seat, and buckled into the harness like an old pro. Jake handed him the spare headset, and talked him through the pre-flight checklist and the engine start sequence. Finally with both turbines idling, Jake flipped the intercom switch to PA and announced "Welcome to Allakaket Airlines for your return flight to Allakaket. If your destination is not Allakaket, you're on the wrong plane. Please fasten your seatbelts, and made sure your trays are stowed, and the seat is in the upright and locked position, and prepare for take-off."

He flipped the intercom back to cockpit and said "Pilot to co-pilot, ready for take-off?"

Doc looked around and said "Clear for Take-off!"

Jake flipped the switch to radio and contacted the tower.

"This is Allakaket Airlines Sierra Golf 13645 requesting take-off clearance."

"Getting formal on us Allakaket?"

Jake laughed and said "Never hurts to practice proper radio procedure, in case you've got an FAA inspector in the tower."

"Roger Allakaket, clear on Runway 17, have a good flight."

"Thank you tower, turning onto 17 now."

Once Jake turned onto the correct runway, he applied the brakes, advanced the throttles, and released the brakes. Once he was moving at 80 knots, he pulled the yoke back gently and cruise climbed to 2,000 feet and turned toward Allakaket. Once they were straight and level, Jake asked Doc if he wanted to take the controls. The look on Doc's face was priceless. Doc put his hands and feet on the controls and called "co-pilot's plane."

Jake said "Ok, Doc, straight and level for 1 hour, then the nav system will give you a programmed turn to the east to line up with the lake. If you want to land the plane you can, or I can take it."

"Young man, I've never landed a plane this big. You better do it!"

“OK Doc. I’ll take the landing. You can keep your hands and feet lightly on the yoke and pedals to feel what I’m doing.”

“Thanks Jake.”

An hour later, the Nav system beeped, indicating a turn to the right to set up for landing at Allakaket. Jake set up a gentle diving turn because he had to lose 1500 feet in 5 miles so he was on glide slope for his landing. He bottomed out of the turn at 500ft AGL and on the heading for Allakaket. “Allakaket Tower, this is SG13465 on final. Requesting permission to land.”

“Permission granted, pattern is clear. Contact tower when clear.”

“Roger tower.”

As Jake cleared the ridge, he chopped his throttles, held a 15 degree nose-up attitude as his speed bled off and he floated down to the lake. Just about 10 feet off the water, he pushed the nose forward and landed with a slight splash.

“Jake that was fun. You’re as good of a pilot as I remember your dad was at your age!”

“Thanks Doc!”

They taxied to the ramp, and Jake remembered to lower his landing gear so he could transition to land, and he rolled up to the passenger loading area, and shut down. He contacted the tower, and let them know he was clear, then turned off the power, and walked back to open the cabin door as the blades stopped spinning. Once everyone was on the ground, Doc took a moment to talk to Jake.

“I saw Doc Nichols today. He said I was in pretty good shape for my age, but he was worried about my heart. He said I had to take it easy from here on out, so this will probably be my last season at the lodge. I wanted to fly with you one last time before I completely retired. That was the most fun I’ve had since I flew with your dad.”

“Doc, any time you want to go flying, just let me know. My dad’s given me use of this SuperGoose when I’m not flying for Allakaket Airlines or the lodge.”

“Thanks Jake, I just might take you up on that! This time I think we’ll take the SuperGoose over to the lodge instead of the 007. I’d like to see what the approach to HelpmeJack Lake is like in this plane.”

“Ok Doc, but if the doctor said for you to take it easy, I just wanted to warn you the approach is pretty hairy and steep. Almost twice as steep as the approach to Allakaket. It’s kind of like

floating down on a parachute attached to a rock.”

“Well, we all gotta die sometime, might as well be doing something I enjoy instead of sitting home in a rocking chair listening to my arteries harden.”

“Make sure you tell Ralph and Sam just in case, so they make sure they spend plenty of time with you, especially with your grandsons. I never knew my Grandpa, since he died way before I was born, but Bert and Larry should have a chance to get to know you first.”

“You’re right Jake - As much as it pains me to think of myself as growing old, I have to make sure Bert and Larry get to spend some time with me. Take care - Nelson is waiting to drive me home.”

## Chapter 65 - In Training

Bear told Josh that the SEALs used Navy Hospital Corpsman, who were more extensively trained than medics, and you couldn't just join the SEALs out of boot camp, you had to have a rate. What he needed to do was go through Boot Camp, kick ass on the Obstacle Course, PT and marksmanship quals, then try to get into an Iron Man competition somewhere in Southern California when he was on leave after he completed Hospital Corpsman school. If he did well, there were usually several SEALs running in the Ironman Triathlons, and if impressed a SEAL officer, he stood a good chance of getting a shot at becoming a SEAL. The triathlon included bicycle riding, but there weren't enough hard surface roads for him to practice on a road bike, so he'd have to make do with a mountain bike. Josh remembered his dad owned an old mountain bike that was in pretty good shape, and maybe he could borrow it. Bear said that riding the heavier bike would put him in excellent shape for riding the much lighter and quicker road bikes. But he was going to have to work even harder on his running and swimming. He needed to work on speed and endurance in the water. He suggested swimming in the lake at Allakaket, which would make any ocean water he swam in seem like a nice warm bathtub. He'd let Jake wait until the middle of summer when the lake warmed up over 40 degrees. Also Bear would have to upgrade his Martial arts training, and build an obstacle course for him to practice on. Bear wanted one at the Survival school anyway for a while, now he had an excuse.

Bear e-mailed George in Atlanta, who had a PDF file showing the layout of an older SEAL obstacle course. He called Ron, and got permission to build an obstacle course for Alaska Survival, and enlisted Josh and Jake, and Tom and Gary to help him build it. The Super Stallion delivered several hundred recycled railroad ties and 8-inch lag bolts. He bought a  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch industrial drill to drill holes and drive the lag bolts. They hauled sand to make a safe landing zone, and started assembling the obstacle course. Bear told him the obstacle course wasn't as tough as the BUDS course, but was significantly tougher than the Basic Training course. They strung a cargo net 20 feet in the air, built 2 walls, a 6-foot wall without a rope, and a 12-foot wall with a knotted rope. They built a rope slide between 2 tall poles 30 feet apart, with a climbing rope to get up, and another to get down. They assembled a series of poles dug into the ground at various heights that you had to jump to/from combined with a log walk that included uphill and downhill sections. Bear said the tough part was if you fell off the log walk/jump sequence you had to start over at the start.

Josh started testing the equipment shortly after it was installed. Bear had an aggressive training regiment for him. One day of the obstacle course, the next day running, the next biking, and for variety he swam every other day. The sixth day he lifted weights. Bear decided to let Josh rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, because if God took a day off, he'd get one too! When Jake wasn't flying or guiding, he was working out with his brother, pushing him as hard as he could. Bear played SEAL Instructor, and alternately praised and cursed them. Josh realized that there was some major truth to the expression "Swears like a Chief!" Josh became pretty good on the mountain bike, and sometimes when Jake had to fly to Anchorage to pick up customers, he dropped Josh



off in the morning with his mountain bike in Anchorage, and when he came back that evening to pick him up, he usually had 50-100 miles on the odometer. Josh liked the residential streets in Anchorage, he could pedal much faster and easier on pavement than on the ratty trails he had in Allakaket. He'd bring a daybag, usually a Camelback Mule full of water, bananas, a PBJ sandwich, first aid kit, cell phone (in case he got in an accident and was too hurt to make it back to the airport.) and his helmet. Josh mapped out routes that varied terrain and distance, avoiding major congested roads whenever possible. Josh was becoming a very strong swimmer, and his speed was improving too. He still shot every now and then on Sunday, either with a scoped M - 25 or an open-sighted AR-15 to simulate what he'd have to do to earn a top score in marksmanship at Basic Training. He also did calisthenics including push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, and chin-ups. Bear had found out through the grapevine what the best scores on the PT tests were, and set goals for Josh to beat every one of them. The only one he really was having trouble with was the run speed. He could run distances, but not fast. A quarter-mile was the farthest he could run fast, beyond that, he went into a marathon pace that he could run a whole marathon at. As the year progressed, he was running 25 miles on his run days, biking 50 miles on his biking days, and swimming 2 miles for his swim day. As his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday got closer, Gene gave Josh the good news, He'd been accepted into the new Seal Challenge program as a Medical Special Operations Technician candidate, which required a 6-year enlistment. He looked up the webpage on the Seal Challenge, and found a Contract overview PDF file <http://www.sealchallenge.navy.mil/seal/pdf/contractoverview.pdf>

The requirements for the Physical Skills Test was a cakewalk compared to the workouts that Bear already had him doing. He realized Bear was preparing him for BUDS, which was grueling, exhausting, and painful. This Seal Challenge program seemed to be much easier than the way they were planning on doing it. Josh wondered if there were a PADI diving program in San Diego that he could get into before he reported to San Diego for BUDS, so he'd already have his PADI cert, his State Paramedic cert, and his Commercial pilot's license. If there was some way to enroll in a jump school, he'd check into that too! Now that he had a firm enlistment day 2 weeks after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he e-mailed the State Medical Board to petition for an early test date, since he was enlisting in the US Navy after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and would be in Great Lakes, MI when he was originally scheduled to take the test. The head of the Paramedic program recognized his last name, and realized that he was Jake's younger brother, and Jake had passed the written exam with the highest score in 10 years. He knew all the Paramedic candidates coming out of Allakaket were being trained by an ER Doc and an ER Surgeon who really knew their stuff. He replied that if Josh could get to Alaska Regional tomorrow to do his 2-week internship/training period, he could take the test when he satisfactorily passed his internship/training period. Josh called for his dad, and Ron told him to go for it, and he'd arrange for Jake to fly him to Anchorage first thing tomorrow. Josh packed his bag for a 2-week stay in Anchorage, and packed his medical books too. He got to bed early, because he'd heard they worked long hours and he'd need his sleep.

Ron called Jake, who agreed in a minute to help out Josh. He'd miss his younger brother, and was grateful for the excellent shape he was in now. Diane was always complimenting him

about his physique, and he tried not to let it go to his head. Bear told him that when Josh left, he'd have to keep the training up, so he wasn't getting off easy. Diane started training with them. She couldn't run too far, but was a real good swimmer. Jake and Diane would continue their training program after Josh left, but at a lower intensity level. Jake flew Josh to Anchorage the next morning, and Josh started his internship at the hospital. They issued him a set of greens to wear, and a yellow coat, indicating that he was a Paramedic Trainee, which meant he was to observe procedures unless a qualified trainer was teaching him how to do a procedure. 2 weeks later he was hooked, and knew that he was going to do what he wanted to do the rest of his life, when he observed a GSW victim, and how the doctors and surgeons worked to save his life. The head of Emergency medicine gave him a certificate, and he called the testing office, then caught a lift to the office to take the State Paramedic license test. Several hours later, he finished, and the proctor shook his head when he scored Josh's test. Just like his brother, he only missed 2 questions. The average candidate that passed missed at least 10 questions out of the 500 question battery. He issued a temporary State Paramedic's license, and said the permanent license would be mailed to his home in the next week or so. He took Josh's picture to go on the ID, and told him he was finished. Josh grabbed his cell phone, and found out Jake would be at the Anchorage Commercial terminal in about an hour, and he'd wait for him. Josh caught a cab, and met his brother at the terminal right as he finished loading up. They talked on the way home about the licensing procedures and funny stuff that happened in the hospital.

When he got home, Josh called Bear and gave him the good news. He asked if it would help if he had a PADI diving cert when he enlisted. Bear said it wouldn't be worth the trouble, since the Navy didn't recognize the PADI cert anyway. He told Josh that he'd be better served by swimming in the lake as much as possible to get used to cold water, because the water off Coronado could be cold. Josh was afraid he was going to say something like that, but decided that Bear knew what he was talking about. Josh knew that the SEALs used cold water to break the morale of the weaker trainees and weed them out. By the time he got to San Diego, the 60 degree water of San Diego Bay would seem like bathwater to him. Every time he went swimming in the lake he came out blue, but he didn't feel as cold anymore. Bear's training tactic was working. He started running no more than 2 miles at a time, and picked up the pace until he was running 2 miles in 14 minutes, which wasn't the fastest time, but he didn't have to be the fastest anymore. The 500-yard swim would be a cakewalk, since Bear made him swim a mile in the lake every time he swam. Bear motored along in a safety boat next to him while Josh froze various parts of his anatomy off. Bear found out about the Superfrog triathlon which was held 2 weeks before Josh's scheduled BUDS school started, and he should be on leave then. Bear told Josh about it, and he was all excited, so Bear signed him up and paid the registration fee. Since it was cheaper for enlisted Naval personnel, and there were more openings, Bear signed him up as an enlisted personnel, since he would have completed Basic by then.

Josh's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday was bittersweet for Nancy, who knew her boy had grown up and was about to enter the Navy. Josh wasn't too worried about it, and was cuddling in the corner of the room

with his girlfriend of the month. He knew that if he wanted to get into the SEALs, he couldn't be married, or have any other distractions, so he didn't get serious about any single girl. They thought he was so good looking that they didn't mind anyway. Josh was now a sandy blonde, about 5-10 and 190 pounds of solid muscle. He was bench-pressing 220 pounds, butterfly curling 40 pounds, and was lifting 100 pounds on the leg extension, and 300 pounds in the squat position on the universal machine. To quote Bill Murray in Stripes, he was a "Lean Mean fighting machine!" As a Special Forces Medical Technician, his job was to save lives, but he could also take them if the team came under fire to protect his teammates. When it came time to open presents, Josh was stunned when he opened a small envelope with a passbook in it. There was a note inside "Josh, now that you're 18, you've reached the age the Trust Fund stipulated to disburse funds. The money in this passbook is the proceeds of that trust fund. Even though it's enough that you could live on the interest for the rest of your life, knowing that you don't have to work gives you the freedom to do what you want with your life. Love, Mom & Dad" When he opened the passbook and read the amount, he almost fainted. The savings account had a balance of over \$5 Million! He slipped from the grasp of his current girlfriend, and walked over to his Mom and Dad, and gave them both a big hug. Ron said his other present was in the driveway.

He opened the door, and there stood a brand-new full-size black Diesel Hummer. He opened the door, and the keys were in it, and the key fob was his name. He took the keys out of the ignition and ran back into the house and gave his parents another big hug. Jake gave him a GPS unit just like his, and Sarah gave him a cellular phone that would work anywhere in the world with 500 pre-paid minutes, with a note attached "ET Phone home every once in a while! Love Sis" Josh picked Sarah up, spun her around, then set her down and kissed her cheek. "Thanks Sis, you're the best. I'll try to keep in touch whenever I'm not restricted." Sarah realized her older brother might not be able to call home all the time, especially if he were on a mission. Her fiancé was sitting next to her, and looking uncomfortable. Finally he stood and shook Josh's hand. "Good luck and be careful." Sarah had just announced their engagement last week, right after he got offered a permanent position working in the mine. She was already wearing her diamond, and the small stone gleamed in the sunlight streaming through the windows. Josh would sure miss this, but like the recruiting poster said "It's Not a Job- It's an Adventure!" David gave his big brother a copy of the Special Forces Medical Handbook. When he opened the cover, it read "Bring them all home, Love David" He walked over to David and said he'd try, and gave him a hug. "See you later bro - take care of things for me while I'm gone!"

"Does this mean I can drive the Hummer?"

"What are you - Nuts?"

"I take that as a NO."

"More like Heck NO!" Josh grabbed his younger brother, and gave him an "Indian rub" on his

scalp. Since David was half the size of Josh, he knew that “resistance was futile” and didn’t bother.

2 weeks later, he was on a plane to Chicago. He arrived in O’Hare without any problems, and found the USO office to check in. Like Bear had told him the RDC on the bus to Recruit Training Command was the nicest RDC there. He made sure never to address an RDC as Sir or Ma’am, usually Chief was the correct way to address an RDC. He had Bill set up an account for him in Allakaket with ATM/Debit access, so he could direct deposit his military pay, and have access to funds as soon as he needed them unlike the other poor recruits that had to wait 4 weeks for their ATM cards through the NFCU. Just like Bear had told him, Basic was a walk in the park. Since his hair was already short, the haircut didn’t amount to much, and thanks to Bear’s training and advice, he was soon the top trainee in the class. He was totally squared away, never talked without permission, and saluted like he was born a sailor. When they started the PT, not only was he the top of his class, but he was so far ahead of 99% of them that the instructors asked him to do more, just to see how much he could do. In-processing was the hardest part of boot camp, because there was always someone who wasn’t with the program. He was issued his smurfs, and couldn’t wait to get his first uniform issue, since he hated the baggy sweats. The first couple of days he didn’t sleep much at all. Finally he got assigned to a Recruit Division, and met his instructor for the next 7 weeks, Chief Washburn. He impressed Chief Washburn so much that he made Josh the Division’s Recruit Chief Petty Officer. Chief Washburn handed him a collar device designating him the Recruit CPO, and a list of things he was responsible for.

During the first week he easily passed his 3rd Class Swimming test, and asked to take the 2<sup>nd</sup> Class swim test, which he easily passed. He wanted to take the first class test, but didn’t have a Red Cross or YMCA Life Saving certificate. He made the mistake of asking the RDC if a State Paramedic’s license counted, and the RDC made him swim a 100-yard freestyle as fast as he could as punishment, thinking it would take him 5 minutes. When Josh pulled up after less than 2 minutes, the RDC thought he cheated until the lifeguard told him that Josh was one of the fastest recruits he’d seen in a while. The RDC got him out of the water and asked him where he learned to swim like that. Josh explained he wanted to get to the SEAL Challenge, and Master Chief Simmons had been training him for over a year, including swimming a mile every other day in 40 degree water.

“Recruit, where the hell did you find 40-degree water?”

“I’m from Alaska Chief.”

The RDC asked Josh if he wanted to take the First Class swim test anyway, since he was such a good swimmer. Josh said he’d like to try with the chief’s permission. He told Josh the test included proficiency in the freestyle, sidestroke, breast stroke, and elementary back stroke. Josh asked him if that was the Back Crawl, and the chief explained it was an elementary stroke with a frog kick, and a sweeping stroke on the back. Josh nodded understanding. It was one of the

strokes Bear had shown him that the Navy wanted him to know. He asked Josh how good at underwater swimming he was. Josh said he could clear over half the length of the pool in 1 breath. The RDC told Josh to get in the water and start swimming. Half an hour later, the chief was signing off on his 1<sup>st</sup> Class swim test, shaking his head as he did so. He'd have to meet this Master Chief Simmons, he trained this recruit well. Josh neglected to tell the RDC that Chief Simmons was a SEAL instructor.

Josh spent the rest of the week learning core values, rate/rank recognition, rape awareness, and other stuff, when he wasn't marching. As the Division RCPO, he was either at the front of the Division, or riding dog, depending on where the RDC wanted him. The first week's PT was a breeze for Josh, and he spent most of his time motivating recruits. Chief Washburn was pleased that Josh was taking a leadership role, and leading by example instead of bossing people. During the second week there was more classroom stuff, PT and marching. The final event of the week was an indoor confidence course. Chief Washburn decided to put Josh's leadership skills to the test, and assigned him 3 of the biggest losers and screw-ups in the division. The confidence course was designed to simulate a ship-board emergency, including donning Oxygen Breathing Apparatus, carry sandbags, and crawl through tiny openings while wearing all their gear. Chief Washburn was amazed when his bunch of screw-ups finished in the middle of the pack, and finished as a team. Later he asked Josh how he did it, and Josh said he told them this one was for pride. If they finished together and in the middle of the pack, he'd be proud of them. Chief Washburn hadn't considered that angle, and congratulated Josh for a job well done. The next week was their first PST. Josh had confided in Chief Washburn that he had applied to the Seal Challenge, and needed outstanding scores to be selected. Chief Washburn told him he'd do what he could. He had to make sure as many good recruits qualified, and the "gazelles" had to take care of themselves. Chief Washburn did help later, when he gave Josh a slip showing competitive PST scores for the SEALs. Josh knew he could easily beat all of them. The next morning, he started at the pool, and decided to set an example for the rest of the recruits, and swam his fastest 500 yard swim he ever had. His final time was 8:00 flat. When he climbed out of the pool, the recruits were cheering him. Next he went to the push-ups stage, and the object was to do as many push-ups as possible in 2 minutes. Josh wanted to do at least 80. The tester said "GO" and Josh started doing pushups as fast as he could. He did 82 before the tester said "Stop" and recorded the number. After a 2 minute rest, it was the Sit-ups next. He knew that he needed at least 80 in 2 minutes. He'd have to work hard to make it. They laid a padded mat down for the sit-ups, which Josh knew would help him. He hyperventilated for the 30 seconds before they were ready to start, then he lay on the mat, and an RDC held his feet and would count for him. The tester said "GO" and Josh brought his elbows to his knees and back down as fast as he could. When the 2 minutes were up, he thought he was going to be sick. He told himself "Suck it up! You can do this - BUDS is going to be worse!" He walked to the chin-up bar, and since he had no time limit, did a dead hang for 30 seconds while he caught his breath, then started chinning up. He stopped at 15, knowing he needed to save energy for the mile and a half run. According to the paper the chief had given him, he needed to beat 10:20. He had run 2 miles in 14 minutes before, so he could do it physically.

He showed up at the track wearing BDU pants, a tee-shirt, and his boots. When the timer said “Go” Jake started running just slightly faster than his 2-mile pace, since he only had to go a mile and a half. Since it was a ¼ mile track, that meant 6 laps. He felt he had enough energy left after his 5<sup>th</sup> lap to kick the pace a little, so he did. By the end of the final lap, he was one hurting puppy, but when he checked his time, it was worth it - 9:54! He had done it. Since he had clobbered the requirements, he knew that he should probably be accepted for BUDS. He took the ASVAB before he signed his enlistment papers, and scored 120 points, which he knew was more than the required 104 points. Since he didn’t have a high school diploma, but a GED, they made him take another test, and he blew it away too. All he had to do was finish Basic with honors, and it was on to BUDS.

Josh had forgotten about the rest of Basic Training, and was soon practicing tying knots. Since Sam had shown him how to suture using a pig’s foot, he found the knot tying to be easy, and helped any recruits who needed it. Chief Washburn was really proud of Josh, since most of the “gazelles” that breezed through basic didn’t take the time to help teach the other recruits, and to be so humble about it. He wrote a glowing report and made sure it made it into Josh’s file. If he made it through BUDS and Hospital Corpsman school, he was recommending he should be selected for OCS, since he already demonstrated leadership abilities the Navy desperately needed. He took his report to the Senior RDC, who agreed with Chief Washburn’s assessment. Josh’s achievements and leadership had been noticed by other RDC’s. He wrote another note and attached it to the letter, seconding the recommendation that Josh be selected for OCS if he made it OK through BUDS and corpsman school. The rest of Basic was a blur until Battle Stations. PT-2 came up, and since he had already scored high enough to qualify for the SEALs, he used his second attempt to motivate several recruits who were right on the ragged edge of not qualifying. He ran with the slower recruits instead of running with the gazelles, and urged, cajoled, and basically did whatever it took to keep them at a pace that would ensure they would pass. There wasn’t much he could do to help them with the push-ups, chin-ups and sit-ups that the other RDC’s weren’t already doing. The Master Chief in charge of the RDC’s, Chief Hernandez, noted that Josh threw away a chance to better his scores in the PST to help other recruits, and wrote another report for Josh’s file. Where some recruit’s files were full of reprimands and other dunning reports, Josh’s was full of glowing reports about how he performed his duties as the RCPO, and had sacrificed any chance to better his score on the PST to get several marginal recruits qualified. Chief Hernandez was worried that he had given Josh’s career as a SEAL the kiss of death, since they were extra hard on anyone who might be a SEAL Officer at some time because they were to lead the rest of the SEALs.

## Chapter 66 - Battle Stations

2200 Monday, first day of week 7

The lights in the barracks flashed on, the RDC's were blowing whistles and beating on trashcans "General Quarters - up and out of your racks. Get dressed right now - MOVE IT!" Josh was expecting this, as was able to get dressed quickly and run outside to muster his division. He knew he was in for 12 hours of intensive drills designed to simulate famous historical incidents, including the sinking of the USS Oklahoma at Pearl Harbor, the 1967 fire and explosion aboard the aircraft carrier USS Forrestal, and another scenario involved going into a smoke-filled room to find a team member. Each scenario was accomplished as a team. In most scenarios they were geared up in a smoky room, and they always had to work as a team. Josh declined a leadership role in the Battle Stations scenarios, saying that other recruits should get a chance to lead. Josh thought the Shaft Alley rescue was the toughest, since the team had to hoist a 185 pound dummy secured on a litter through a vertical shaft, through an obstacle course all without dropping or banging the "victim". The group leader the RDC picked did very well, listened to his shipmates, and they came up with an excellent plan for solving the scenario. The Forrestal scenario was tough too, since they had to get their entire team through a small circular hatch without touching the sides, which in the scenario were supposed to be hot enough to deliver a serious burn. Basically they formed a human chain, and passed everyone through the portal. Josh was glad he was fairly tall and skinny since shorter, heavier recruits had a real problem with the small hatch. As they moved from scenario to scenario, they double-timed it. They learned a little Naval history at each scenario, learned teamwork, and learned to think creatively. The final ceremony of Battle Stations was when the recruits were awarded their Navy ball caps, symbolically changing from Recruits to Sailors.

0930 the next morning came none too soon for Josh, who fell into his rack exhausted. While he slept, he dreamt about the Weapons training during Week 4. He fired an M -16 that had been retrofitted with a laser, and Chief Washburn just shook his head when after firing 1 shot to confirm his zero, put the rest of the rounds in the 100-yard x-ring according to the scoring computer. He didn't have any more trouble with the shotgun either, and when out to the live fire range, where he easily qualified as Sharpshooter. Chief Washburn took him off the line, and talked with him. The story Josh told made Chief Washburn's chin hit his chest. This kid had been in training since before his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, owned a Springfield Armory M -25 that he could shoot 3-4 inch groups at 600 yards with, and was trained by a retired SEAL Instructor, who just turned out to be Master Chief "Bear" Simmons from the JSOC command at MacDill AFB. Bear was legendary among the Navy chiefs. He asked Josh if he wanted to switch his MOS to Sniper, but Josh said he'd rather patch them up then kill them. When Chief Washburn heard that Josh was also a State Certified Paramedic and a licensed Commercial Pilot, he asked Josh when his cape was coming out of the cleaners.

Josh said "My dad makes me look like an amateur!"

“Who’s your dad?”

“Ron Williams.”

“Whoa - wait a minute, this is too much of a coincidence! You’re Ron Williams Son?”

“You’ve heard of him?”

“I’ve got friends in Delta that still talk about that target hanging in their club at MacDill. Is what they said true, your dad was only 13 when he put on that shooting exhibition?”

“That’s what Bear, excuse me Chief Simmons told me.”

“You call Master Chief Simmons “Bear?”

“He’s been retired for years, and he decided that Chief was too formal, especially since his boss Gene Shepard retired there too.”

“Now you’re telling me that General Gene Shepard, the retired JSOC lives in Allakaket Alaska?”

“Yes Chief Washburn, and my Great Uncle Steve Fellows lives there too.”

“Oh, are you sure you’re not telling me a tall tale - Col. Steve Fellows is your Great Uncle?”

“I wouldn’t lie to you Chief. If you’ve got a pen and paper, I’ll give you Bear’s number in Alaska, and you can ask him.” Chief Washburn pulled out his notepad and a pen, and Josh recited Bear’s number from memory. “907- 387-2259 Sometimes when he’s tired he still answers his phone like he did at MacDill.”

2 days later, Josh ran into Chief Washburn again. He had a bemused smile on his face, and he asked Josh to accompany him to his office. When they sat down and closed the door, Chief Washburn said “Young man, I owe you an apology. Chief Simmons straightened me out on a few things, with a minimum of swearing, so he wasn’t mad. The main thing he wanted to know was how you were doing. When I told him, you could hear the pride in his voice. Anyway, I just wanted to congratulate you, and wish you good luck and God speed.”

When they stood, Chief Washburn extended his hand, and Josh shook it, then returned to Attention. When Chief Washburn said “dismissed” he turned and marched out the door.

When Josh awoke the next morning, he wondered why he had a big grin on his face, then got up and got dressed, then mustered the division in preparation to marching to the mess hall. The food wasn’t too bad, but different than he was used to. Josh was really disappointed with his



Beretta 9mm. It felt like a popgun, and wasn't nearly as accurate as the ParaOrd P-14 he left at home. When he complained to Chief Washburn that he couldn't hold a decent group with the Berretta, he asked Josh what he normally shot. He said that when he shot pistol in the town's indoor range, he could shoot a 10-ring group at 25-yards with his personal Para-Ordinance P-14 Limited. Chief Washburn had good news for him. If he made it to the SEALs, and he had an understanding CO, he could ditch the Beretta and carry his P-14 as his personal weapon. Josh had another reason to make it through BUDS now, if he didn't, he'd be stuck carrying that POS Beretta M-9 for the next 6 years. The P-14 carried 14 rounds of .45acp which was the round to carry if you were stuck shooting FMJ ammo, because at least it made bigger holes going through. He spent the rest of week 7 in classroom training when they weren't marching or doing PT. He learned about Navy History, grooming standards, and anti-terrorism measures. He hoped that as a SEAL he'd have a more active role in Anti-terrorism. The September 11<sup>th</sup> bombings really upset him.

During the 8<sup>th</sup> week, he started his administrative out-processing, received his orders to BUDS, which included the expected 2 weeks of in-transit leave, so he could compete in the Superfrog triathlon on Coronado Island right before BUDS. They received some final classroom study on Core Values, then practiced for the Graduation Ceremony. Chief Washburn took Josh aside, and told him he had a choice to make. As the top recruit in his division, he could either march at the head of the formation carrying the division flag, or next to him as the Division Recruit Chief Petty Officer. Josh responded that he wasn't there for the Glory - his goal was to make it into the SEALs, and he'd be proud to march in review next to the chief. Chief Washburn was proud of Josh, and told the #2 recruit that he would march at the head of the division formation. Josh was in for a surprise when his Mom and Dad showed up for graduation. He didn't see them until after his division was dismissed. Ron gave his son a big hug, and Nancy cried. Chief Washburn saw them, and once he had greeted his parents, Chief Washburn walked up, and Josh introduced them. He stunned Josh by saying "Mr. Williams, may I shake your hand. I always wanted to meet you after hearing of your exploits at MacDill. Sir, you should be very proud of your son. He was the top recruit, but elected to march next to me as the Recruit Chief Petty Officer instead."

"Thanks, Chief. Bear gave us a heads-up after your call. Yes, you're right, we're very proud of Josh. Bear told me he's been accepted to BUDS in 2 weeks."

"Yes sir, 5 of our recruits were accepted to BUDS, and he had the highest scores of all of them."

"Thank you Chief, nice meeting you!"

Chief Washburn turned to Nancy, tipped his hat and said "Ma'am." then turned and left. He had other recruit's parents to see. Ron, Nancy, and Josh visited for a while, and Ron said that his brothers and sister said hi, and wished they could have come, but seats were limited. When it came time to leave, Ron and Nancy hugged their son, and said they'd see him at BUDS graduation. That afternoon, he boarded an aircraft bound for San Diego. He checked in early at

the SEAL training base at Coronado Island, and received permission to compete in the Superfrog, since he was still on leave, and had already registered. There was a note from Bear to be expecting something soon. The next day Bear showed up at the gate, he'd flown MAC from Elmendorf to NAS North Island, which was the closest airbase to the SEAL command on Coronado. One of the instructors met him at North Island, and they caught up on old times. Bear had to pick up a huge package which he told his buddy contained a purpose-built triathlon bike, and all the gear necessary to compete in Superfrog. His buddy laughed and said "Aren't you a little old for that Bear?"

He laughed and said "It's not for me. I've been working with this kid to get him ready for BUDS, and when he heard that Superfrog was this week, he decided to compete. He just finished basic, and should be on Transit leave until the next class starts."

"Cool, we could use more gung-ho kids in the SEALS."

Bear remembered that his buddy wasn't involved in BUDS training anymore, at least as a direct instructor, and told him Josh's story.

"Impressive kid, Bear - I hope he makes it. I won't say anything to the other instructors, because I don't want to jinx his chances of making it. I can't believe you made him swim in 40 degree water. Sometimes the medical officers make us curtail our water activities when the water gets too cold in winter to avoid killing a recruit by hypothermia. You had him swimming a mile in 40 degree water? What were you thinking?"

"If he could handle 40 degree water, the 60 degree water around here would seem like a bathtub to him - I just wanted to stack the deck in his favor because I remember how much you Sadists liked to freeze us half to death in the ocean to get us to quit."

"Sounds like you might be on to something Bear, we'll see in 4 weeks if it worked."

They drove onto the base, and Josh was stunned to see Bear getting out of a Humvee, and manhandle a huge box out of the back. He yelled at Josh to give him some help, and he double-timed it over there. They took the box into Visitor's quarters, where they'd stashed Josh until his class, and Bear opened the box. Josh was amazed to see the frame and wheels of a purpose built triathlon bike, and all the rest of the gear he needed to compete in Superfrog. They spent the rest of the day assembling and fitting the bike. Finally Josh tried on his Triathlon uniform, and followed the Humvee around the base to try out the bike. Bear got permission to take Josh off the base for some road work, and get him up to speed with the road bike. They drove up and down the Silver strand until Josh was exhausted. Bear was amazed at how fast Josh could ride that bike behind the Hummer. Since he was used to a bike that weighed almost twice as much, Josh was able to cruise at 25 mph, sprint to 40mph, and hold 30 mph for short distances. Finally they put the bike up, and introduced Josh to the Pacific Ocean. It took him a while to adjust to the open ocean until Bear joined him and showed him the rough water crawl. It was a

variation on the Australian Crawl that kept you from swallowing too much water. They spent the rest of the day swimming inside and outside the surf zone, learning how to time and attack the waves, since they had to start on the beach, run out into the deep water, and swim out to a pylon and back for the water portion of the race. The swim was divided into 2 1,000-yard open ocean swims, separated by two 100-yard runs in soft sand, so Bear's next task was to teach Josh how to run in soft sand. They ran and jogged up and down the beach, and Bear ran Josh up and down some sand dunes to build his endurance. At the end of the day, Josh hurt in muscles he didn't even know he had. The bike ride was 5 11-mile laps around the base on flat but varying surfaces ranging from smooth to rough. Josh knew he could handle the rough stuff, since he had all that practice on his mountain bike. The Speed Demons might get ahead of him on the smooth sections, but he should catch them in the rough stuff. The part that Josh dreaded was the 13-mile run on sand, varying between hard and soft sand. He hoped to finish in the middle of the pack, but just wanted to finish. Josh was competing in the male 18-29 class on the 20<sup>th</sup>, which was 3 days away. Bear told Josh to load up on the carbs for the next couple of days, but not to overeat, and to make sure he ate plenty of bananas since he'd need the potassium.

Josh lined up on the beach the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, and Lt.(SEAL) Moki Martin (ret.) held the starter's pistol for the run/swim event. With the crack of the pistol, 100 competitors raced through the sand to the ocean. Ron was in the first group to hit the water, and managed to swim the first leg in fairly good position. The water was cold and rough, but not any rougher than when they had practiced further south at the Silver Strand. He lost 2 positions during the 100-yard sand run, but caught them in the ocean. When they swam back in, there was another 100-yard run to the transition area. Josh had an easy transition since he was already wearing a triathlon suit, and slipped into his cycling/running shoes, climbed aboard his bike, and headed out for the first lap. He made up 2 positions in the transition area due to his top-notch triathlon equipment. He maintained his position during the first lap, then during the second lap, was passed by a group of 5 faster riders. Since he was on smooth road, he didn't try to keep up, and caught them when the pavement turned rough. He decided to use the group ahead of him to break the wind and save his strength, so he didn't pass them, since they would probably take off again once they were on smooth pavement. At the end of lap 1, he grabbed a bottle of Gatorade from Bear, who was there to cheer him on, and keep him hydrated. He had 2 water bottles on his frame, but the Gatorade helped. At the end of each lap, Bear held up a sign showing his overall position, and handed him a bottle of Gatorade every other lap.

The end of the 5<sup>th</sup> lap ended in the transition area, and all Josh had to do was secure his bike and start running. The run course was 13 miles long, broken up into 6 2.2-mile laps that varied between hard pack and soft sand. They quickly transitioned to sand, and soon were in deep sand. He gutted it out, and made up for lost time on the hard-packed sand. After the first lap, he was glad to see Bear, who held up a sign that said he was 5<sup>th</sup> in class, and 25<sup>th</sup> overall, then handed him a bottle of Gatorade. Josh inhaled most of it as he headed back onto the sand. At the end of lap #2, Bear's signboard said he was 6<sup>th</sup> in class and 30<sup>th</sup> overall. He wondered who had passed him, and decided to speed up slightly. At the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lap, his extra speed paid off, he was back in 5<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> overall. He didn't know if he could keep up this pace, and

hoped the other runners were tiring too. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> lap, Bear's sign had him still in 5<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> overall. He grabbed a paper cup full of Gatorade, and kept running. Right in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> lap, he narrowly avoided catastrophe, when 2 runners ahead of him collided and went down. He had to jump over them, since he was too close to swerve around them. He landed on his feet, and kept running. The signboard at the end of lap five reflected the accident, he was 4<sup>th</sup> in class, and 22<sup>nd</sup> overall. He grabbed another cup of Gatorade from Bear, and knowing that he only had 1 more lap to complete, kicked the speed up. He could see the finish line just ahead of him at the end of lap 6, and willed himself across it, then collapsed into the sand. Bear helped him back up, and helped him walk it off. Bear told him that he thought that Josh had finished 4<sup>th</sup> in class, and 20<sup>th</sup> overall. Once the last racer crossed the line half an hour later, they gathered around Lt. Martin, who was reading numbers off his clipboard that corresponded to the racer's entry numbers. He finally got to Josh's number, and confirmed Bear's evaluation. Bear gave Josh one of his trademark Bear hugs, then they went to the tent and sat in the shade. 15 minutes later, Josh was looking up into the face of Moki Martin. Josh stood up, and Moki said "I heard you're a new Seaman Recruit, and you applied for BUDS. Bravo Zulu son, and good luck in BUDS." Moki stuck out his hand and shook Josh's. Then he turned to Bear "Long time no see Chief. I see your protégée seems to be highly motivated and well trained. Well Done Chief - see you later!" Bear and Moki exchanged a "guy hug" and Moki moved on to talk to other competitors and fellow SEALS. Bear's friend came up, and introduced himself. Josh was exhausted, but still stood up.

"Son, you showed a lot of heart out there, If you can do that in BUDS, and survive Hell Week, I think you'd make a good SEAL. Bear tells me you're applying for the Special Forces Medical Technician program. We need a bunch of new medics to take care of the new teams Congress had authorized the Navy and Special Forces to form up. Make us proud!"

Since Bear's friend was in civvies, and not wearing any rank insignia, Josh said "I'll do my best Sir" and they shook hands. Once he left, Josh collapsed onto a cot and sipped ice water while Bear closely monitored his condition during the extended cool-down period mandated by the race safety rules. 2 hours later when they released the racers, Bear told Josh that he was taking him out to dinner, but first they had to go back to Visitor Quarters, put up his stuff, and take a shower, because anyone downwind of him would think there was a dead seagull hiding somewhere nearby. Josh laughed, and they piled into the jeep, and drove with the windows open all the way back to Visitor's Quarters.

## Chapter 67 - BUDS

Once Josh got inside his room, and got a good whiff of himself, he hurried into the shower, then stuffed his Triathlon suit into a trash bag (the suit was the cause of the dead seagull smell - he'd been swimming in salt water and sweating in it for almost a day). Once he was squared away, he got dressed in civvies for maybe the last time in a long time, and checked outside. Bear and his friend were leaning against the Hummer talking. Josh opened his door, then secured it and walked to the Hummer. Bear teased him "What did you do with the seagull?"

"I threw my triathlon suit in a trash bag and threw it out."

"I can see why you would want to do that, I'm not even sure that a good laundry could get that stench out!"

They climbed into Troy's Humvee. Bear finally introduced his friend as Master Chief Troy Piper, and a SEAL instructor from Coronado. Josh said "Chief Piper, nice to meet you."

"Josh, after tonight, we can have no further contact unless I address you first, or it would be a serious breach of protocol since you're still a tadpole."

"Aye, Aye Chief!"

They drove off the island, to a killer steakhouse that Troy knew about. When they pulled into the parking lot, Josh observed that the restaurant must cater to SEALs. Troy asked Josh why he thought so.

"Every vehicle in the parking lot has a base sticker, and they're either Jeeps, Hummers, or motorcycles. How many SEALs do you know that drive a Volvo sedan?"

Troy looked around. Josh was right, which meant that if he could spot it, so could a terrorist, so he'd have to say something to the base commander about making the base stickers for SEALs less obvious, or eliminating base stickers on SEAL's personal vehicles and replacing them with temporary window placards. When they got inside, Josh was sure the place catered to SEALs. All the waitresses were in their 20's, stunningly beautiful, and wore uniforms with low necklines that accentuated their physical attributes. One of the prettiest waitresses walked over to Troy and gave him a big hug and a kiss, and showed them to their table in the corner. Josh thought "Wow - there are definitely some fringe benefits with this job!" Troy ordered 3 ranch-cut ribeye steaks with all the trimmings, and a pitcher of beer and 3 glasses. Once the waitress left, Josh discretely coughed and whispered to Troy "I'm under age."

"I know, but as Navy Enlisted personnel, the minimum age for drinking on base is 18, so no one hassles anyone here about their age as long as we keep it real."

“Ok Chief.”

15 minutes later 3 huge steaks grilled to perfection with huge baskets of fries, and a pitcher of Coors with 3 glasses were set on the table by the same beautiful waitress. Since Josh was seated across the table from where she set the plates down, when she leaned over to set the plates down, Josh got a better look at her than he planned on. Finally he forced his eyes to her nameplate then her face. “Thanks Kathy” he stammered.

She smiled sweetly said “Anything I can get the 3 of you?”

Josh tried really hard not to blush - what he was thinking could get him in serious trouble!

The 2 SEALS chowed down like they hadn’t eaten in a week, and Josh followed their lead. Later that night, Troy dropped Josh off at the Visitor’s quarters, and told him to report in tomorrow for Pre-BUDS. It was a 2-week period to make sure everyone was physically suited to complete BUDS. BEAR suggested that he wear a spotlessly clean dress uniform and perfectly polished shoes. He had already gotten a haircut the day before, so he was good to go. His package was complete and organized. Bear strongly suggested that he didn’t stick out, and for god’s sake, never be the last person to finish an evolution, that would bring down the wrath of the SEAL Instructors, who could be brutal with Tadpoles. Bear told him to go right to bed; he could guarantee that was the last full night of sleep he’d get for a while.

The next morning, he was up at 0700 for a scheduled check-in of 0800 in deference to the tadpoles that flew in last night. From here on out, the tadpoles’ day started at 0600, and they got to go to bed by 2200 if they hadn’t incurred the wrath of one of the instructors. After initial in-processing, the tadpoles as they were called were told to get into their BDUs, since they were going to start PT in 15 minutes. They had exactly 2 weeks until the next BUDS class would start, so they had to make the most of it. Josh felt ready already, but knew that they would push him harder than ever before. He vowed that he would survive BUDS or be taken out in a stretcher, he wasn’t going to quit - he wasn’t even going to think of that word anymore. The harassment started as soon as they had formed up for calisthenics. The SEAL instructors yelled at them using bullhorns, and instead of just doing jumping jacks, they started right on in with first jumping jacks, pushups, and sit-ups using whistle drills. 1 blast meant assume the position for pushups, 2 meant sit-ups, and 3 meant jumping jacks, and they were to continue to do the exercise until they heard a whistle switching the exercise. Josh thought, “Well, it’s started already, but that just means it would be over sooner.” Meanwhile the other instructors were yelling into their bullhorns that their agony had just begun. After their “Indoctrination phase” as the chief instructor called it, they were to assemble at the pool for their swimming tests. They were double-timed back to the barracks to change into swim gear, then double-timed to the pool, and spent the rest of the afternoon trying not to drown.

The next morning they were up at 0600 for a quick breakfast, then they were introduced to the soft sand around the training area. Josh was glad that he had practiced running in the soft sand,

and stayed towards the head of the pack, but never leading. When they finished that, the instructors decided to introduce this group to “surf torture” early and walked the entire group into the 63 degree Pacific surf, told them to link arms and sit down with their backs to the surf. They were only in for 5 minutes but to some trainees, it felt like forever. When they were called out of the water, the instructors said “better get used to being cold, wet and covered with sand, you’ve got another 6 weeks of this stuff.” Then they ran them up and down the beach some more to “toughen them up.” Later in the afternoon, it was back into the pool. At the end of the 2 weeks, they did a qualifying PST again to drop anyone who couldn’t pass. Josh got nervous because he thought he already had a guaranteed slot, but pushed those fears aside, and said that this was a brand new ball game, and set out to perform his best. This time the instructors insisted on a side or breast stroke for the 500-yard swim. Josh decided to use the breast stroke, because it was marginally faster, and he could qualify easily, and did so with a 10:00 time. Next the pushups and sit-ups, and he equaled his previous marks of 80 each in 2 minutes. The chin-ups seemed easier this time, and he did 20. He was elated to realize he had qualified for BUDS.

Several tadpoles couldn’t hack the obstacle course, and couldn’t finish in the required time. Josh was glad that Bear had made him practice on an older design, so he was able to complete the course in the middle of the pack, and easily qualified. He excelled in the pool since he was a strong swimmer. When they introduced them to the IBS boats, there was an audible groan from the group of trainees, several of them had been rolled back for medical reasons from the last class, and learned to loathe every square inch of the hated rubber boats. The instructors showed them how to get the boats through the surf, and how to land the boats and other boat-handling skills. The instructors told them they were getting off easy. During the winter the surf was much higher, making it much harder to handle the boats. Once they had finished the pre-BUDS, the instructors posted the list of the tadpoles who were invited to BUDS, the rest had to go back to the fleet and try again later. Josh saw his name on the list and said a quick prayer of thanks. The instructors told them not to get too cocky, because tomorrow started the really hard stuff. Josh remembered the sign on the gate coming in “The only easy day was yesterday!” - Someone knew what they were talking about!

The next day, the 100 tadpoles started Phase I of BUDS, and they never stopped running. They double-timed to and from each evolution, and the requirements for each evolution got progressively tougher and tougher. The Instructors were always ready to pounce on any Tadpole that showed any signs of weakness, so Josh quickly learned the safest spot was the middle of the pack. Josh was glad he went through BUDS as an enlisted sailor, because the officers seemed to be getting more than their share of harassment. They ran 4 miles in the sand wearing their heavy boots, and had 2 timed runs per week. Several tadpoles couldn’t keep up and were dropped in the first week as the time allowed to complete each evolution decreased. The 2 mile swim in the ocean with fins was easy for Josh, thanks to Bear insisting on all that swimming in the lake, and his triathlon experience, but again, some of the tadpoles were dropped when they couldn’t meet the time requirements. Several times a day they were led to the surf zone for some more surf torture. Josh realized that if he didn’t think about how cold he

was, it really didn't bother him. He shivered with the rest of them, but it didn't affect his morale or motivation to complete BUDS and earn his Budweiser. He had no problem with the skills tests, including underwater knot tying. He was lucky that most of his boat crew stayed together until Hell Week, and no one dropped. Josh barely made the 50-yard underwater swim, but he did make it. He helped the members of his boat crew with the first aid and knot tying, realizing that if his boat crew stayed together, it meant less work for him. He thought the drown-proofing training was fun. The part he hated was carrying those @#\$@#\$ boats everywhere on top of their heads, since he was one of the taller members of his boat crew. Hell Week was a complete surprise to Josh, who'd lost all track of time in the endless evolutions. All he thought about was getting through the current evolution, and the fact that they couldn't kill him.

Sunday night they were awakened by the sounds of explosives and full-auto fire, and were ordered out of their bunks, and were told to stand at attention. For the next week, they'd be lucky to get 2 hours of sleep per night, and their only respite from the endless grind of cold, wet sandy miserable existence was 4 visits per day to the mess hall, where they ate huge meals to compensate for the lack of sleep. The Instructors were on the remaining tadpoles like a pack of sharks, and harassed them constantly. Josh was cold, wet miserable, and suffered from chafing caused by the sand and surf. He realized the only way he was going to get through all this was to ignore the pain and discomfort. After a while, the surf torture felt good to him. What he didn't realize is the instructors knew that the salt water was keeping their chafed skin from getting any worse. The tadpoles had daily medical checks, and several were pulled out with stress fractures they had hidden from the instructors, because they wanted to complete training and earn their Budweiser. Josh was now sprained, bruised, and chafed, but the medics said that he could continue, and that was all he cared about. By the middle of the week, the survivors were on autopilot, and responded like robots to any command without thinking. The combination of sleep deprivation, cold, and misery were driving the tadpoles to dig deep within themselves to muster the will to continue. Josh almost quit once when he was thrown from the boat when they tried to land on the rocks. He almost drowned, but wasn't injured otherwise, still the incident scared him. He realized he could die out here, and all it would take was a freak accident. The instructor talked to him, assured him that he could remain in the program since he wasn't injured, and was told to get his butt back with his boat crew. Josh's boat crew remained intact until Thursday "So Solly Day" when four of them couldn't take the cold anymore during surf torture and snapped. The instructors combined the remnants of Josh's crew with another crew. Now that he wasn't the tallest tadpole in his boat crew, he was more comfortable carrying the heavy boat. The instructors piled sand into the boat with a shovel, and rode on top to add extra weight. They did a test of their mental acuity by marching the boat crews past several land marks, and telling the crews what they were. Later, when they came back, they had to struggle to remember where they were. By now the medics were using aggressive methods to keep tadpoles in the class, since they were almost through. Several tadpoles were wearing the equivalent of pantyhose to stop the damage to their legs. Several had large parts of their anatomy covered with bandages and splints. The tadpoles resembled the walking wounded, but they wouldn't quit. Finally on Friday morning, the instructors got



together and decided to end Hell Week early, since no one had dropped out since the last big crash, and all they'd do by continuing for a couple of extra hours was to further injure the trainees. When they were told the good news, several trainees broke down and cried. Several were put on stretchers and transported to the base infirmary. The rest were carefully taken to the mess hall for a light meal, helped to shower and change, and put to bed, with instructors and medics supervising in case they fell asleep with an arm or leg out of their racks, or in a position that would cause them further injury. They let them sleep the rest of the day, and when they awoke, they were fed again, and visited by the medics, who bandaged and took care of their aches and pains with large doses of ibuprofen, which had come to be called SEAL candy, since they popped them like candy during training. They gradually recovered and resumed training on Monday.

## Chapter 68 - Phase II

Monday dawned bright and early. Josh had healed from his injuries, and most of the Tadpoles were returned to training. They met out on the parade ground for more PT. The instructors kept up the pressure, reducing the maximum qualifying times for each evolution. Josh was one of the best swimmers left and usually finished 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> on the 4-mile open ocean swim. He actually liked swimming more than the other evolutions, including long runs in soft sand. One good thing was the instructors stopped the Circus, or Burn-out PT, and other means of deliberately breaking down the tadpoles, and concentrated on turning the tadpoles into SEALs. The only way you'd get dropped now was to fail to complete an evolution, or fail a major test like the dive tank. Josh was looking forward to the diving training. Bear said that was the most fun he had as a SEAL, but the actual ops were tough, since you were swimming for hours in cold murky water with only a swim board with a compass and a clock to guide you. The diving training started easy enough, open circuit diving in the pool. They learned how to don their gear underwater, how to clear their mask, how to put it on right by feel alone. The diving tasks got more and more difficult, culminating with the Combat Training Tank, which allowed the instructors to view the tadpoles, and increased the harassment the Instructors could provide.

One such scenario simulates the effects of being caught in a strong surge when the Diving instructors tumble the tadpoles as if they were in a washing machine, rip their masks and regulators off, and then they have to recover, put their mask and regulator back on without panicking and rocketing to the surface. Several tadpoles panicked, and they were either rolled back or sent back to the fleet. Josh was forewarned about this by Bear, and didn't panic. Once the instructor thoroughly thrashed Josh, he grabbed his mask, felt for the purge valve, put it on right side up, and proceeded to locate his regulator and untangle the hoses, all the while holding his breath near the bottom of the tank. One of the instructors who were watching the tadpoles through a viewing port commented that Josh looked pretty calm in the water. Troy almost said something, and then realized it would only hurt Josh's chances if the other Instructors knew that Bear had been training him for over a year, and he could take whatever they dished out.

Once they completed the "shark attack" scenario, they started spending more and more time in the classroom, starting with the physics of diving. The Draeger LAR V closed circuit breathing apparatus used 100% pure oxygen, a rebreather, and a CO2 scrubber so it didn't leave a trail of bubbles on the surface to make it easier to spot the diver in the water. The problem with the Draeger was it was depth-limited, and if you dove too deep, you could actually get oxygen poisoning. During the classroom phase, they explained the physics and physiology of diving. They practiced what they learned in the pool and in the open ocean. Josh thought underwater navigation was hard, until it clicked in his mind and he got it. If he knew how far he traveled with each kick, and the bearing he traveled on, and how many kicks per minute he maintained, he could navigate with a compass and clock fairly accurately. Josh thought it was too bad GPS didn't work too well under water. The dives got more complex and difficult, but Josh managed to stay ahead of the curve.

Other tadpoles weren't so lucky, and the size of the class continued to shrink. Several failed tests in the hyperbaric chamber, some failed to complete evolutions like the diving bell that taught the SEAL candidate the free ascent technique, which was necessary if their lung failed, or if they had to exit a submarine in an emergency. During this time, the physical standards increased slowly, and there were a few who couldn't keep up, and were rolled over or dropped. Josh had a scare when he failed an evolution. His time on the obstacle course was slightly below standard, and he was called in for a counseling session. The team medic confirmed that the reason he was having problems with the obstacle course was a deep thigh bruise incurred during Hell Week that was still healing. Since the rest of his scores were outstanding, the instructors voted to let him continue the program, but he had just used his 1 free pass. The next failure would result in him being rolled back or dropped. Josh reported to the infirmary where the docs treated his thigh bruise with advanced therapy treatments to speed healing. They excused him from PT for 2 days to let the bruise finish healing, but he still attended all classes and underwater evolutions, since they didn't involve his injury, which resulted from repeated impacts with the top rail of the low fence in the obstacle course. When the bruise healed, he was back to 100%. He breezed through the daytime dives, but the night time dives gave him the willies, but he did them.

Finally he made it through Phase II and on to Phase III - the land warfare phase. The SEALs used the crawl, walk run principle to teach land warfare. Josh breezed through the marksmanship part of the phase, and was so good with the M -16 that he qualified Expert. They spent time in the classroom learning Immediate Action drills, and then went into the field and practiced it. Josh's Militia training came back to him suddenly, and he realized that Bear was teaching SEAL tactics to the militia members, since he started remembering stuff Bear had told him over a year ago. Suddenly it made sense. He liked firing the M -60, but preferred firing the long rifles. He was bummed when they only spent 1 day with the M -14, which was the fully automatic version of the M-1a Springfield Armory rifle. With the open sights, he was shooting groups as small as the instructor was. Finally the head instructor took him aside, and Josh told him he had previous weapons training, and he routinely shot an M -25 at the 600 yard range at Alaska Survival Inc. The instructor had heard about that, and suddenly everything about Josh clicked. He thanked Josh and told him to rejoin training. His old buddy Bear must have had a hand in training this kid. He thought he saw him at Superfrog, but he didn't recognize him. Josh really enjoyed playing with the high explosives. One milestone/hurdle to overcome during Phase III was a 14-mile run and a 5.5 mile swim. They were for completion only, but as usual, superior performance avoided the butt-chewing that the last couple of tadpoles received. Josh made sure that he finished well ahead of the last man, but he wasn't the first man to finish either.

With the start of Week 5, they moved from Coronado to San Clemente Island, where they got to practice everything they learned, and the instructors devised devious "training" exercises. By now, Josh was past caring, and knew that if he wanted to be a SEAL, he had to survive the next couple of months, and then came Graduation. Josh preformed well enough to make it through every evolution, which required more and more from him. He was doing things that 6 months

ago he would have thought were impossible. More and more of the exercises occurred at night, since the SEALs preferred to work at night. They practiced combat beach reconnaissance, charge emplacement which included breath-holding diving to 20 feet. They ran night patrols, ambushes, and direct action raids. Everything except the beach recon techniques was review for Josh, but he learned with a new intensity, since this was the bread and butter of what SEALs were. The final exercise was a Full Mission Profile Field Exercise over a 5 day/night period, which the instructors made as real as possible. They used most of the skills they had learned over the last 6 months. Josh was exhilarated to be finally doing what SEALs did. The instructors were pleased with his performance and leadership abilities. They rotated leaders throughout the exercise to find out who had it, and who didn't. Some men were better at point, and some were better leaders. Once they finished the field-ex, they were transported back to Coronado, and then it was time for Graduation.

They mustered out to the parade ground of the Naval Special Warfare Center, and received their Budweisers. Josh looked up when they were dismissed to see his Mom, Dad and Bear in the stands cheering. They made their way onto the field, and Bear was the first to greet Josh. "Well done Sailor!" Bear swept Josh off his feet in a bear hug, then Ron and Nancy gathered around him. The CO of the NSWC showed up and said "Bear, I thought that was you. I guess it was your training that helped Josh through BUDS."

"Sir, I gave him the knowledge, but it was heart that got Josh through BUDS."

"You should be very proud of Josh, he was one of our outstanding recruits. I understand you wanted to be a Special Forces Corpsman?"

Josh saluted and said "Yes Sir!"

Admiral Johnson returned the salute and said "Once you've completed your probationary period in the teams, I fully expect you to apply for OCS. I read your package, and I'm attaching an endorsement to the rest of your reports recommending you for OCS. Don't let me down!"

"No Sir, I won't let you down!" Josh saluted again, and the admiral returned his salute and left.

Ron stood there amazed. The CO of the NSWC was endorsing Josh's application for OCS, which meant that as soon as he completed A school, and served his probationary period, he'd be pulled out of a team, and transformed from a sailor to an "officer and a gentleman."

2 days later, Bear and Troy took Josh with his brand new Budweiser back to the same restaurant. Kathy was working, and when she saw the "cherry" she practically threw herself at him. He got a very friendly hug, and the lack of female companionship over the last 6 months resulted in an obvious reaction. Kathy smiled and held him tighter, then whispered in his ear, and gave him a big kiss. After dinner, Josh asked if he could be excused. Troy had been a new SEAL once, and knew what was going on. He handed Josh a pack of condoms and told him to

enjoy himself but make sure he was back on base by 0800 tomorrow for muster, he'd square it with the CO. Later that evening Josh was introduced to a new form of SEAL PT. He made it back to the base before 0800, since Kathy dropped him off, and barely had time to change into a fresh uniform and wipe the lipstick off his face before muster. After Breakfast, Troy asked Josh if he had a good time, and if he got it out of his system. He highly suggested not to try that again as long as he was a probationary SEAL, because he could get tossed from the Teams for just about any reason while on probation, including being late for muster.

## Chapter 69 - Back Home on the Ranch

Life in Allakaket went on while Josh was away in the Navy. Sarah and Neil got married while Josh was in BUDS and couldn't get away. They felt bad, but Josh wrote and told them to go ahead, he wouldn't be getting much if any leave for the next year. Nancy was feeling older, the only one of their kids left at home was David, who had just turned 17, so she knew he would be home another year. Jake and Diane finally managed to get pregnant, and Diane was almost 6 months pregnant, so Bear decided she could stop jogging. Jake flew for Doc's Lodge all Hunting Season, and every hunter he guided got a nice Caribou. He took to wearing his double shoulder holster full time, and even shot a bear near the cabin. He skinned and brain tanned it, and used it as a throw rug in their new home in front of the fireplace. Once he was done for the season, he helped Diane around the house, since she had lost the ability to see her shoes, and her back was killing her. Between the bear and a Caribou he'd taken at the end of the season, they were set for the winter. Financially they were more than set, and were able to save almost \$50 thousand that year. If he could bank 50 grand per year for the next 20 years, plus the almost \$5 mil he had in the bank, he'd have close to \$10 million in the bank. He didn't need the money, but the number gave him some security. They used the basement of their house as an emergency shelter/pantry, and slowly stocked it full of staples, canned meat, and canned vegetables from their garden.

Diane informed Jake that she was staying home this winter, and doubted she could wear the 5-point seatbelts. She suggested they get a dog, and when a friend of theirs Husky got pregnant, they offered to give them 1 pup from the litter in a couple of months, after they were weaned. The only thing they were sure of was the pups weren't purebred Husky, since their dog had gotten out of her kennel and gotten pregnant by one of the neighborhood dogs. Jake and Diane didn't care, most of the dogs in the neighborhood were even-tempered mutts. With Josh gone to the Navy, Bear's Sniper Team problem was resolved until Diane got pregnant. David was coming along, but wasn't as good of a shot as Josh. David seemed to act like the proverbial "youngest kid" and took forever to grow up. Bear started working on that, and got him working out when he wasn't working for the lodge. He had to pick up the slack at the lodge during hunting season, since Sarah wasn't working there anymore since they were seriously working on starting a family, and the smell of fish guts wasn't conducive to romance. When everyone had time, they went to Bear's shooting range just to stay in practice.

Ralph and Sam concentrated on raising Bert (5) and Larry (4). Sam started homeschooling them using a pre-school/kindergarten curriculum that Nancy had used. They quickly learned simple counting skills and the alphabet. They loved it when Sam read it to them while Oliver lay between them on the bearskin rug. Ralph was flying a couple of days a week for Allakaket Airlines, and seriously considering going into business building Snow Bugs, especially when he got a letter from the State of Alaska asking about the vehicles. The game wardens and park rangers could use a light fast vehicle to patrol in, and the heater would greatly improve officer comfort. The cab would allow them to carry a better radio, and weapons for their protection.

What sold them was when Ralph mentioned the fact that it could pull a fairly heavy sled over the snow as fast as you cared to go, and could easily travel at 40mph with a light load. They were interested in the Kevlar panel protection option, because sometimes they ran into poachers who wouldn't hesitate to shoot at a warden.

Finally the state placed an initial order of 20 units for the price quoted, \$12,000 per copy. Ralph figured he'd clear \$4K per unit, or \$80 grand for the contract. If he had to hire people to build it that would cut into his profit margin, but if he could keep them busy, he'd make his money back in sales volume. Since the vehicle was for off-road use only, he didn't have to mess with the DOT or anyone, and since he was using Chenowith frames that had already been safety tested, all he had to do was build them and warranty them for a year. Ralph contacted his suppliers, and if he ordered 20 units at a time, he'd get much better pricing. If he ordered 50 units, he'd really save money. Ralph spotted a huge unused hangar that was big enough to hold a small assembly line, and called Ron. He wasn't using it for the airline, and made Ralph an offer he couldn't refuse. Instead of charging monthly rent up front, he wanted 10% of Ralph's profits. That way if things went bust, Ralph wouldn't lose money paying rent, and if things got really good, Ron would collect way more than the building would rent for. To Ralph it was a win-win situation, and took him up on the offer. He placed ads in the paper, and soon he had an experienced work crew of out-of-work mechanics and factory workers. He used some of the money Doc gave them to set up his factory with air tools, a rolling assembly line, and office equipment.

Finally the parts started arriving, and they got going assembling the Snow Bugs. They bought a 2-seater dune buggy frame from Chenowith with the 5-point restraint system brackets installed, and ordered the Kevlar panels from the same supplier. He ordered the completed motors and transmissions from VW parts. Since the State of Alaska wanted to run the Snow Bugs on pump gas, Ralph ordered 1600 cc motors set up for 85 octane gasoline instead of Avgas, which saved him \$200 per motor since they installed a stock camshaft, crank and pistons instead of the radical setup. His small group of workers had them built in 2 weeks, and airlifted them to Anchorage for the state to take delivery of them. Once the state took delivery, orders started pouring in from all over the state and Canada, both from State and Federal Government agencies, and individuals. All of a sudden, he had a backlog of 100 orders, and needed to cut costs, so he called all his suppliers, and got quotes for 100-unit pricing. They dropped their prices an additional 30% and Chenowith volunteered to pay shipping to Anchorage for their frames. Since their frames were light but bulky, the additional savings were small, but Ralph took them up on it.

As the orders continued to pour in, Ralph realized that this was becoming a year-round business, and needed to talk to Sam and Ron. Sam was OK with it since the boys were old enough that they weren't a big hassle to take care of, and Ron was happy as a clam. With Jake flying year-round for Allakaket Airlines except for hunting season, he didn't need Ralph to fly for them. He said he'd keep him on the books, and available as Emergency Relief only, and keep the same deal they had for the \$1 lease of the SuperGoose. Ralph asked Ron to work up a

quote for shipping Snow Bugs to and from Anchorage using the Super Stallion or the Chinook. Since the vehicles were light, if they were packed correctly into an 8-unit or 10-unit crate, the Super Stallion would be their best bet. Ralph set about designing a 10-unit shipping crate since the Super Stallion could carry 36,000 pounds, and each fully assembled Snow Bug only weighed maybe 2,000 pounds. He built a rack to stack the SB's on top of each other with drive-up ramps. He'd load them from opposite sides, so the engines would counterbalance each other. He built another shipping crate to fly 20 frames at once to Allakaket from Anchorage. Ron reminded Ralph that he needed product liability insurance, and he told Ron that he'd already taken care of that when he filed his incorporation papers with the state. The name Snow Bugs Inc. was available, and the trademark Snow Bug didn't infringe on an existing trademark, so he was all set.

Ralph offered 2 models of the Snow Bug, a 2-seater or a 4-seater. The 2-seater sold for \$11,899.00 each, and the 4-seaters sold for \$13,995.00 each FOB Anchorage or Fairbanks. Allakaket Airlines could ship units to other areas in Alaska on a space available basis for an additional charge. Ralph talked to Ron, who thought that was an excellent idea, because sometimes their planes flew with empty cargo areas to Anchorage or Fairbanks. 6 months after he started selling them, a snowmobile dealer with stores in Anchorage and Fairbanks asked him if he could become a dealership for his product. Ralph called Ron and BA, and the 4 of them met in Anchorage to negotiate the deal. BA and Ron did most of the talking, since they were shrewd negotiators, and this guy had a reputation of being a barracuda in negotiations. Finally they agreed on a fixed-price contract based on units ordered. The dealer asked for flooring, which they refused, since he could get favorable terms from a bank for a commercial loan, and get the bank to take the risk. Next he asked for free shipping, which the also refused, since they were giving him a good price per unit. Finally the three of them met separately before they signed the contract.

"Ralph, this guy's a snake, but a predictable snake. I've reviewed the contract, and it's as airtight as we can make it. 2 words of warning: Never accept anything from the dealership without his signature on it, and never extend him credit. He loves to slow-pay all his accounts, and makes most of his money by paying late, and demanding favorable credit terms."

"BA, if he's such a snake, why do I want to do business with him?"

"Because he's got the largest customer base in Alaska for snowmobiles. He can easily sell 100 units per month."

"OK, if you say so. Just make sure he understands that unless he personally signs an order, it won't get filled, and the contract terms are not negotiable and are fixed, so he better not even think about asking for credit. Matter of fact, I want to be paid for all units he orders before they are physically shipped to him."

"I can take care of that Ralph. I agree, I wouldn't trust him as far as we could throw him



either.”

BA walked back into the meeting room “Ok, 2 last things. This is a paid-in advance contract. The balance for each shipment must be paid in full, and transferred to our account by 5:00pm the business day before the order ships. Failure to pay for the order by 5:00 the business day before the scheduled shipping date will result in a \$500 shipment delay penalty. Furthermore, all orders must be signed by you with a personal liability clause in case you renege on an order, or cause us any other losses.”

Sam Snidegrass growled “What the hell - you think I’m some sort of crook?”

BA didn’t back down. “Mr. Snidegrass, your reputation precedes you. If you didn’t have the corner on the snowmobile market in Alaska, we wouldn’t even be doing business with you. This is a take-it or leave it agreement. We’re more than willing to walk away from this, since we don’t need you to sell for us, since we’ve got more than enough orders coming in to keep us busy. Remember, you contacted us.”

Sam was not a happy camper. BA was an excellent and very tough negotiator, and his reputation was well-known too. He wasn’t some babe in the woods. Sam was hoping to fleece Ralph and get the lion’s share of the profits, and then BA had to show up. Damn - still, he was greedy enough to want what money he could make out of the deal, and he’d just have to find another way to fix things later. The lawyers modified the contract according to BA’s stipulations, then they each read it and signed it. BA said they could start delivering 10 units per week 2 weeks after the first order was placed. He had a copy of the price list, which was fixed and non-negotiable. They shook hands all around, and flew home. On the flight home, Ralph asked Ron “Why do I feel I just made a deal with the Devil himself?”

“Ralph, like BA said, Sam’s a snake, but a predictable snake. He didn’t expect BA to show up and negotiate for you. He was probably planning on taking you for everything you had while he made all the money. BA is a shrewd negotiator and knows how to write an air-tight contract, so you should be OK. This guy will probably sell 100 units per month on a good month, and even during the slow months he’ll still move 20-30 units per month. That’s better than you could have done on your own. Besides, you don’t have to give him your government contracts. He’s not an exclusive dealer, you’re giving him favorable pricing for the units he buys from you, but you can continue to sell units over the internet, and via government contracts.”

“That’s good to know, because if he was an exclusive dealer, he could put me out of business by refusing to buy any units for a month or two.”

They flew back to Allakaket, and when they landed, Ralph had an order for 20 4-seater Snow Bugs sitting on his desk, signed by Sam Snidegrass, with a note that the balance in full had been wire-transferred to his account. Ralph called Bill, and was amazed that a deposit in the amount of \$237,915.00 from Snidegrass Motors was in his corporate account. Ron and BA were

pleased, but warned Ralph not to change anything just because he paid so far in advance this time. Ralph called the factory foreman and said they needed 20 4-seater Snow Bugs for Snidegrass Motors for delivery in 2 weeks. He assured Ralph that they'd be done on time, since they had sufficient stock on hand to build 30 4-seaters, and parts for another 50 were en-route. The factory got busy, and 2 weeks later, all 20 4-seater Snow Bugs shipped to Snidegrass's dealership. Parts kept coming in, but so did orders. Everyone was busy including Ralph, who thought he would have been less busy if he would have stayed at Anchorage Regional. On the up side, he was making a lot of money. Snidegrass placed another order for 20 Snow Bugs, except this time they were the 2-seaters. Ralph received a deposit in his bank the next day for \$202,283.00. 2 weeks later, Ralph shipped them to Anchorage. The week after that, Ralph received another order for 20 4-seater Snow Bugs, to be delivered to Snidegrass's dealership in Fairbanks. The next day another deposit for \$237,915.00 appeared in his corporate account. Maybe Sam Snidegrass wasn't a snake after all. Ralph was happy, the Snow Bugs were rolling out, and the parts were rolling in. The Super Stallion crews were happy; they were busy and home every night. Snow Bug Inc. made almost \$68 thousand dollars on just those three orders, and after expenses, Ralph showed an \$8,000 profit, so he cut a check to Ron for \$800, and put the remainder in the bank. When he wasn't building Snow Bugs for Snidegrass, Ralph was building them for customers who ordered them over the internet, or small government contracts from Canada and the upper US.

As Diane's pregnancy advanced Jake was doing more and more for her. He was glad that it wasn't during the peak of the Hunting Season, so he would be home when his son was born. They had already picked a name for him; they would call him Daniel, or Dan for short. As her due date got closer, Diane made an appointment with Doc Miller, who was about ready to retire, and talked to the village midwife, who would do the delivery at home, since Doc Miller said that Daniel was coming along fine, with no apparent complications. Just to be on the safe side, Jake had Ralph's cell number on speed dial on his cell phone, since as an ER Doc, Ralph was the best trained doctor in the area to deal with any complications or emergencies during delivery. Sarah told her mom that she was pregnant too, and Nancy realized that she soon would be a Grandmother big time. She thought she was too young, her grandmother was old! Then she remembered that she and Ron started young, and if she added 20 years to how old she was when she had Sarah, the number were just right. Before Diane had Daniel, their friend's Husky had puppies, and 2 weeks later, Jake drove over to pick one out, since Diane said she wasn't moving if she didn't have to. He picked out a beautiful puppy with a star-shaped marking around his eye, so Jake called him Star. Diane thought he was cute, but told Jake that the puppy was his responsibility. Just for laughs, Jake called up his mom "Mom, remember when you asked if you were going to get grandkids or grand-puppies first, well - it looks like you got a grand-puppy first, I just picked up a new puppy, and I called him Star. If you want to see him, you'll have to come here, because Diane's not moving off the couch unless she has to! Ok, see you in a few!"

One hour later, Nancy showed up at Jake and Diane's home. Star was asleep on Diane's lap, so Nancy got to visit with both of them, and commiserate with Diane, who felt as big as a house,

and was making jokes that they should sell advertising on her maternity clothes. Star woke up, and Nancy held him for a minute, then quickly picked him up and set him back down on the floor. Seems Star decided that it was time to go to the bathroom. Jake got a paper towel and cleaned up the floor, then apologized to his mom. “Don’t worry about me; it’s not the first time I’ve been peed on. If I remember correctly you liked to pull a “fountain of youth” right after we took you out of the bath. You almost peed all over your dad, who managed to turn you around in the nick of time and hold you over the toilet.”

“Gee mom- thanks for that reminder!”

Diane started to laugh even though her belly hurt when she laughed. Jake thought his wife was beautiful.

Fall progressed into winter, and as Josh completed BUDS, Ralph’s business was going gang-busters, and both Diane and Sarah’s pregnancies took their normal course. Jake stayed close to home, and one day Diane let out a yell and Jake was in there with her in an instant. “I think my water broke!” and then the first contraction hit her. Jake stripped the bed, laid down a tarp and a sheet, and tucked them into the mattress, then called the midwife. She arrived half an hour later, and said that Diane was in the early stages of labor, and this could take a while. Jake was acting as her Lamaze coach, and sat next to her. He made sure he didn’t say something stupid like “I want to share the experience” because he knew she’d grab him and squeeze. 6 hours later, Daniel was born, and once the labor was over Jake was glad that Diane didn’t turn into something from Psycho or the Exorcist as some of his friends who had children had alluded to. Daniel was laid on his mother’s abdomen until the placenta was delivered, which the midwife bagged up, and Jake got to cut the cord. Finally he laid Daniel on his mother’s breast, and soon he was nursing. The midwife pulled a sheet and a light blanket up over them, and told Jake to check on them every hour or so.

Two months later, Sarah had a daughter, and they named her Rachael. She looked just like her mother according to her proud papa Neil. 6 months later, Doc Miller announced his retirement. Ralph asked Sam, and when she said OK, he petitioned the State of Alaska to allow him to take Doc Miller’s place. The Director of Rural Medical Services flew to Allakaket, and asked if Sam were available too for emergency surgery. She said she was out of practice, but the Director suggested that if she were on call, they could upgrade the Clinic in Allakaket to offer Emergency Services. Since Ralph lived just a couple of miles from the existing clinic, and they had cellular service, the Emergency number for the clinic would forward to his cell phone, and the State would pay them a monthly stipend. Even with Ralph being an ER doc instead of a GP, they felt he was more than qualified, and the truth was they didn’t have any applicants, and there wasn’t some poor schmuck from New York City that needed to work off his student loans.

Sam wondered about his business, and Ralph said the foreman was just about ready to move into Management, and he was tired of the day-to-day BS of running his own business. He was

available for decisions, since he was only a phone call away. The director said they were paying Doc Miller \$40K per year, and they would be willing to pay them \$60K if Sam agreed to be on call for emergency surgery. The State had a quarter million budgeted to upgrade the clinic, so Ralph said that he'd love to take the job. The next day they left the boys with Anne, and drove to the old clinic. Ralph and Sam made a list of all the stuff they wanted and e-mailed it to the Director of Rural Medical Services, and fainted when it was approved. They'd ordered over \$500 thousand worth of stuff, but in the process, upgraded the clinic from a GP/Wellness clinic to an Emergency Services clinic with modern equipment, computers, and more space. They built a bigger building next to the old clinic, then converted the old clinic to a Wellness center with a Social Services Nurse who would do BP and health screenings. The new building had enough room for 6 treatment rooms and an OR in case they needed it. It was well stocked for a rural ER, and Ralph felt like he was at home. The Wellness Nurse could refer any cases she thought should be seen by a doc to the new Rural ER. Slowly business picked up as the people started realizing they had a well-trained doc available, and they didn't have to go to Anchorage for everything. Ralph still referred certain cases to Anchorage to see a specialist. Ralph felt like he was back in Louisiana, except no one spoke Cajun except Sam. He liked wearing greens again, and the badge that said "Doctor Lacombe." His schedule was very relaxed, and unless he had a bona-fide emergency, he was home for dinner every night at 5:00

## Chapter 70 - Back in Training

Once Josh had finished his BUDS, he was sent to his A School. Since he wanted to be a Special Forces Medical Technician, he first had to complete Hospital Corpsman School, then get advanced training beyond what the normal corpsman had, since he might be the only medical care for an entire village of partisans they were assisting. With his paramedic training, Josh breezed through the Hospital Corpsman's school, since he knew 99% of what they were teaching him. Again, he spent most of his time helping the other trainees. The instructors were amazed until Josh explained he was a licensed Paramedic in Alaska, and had to know this stuff cold because hunters got shot more frequently than they could imagine. He told them he was trained by an ER Doc and an ER Surgeon, who just happened to be Husband and Wife. One of the instructors sat him down and basically gave him an oral exam on all the stuff he needed to know to graduate, and Josh wasn't kidding, he knew it cold. The instructors had the option of graduating him early and letting him get back to his unit, or keeping him there. Since he still had other schools to attend, like Jump School at Fort Benning, GA, they decided to graduate him and let him finish his schools. Once they signed the paperwork, he received orders to Fort Benning to catch up with his class and finish his SEAL training. Josh was looking forward to Jump School, and while he was waiting for the next class to start, he located a Special Forces Medical Instructor that was stationed at Benning, and spent 2 weeks studying the advanced techniques he'd need later. Since it wasn't a formal class, he didn't get certified for the class, but it would make the real class much easier later.

When the next class at Jump School started Josh was apprehensive but looking forward to it. Since he had passed BUDS and now had an official rating (Hospital Corpsman), he received a notice from the Navy informing him of his promotion to E-2 effective his enlistment date, and his promotion to E-3 effective receipt of this letter. He went to the commissary and bought the required stripes to reflect his new rank and had them sewn onto his uniforms, then made sure his rate badges were properly attached to his BDU shirts every morning. He added his Corpsman badge next to his Budweiser. Jump school was a breeze compared to BUDS, and he was looking forward to his first static jump. He was the first man in his string, and when the green light came on, the Jump master held him at the door for a fraction of a second to make sure everything was safe, then yelled "GO!" and Josh stepped out into space. When he reached the end of the static cord, it jerked his parachute open just like he was on a bungee cord, then the parachute banged open. He had maybe 30 seconds of hang time before he hit the ground, and made sure he was in the proper position to execute a Parachute Landing Fall. His feet were together, and his knees bent as he touched the ground, next he rolled onto his side, then reached up and dumped his parachute, then bundled it up and marched back to the jump shack. The Sergeant said "Well done trainee. 4 more jumps, and you'll get your badge."

Josh sort of wished they taught freefall techniques at Benning, but the Army was married to Static Jumps which could get a lot of paratroopers on the ground together quickly. Ron told him about flying at the Freefall simulator at Tampa, FL and he wanted to try it. Josh's scariest

jump was the required Night Jump. Again, he was the first man in his stick, and this time, he looked out the door and couldn't see shit! It was pitch dark out, and the landing zone was so far below that he couldn't see the markers from the door of the airplane. The Jumpmaster gave the Command "UP" and they all stood up. Josh checked the guy behind him, then turned around to check the guy in front, and realized he was the first man in his stick again. The jumpmaster commanded "Hook up" and he reached up and connected his static line to the cable running down the aircraft, then finally he ordered "In the Door" and the line moved forward 2 paces, and Josh stood in the door. Finally he could see something, a dull glow below him that indicated where the drop zone was. 2 seconds later the green light came on, and the Jumpmaster yelled "GO...Go..Go!" and slapped Josh on the back, but he barely felt it. He stepped into the void and fell for a second until he reached the end of his static cord, which pulled his chute open. He was glad his chute opened, and he was right over the drop zone. As he got closer to the ground, he got into his PLF position, and as his boots touched the ground, he rolled right onto his left side, just like he had been trained, then spilled his chute and bundled it. He had made it - this was his 5<sup>th</sup> jump, and tomorrow he'd get his ice cream cone, as they called the parachutist's badge. He realized this was Basic Training for a SEAL, and later he'd learn how to HAHO and HALO with 100% of his body weight strapped to him. He read books by Dick Marcinko and wondered why anyone would pull right about the masthead of a destroyer after he had made his required 5 jumps. He could pull low with the best of them, but 500 feet was plenty low for him.

The next morning, they had a basic Graduation ceremony with the Sergeant pinning the snow cone on the uniforms of the trainees. When the Sergeant came up to Ron, he saw the Budweiser and the caduceus and said "Well done SEAL, bring them home alive."

"Will do Sergeant!"

Once he was finished with Jump School, Josh returned to his Training Command at Coronado to await the opening of his next school, and assignment to a SEAL Team. While he waited, Troy decided that since Josh had nothing to do, he'd give him some personal instruction on how the SEALs used the Draeger, and took him out into San Diego Bay where they practiced attaching dummy Limpet mines to Navy ships in the harbor. Josh was amazed it was so easy, and Troy said that the Navy's idea of security when they were in port was to keep people from walking aboard the ship, and there was almost no protection against a diver wearing a Draeger unit. Half an hour later when they reached their IBS, Josh looked back to see what would happen when their dummy limpets went off and pumped a bunch of yellow dye around the ships they had targeted. Try as they might, the only way to secure a ship against divers with Draegers was to have divers in the water looking for them. He would have loved to hear the Ship's Captain cursing the SEALs!

Finally Josh got word he had been assigned to a West Coast SEAL team that needed a Corpsman. Instead of forming new teams around the trainees, the SEALs had decided long ago to bring trainees into existing teams so they could find out what being a SEAL was really about,

and learn the trade from pros. He spent the next year or two going to different schools, and when he wasn't in school, he was training with his new SEAL team, including several Full Mission Profile training exercises. Josh never repeated his escapade at the Restaurant, and felt bad for it. He thought he was going to wait until he got married, then realized that might be a while, so he didn't feel so bad, but never went back. His team was mostly older SEALs, and married, which cut down on the carousing, but he didn't miss it. They were quiet professionals with a very dangerous job. Josh finished his year's probation, and was accepted as a full member of the team. Several times during Full Mission Profile exercises, he got to practice his skills for real when a SEAL hurt himself with a bad landing, or got grazed by shrapnel from an exploding practice grenade. His boss told Josh that the closer they could come to combat in training, the less SEALs he'd lose if they had to go to war for real.

Josh's wish came true when his CO approved him carrying his personal P-14, since most of the SEALs had dumped their 9mm Berretta in favor of a high-cap .45 or a 1911. His main weapon was a Mini-UZI manufactured by IMI as a special order for the US Special Forces as a .45acp weapon with a QD suppressor. It carried 30 rounds of .45acp, and with a rate of fire of 950 rounds per minute, it took a while for Josh to learn to fire short controlled bursts of 3-5 rounds. The SF version of the UZI was Full-Auto only, fired from an open bolt, and was built to higher specs than the export version of the UZI with a fully chromed barrel and chamber so it wouldn't jam easily. Josh's was fitted with a custom shoulder holster under his right arm, with a break-front barrel retainer, and a fixed sling. He carried 4 loaded mags on the offside of the carrier to balance the rig. Since he was loaded down with medical gear, and his first job was caring for and securing a wounded SEAL, they didn't want him carrying a large part of the team's firepower. The Mini-Uzi had an effective range of 100 yards, which was fine with Josh. His suppressor was able to go quickly from his P-14 to his Uzi since they took the same mount. Josh couldn't wait to get home and challenge his Dad and Ralph to a pistol shooting contest, because SEALs put thousands of rounds downrange each week during training, and he was sure he was faster than his dad now. He doubted he could shoot rifle as well as he could, but that wasn't his job. The SEALs had trained Snipers, but they were defensive instead of offensive snipers who were situated in overwatch positions to observe and report, and if necessary take out a threat to the team. Most of the SEAL Snipers used a variation of the M-1a, since they'd almost never shoot something more than 600 yards away, and the 20 round mag and the semiauto action gave them extra firepower if needed.

When he requested the Mini-Uzi in .45acp as his main weapon, his CO asked him if he'd rather have an MP-5/10SD since they had tons of them in stock instead of the older UZI. Josh said that if they could get one of the .45acp Uzis out of storage, it would take the same ammo as his P-14, so he would only have to carry .45acp ammo in his combat bag instead of .45 and 10mm. His boss knew Josh had a point, so he said "Ok Doc, if they can locate one with at least 10 mags, it's yours." Little did he know that Josh had already checked with a friend of Bear's at MacDill who was sitting on a bunch of them with 30-round magazines and had modern Shadow Technology suppressors for them too - Seems Delta ordered a bunch before they switched to the MP-5/10SD for the bigger more powerful round, and they had a dozen still in the IMI

wrappings. He got his CO to sign for the requisition, and 1 week later, he was the proud owner of a very rare Mini Uzi. IMI didn't sell many more .45acp Mini-Uzi's to the US Gov't since the advent of the MP-5/10SD. 2 things Doc liked better about the UZI. It was lighter and smaller than the MP-5/10SD, especially when you removed the suppressor, which you couldn't do with the H&K. He thought of the .45 acp Ingram Mac-10, but it was more of a bullet hose like the Sten gun and wasn't very accurate, and pretty useless outside of 25 yards regardless of what the producers of Invasion USA would lead you to believe. Josh quickly got the hang of firing short controlled bursts with the full-auto trigger, and when he mounted the suppressor, the loudest noise you heard was the bolt hitting the firing pin. If he really needed to be quiet, he could mount the same suppressor to his P-14, since the SEALs bought barrels from Para-Ordinance so they could mount QD suppressors on their pistols. Instead of a barrel bushing, a threaded adapter was factory installed on a slightly longer barrel with QD ears that matched the QD ears of the Shadow Suppressor.

Finally, after almost 2 years in the Navy, Josh's request for 2 weeks of leave was approved, as well as his transport orders via MAC to Elmendorf AFB in Alaska. He called his dad, and told him he'd be home in a couple of days, and he'd better practice up, and tell Ralph to practice too! He called again from Seattle when he had a confirmed flight to Elmendorf, and Ron said that he would meet him with the SuperGoose at Elmendorf. The next day, Ron was looking for his Son, and was surprised to see a big rangy man standing in front of him saying "Hi Dad!" Josh's hair was cut short, but not quite regulation short, and he weighed almost 200 pounds of solid muscle. His upper body looked like Arnold Swartzenegger's after a work out. All he had with him was a military duffle, which they loaded into the SuperGoose. Josh climbed into the co-pilot's seat, and Ron requested take-off clearance. Once they were back on their way to Allakaket, Ron blurted out "Josh, I barely recognize you - you have really changed and grown up." Since he had just left a military installation, he was still in his dress whites, and Ron checked, and Josh's chest was full of medals and badges.

When they landed, Josh was surprised to see Bear, Gene, and Steve there to greet him as well as his family. Bear was the first one to him, and tried to pick him up and give him a bear hug, and failed, Josh was solid as a rock, and in better shape than Bear remembered being in. Even though they weren't in uniform, Josh saluted Gene and Steve, and they smartly returned it. Nancy ran up to her son and gave him a big hug with tears in her eyes saying "I'm so proud of you, and I've really missed you!" Jake looked at his younger brother with newfound admiration while Gene, Bear and Steve checked out the medals on his chest. For a newly promoted E-4, he sure had a lot of stuff on his chest. Bear knew that a lot of Josh's awards were classified, and he couldn't wear them, but what he was wearing impressed the heck out of him. It looked like Josh had been busy for the last couple of years. He told Bear that he had been accepted to OCS, and that was why they approved 2 weeks of leave, because once he started OCS, he'd be busy for a couple of years. Normally the Navy reassigned Mustang officers to a new unit when they came through OCS, but the SEALs were hurting for experienced Medical Technicians, so Josh would stay with his old unit, especially when Josh expressed no interest in Flag rank or driving ships. All he wanted to be was a SEAL, and if the Navy wouldn't let him stay with his team,



he'd turn down OCS. Diane introduced Josh to his new nephew Daniel Williams, and Sarah introduced him to his niece Rachael and his other nephew, Russell Lewis. Josh held his niece and nephews, then gave their moms a hug, and said he was ready to go home. They drove to Ron and Nancy's, and when they drove up into the driveway, Josh noticed that Starsky and Hutch didn't run out to greet him. "Dad, where's Starsky and Hutch?"

"They died a couple of years ago, right after you left. You were in BUDS, so we didn't want to disturb you with the news. We buried them out back if you want to say hi to them."

Josh set his sea bag down and walked out back by himself, and found Starsky and Hutch's graves. They were buried next to each other, and he thought that was fitting, since they were inseparable in life. He knelt next to their graves and wept. He was closer to those 2 dogs than he had told anyone, and it broke his heart to realize he'd never see them again. Suddenly he felt a familiar hand on his shoulder, and looking up through his tear-stained eyes, he saw the face of his older brother Jake. "I know Josh, I cried too when they died. I made sure they were buried with their favorite toy. I'm sure they're waiting for us at the Rainbow Bridge." Jake handed Josh a copy of the poem and turned to leave and let his brother mourn in private. Later, Josh wiped his eyes and got up, then went back into the house. The only people there were his family. He felt suddenly like he was home, yet he wasn't. This was once his home, and this was his family. Now the Navy was his home, and the SEALs his family. Still, he loved and missed them, and they spent the rest of the day getting caught up.

The next morning Josh asked his dad if he'd been practicing. Ron grinned thinking "Junior's feeling cocky and wants to take on Dad - Ok!" Josh took his P-14 out of his sea bag with the IWB holster and 5 single-mag carriers, and said "Excuse me" and walked into the bathroom. 2 minutes later, you would have never known he was carrying a large pistol and 5 loaded mags. Word had spread of the grudge match, and the entire town tried to squeeze into the shooting range. The rangemaster ordered half of them to watch through the glass, because it was too crowded. When they were all set, Ron asked Josh, "OK, what do you want to try."

"How about a pure speed run with 3 magazine changes. All rounds in the 10-ring or better, at 20 yards."

"Deal!"

Josh won the coin toss, and went first. The rangemaster ran a B-27 down to the 20 yard line, and everyone put on their Wolf ears and shooting glasses. When everyone was set, Josh shrugged his shoulders twice, the rangemaster picked up the timer and moved to his left. Finally Josh raised his hands into the surrender position, and the rangemaster touched the button on the timer. As soon as the beeper went off, Josh was a blur of motion, drew and fired in one smooth motion, and emptied the pistol into the 10-ring like he was firing the Uzi. He moved his thumb slightly, dropped the empty mag, grabbed his first spare, shoved it home, thumbed the slide release and continued shooting, barely losing a second with the combat reload. The gun

roared continuously, and locked open again. Josh reached for his second reload, and slammed it home, then swept the slide release down and resumed firing. Seconds later, the second magazine was empty, and he reloaded a 3<sup>rd</sup> time. Seconds later, the 4<sup>th</sup> magazine was empty, and Ron was standing there open-mouthed. When they checked his time, Ron shook his head. Josh had shot 57 rounds into the 10-ring or better in 41 seconds flat. There was no way he could do that, his best time for 57 rounds was 45 seconds, and that was at 15 yards. Years ago, when he was shooting with Ralph, he fired 43 rounds at 15 yards in a little over 31 seconds, but that was almost 10 years ago!

Ron walked over and hugged Josh then said “There’s no way I could even get close to that time - you win!”

Josh said the smartest thing of his life when he said “I’m not going to try and challenge you to shooting rifles!” Ralph was watching too, and was standing there amazed. He fired the P-14 so fast that he couldn’t hear the individual explosions of the rounds firing. Later Bear walked over to check his pistol and make sure it wasn’t full auto. “Son, nobody shoots that fast!”

“I’ve been shooting 1,000 rounds per week for the last 6 months rain or shine. My main weapon is a 45-caliber mini-Uzi that’s full auto.”

“Nice gun, how’d you get one?”

“A friend of yours from MacDill knew Delta was sitting on a bunch of them they never opened when they switched to the MP-5/10SD.”

“So why didn’t you get one too!”

“This way my pistol and subgun use the same ammo, so all I have to carry in my combat pack is 500 rounds of .45 acp ammo, instead of carrying .45 and 10mm ammo.”

“Smart Kid. Troy told me you were accepted for OCS.”

“That’s how I got the 2 weeks of leave, they figured I’d be busy for a while.”

“They were right, so are they letting you go back to the Teams?”

“They’re letting me go back to my original unit!”

“Isn’t that against normal procedures?”

“Bear, they’re hurting for trained Special Forces Medical Technicians so bad that they’re not even going to send me out to the fleet. I told my CO that if I couldn’t stay with the SEALs, they could forget OCS, and he made arrangements for me to return to my unit.”

“Must be nice to be indispensable!”

“That’s not what my CO said, we’re all dispensable if we have to die to complete the mission, we die! I’m not looking forward to it, but if my number comes up, I hope it does when I’m in action.”

“Let me guess, your teammates call you Doc - right!”

“No kidding Bear, they always call their corpsman Doc!”

## Chapter 71 - Organized Chicken Shit

Josh spent the remainder of his leave visiting family and friends, and they went shooting at Bear's range. Jake and Ron were in for a surprise when Josh took out his old M -25 and shot a 2.5" group at 600 yards. The best he'd ever been able to do before was 4 inches at 600 yards. Ron walked over to him and said "I can see that someone's been practicing."

"When my CO found out about my rifle qualification scores, he asked me to cross-train as the team sniper in case he's wounded or busy elsewhere. When I'm not shooting my Pistol or Uzi, I'm shooting the team's sniper rifles. One of them is a National Match M-1a. They put the Springfield Armory scope on it for me, so it's pretty close to the M - 25 minus the adjustable stock. I've actually shot a 2" 5-shot group at 600 yards before. Since I can shoot .308 all day with the Teams, what I'd really like to do is shoot one of the M-200's on the 1,000 yard line just for kicks. The SEALs might be getting some soon."

That's all his Dad needed to hear, and he uncased an M -200, and had Bear mount and boresight the Swarovski scope. Next they took it to the 600-yard line to set the zero and confirm the boresight. Once Josh got the rifle zeroed at 600 yards, he opened a new logbook, recorded the date, the rifle's serial number, and the atmospheric conditions just like Ron did. Next they moved to the 1,000 yard line. Ron suggested adding 3 inches to his 600-yard zero, so Josh added 1 click to his 600-yard zero, then Ron helped him get set and adjust the rifle. Josh seemed to know what he was doing, so Ron let him alone, but suggested setting the bipod and monopod so that the x-ring was centered in the reticle of the scope. Josh got the scope set up, and fired 10 dry-fires, calling his break. Finally he loaded the gun, put on his hearing protectors, and checked that the range was clear. Josh got behind the gun, cycled the action, cleared the safety, and looked through the scope. He was amazed that the image in the scope wiggled less than his M - 25 at 600 yards, then he remembered that with the bipod/monopod setup, it was almost like shooting off sandbags on a benchrest. He took a firing grip on the gun, and when he touched it, he noticed it vibrated more, so he went into his calming routine Ron had taught him. When he opened his eyes, the crosshairs were oscillating right around the X-ring in a figure 8 pattern. He touched the trigger as the crosshairs were oscillating into the x-ring, and Ron was pleasantly surprised that his first round was a bullseye. Josh settled down and fired 4 more times. When the gun locked open, Josh was surprised to learn that all 5 rounds were in the x-ring, and he had just shot a 5-inch group at 1,000 yards. Ron hugged his son and said "I knew it - all you needed was a bunch of practice, and you just shot a half-moa group at 1,000 yards. If the SEALs decide to get the M -200, you could probably shoot it as well or better than their designated Sniper."

"I'd like that Dad, but I don't have time to go to Sniper School with OCS coming up. My CO said that once I come back from OCS, he wanted to make me the team leader's assistant, since we'd be the only 2 commissioned officers on the team. The rest of the guys are E-4 enlisted up to E-7 non-coms."

When they returned to Allakaket, Josh met the rest of his friends, but basically felt that he was a stranger in a strange land, and the only people who understood him were Bear, Gene, and Steve. He wasn't too terribly choked up when his 2 weeks were up. Bear talked with him and told him what they called OCS and that if he behaved himself and treated it like Basic, it would be much easier than BUDS or most of the schools he went to. Instead of flying back to San Diego, he had orders to report to NAS Pensacola in Florida to start OCS. He wore civilian clothes per his orders, and packed all of his uniforms and medals. It took almost 2 days to fly MAC from Elmendorf to Pensacola with transfers and everything. He made it on time, and had a taxi drop him at the main base gate so that they could process him in.

OCS was a 12-week school, but between in-processing and out-processing, he knew it would take around 13 weeks to get back to Coronado and his team, assuming they were still in San Diego when he got back instead of overseas somewhere. Since he was a SEAL, and was supposed to be armed 24/7, when he got to the main gate, he surrendered his weapon, magazines and holsters to the Master Chief of the Guard, who filled out a receipt for the equipment, and stowed it in the weapons locker. The procedure was so well rehearsed that Josh knew that they had processed hundreds of SEAL Mustangs through OCS before, since they were one of the few sailors that was supposed to be armed 24/7 due to the nature of their duties. When he was finished, the Chief told him there was a Hummer and a driver who would drive him to Building 622, the OTCP Quarterdeck, where he would be processed into OCS. There was a big sign inside the Quarterdeck that said OCS Check-in. Josh stood in line, and when he got to the front, they asked for his package. Inside his package was his complete military records, a copy of his EPSQ on floppy disk, his orders, and 5 copies; a certified copy of his birth certificate (which was a bear to get since he was born at home instead of a hospital.) They asked him if he had at least \$100 cash on him, and he chuckled. Knowing how efficient Military payroll was, he had 5,000 dollars in traveler's checks and \$200 in cash in a money belt. They asked if he had everything on the list, and he told them that he had his entire kit and several changes of BDUs, and 2 pair of running shoes in his sea bag. The admin clerk assigned Josh a room number, and gave him directions to his barracks. The told him to go next door and get his issue for OCS.

Next door was a supply clerk who issued PT uniforms and BDUs to Officer Candidates, as they were called. He must have seen SEALs before, so he wasn't surprised when Josh asked for 2XL shirts and medium pants and shorts. Since Josh already had a good set of running shoes in his kit, he was set. He walked outside, located his barracks and his bunk, then quickly got his area squared away and cleaned. Bear had told him to keep his area always ready for inspection, and unless he was in PT, to be squared away at all times. Later that day, he met his Officer Candidate Instructor, who would be in charge of his class, which would be known from here on out by their in-processing date. He liked having SEALs in OCS, since they could easily pass all the requirements, and could be counted on to help some of the slower candidates pass OCS.

When the rest of the class got checked in, the OCI introduced himself as Lieutenant Commander Lewis, then suggested they get in their PT uniforms, he was going to see what kind of shape they were in. Luckily their CO's or Chiefs had tipped them off, and there weren't too many

butterballs. LCDR Lewis was pleased that Josh wasn't out front showing off, but in the middle of the pack, encouraging several Officer Candidates to give their all. Several days later, when their first Physical Fitness Assessment came up, Josh made sure he was at the head of the pack, and doing his best, but holding back maybe 10% just in case he needed it later. This reminded him of his PST over 2 years ago, and he did about what he did on his PST before entering BUDS. He did the sit-stretch easily, then since the curl-up was easier than the sit-ups required for PST, he managed 103 in 2 minutes, then he switched to push-ups and did 85 within the 2-minutes allowed. He elected to do the 500 yard swim, and reported to the pool in his SEAL trunks and swimming goggles. Even with the in-pool start, he knew how to do a log-roll turn, and was able to swim 500 yards using a crawl stroke in a little over 7 minutes. When LCDR Lewis got his scores the next day, he called Josh in to his office. "I got a look at your PST scores, and I can tell you were sandbagging the PFA. I want to know why!"

"Sir, all I had to do was qualify. I didn't want to risk injury going all out, because if I'm seriously injured, I might lose my slot in the teams, then I'd be stuck in the Fleet."

"I understand your CO gave you a waiver to return to your team - Being a SEAL means that much to you?"

"Yes Sir, I told my CO that if I couldn't return to my team after OCS, I'd rather not go."

"Luckily for you, when I was a Chief Petty Officer, I knew some SEALs, and I know how dedicated you are to your teams, so I'm not going to write you up."

"Thank you Commander Lewis, All I want to do is finish OCS with a rating of Outstanding so I can go back to my team as an Ensign."

"It says here you're a Hospital Corpsman. Which means that they need you in the teams, so I agree. Now get back to training, and not a word of this."

"Yes Sir!"

"Dismissed."

Josh turned and marched out of LCDR Lewis' office, and rejoined his class, grateful to have dodged a bullet.

They spent the next couple of weeks in the classroom, Josh's favorite class was the Engineering class where the instructor explained how turbines, diesel engines, and nuclear or steam reactors worked. Every time he heard "You will see this again" he wrote down what the instructor said. He learned to do that from BUDS, and it always paid off when it showed up on a test. Josh already knew quite a bit about Navigation, but shipboard navigation was something new. Most of the Seamanship course was review from Basic Training, but on a more advanced level, so he

made sure he paid attention. His first trip through the Damage Control simulator was scary, but he handled it. Several candidates panicked, and flunked the simulation. They would be given another chance, or they would be dropped from OCS, and returned to the fleet. Josh already had a lot of practical experience in Naval Leadership, but appreciated the fresh viewpoint and additional information he got from the class. The class on Military Law was an eye-opener, and he learned more than he thought was possible about the way the Military Justice system worked. He had a hard time staying awake through the Special Awareness Program, because if a SEAL ever had problems with Drugs or Alcohol, he didn't remain a SEAL much longer. The counterespionage briefing was so much hot air. SEALs dealt with classified stuff on a daily basis, and SEAL officers were exposed to Code Word classified documents all the time. Operational Security was drilled into the youngest tadpole in BUDS, and reinforced daily or weekly. Most SEALs had a Top Secret Clearance, and some had Code Word or Crypto clearances, which were far past the scope of the briefing.

During the 13 week period, they had numerous inspections, which he passed with flying colors. LCDR Lewis told him that he was the most squared away sailor he had seen in OCS in over a year. He breezed through his personal inspection, and LCDR Lewis later told Josh that his uniform looked so sharp that he should pose for a recruiting poster. Josh quipped that they better do it before he reported back to the TEAMS and his hair grew longer. LCDR Lewis laughed at the image of a SEAL with a non-regulation haircut in dress blues, somehow he could imagine the Secretary of the Navy's reaction. Finally it was time for Graduation Day, and Josh was careful to perfectly locate every badge, rank and rate insignia properly on his uniform jacket. It took a long time to correctly pin every medal he had won on his jacket. Finally after passing in review, he stood at attention while the CO of Officer Training Command pinned his Ensign's bars on his collar. Once the bars were in place, Josh snapped a perfect salute, which was returned by the CO. Finally he was an Officer and a Gentleman, and a newly minted Ensign. A couple of days later, he was back on a plane to San Diego. When he got to the Naval Special Warfare Command Center, he was met at the quarterdeck by a senior chief, who saluted Josh since he was in uniform. Josh returned the salute, then the Chief said "Welcome home Ensign Williams."

"Thanks Chief. What do I need to do, who do I check in with?"

"You just did - go get a new room at the BOQ then check in with your team."

"Thanks Chief - see ya later!"

Josh picked up his sea bag, and marched off to get a new room at the BOQ.

## Chapter 72 - Under Fire

Several Years later, somewhere in the South American Jungle

“Fall back and Regroup.” {Sounds of Full Auto Fire, grenades, whistles from near misses, and Spanish-sounding voices shouting - a lot of them}

The SEALs did their well-rehearsed “Break Contact” Drill, except this time the enemy wasn’t playing along. Lt. Josh “Doc” Williams didn’t know what he had run into, but it was much bigger than the drug lord’s personal army they were expecting. The SEALs were running for their lives, low on ammo, and up against a superior force. Suddenly his CO, LCDR. Steve “Big Dog” Nelson dropped behind a large log and set something in front of it. Josh immediately recognized it as a Claymore, and kept running. Once Big Dog had the detonators installed, he quickly unrolled the wires and attached them to the twist detonator. He ran 25 yards further back, and dove behind the next log, with Josh sitting next to him. Suddenly a SEAL vaulted the log yelling “Last Man”, so Big Dog knew the enemy was right behind him. He waited until a large group of enemy showed themselves, and got within point-blank range of the Claymore, then he twisted the handle, firing the Claymore, and thousands of steel balls were explosively hurled into the massed enemy, killing 2/3 of them, and severely wounding the rest, who were at the back of the pack. Suddenly to his right, Josh heard the dreaded yell “Doc” and he got up to tend the wounded SEAL. Big Dog fired several short bursts from his M - 4 to keep any survivors from shooting back, and Doc landed with a thud next to his swim buddy Chief Jack “Eagle” Sharp. He looked him over, and could see he’d taken a through and through round to the leg. He asked Jack if he could walk on it, and Jack nodded, so Josh bandaged it tightly, since they had a long way to go to their assigned pickup. Jack grimaced as Josh pulled the bandage tight to stop the bleeding.

Josh looked at Steve, who yelled to be heard over the gunfire “Let’s get the flock out of here!” then Josh helped his buddy Jack up. Jack was limping, but could move quicker on his own than with a SEAL carrying him. Big Dog got a bearing to their pick-up point, and hoped the Pave Low would be on time. They still heard sporadic gunfire behind them. To say that Big Dog and Doc were pissed would be an extreme understatement. Some Intel squirrel didn’t read the tea leaves right, resulting in a blown mission, and a wounded SEAL. Josh realized there was more truth than he realized to the old saw “We bet your life” when it came to Intel. He remembered the line from MASH about “Military Intelligence” and laughed to himself. He checked his gear as he ran, and he was down to his last 2 30-round magazines for his UZI, and he had 1 mag in his P-14, and 2 spares after that. He started praying they would make it to the Pave Low without further contact. He thought someone might be out looking for them, because this last group was the third heavily-armed group they had ran into today, when the Intelligence Officers swore the only armed men were the small bunch of mercenaries guarding the drug lord they were supposed to snatch. Not only was he not there, but Josh suspected they had run into several groups of FARC guerillas since they were so heavily armed and well trained. If they survived and got



back to the States, he was going to find out who screwed up even if it cost him his bars. Josh didn't know, but that was the exact same thought rolling through LCDR Nelson's mind right about now, except he was even lower on Ammo than Josh was, and once he shot out his last mag from the M - 4, he'd be down to his personal sidearm. He grabbed the microphone from his radioman and yelled "Birddog, this is Point, Dry Hole, lots of company, need emergency extract at Alpha."

"Roger Point, Emergency extract at Alternate Alpha in 10 mikes."

"Confirm, Alpha in 10 mikes."

He threw the microphone back to his radioman, and told the team "We're moving to Alpha for an emergency extract in 10 mikes. Drop everything and prepare to make a run for it." Josh knew that as the Corpsman, he could drop only some of his gear, the rest might be needed to save the team if they got shot. He dropped everything he could, then told Jack he'd stay with him, and carry him if necessary.

Big Dog turned to Doc and said "You're Tail-end Charlie. Don't let any SEALs get behind you. I'm taking point. If you're not to Alpha in 10 minutes, it was nice knowing you!"

Doc flipped him the bird and said it was nice knowing him too! They stood up and started jogging as fast as they could. Alpha was almost 1 mile away, and they had less than 10 minutes to get there. Now Josh understood why the SEALs were so adamant about being able to run a mile and a half in 8 minutes. Now his life and the lives of his Teammates depended on it. Jack was keeping up, but collapsed with 100 yards to go when he tripped on a vine. Josh picked him up and carried him the last 100 yards right as the huge Pave Low set down. All 3 door gunners were on their mini-guns, but there were no targets in sight, so they didn't shoot. Right as Josh climbed aboard, Big Dog gave the pilot the "thumbs-up", and he lifted off. As soon as they were airborne, Josh started an IV of Ringers, and told Eagle to rest easy it was just a flesh wound. "Easy for you to say Doc, you're not the one with the bullet in the leg!" Josh opened a Syringette of Morphine and gave him half, then wrote a big M on his forehead and the time, then bent the needle of the syringette and stuck it in his collar. He made sure Jack was comfortable, then checked his pulse, and told him to take it easy.

"Just take it easy Eagle, you've now got half as many Purple Hearts as Sen. Kerry!"

"Too bad he didn't get one for getting shot in the head!"

When the team heard that one, there were gales of laughter, and a couple of Sierra Hotel's from in back.

2 weeks later back at Coronado, Josh and LCDR Nelson met with their CO. "Word is you two think Intel screwed the pooch, and you want some heads. I've got news for you, but it can never

leave this room. Your mission was blown from the start by some Congressman or his aide who couldn't keep their big mouths shut. We're looking into it. I thought I'd tell you so you wouldn't punch out the first Intelligence Officer you saw and lose your bars over a mistake."

Josh and LCDR Nelson both relaxed, realizing that DC had blown it again. They both were thinking "Why do the SEALs bother with security clearances at all, when some idiot in DC can open his big mouth, get some SEALs killed, and not get punished? Maybe they should just take out an advertisement in the Washington Post listing the dates and times of their next 10 missions?" Suddenly Josh realized what Bear meant when he was always asking Gene if it was time yet. Right now he was so mad that if he had a TLAM-N, he'd personally load the coordinates for DC and launch it himself.

"Permission to speak candidly Admiral?"

"Granted, but realize I feel exactly like you do right now."

"Why do we bother with Security when some Idiot in DC can open his fat trap and get us killed, but not get punished in the least way?"

"I've asked that question myself numerous times. I'd like to see a bunch of the most loose-lipped Senators hung or shot, and that would convince the rest to keep their lips zipped."

Once the Admiral had accomplished what he needed to - keep two of his best officers out of the brig, he dismissed them to get back to his paperwork. On the way back to the Team barracks, Big Dog told Doc "You know we can never tell the team the mission was blown from DC, several of the younger members might book a 1-way trip to DC to take care of the problem personally."

"Agreed, but it still makes me furious."

"Just keep it under your hat."

"Aye, Aye Sir!"

When they got back, the good news was Eagle was out of the infirmary, and would be mission capable in a month.

## Chapter 73 - Out of the Frying Pan

Shortly after his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, Josh put in for 2 weeks leave and flew with his Team Leader for a 2-week vacation in Australia. They were quickly discovered by the local Sheilas at a local pub. One beautiful girl seemed to catch his eye, but didn't seem to be impressed by his lines. She introduced herself as Sheila Bannon and said she was on holiday from the University where she was studying for her doctorate in Marine Biology. Before she left for the evening, she handed him her business card with a phone number and e-mail address at the University, and told him to call her if he wanted to go to church with her on Sunday morning. Since she was a total babe, and he had nothing better to do, he called her voice mail the next morning, and left a number where he could be contacted. 2 hours later, she told him to be waiting out front of his hotel Sunday morning at 0800, and she'd pick him up and give him a lift to church. She said to dress nice, but he didn't need to wear a suit. Josh rummaged around, found a clean shirt and tie, and a pair of chinos that still fit. The next morning, he was out front of the hotel at 0800, when this beautiful redhead wearing a stunning sun dress pulled up in a robin's egg blue Toyota Land Cruiser, and unlocked the door. As he bent down to open the door, he recognized Sheila from the night before. She was even more beautiful in the daylight. He sat down, closed and locked the door, and secured his lap/shoulder harness. She headed back out into traffic, and 20 minutes later, they arrived at this plain-looking building that didn't look like any churches Josh had seen before, since there was no steeple or stained glass. When she stopped the car she said "Sorry, where's my Manners? I'm Sheila Bannon, and we're at the First Church of Christ of Sydney. I don't normally pick up guys and ask them to church, but I just sensed something in you that I liked."

"Sheila, I grew up in a decent Christian family, but I haven't been as diligent in my walk since I joined the SEALs, so going to a good church with a pretty lady would make my day."

They got out of the car and walked hand in hand to church. Josh liked the singing, even though he couldn't sing a note, and was very moved by the pastor's sermon about the Prodigal Son, and thanked the pastor on their way out.

"Ok, Josh, I've got the rest of the day, what do you want to do?"

"I want to spend it with you, but not someplace where I'd be tempted to make out with you. Hopefully someplace pretty we could talk." They got into Sheila's Land Cruiser and drove to the Observatory Hill Park, which she said was one of the prettiest views in Sydney.

They spend the rest of the day talking. Sheila told Josh that she had a little over a year to go for her PhD in Marine Biology, and Josh told her that he was right in the middle of a 20-year SEAL career, and he was up for promotion to Lieutenant Commander, and the command of his own Seal Team. Neither of them were looking for anything serious, so they enjoyed the afternoon together. Right before they went back to her car, a guy approached them, flipped out a

switchblade and demanded Josh's wallet. Instead, quick as a cat, Josh drew and extended his collapsible baton with a snap of his wrist, reversed his swing and tagged the elbow of the assailant's knife hand with the tip of the steel baton, traumatizing the nerves in his elbow, and numbing his hand to the point that he dropped the knife and ran screaming in agony, holding his injured arm with his other hand.

"We'd better split before the cops show up, I don't want to have to explain why I'm carrying a baton in Sydney."

"Good idea, the constables here don't look favorably on anyone carrying weapons, even something as innocent as a collapsible baton."

"Sheila, were I come from in Alaska, everyone walks around openly armed, there is zero crime and hasn't been for almost 20 years. We even have a company/town shooting range, and my friend Bear owns a survival school with a 1,000-yard range that we used to go shooting at all the time."

"Wow, I'd love it there, the only place we can go armed is out at my parent's Station in the Northern Territories. It's in the middle of nowhere, so the pantywaists that run the government pretty much leave us alone out there."

Josh was laughing to himself, she sounded just like he did! If things were different, maybe he could settle down with someone like her! That idea brought him to a full stop. He had a trust fund worth over \$10 Million plus his accrued Military pay, since he lived on base in the BOQ, and put most of it in the bank. He loved his mom and dad, and missed his brother and sister, but he could be happy anywhere in the world as long as he was married to a woman that loved him. Sheila was a beautiful red head with long hair, emerald green eyes and a killer body. He wondered how she looked in a wet suit, remembering the story his Dad told them about the time Nancy almost gave Bear a heart attack when he saw her in a 3/4 wetsuit. Looking at Sheila, he hoped she owned a 6/4 wetsuit, or he'd have problems concentrating on diving! On the way back to his hotel, he found out she was on her semester break, and didn't have to be anywhere special. He asked where he could reach her tomorrow, because if they wanted to spend any more time together, he'd have to ask for extended leave. The US Navy owed him a bunch of Leave, so if his team weren't doing anything, his CO could grant up to 30 days leave. When they got out, her goodnight kiss told him that he'd better put in for the full 30 days, and she handed him a card with the number where she was staying. When he got back to the hotel, he talked to Steve, who was now a full Commander. "You wouldn't believe the girl I met. We haven't done anything but talk, and she just gave me a real hot goodnight kiss. She's a good Christian woman, and almost finished with her Doctorate in Marine Biology. I'd like to request permission to extend my leave for a full 30 days."

"Permission Granted, make sure you clear it with the CO. Good Luck Josh!"

Steve gave Josh a “guy hug” then they went down for dinner. After dinner, Josh called his CO on his secure shoe phone, and he authorized an additional 30 days leave since his team had no missions scheduled for at least 60 days, and they weren’t going to be the Alert team for the next 6 months, since they had already been the alert team twice this year. He thanked his CO and gave Steve the good news, then called Sheila. Since he had another 30 days, she suggested borrowing a friend of her’s Catalina Amphibian that was set up as a live aboard diving platform with compressors, spare tanks, shower and head facilities, and comfortable beds. Josh blushed at the mention of beds, and hoped he could stay on his own bed. She said she’d pick him up first thing in the morning, and to check out of the hotel, and bring all his stuff, she’d keep him busy for the next 30 days. She said “See you tomorrow at 0800, bye!” and hung up. Josh called downstairs and asked that they check him out effective 0800 tomorrow. The Hotel Manager said that it would be taken care of. Since he’d already given them his American Express card, all he had to do was deposit his key in the drop box, and pick up a copy of his bill that would be waiting for him.

Steve went back to his team the next morning, and Josh checked out. He walked out the front door, and Sheila was sitting there with her Land Cruiser. They loaded up all his stuff, and she commented how heavy his duffles were. He said that even though he was on leave, he had to carry his go bag everywhere, so he could be wherever he needed to be in 24 hours with all his gear. They drove to the nearest Royal Australian Air Force base, and they presented their ID’s, and the gate guard gave them directions to Sheila’s friend’s office near the flight line. He gave Sheila a warm hug, then shook Josh’s hand. Josh handed him his military ID, and Nicolas (Nick to his friends) told him they had reserved a PBY for their exclusive use for the next 30 days. It used to belong to an Admiral who was really into diving, and had the RAAF configure it as a live-aboard diving platform with fresh water tanks, a desalinator, water heater, showers, a small galley, and a small bedroom with 2 twin beds. They had already loaded filled air tanks with modern diving gear, masks, fins, snorkels, and weight belts. Josh had his own gear in his bag, but thought it was a nice touch. When they mentioned wet suits, Josh looked at Sheila, and said “I hope you’ve got a 6-4 suit!”

“Why’s that?”

“Otherwise I might have problems concentrating on diving!”

Sheila laughed and said “Don’t worry, I brought both, and if you can’t stand the excitement, I’ll wear the 6-4!”

Josh turned to Nick and said “Who’s going to fly this thing, I’m not type rated in the Catalina.”

Sheila smiled and said “You’re a Pilot?”

“Yup, my dad owns Allakaket Airlines, and I’ve had my Commercial ticket with my sea endorsement since shortly after my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. I’ve got hundreds of hours in the Grumman

Super Goose.”

Nick looked at him with amazement. “You’ve got HOW many hours in the Super Goose?”

“My dad helped Northrop-Grumman and the RCAF design the SuperGoose, based on the design of his Turbogoose.”

“What did you say your name was?”

“Josh Williams, why?”

“Ok, that’s right, the owner of Allakaket Airlines is Ron Williams. The RAAF has wanted to buy the SuperGoose for years. Can I tell my wing commander that you’ve got all this experience in the Super Goose? I’m sure he’d like to talk to you.”

“Maybe later, if I know Sheila, she’ll have me busy for the next 30 days.”

Sheila smiled and said “Lucky for us Mr. Williams that I AM type-rated in the Catalina. Nick here is my oldest brother’s best friend, and taught me how to fly as soon as I was old enough. I’ve got the equivalent of your FAA Commercial rating, with my Sea endorsement as well, and I’m type rated in the Catalina, so let’s get your stuff stowed and get going, co-pilot!”

Josh couldn’t help himself, and saluted her in the British style “Aye, Aye Sir!”

She replied “Just remember that later!”

They climbed aboard the Catalina, stowed Josh’s gear, then opened the cockpit door. Inside was a modern avionics suite, including the latest GPS moving map display, surface and air search/navigation radar, IFF gear (it was a military plane after all) and one of the best aviation radios Josh had seen in a while. Sheila slid into the pilot’s seat, and checked the GPS display, then programmed in several diving spots she wanted to show Josh. She told Josh that this Consolidated PBY was slow, but had a 2500 mile range. Since it had been de-milled, the range went up slightly, and they gained almost 50 knots airspeed to cruise at almost 150 knots. The GPS indicated a 10 hour flight to their first dive site assuming an airspeed of 150 knots. He was glad Sheila was so pretty and talkative, otherwise he might get bored flying for 10 hours.

They talked about everything on the way to the first dive site. He found out Sheila was the youngest of 6 kids, and the only one to get an advanced degree, but the rest all graduated college and returned to their station in the Northern Territories. She said it was a small station, only a couple hundred square miles, and they had their own airfield and 2 leased Turbo Commanders. Their most valuable asset was the really good wells they had which had never run dry in 100 years, like others had during prolonged drought. They raised sheep and cattle, like most stations did, and had a small garden for all the vegetables they needed. She was home schooled through

high school, and her test scores were high enough to get her accepted to the University of New South Wales in Sydney. It meant leaving home for the first time, but luckily her brother's best friend Nick owned a huge house in Sydney, and she was living there for free, in exchange for housecleaning duties when she wasn't studying. Nick was a life-long bachelor, like some Aussies, but had a steady stream of girlfriends. Josh could relate, and told her about his past, including the encounter with the SEAL groupie. Sheila admitted she wasn't a Virgin either, and until a few years ago had really loose morals, then she got invited to the church she now attended, and gave her life to Jesus. Josh said that wasn't important to him, but loyalty and love were. She put the plane on Autopilot, and gave Josh a big kiss, and said "Thanks for understanding. Several guys I dated that claimed to be Christians left me after I told them I wasn't a Virgin. I don't understand how some Christians could be so self-righteous. Jesus forgave the Prostitute, and told her to go and sin no more, and even Mary Magdalene was a prostitute at one time."

"Sheila, You were forgiven for everything you ever did, or will do when you accepted Christ. All you had to do was repent. Anyone who holds anything you've done before you accepted Christ is a Self-Righteous Hypocrite, and forgot everything they've been forgiven." She leaned towards Josh and he held her while she cried. She felt she was falling in love with Josh, but didn't want to say anything in case he might reject her, and she didn't want to get hurt again.

After about 5 minutes, she dried her eyes, and he looked into her eyes and said "I don't know how to tell you this, but I think I'm falling in love with you. I want to take it slow and get to know you, but my response so far has been "So far - so good." If we decide to get married, I'll resign my commission, since I'm sitting on almost \$12 million in a trust fund, plus 10 years of accrued Navy Pay. The last time I checked, it was almost \$15 Million total. I need to work like I need a hole in my head. I'm getting sick of the Navy anyway. It's not the NAVY per se, it's the damn politicians! My swim buddy almost bought it during a blown mission when some blowhard Congresscritter said something to the wrong person at a Washington party, and several other SEALS have been killed on blown missions. Sometimes I think our politicians are bigger enemies to freedom than the people they send us out to kill. If we got married, I could just chuck the whole thing and go back to being a civilian."

Sheila didn't say anything, just hugged the stuffing out of him and gave him a big kiss. When she crushed her chest into his, he really hoped she had a 6/4 suit handy, or he'd really be distracted. Finally she came up for air and said "Where have you been all my life?"

"Alaska!"

"Real funny Mr. Wiseguy!"

"You asked."

Several hours later, they arrived at the Great Barrier Reef. Sheila landed the Catalina like a pro,

and set down right where she wanted to be. They lowered a reef-safe anchor out of the starboard window to hold the plane over the diving spot, and Sheila went in back to get changed first. 10 minutes later, she opened the cabin door, and Josh was glad she was wearing a 6-4 suit, or else he might have said “forget the diving!” Even with the 6-4, she made Venus de Milo look like a scrawny Teenager. He squeezed by her, got into his swim trunks and wetsuit, then they popped open the port side blister, and installed a diving ladder. He helped her into her BC and tanks, being careful to avoid bumping her breasts, only to accidentally grope her when he helped her fasten the top strap of her BC vest. She must have been a very passionate woman, because she responded with a very passionate kiss, instead of slapping him silly. He said “Sorry that was an accident.”

“I didn’t mind, I was kind of hoping you’d do something like that. I’ve a confession, I sleep in the nude, and didn’t bring any PJ’s.”

“Me Neither, well this could get interesting!”

“Why fight it, neither one of us is a virgin!”

“Are you sure?”

“I’ve wanted to attack you since I first met you. Now that I know you love me, I really want to attack you!”

“Ok, but can we go diving first, and maybe get something to eat?”

“I can wait if you can.”



## Chapter 74 - Into the Fire

When they got back from diving, Sheila took off her BC and her wetsuit, and kept going from there. When she was standing naked in front of Josh, she said “Well, what are you waiting for?” Josh got undressed as fast as he ever remembered, and suggested they start in the shower. He was glad to see the shower was big enough to hold them, barely. He picked her up when they were through and carried her to the bedroom.

The next morning they both had goofy grins on their faces. Sheila got up and made breakfast, then asked Josh if he’d rather stay in bed or go diving. Josh said that they should go diving, he needed a breather. They dove the other side of the reef they were anchored to, then ate lunch, and then Sheila asked Josh if that was enough of a breather. Several hours later, Josh got up and decided to see what was for dinner. They had several ribeye steaks in the refrigerator, and he rummaged around until he found a large cast iron skillet, got it heating, then found a bag of frozen veggie mix and popped that in the microwave. Sheila woke to the smells of steaks frying in the skillet. She slid into one of Josh’s longer t-shirts and walked out to check on dinner. She saw Josh slaving away over a hot stove, and decided to give him a hug from behind. Josh forgot all about dinner when he felt her warm body pressed against his back. “Sheila, settle down girl, or I’ll burn the steaks.” He turned around, and she gave him a big hug and a passionate kiss.

Josh looked at Sheila, and looked deep into her eyes. He saw love there, and knew she was the woman for him. He loved her more than life itself. He reached over, shut off the skillet, and gently cupping Sheila’s chin in his right hand and looking into her eyes, said “Sheila, will you marry me?”

Looking into his eyes, she saw real love, not just lust for the first time in her life, and realized that Josh was a good lover because he was making love to her, not just having sex. She felt all warm inside and almost started crying. Instead she kissed Josh and said “What took you so long dear, of course I’ll marry you! I’ve never loved anyone like you before in my life.”

Josh decided then and there to resign his commission and live in Australia with Sheila, since it would take her a year to earn her Doctorate.

“Sheila, what would you say if I told you I decided to resign my commission and live in Australia with you?”

“Why would you do that Josh, you’re giving up a career you love.”

“I don’t love it anymore, and even if I did, I love you more! You’ve still got a year to go on your doctorate in Marine Biology, so we should live somewhere where you could finish your degree, since you’re almost finished with this program, we should stay in Sydney.”

“If we want to get married now, we need to get moving, I’ve got to be back in school by the end of the month. You need to meet my parents, then we’ve got to get married somewhere.”

“How many relatives do you have in Australia?”

“Let’s see, my parents, siblings, their kids... say about 50.”

“Would you mind getting married in Alaska?”

“Why not, that sounds lovely. You’re planning on keeping your US citizenship - right?”

“That’s one of the reasons I wanted to get married in Alaska, the other one is we’d have to fly half the town here if we got married in Australia. My dad can charter a VIP jet to fly everyone to Alaska for the wedding, then fly them back.”

“So, you want to do any more diving?”

“Much as I’d love to, we’re on a tight time line. Let’s eat dinner, fly back to Sydney tomorrow morning, rent a twin turboprop and fly to your parent’s station. That way, I can buy you an engagement ring before your parents meet me.”

“Can we buy me a wedding dress while we’re in Sydney? There aren’t too many dress shops in the Northern Territories.”

“I looked on the map, the Northern Territories covers about 2/3 of the map. Can you pin it any closer?”

“Ok, we’re right outside of Hatches Creek, which is Northeast of Alice Springs. It’s about 1200nm northwest of Sydney.”

“Ok, that barely puts it within range of a Turbo Commander.”

“Funny you should mention that, we’ve got one parked at the airport.”

“Ok, let’s fly this slow old Albatross back to Sydney, buy your ring and dress, then fly the Turbo Commander back to your parent’s house so I won’t feel like getting out and pushing.”

“You poor baby, that SuperGoose must have spoiled you!”

“You’d have to see one to believe it - it’s got the same range and speed as your Turbo Commander, yet it’s bigger and an Amphibian!”

“Cool, I can’t wait. Meanwhile we still need to fly ole Bessy back to the barn. Too bad I don’t

totally trust the autopilot on this old bird, or we could join the Mile High Club!”

“I don’t think I could handle any more today.”

“We’ve got to stay overnight, I don’t want to land the Catalina on a runway in the dark.”

“Ok, I guess I could handle some more today.”

They crawled into bed, and spent the rest of the day holding each other. The first thing the next morning, Sheila made breakfast, while Josh secured the rest of the plane for flight. Once they were done with breakfast, they quickly cleaned up and stored the dishes, then climbed into the cockpit. They were quickly airborne headed to Sydney, and touched down at the RAAF base 10 hours later. Nick was waiting for them with a very sad look on his face, and handed Josh a note.

Josh:

Just wanted you to know. Your Team suffered a fatal accident yesterday. Commander Steve Nelson was killed, along with the pilot of the small plane they were practicing HALO jumps from. The investigation is inconclusive, but points to a maintenance problem. As you know, due to budget cuts, planes that should have been mothballed are put back into service, or planes that should be redlined for mechanical problems are being sent back with rebuild motors and other major parts. Sorry to use this impersonal means of conveying this message, but your shoe phone was off.

Admiral Nelson

Josh checked his “shoe phone” and it was on. He guessed there was no service where they were earlier. He dialed his CO’s #, and got a recording. He left a brief message and hung up, making sure the phone was still on. Josh looked at his Fiancé and decided that there wasn’t anything he could do for Commander Nelson, since he couldn’t get home in time for the funeral even if there was one, so he suggested they stop at a pub on their way to the jewelers, so he could have a drink in Big Dog’s memory. She gave Josh a big hug, and Josh said “that’s the way Steve would have wanted it. Also, now I’m sure I want to quit.” He called his CO’s number again, and this time Admiral Nelson answered the phone, after expressing his condolences for Josh’s loss, he told Josh the bad news. The plane he was flying should have been grounded and replaced years ago, but Congress kept dragging their heels funding replacements for the older transport planes the Military was forced to use for training purposes. SEALs had to routinely practice jumping out of all kinds of planes, and this was an old obsolete single-engine transport. When the engine sputtered and died, Steve gave the Abandon ship command, but his harness got stuck on the way out, and he couldn’t clear it in time, which resulted in the death the pilot and himself. They were flying low, and didn’t have time to recover from either the engine failure or Steve’s entanglement. When Josh heard it, he was livid, and told his CO he was

going to resign his commission and get married. He was tired of the BS, and didn't want to die because some Fat Cat in DC was too cheap to replace an old plane, or couldn't keep his lips zipped. The Admiral understood completely, and told him to contact his office when he got back to the CONUS, and they'd e-mail or fax the paperwork for him to sign. As of right now, he was on extended leave pending discharge from the military. The Admiral's only request was that he keep his shoe phone on. Josh explained they were diving on the Great Barrier Reef a couple of days ago, and the phone might have been in a dead area. Admiral Johnson said he'd check into it, the new phones weren't supposed to have any dead areas, since they used satellites. He wished Josh good luck and hung up. Sheila held Josh while he started crying. He lost his best buddy, and his career was over. He was officially out of the Teams. Then he looked into the face of Sheila, and realized it was all worth it, and kissed her. Nick said "Hey, you two want to get a room?"

Josh told him the gist of the letter and his conversation with Admiral Johnson, then asked him if he'd like to go to a pub with them, and drink a toast to the memory of Commander Steve "Big Dog" Nelson. Nick teared up a little, and suggested the base pub, since the Military Men there would understand and appreciate such a gesture. They climbed into Nick's Hummer, and were at the base pub 10 minutes later. Nick ordered the first round, a pint of Stout Ale for the 3 of them. Then Josh stood up and asked for the attention of the patrons.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I'd like to buy the house a round so you can drink a toast with me to a fallen comrade. My SEAL team commander, Steve "Big Dog" Nelson died the other day in a training accident." Once the bartender had filled everyone's glass, Josh raised a shot of Bushmills and said "Here's to you Big Dog, God Rest your Soul." He drank the shot straight down to shouts of "Here, Here!" then he dissolved into tears while Sheila held him. When he regained his composure, he paid the barman, and walked out the door, only to be stopped by a Sergeant Major.

"Sir, I'd salute you if you were in uniform, but instead could I shake your hand, and offer my condolences. What you just did took Class, and I'll remember Big Dog for quite a while. I've had the pleasure to meet several SEALs during my 30 years in the RAAF. You sir are a credit to the Teams, Godspeed and thanks!" He stuck out his hand, and Josh shook it, still wiping away some tears.

When they got out to the Hummer, Sheila told Nick they were going to get married in Alaska, then come back to Sydney to live until she finished her Doctorate. Nick offered them a huge room in his house that was twice the size of Sheila's for half the utilities and 200 dollars per month rent. Sheila knew that rents for rooms that size went for double that in Sydney, and she also knew how hard it was to get an apartment in Sydney, and accepted in a heartbeat. She asked if Nick could afford it, and he said that once they were established, they'd probably start having kids, and need a place of their own, so he could afford it for a couple of years. Josh thanked Nick, and said he'd get in touch with him when they got back. Nick hugged Sheila, and shook Josh's hand, and wished them luck, then they climbed into Sheila's Land Cruiser and

drove over to a nearby jeweler's. He had a ring that fit her finger perfectly, with a ½ carat round near-flawless ice blue diamond in a low solitaire mount. Josh took out his AMEX card, and paid for it while the Jeweler had it polished and ultrasonically cleaned. Next they drove to a dress shop where they had a huge selection of white wedding dresses. 2 hours later, Sheila had her dress picked out. Josh knew he still had a Black tuxedo in his closet in Allakaket from his Brother's wedding that should fit. With that out of the way, they drove to the airport where her Turbo Commander was hangared, and had it pulled out, serviced and fueled while she filed a flight plan from Sydney to Hatches Creek. Once the flight plan was filed, they loaded the plane and boarded it. Since Josh wasn't type rated in the aircraft, he flew right seat, but thoroughly enjoyed the flight. At 300 knots, it took a little over 4 hours to reach Hatches Creek. She called ahead, and landed on their private airstrip, which turned out to be way bigger than Josh thought it was. He asked Sheila how big it was, and she said they built it big enough to land medium jets. The runway was 100 feet wide, and 10,000 feet long, with no obstructions to either side for 400 feet. Josh thought fast, and made a mental note to see if his Dad could charter a Boeing 727-100/ER plane configured with 50 VIP seats. He hoped Qantas or one of the other Australian airlines had a plane available for charter at a reasonable price. When they landed, they were met by an older man driving an old beat up pick up. Sheila jumped out of the aircraft as soon as the propellers stopped, ran to him and yelled "Daddy!" so Josh assumed that was her Dad. When he walked up to him, Sheila introduced Josh "Daddy, this is my Fiancé Josh Williams. Josh, this is my Daddy, Jack Bannon."

"Mr. Bannon, I'm glad to meet you."

"Josh, please call me Jack, we don't stand on formalities in Australia."

"We don't either in Alaska, I just didn't want to seem too forward."

"Sheila said you were her Fiancé, so when you getting married?"

"As soon as we can fly everyone to Alaska. My dad owns Allakaket Airlines, and can charter a jet to fly everyone to Allakaket for the wedding."

"That's a long ways to fly for a wedding!"

"Beats walking!"

They both had a good laugh, and Josh pulled one of his duffle bags out of the plane, and set it on the ground. Then he turned to Sheila and said "Do you think a 727 could land and take off here?"

"Why, what are you thinking?"

"If Dad could charter a 727-100/ER for the flight to Alaska, we'd be an hour ahead of schedule

if they could meet us here, plus it would save the extra fuel between here and there, since it's almost a thousand nautical miles from here to Sydney. If the plane's only got a 5,000nm range, it would be a shame to fly everyone to Sydney, then fly the 727 all the way back over here without landing. It would save several hours flying time, plus over 1,000 miles of range."

"Josh, I like the way you think. I know of a charter company in Sydney that has a 727-100 in it's fleet that's configured as a VIP carrier. But why such a big plane?"

"We were hoping most of Sheila's relatives would be able to make it, since the plane seats 50 easily."

"I doubt if more than 20 of her relatives would be able to go, even if the flight were free."

"Jack, we'd never charge you or your family to fly anywhere. My Dad owns a huge feeder airline that works with Alaska Airlines. He's probably worth almost \$100 million by now, and my personal trust fund's worth \$15 Million easy. Money is no object."

"Let's get to the house and make some calls, I'll have Ernie stow your plane."

"If you think a 727 can land here, I need to get the rest of my stuff."

Between the 2 of them, they hauled all of Josh's bags into the bed of the pickup.

"What you got in those bags, lead?"

"Among other things, that's my Go Bag. Until this afternoon, I was a Lieutenant on a US Navy SEAL team."

"What do you mean "Until this afternoon?"

"Daddy, Josh resigned his commission. He got sick and tired of all the Political BS, and now his friend and Team leader died in a stupid training accident because some congressman was too cheap to include enough money in the budget to replace the older transport planes, or fix them."

"I guess with a \$15 million trust fund, you need the money like you need a hole in the head."

"Exactly Jack. I didn't want to die in some South American Jungle just because some Congressman or his aide couldn't keep their big mouth's shut. Not only that, but I have a sneaky suspicion that the men they're sending us to capture and kill are no worse than the Political Fat Cats in DC."

"You're probably right there."

They got inside the truck, and drove to their house. It was a huge ranch style house, and it was several miles away from the runway, located next to a windmill that pumped water from a deep aquifer that Jack said hadn't ran out in over 100 years. When the truck stopped, Sheila's mother was standing in the doorway to greet them. Sheila ran up to her mom, gave her a big hug, and when Josh got close enough, she said "Mom, this is my fiancé, Josh Williams. Josh, this is my Mom, Nellie Bannon."

"Ma'am. Nice to meet you."

"Please call me Nellie, I'm sure Jack's already told you we're not formal out here."

"Thanks Nellie, Please call me Josh."

Nellie gave Josh a motherly hug, and thought "Looks like Sheila's got herself a winner" and smiled. She asked them all inside for dinner. Once they were seated Jack said grace, and they all said "Amen." After dinner, and some small talk, Josh excused himself, saying he needed to call his parents. He reached into his pocket, extracted his "shoe phone" and called home.

"Mom, Hi It's Josh. Is Dad there? Great, can you put him on the extension, and switch on the speaker phone if anyone else is there? Mom, Dad, I'm getting married. I'm sitting in her living room right now with her parents. My phone can send video if you can receive it. OK, I'll give Dad a second to set up. Jack, Nellie, Sheila, could you gather round so I can send your picture to my parents?" When Ron said he was ready, he turned around, put his arm around Sheila, and pointed the built-in camera at the group and pushed a button. When he looked at the display, he could see that he got a nice head and shoulders shot of the foursome. When Josh got back on the phone, Ron told him that he got it, and he'd tell everyone. He asked Josh when they were getting married, and where, so they could be there.

Josh said "That's what I wanted to ask you. We wanted to get married in Allakaket, and wanted to know if you could charter a 727-100 to fly Sheila's family to Anchorage, then we could fly them to Allakaket using the SuperGoose and the helicopters if necessary."

Ron asked Josh if they had a computer connected to the internet. Jack nodded yes, and Josh asked for their E-mail address. He gave it to his Dad, and he said he'd e-mail a purchase order authorizing the charter through Allakaket Airlines. Josh told his Dad that Jack knew of a local Australian company that had a 727-100/ER for charter with a 5,000 nautical mile range that was configured for VIP transport. 5 seconds later, the PO appeared in Jack's in-box, and he printed it out and saved it. Jack noted that the name of the charter company was blank, as was the dollar amount. Josh thanked his Dad, and said he'd call him when they had the details worked out, but they should be in Allakaket within the week. He told his Mom and Dad that he loved them, and he'd see them soon, then said Bye and hung up. Meanwhile Jack had located the charter company over the internet, and sent them an e-mail with a copy of the Purchase Order. An hour later, the leasing agent replied that the plane was available, and they could take

Allakaket Airline's PO since they were in the FAA database. Jack asked him to reserve the plane, and he'd give them a passenger count as soon as he had it.

Jack got on the phone, and called all of Sheila's relatives. Even including a free trip, he could only get her 20 closest relatives to come. Most made up some excuse or another, and the rest were just too busy or too far away to really care. Jack told Josh that they could only get 20 people to come, and Josh said that would just mean more room on the plane, since anything over 10 people would be crowded and cramped on a smaller plane. Jack e-mailed the charter company with a passenger count of 24, and a destination of Anchorage Alaska, with a 3 day lay-over. The leasing agent quoted their best rate they only give other airlines of \$30,000 round trip for 24 passengers with 50 pounds of luggage each, and a dollar per pound for anything over 1,200 pounds of luggage total. Josh filled in the figures on the computer copy of the PO, and e-mailed it to the leasing agent, and stipulated the pick-up point would be their private airfield at the following GPS co-ordinates, and included the GPS co-ordinates for their runway, and the dimensions. The leasing agent talked it over with the Operations supervisor, who told him that runway was well within their landing and take-off parameters, and to include a rider that if their runway wasn't up to snuff, and damaged the plane or the tires, they were responsible for it, since it wasn't a hard-surface runway. The leasing agent included the proper riders, and Jack replied that the runway was properly designed to handle smaller jets, and they shouldn't have any problem. The Leasing agent replied that the riders were CYA for the charter company in case the runway caused major damage to the plane.

Jack called everyone who said they could go, and told them to meet them at their private runway at 0800 tomorrow morning, with a carry-on and a single suitcase not to exceed 50 pounds. Jack e-mailed the charter company, and told them to have the plane on the runway at Hatches Creek, ready to load and take off at 0800. The leasing company asked if Jack had any Jet fuel, and he said he had a 20,000 gallon tank of JP-5. They asked if they could buy enough fuel to fill their tanks, and give them another 1,000 miles of range without having to land and refuel. If he would let them, they'd deduct the going price of the fuel from their bill. Jack asked if they could pay him direct, since he didn't own Allakaket Airlines, his future son-in-law was the son of the owner, and they were flying to a wedding in Alaska. The agent said that they could mail a check, or send a tanker with replacement fuel. Jack took them up on the offer replace the fuel, since his tank was getting below half.

The next morning, everyone was packed and on the runway at 0800 when the big jet landed, touched down lightly, and as soon as it was down, engaged full reverse thrust. When it stopped, they turned the aircraft around, and taxied up to the crowd, then shut down the engines while they boarded. Jack walked up front, introduced himself to the pilot and co-pilot, and told them where the fuel farm was, and that someone was waiting there to help them fuel the plane. Once everyone was boarded, and their luggage loaded, the pilots did a quick walk-around, checking that the baggage compartment and passenger doors were sealed, then taxied to the fuel farm, took on a max load of fuel, and turned to take off into the wind. They had plenty of fuel, since it was a little over 4,000 Nautical Miles to Honolulu, their fuel stop, and just over 2800 from



there to Anchorage Alaska, for a total of around 7,000 air miles, at 500 knots, it would take around 8 hours to reach Honolulu, and depending on how much time they spent on the ground getting refueled and serviced, it would be another 6 hours or so to Anchorage. Even with VIP seating, 14 hours in the air was a long flight. Sheila commented that there was a Master Suite, and if Josh ever wanted to join the Mile High club, they could do it in comfort. He knew they were facing a 14-hour flight, and realized that joining the mile-high club was a good way to pass a bunch of time, plus he was so in love with Sheila that he loved making love to her, feeling her body next to his, and knowing that he was making her feel so good!

8 hours later they landed in Honolulu, and Nellie had a couple of words with Sheila, and they decided that Sheila and Josh should spend the rest of the trip in the forward cabin with their clothes on.

## Chapter 75 - Hatfield's and McCoy's

When they landed in Anchorage, they taxied to the VIP terminal, where they were met by 4 SuperGoose planes. Josh noticed one was decorated with a red ribbon and bow. His Mom and Dad were the first to greet them, and once they stepped off the plane, Jack and Nellie were glad they followed Jake's advice and dressed warmly. It was fall in Australia, but late Spring in Alaska, and there was still snow on the ground, and the air was freezing cold. They all wore their sheepskin lined dusters and boots. Ron and Nancy were wearing their sheepskin jackets, and once introductions were made, Ron told Josh that the SuperGoose with the red ribbon on it was a wedding present, and he could fly his fiancé, Jack, and Nellie back to Allakaket, and the rest of the clan would divide up among the 3 other SuperGoose. Josh gave his dad a big hug, and the 4 of them walked to Josh's brand new SuperGoose. When he opened the air stairs, he could see it was a upgraded convertible SuperGoose with VIP seats that were removable, the oxygen system, and all the Paramedic gear strapped to the bulkheads. Once Jack and Nellie were seated and strapped in, he did a quick walk around, and pointed out things to Sheila. Once they were satisfied, they climbed aboard, closed the air stairs, walked forward to the cockpit, and saw the new upgrades his Dad had installed in the new SuperGoose, including the upgraded pilot's seats, the first aid kit, and a complete bail-out kit and ditch kit for over-water flying. Josh guessed that Ron had decided to upgrade all the existing SuperGoose aircraft to the same equipment so they could transfer from 1 aircraft to the other without having to transfer any gear. Once he was finished Josh engaged the APU, and soon both turbines were in the green. Some nice person had taped his tail number above the radio, so he could ID himself to the tower.

"Allakaket Airlines, SG 145986 requesting permission for take-off."

"Tower, you're number 4 for take-off, please follow the other Allakaket Airlines aircraft to the proper runway. There are no altitude restrictions at this time."

"Roger tower, Allakaket Airlines out."

Josh guessed he was going to be Tail End Charlie in this convoy. Since he was the least experienced pilot in the group, Tail End Charlie was the place to be. While he taxied, he mentally reviewed the ski-borne take-off procedures. He remembered he had to go easy on the throttles, or he could skid off the runway sideways. He stopped 100 feet behind #3 in line and waited. His Dad took off first, then Jake, then Ralph, and finally it was his turn. They climbed to 2,000 feet, and a couple of hours later, the nav system beeped, indicating a programmed turn and descent to Allakaket. Josh disengaged the autopilot and flew the approach manually. He made a textbook snow landing, and taxied to the hangars. He was stunned when he got out, and his Hummer was waiting for him with the engine running and the heater on. They transferred their baggage to the Hummer, and the 4 of them followed the convoy to his Dad's house where the entire clan was waiting. Josh had more nieces and nephews this time than he did last time he was home, since Jake and Diane had a couple of more kids since last time, and Sarah had a

few more too. Jake and Diane were now the proud parents of 4 kids ranging in age from 12 to 5, and their names were Daniel, Rebecca, Samuel, and John in order. Sarah and Neil's brood included Rachael and Russell, and since he'd been back they had Robert and Rebecca. Josh laughed to himself, thinking they were really into names that started with R. David had finally settled down and married an Inuit woman from town named Isabel. He was 24 and she was 30 when they were married. She wasn't a beauty queen, but everyone in town respected her for her wisdom and common sense. She was raised all her life in an Inuit village far to the north of Allakaket, and had only moved to Allakaket 5 years ago when her parents died. Dave and Isabel built a house over by Jake and Diane since they had finally opened that end of the lake up to building. They too bought a 100-acre property with plenty of trees and access to the lake so they could fish. Dave worked from Home as a Graphic designer. He made steady money, but didn't really need it due to his trust fund. Ralph had given them a Snow Bug for a wedding present as well, so the entire family now owned Snow Bugs, and could get out any time they wanted except during blizzard conditions so they wouldn't get lost.

Once Josh got caught up with the family, he told his Dad that he needed to check with Bill about the wedding. Ron told his son everything had been taken care of, all they had to do was show up tomorrow at noon. With that settled Josh asked if they wanted to do anything. Sheila grinned, then thinking better of it, suggested they go shooting at Bear's range. That met with unanimous approval, and Ron called Bear and asked him if the range were open, they wanted to come up and shoot. Bear told them the range was vacant, and to come on up. Everyone threw their rifles and ammunition into the vehicles, and drove to the airport, then flew over to Bear's survival school. He had several ATV's with the beds in back, and piled on the gear, then they drove up to the range. Bear had tarps laid out at all the positions. Since there still was snow on the ground, he'd added Ensolite pads to the tops of the tarps to keep everyone from freezing. Josh asked Jack and Nellie on the way over what they wanted to shoot. They had scoped AR-15 HBAR Match rifles, M-1a's of various types with scopes, and a half dozen Barrett M -200 50 BMG rifles with monster scopes for shooting at 1,000 yards. Jack was incredulous. The longest shot he'd ever tried was 300 yards with his scoped Browning A-bolt.

Josh said that any one of his siblings with the exception of his youngest brother Dave were qualified shooting coaches, and could get him putting rounds in the black at 600 yards with a Springfield Super Match by the end of the afternoon. Jack said he'd like to try that, and asked if Josh could teach him. Josh demurred, saying he was going to spend time with Sheila and teach her how to shoot his personal M -25 at 600 yards, and maybe if they had time, teach her how to shoot the M -200 at 1,000 yards. Josh asked his Dad if he could work with Jack and Nellie, and he agreed in a heartbeat, and brought Nancy along with him. They set up on 2 adjacent lanes on the 300 yard line, to check out Jack and Nellie's marksmanship before they moved them to the 600-yard line, which could be frustrating if you didn't have near-perfect shooting technique. With Ron and Nancy acting as shooting coaches, they both soon were shooting groups in the black, so Ron suggested moving to the 600-yard line. They spent the rest of the day at the 600-yard line shooting progressively smaller groups, and developing an ear-to-ear grin.

Sheila had almost no experience with rifles, so Josh started slow on the 100 yard line with a scoped HBAR Match-grade Bushmaster AR-15 with a Leupold 3-12x50 scope. He gave her the complete safety lecture, showed her how to operate the rifle, and then had her do 20 dry fires, writing down where the crosshairs were when the trigger broke. With that finished, he handed her a loaded mag, and since she was already wearing her Gargoyle shooting glasses and Wolf Ears hearing protection, she was good to go. Once she loaded the mag, pulled the charging handle back, and settled behind the gun, she went into the calming technique that Josh had described, and she touched the trigger without being aware of it. Her first round was a bullseye, and she was hooked. Hours later, when she was shooting groups in the 10-ring or better, they moved to the 300-yard range, which he explained was a long shot for an AR-15. Once she got her group size down, and was comfortable with the gun, he asked if she wanted to shoot his M - 25. She jumped up and kissed him, so he took that as a “Yes” and went to get his rifle. They moved back to the 100-yard line to establish her zero, and Josh was amazed when Sheila’s first round went right through the bullseye without changing his scope settings. He had her shoot 2 more rounds to confirm her zero, and they were within ½ inch of each other. Josh was amazed, she was the first woman to shoot the same zero as he did!

He moved her to the 300-yard line and had her set the BDC turret to the 300-yard setting without touching anything else. When they had the bipod set up, she got behind the rifle, and noticed the wobble was pretty big. Realizing that she was inducing the wobble herself, she tried Josh’s routine again, and the wobble stabilized into a lazy-8 around the bullseye. She remembered all of Josh’s instructions, and shot as the reticle was crossing into the X-ring. She wrote down where the crosshairs were right when the trigger broke, just as Josh had taught her, then she got ready to fire a second round. After 5 rounds, the rifle clicked Empty, and Josh told her that he looked at her group through his spotting scope, and she had just shot a 5" group at 300 yards. She wrote that down too, along with the date, time, and environmental conditions. They kept it up, and over the rest of the afternoon, her groups got smaller and smaller. Around 5:00, she was visibly tired, and asked Josh if he wanted to shoot.

He kissed her, and walked over to uncase his M -200, and the 2 of them walked to the 1,000 yard line. Sheila thought he was nuts - she couldn’t see the targets at all! Josh set her down on his left side with a 60-power spotting scope so she could watch, and he got set up. When he was ready to shoot, he noticed his wobble was bigger than normal, so he went into his calming routine, reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. The next thing he knew, the gun was empty, and he had fired 5 rounds. Looking through the scope, he almost fainted when he realized all his rounds were inside the 5-inch X-ring. Sheila was giddy when she realized exactly what Josh had done. He had explained to her what a Minute of Angle was, and how tough it was to shoot sub-MOA groups at any distance. Now her fiancé had taken a rifle he just picked up and shot a sub-moa, actually a half-moa group at the unheard of distance of 1,000 yards. Ron was watching from a nearby table, and as soon as Josh got up, Ron ran over to him and gave him a big bear hug.

“Looks like all that practice with the sniper rifles has finally paid off. That group you just shot equals Jake’s best group, and you haven’t been practicing with this rifle.”

“Dad, I finally realize what you meant by being in the “Zone” - I don’t remember pulling the trigger even once. The next thing I knew, the magazine was empty, and all 5 rounds were in the X-ring.” The next thing he knew, Josh was surrounded by the rest of his Family, congratulating him on shooting a 5" group at 1,000 yards. Once the range was cleared, Bear drove down and collected Josh’s target, then asked him to sign and date it. Feeling maudlin about his “retirement” from the SEALs, he signed it Lt. Josh “Doc” Williams, USN SEALs (ret.) and dated it. Bear saw the inscription and gave Josh a big hug in front of everyone, and told Josh. “I know how you feel Brother, it broke me up inside when I retired from the Teams. Just remember, like Uncle Sam’s Misguided Children, Once a SEAL, always a SEAL. You retired with your honor intact. Bravo Zulu.” Now it was Josh’s turn to choke up! Sheila walked up to them and Josh turned into her arms and held her for the longest time. When they broke the clinch, his eyes were dry, and his mind was focused on the present. He was standing in front of the most beautiful woman in the world, who would become his wife tomorrow. He gave her a big kiss, then helped Bear put up all the rifles and gear.

When they got home, Nancy took Josh and Sheila aside. “Nellie told me about the shenanigans aboard the 727. I wanted you two to know that you’re sleeping in separate bedrooms tonight, those were Bill’s specific orders.”

“Mom, how come, we know each other now, so sleeping apart is kind of pointless.”

“If that’s how you feel, why are you getting married. Bill said that if you sleep apart, there is a sense of anticipation for your wedding night, instead of just another night sleeping together. I’m disappointed in the two of you, but I can’t undo what has already been done.” The look in her eyes told Josh more than she said, she was deeply disappointed in her son, and Josh knew he had messed up big time!

“Mom, I’m sorry. I can’t undo what happened, and Sheila and I really do love each other, and this just happened. We were planning on getting married anyway, so I just kind of put the cart before the horse.”

Nancy cooled off a little remembering that Josh was the impulsive one of her children, besides they WERE getting married the next day.

“Josh, your Grandpa and Grandma lived in a tiny little log cabin together before they were married, and they kept their hands off each other. Your father and I lived in the same house for a couple of months and we kept our hands off. You need to practice discipline. You display great discipline in shooting and other areas, now you need to apply it to your personal life.”

“Ok Mom, I never want to disappoint you again!”

Nancy turned to Sheila, and said “I just wanted you two to get off on the right foot. I’m sorry if I lectured you.”

“Don’t worry Nancy, my mom gave me the same lecture practically word for word when we came out of the rear cabin. I guess joining the mile high club with your parents in the cabin next door wasn’t one of my brightest ideas. Don’t be mad at Josh, it was my idea.”

“Just like Adam and Eve, he could have said “no”, so he’s not off the hook, but thanks for standing up for him and taking responsibility, that shows maturity.”

Nancy grabbed the two of them and gave them a big hug, then they went out and talked with the rest of their guests. Jack was talking to Ron, and commenting on how wild and free Alaska was. In Australia, they couldn’t even own a rifle like their M -25, and especially not their M - 200, which would cause the hanky-waving pantywaists in Parliament to throw a major snit! Ron told him they had a bunch of snit-throwing pantywaists in DC too, it’s just that Alaska was remote enough that they really didn’t have too much control over what went on here. Having a retired 3-star Special Forces General married to his mom didn’t hurt either. He told Jack about some of the preparations that Gene had taken to protect Allakaket, and why. Jack’s eyes got huge, and couldn’t fathom someone living in what amounted to an armed camp. Ron explained that most of the US felt the same as the rural interior of Australia - that we were responsible for our own safety, not some Government Nanny who only wanted to do what they thought was best for us.

Josh asked his dad if he could use the computer, he needed to send an e-mail to his CO. Ron told him to go ahead, and Josh sent an e-mail to Admiral Jackson. 10 minutes later, his reply was in his in box, with a bunch of separation papers to sign, including a voluntary discharge and resignation form. There was also a note from the Admiral, suggesting that his Uzi and all it’s attachments were lost in combat, and not in the inventory. Josh smiled at that subterfuge, knowing the Navy supply clerks would look the other way, since stuff was always getting lost. He told Josh to turn the rest of his gear into Elmendorf at his earliest convenience, and they’d ship it back to San Diego for him. Josh printed out the documents, then went through his gear, and removed everything that wasn’t USN property, including his P-14, Uzi, and the magazines and accessories for them including the suppressor. He packed the rest of it up, and made a note to himself to stop in Elmendorf on the way back to Australia and drop off his US Navy equipment.

Later that evening, they ate dinner, then went to bed. Josh and Sheila went to separate bedrooms, and the next morning everyone got dressed, ate breakfast, then they got into their wedding clothes. Jack and Nellie drove Sheila to the church in one vehicle while Ron and Nancy drove Josh in the other. They got to the church about 11:45, and Josh realized he had forgotten to get a best man. He asked his brother Jake, and when he said he’d be honored, he handed Jake 2 gold rings for the ceremony. Josh had already checked with Sheila and asked if she had any psychotically jealous ex-boyfriends. She said she didn’t, then Josh explained it to her, and told her not to worry, practically everyone in the family carried concealed 24/7. She said “Even in Church?”

“With our track record, especially in church.”

At about 11:55 Josh, Jake and Bill walked to the front of the church to await Sheila’s entrance. When the music started Sheila marched down the aisle on the arm of her dad, kissed him on the cheek, and Jack took his seat. Sheila took Josh’s hand, and they turned to face Bill, who began “Dearly Beloved...”

Just like the rest of his family, and probably grooms all over the world, the ceremony was a blur to Josh, until Bill got to the vows. Looking into the eyes of his bride, Josh said “I do!” 2 minutes later, Sheila echoed “I do!” Finally they exchanged rings, and Josh got to kiss his bride. Bill knew the Williams Clan could hold their breath a while, especially since Josh was a SEAL, so he didn’t become alarmed when they didn’t come right up for air. Finally they came up for air, and Bill turned them around. “May I present Josh and Sheila Williams. What God has joined let no man separate.” Most of the town was there sitting in the pews, which Josh’s family on one side, and Sheila’s on the other, and the townspeople scattered behind them. They filled the chapel to capacity, and after they made it down the aisle the townspeople assembled outside and pelted them with rice. The new couple walked next door to the Inn where a huge buffet table was set out. Josh was glad the new Inn was so huge, or they might not have had room for everyone. There was a wedding cake in the corner, and a huge pile of presents. After dinner, they cut the cake, Jake made a toast, and they were given the key to the Bridal Suite.

The next day, there was a note on their door to meet Josh’s parents at their house, so they drove Josh’s Hummer to his house. All his relatives, and Sheila’s relatives were there for a more intimate party. Ron and Nancy gave them the SuperGoose, and another \$10 Million. Josh was wrong, his Dad was worth closer to \$100 million by now, so \$10 million was a drop in the bucket to him. Jake gave him a cool Bowie knife, Sarah gave him a GPS receiver with a world-wide map function, and David got them a Katadyn water filter. Bear gave him a pair of BOB’s with some interesting stuff, including 2 M -4/ M -203 SOPMOD kits with 20 30-round mags each, 2 Level IIA vests with chicken plates, 2,000 rounds of SS-109 ammo, 2,000 rounds of 200gr Corbon JHP ammo, and another suppressed Mini-Uzi in 45 caliber with 20 factory magazines still in the original packaging. Gene gave them a pair of Federal CCW’s, and a letter from the Defense Department making Josh an official consultant to the M - 200 Barrett’s project, and authorizing him to carry Military hardware anywhere in the US. Anne crocheted a beautiful blanket/throw rug for them, and Steve gave them a ParaOrd P-14 Limited to match Josh’s with 6 14-rd mags, a Bladetech IWB holster, and 6 single-mag carriers to go with it.

When everyone was finished, Josh suggested going to the pistol range so Sheila could learn how to shoot her new pistol. On the way there, she asked what a Federal CCW was. Josh explained it allowed the bearer to legally carry anywhere in the United States except inside the White House, which was controlled by the Secret Service. Sheila’s eyes got big, she never heard that there was a way to legally carry anywhere in the country, and she always heard what a hassle it was to get a permit to carry concealed in any Australian city.

When they arrived at the range, Josh made Sheila put her eye and ear protection on, and pulled 200 rounds of FMJ practice ammo and 30 B-27 targets off the shelf. They set the pistol down, and Josh gave her the safety lecture, showed her how to load and unload the pistol, and how to work all the controls. Once she was familiar with the gun, they went through the dry fire routine using the Isosceles stance first, then the Weaver Stance. Josh rediscovered the fact that women with big chests prefer the Weaver stance because their elbows aren't jammed into their breasts. Josh added a level of difficulty when he put a penny on top of her slide, and had her dry fire without making the penny fall off. After about 10 tries, she got it right, and Josh made her do 10 in a row without the penny falling off. Finally he handed her a loaded magazine, and had her insert it into the well, pull the slide back, and let it fly forward. He told her the gun was now ready to fire with a live round in the chamber. She started firing at the target 15 feet away, and he slowly backed up the target as she got better. By that afternoon, she was shooting kill zone shots at 15 yards, and getting most of the rounds in the black at 25 yards. It wasn't great, but Josh knew that they didn't have another day, because the plane would be waiting to fly her parents back to Australia tomorrow, and he'd have to plan a route to get the SuperGoose from Allakaket to Australia.

After talking with his Dad, Josh learned that the Super Goose's maximum range was right around 2,000 nautical miles at 280 knots. If he kicked it up to 300 knots, the range dropped to 1800nm, on down to 1200nm at 350 knots, which was it's maximum recommended straight and level speed. The plane could climb at 2,500 feet per minute lightly loaded, with a max emergency climb rate of 3,000 feet per minute for short periods, since it could easily induce a stall and a crash. Took his calculator and started figuring out a safe route to get home. He checked the great circle route from Anchorage to Honolulu, and it was right at the SuperGoose's maximum range at 2400 nautical miles. He called his Dad in, who called the Aircraft mechanic, who told him they could install a fuel bladder in the cargo compartment, since it was just the 2 of them, and put all their junk in the passenger compartment. 500 gallons of fuel would just about double their range, and just about equal their max cargo capacity with a full load of passengers (8). If they deducted the weight of the passengers (1600 pounds) they could theoretically carry 1600 pounds in the passenger cabin, and still be safe for the long over-water hops. The extra weight of the fuel and cargo would reduce the efficiency of the plane, but they'd still get an additional 1500 miles or so, giving them an ample emergency reserve. They wouldn't need to refill the bladder for the shorter hops, but they'd have it for the longer ones. All the airports serviced jets so they should have plenty of jet fuel, and the Super Goose wasn't picky about what kind of jet fuel it burned.

With that out of the way, Josh called Dan up at the FAA office to file the international flight plan. He almost told Josh he couldn't do it, until Josh told him the Aircraft mechanic was installing a 500 gallon fuel bladder in the cargo area instead of the 3,500 pounds of cargo they could haul. Jet fuel weighed right around 6 pounds per gallon, so it was an even trade, since the bladders didn't weigh that much. Dan said he'd get back to him, and asked Josh when he was planning on leaving. He said they'd be out of there at first light, since that first leg was over 10 hours in the air. Meanwhile, Ron was making a hotel reservation for Josh and Sheila, and



booked a nice hotel near the Honolulu International airport. He checked the internet, located the Captain Cook Hotel on Christmas Island (Kiritimati), and booked a room for the next night, and arranged refueling. They had plenty of jet fuel available since a 737 from Honolulu landed there once a week. Ron sent them a PO for 1200 gallons of Jet A, and they agreed to bill Allakaket Airlines. He sent an e-mail to the Airport Manager at Honolulu International, who agreed to take an Allakaket Airlines PO for jet fuel there as well. Next Ron checked out the airport at Tahiti, and booked a room at the Intercontinental Beachcomber Resort Tahiti. Thinking they might want a breather, he made it for 2 nights. Papeete was a major tourist location, so he had no problem securing 1200 gallons of Jet fuel, and they took his Allakaket Airlines Purchase Order as well. Their next stop on Josh's routing was Nadi International Airport in Fiji. That was the second-longest leg of the trip at 1885 nautical miles, so he booked a room for the night, and secured 1200 gallons of Jet A with an Allakaket Airlines purchase order. From Fiji, they now had the range to fly directly to Brisbane Australia, skipping the stop in New Caledonia if they wanted, since the whole Fiji/Brisbane leg was only 1668 nautical miles. He talked to Josh, who agreed they could fly direct to Brisbane from there, and save a stop, he just wanted to make sure New Caledonia stayed in his Navigation Computer in case they had a problem. If everything went well, they'd just overfly it and land in Australia.

Ron almost panicked when he realized they'd need visas for each country, and made a couple of calls. He found out that unless they were staying for more than a day or two, they only needed a simple tourist visa since they were "just passing through", so he made arrangements for both of them for visas in all the little islands. Since the islands had once been American or British territories, the visas were a formality, and were issued over the internet. Ron reminded Josh to bring a copy of their marriage license and birth certificates just in case. Josh still had a valid passport as did Sheila. Thinking quickly, he had Gene type an official looking letter stating that Josh was on a TDY assignment to Australia, and was authorized to fly his personal plane. Gene knew what was going on, and realized it was just a scam to get past a nosy customs official on these small Pacific Islands. Gene went into full "Bureaucratic BS" mode, and wrote a whopper of a letter, citing non-existent Special Forces projects and DOD directives. Between the letter, and the contractor letter he got, it should intimidate the heck out of any nosy customs officials. Gene printed a hard copy on some of his old office stationery, and drove it over to Ron's house. Gene showed Josh the letter, and explained what they were trying to do. Most Pacific Island Nations don't like people to import full-auto weapons into their country, but if they realized that he was part of a Top-Secret DOD project in Australia, and he was just passing through, it might work. Josh had to laugh, then Gene made him swear he'd only use the letter if he got in a jamb, because if they checked, Gene could get in a whole bunch of trouble.

## Chapter 76 - A Wing and a Prayer

They went to bed early that afternoon, since they had to be up before 0500 to be in the air at first light at 0600. Sheila and Josh went to sleep as soon as they hit the sheets since they knew they had a long couple of days ahead. Ron and Nancy got up early the next morning to make sure they were up to see Josh and Sheila off. The 6 of them had an early breakfast, and the truck was already loaded, so they said goodbye to everyone there. Josh had made arrangements to fly into Elmendorf and refuel there while he surrendered his military gear. The Supply Sergeant knew Josh was in a hurry, so he just signed for the bags of gear that Josh handed him. They quickly taxied to the fuel pumps and topped off the tanks, then called for permission to take off. Since there was no one around that time of the day, they were given immediate clearance, and were airborne for Honolulu at 0800 local. Josh slowly climbed to his assigned altitude and set the autopilot to maintain an airspeed of 280 knots. He barely noticed the fuel bladder, but was glad he had the extra fuel, because he was bucking a 10-knot headwind, and wouldn't have made it without it. The Aircraft mechanic had installed the 500-gallon bladder, and secured it so it wouldn't move, and plumbed it into the fuel system. They had stored all their baggage and gifts in the passenger compartment, and there was barely enough room for everything, so they wouldn't be joining the Mile High club on this trip. The mechanic had thoughtfully installed a porta-potty and a tarp for privacy, because there was no way they could hold it for 10 hours. They had brought a pile of books, and passed the time reading, listening to music on Josh's portable CD player, or talking.

They found out they had even more in common than they thought before. Sheila wanted at least 2 and maybe 4 kids, which was OK with Josh. She surprised Josh when she said she didn't want to live the rest of her life in Australia, and wanted to move to the US. She said she loved Alaska, and wanted to move back there sometime. Josh said he'd be happy anywhere, as long as she was with him. That called for a kiss, so Sheila gave Josh a very affectionate kiss. Ron had printed out their itinerary last night, including which hotels they were staying at, and their reservation numbers. Josh was confused by all the PO numbers for fuel, but decided not to look a gift horse in the mouth, he was sure his Dad would write it off somehow. Josh was wondering how his Dad had managed to get all the visas and everything done so quickly, then he remembered the old quote "Nice to have low friends in High places." and guessed that Ron had some help. He read the letter Gene wrote and laughed. He hoped the Customs inspectors in these small pacific island countries weren't too diligent, and were impressed by official-looking documents. Since they were just passing through, he didn't think there would be any problems. Josh remembered his dad handing him something last night before he went to bed. It was a money belt with 20 Canadian maple leafs. Ron explained that sometimes you could use a gold coin to buy yourself out of deep trouble if you used it properly. Josh thought it was a good idea, and decided to always carry a money belt from now on. Sheila felt funny putting on her IWB holster that morning, but Josh told her that it didn't do her too much good in the night stand. For now, he told her that she could get by with 2 spare magazines, and if they got permits in Australia, she could work her way up to 4. She wondered why anyone would need 4

magazines, so Josh told her Bear's story, and told her that he'd almost run out of ammunition on ops before, and an empty gun was a very expensive club.

A little over 10 hours later, they landed at Honolulu international, taxied to the fuel pumps, filled every tank they had including the bladder as full as they could get, then taxied to the General Aviation parking lot, then parked and locked the plane. The airport's security was pretty good, but he didn't want anyone to break into their plane. They caught a cab at the taxi stand, and had him drop them off at their hotel, which turned out to be within walking distance, but they decided they'd take a cab back so they wouldn't have to walk back. Josh paid the cabby and gave him a good tip, and asked if he could take them back to the airport at 0700 tomorrow morning, they had a long trip ahead of them. He said he'd be right were he dropped them off at 0700 tomorrow, and Josh thanked him then got out of the cab. He gave the registration number and his American Express card to the clerk, and since they were only staying 1 night and leaving early the next morning, she charged the card and he signed the receipt since they didn't need the phone or room service. She handed them their electronic passkey, and they went into their room, dropped their bags, then after using the bathroom, walked down to the diner and ate. After dinner, they went back up to their room, showered and went to sleep, but not before they fooled around a while. Josh's alarm went off at 0600, and he got up, used the bathroom, got packed and dressed, then they went down for an early breakfast, then went back into their room to retrieve their bags and dropped the key off on their way out of the lobby. Just like he said, the cabby was waiting right at the door at 0700. He dropped them off right in front of the General Aviation terminal, and they walked out to where their plane was parked, checked it out and did a walk around, then opened it up and got inside.

Josh used the APU to start the turbines, then Sheila helped him with the pre-flight checklist. Once the turbines were in the green, Josh bumped them from idle to taxi, and called the tower for permission to take off. The tower said they were #3 for take-off, and it would be a couple of minutes. When he got to the end of the runway, he called again, and the tower said he was clear to take off. He slowly climbed to altitude and turned southwest to Christmas Island (Kiritimati), which was about 1200 nautical miles away. At 280 knots, they'd be there in a little over 4 hours. This time, Josh set the switches to burn off the fuel stored in the bladder first, so he could land as light as possible in case the runway at Christmas Island was rough. While they were flying, Josh talked Sheila through the operations of the SuperGoose, and told her that he wanted to get her type rated in the Goose as soon as possible. Sheila thought this was really nice of Josh, and gave him another kiss. 4 hours later, they landed at Christmas Island, and ran into their first snag, in the form of a Customs Official that decided to give them a hard time. Josh explained he was a United States Navy SEAL en route to Australia with his new wife on temporary duty to a classified project. He showed the official his Military ID, and the letter from Barrett, and the official was mollified. Josh explained they were only staying overnight, and flying on to Australia the next morning, and presented their passports. He inspected their passports and visas, then grudgingly stamped them. Once they were in the taxi, Josh breathed a sigh of relief.

The cabby took them to the Captain Hook Hotel, which turned out to be the only hotel on the island with electricity and running water all day long. They were so close to equator that as soon as they got into their room, they turned the air conditioning on high and left it on. The shower was large enough to take a shower together so they did, then they laid down on the bed for a while. Finally they got up and looked for a place to eat dinner. The hotel clerk said there was a nice restaurant across the street that took credit cards. The food was simple but spicy, and consisted mostly of fish and rice. When they were done eating they went back to their room, took another shower and went to sleep. They got up at 0600 the next morning, caught a cab to the airport, filled the tanks of the plane, including the bladder, even though they were only going 1200 miles. They were flying to Tahiti, and were looking forward to spending 2 days there as a mini-honeymoon. They had reserved the honeymoon suite since it was available. They wanted to go diving, but knew better than to dive then fly in an unpressurized aircraft, which was a sure way to get the bends.

On their way to Tahiti, Sheila was reading something about Polynesian women going topless in Tahiti. She mentioned it to Josh, who quipped “If you go topless, it will probably start a riot, so I wouldn’t. But if you really feel like it, you can take your top off while we’re flying, as long as the autopilot’s engaged so we don’t crash!”

“You Dirty Old Man!”

“Who you calling OLD?”

Sheila made sure the autopilot was engaged, and started unbuttoning her blouse. Fascinated, Josh never thought to tell her to stop, and 2 minutes later she was flying topless. Good thing they weren’t flying formation with anyone, or they might have a heart attack. They flew like that for hours, until Josh noticed Sheila’s breasts starting to turn pink. “Dear, you might want to cover up, you’re starting to burn.” Reluctantly, Sheila put her blouse back on, but left her bra off. She asked Josh to remind her to put it back on before they landed. Josh started giggling about the image of his wife jiggling, and old men dropping dead from the excitement. She said “What’s so funny?”

“It’s a guy thing, I was imagining you walking around braless, giving all the old men heart attacks!”

“Good thing you’re a Special Forces Medical Technician, and a Paramedic!”

“Yeah, but I can only do CPR on one old fart at a time.”

“Never thought of that!”

“Having you give CPR to an old man while you were braless would be self-defeating - every time he woke up, he’d pass out from the excitement!”

Later, Sheila said that she needed to put something on her breasts, and Josh suggested Aloe vera Gel. She asked if he could put it on, and he grinned a lecherous grin. “On second thought, maybe I should put it on, there’s not enough room here to finish what we started.”

“You could always take a rain check.”

“I’d probably attack you right as we got off the plane, and get ourselves arrested - not a good idea! How about if I let you re-apply it in the hotel room?”

“Works for me!”

Josh was starting to get seriously aroused, so he changed the subject, and picked up a paperback and turned on the CD to a Jazz group he liked. Later, he turned up the cabin air conditioning, it was getting warm in the cockpit.

Several hours later, they landed in Papeete Tahiti, and the only thing Josh could think about was getting to the hotel as fast as possible. The Customs officer recognized the look on numerous newlywed’s faces, and got them through customs as quickly as possible. The cab got them quickly to the hotel, and Sheila was glad Ron had booked the Honeymoon suite at the Intercontinental Beachcomber Resort Tahiti for 2 nights, because she was pretty sure they wouldn’t get out of the room for the first day, and maybe the second.

Sheila was more sunburned than she realized, which meant that Josh had to re-apply the aloe vera gel frequently, which resulted in them staying inside their whole 2-day stay. All in all, it was a good trade-off in Sheila’s opinion. She realized she had better plan on having at least 4 kids if they kept this up. That evening, they went to dinner, and did an early check-out since they wanted to be airborne by 0600, since the next leg to Fiji was over 1800nm long. At 280 knots, it would be a long flight. Josh called the airport, and asked that the plane be filled, including the fuel bladder in the baggage compartment and the 50-gallon APU tank, and to make sure they got them as full as possible, since he had a long over-water flight. When they got to the airport the next morning, the airport manager handed him a receipt for 750 gallons of Jet Fuel A, and a plane washing, since the plane was covered with salt spray. Josh appreciated the wash, since it could add 10 knots to his speed at the same power setting, and the plane was starting to look kind of grey. Josh checked the fuel tanks, and they were full to the caps, and the bladder was as full as he had seen it. The airport manager had taken his instruction literally. He was glad they had a long runway here, because as heavily loaded as he was, and as hot as it was even at 0600, he knew he was going to need all of it to get airborne. Josh and Sheila finished the walk-around, climbed aboard, and started the turbines, then finished the pre-flight checks. Once the turbines were in the green, Josh moved the throttles to taxi, and called the tower for permission to take off. That early in the morning, there wasn’t any air traffic in the air or on the runways, so he told him he was clear to take off as soon as he reached the runway. Sheila programmed the navigation system for the next airport, NAN @ 17.45.17S 177.26.37E, and double checked the GPS coordinates, which were more precise. They had plenty of fuel, but

they didn't want to get lost out here, so they were practically paranoid about double checking the navigation system. When she finished programming it, Josh double checked her. During this flight, they always double-checked each other, especially with the navigation system. Hawaii was a pretty big island and hard to miss, but they could miss Fiji from the air.

The flight to Fiji was long and boring. Josh estimated 7 hours at their current speed to arrive at Fiji, and they were already tired. He decided to trust the autopilot, set an alarm for 6 hours, and told Sheila he was taking a nap. She was exhausted too, and they were both soon fast asleep. The alarm went off 6 hours later, and Josh checked the Nav display, and they were 45 minutes out of Fiji, and needed to contact the tower since they were almost to Fijian territorial waters.

"Allakaket Airlines calling Fiji Control."

"Go Ahead Allakaket."

"Approaching Fijian waters, request permission to enter and land at Nadi International to refuel and rest overnight."

"Wait One."

"Allakaket, we have your flight plan on file, proceed according to plan, and contact Nadi after you're finished with us."

"Roger, Wilco. Allakaket out."

Josh switched frequencies to Nadi Control

"Nadi, this is Allakaket Airlines requesting permission to land and landing instructions."

"Allakaket, this is Nadi, come right to 360 and reduce altitude to 5,000 feet and expedite."

"Roger Nadi."

Josh put the plane into a steep right bank, and 2 minutes later, he was on heading 360 at 5,000 MSL.

"Thanks Allakaket, we had a 737 that just took off on a collision course. I wish those SOB's that publish the inter-island charts would note the altitude restrictions for incoming flights from the east."

"Copy tower, the 737 just passed well overhead. Thanks. Any further instructions."

"Maintain heading and altitude until over outer marker, then turn left to line up with 27W,

which is our only active runway. There are no nearby obstructions, and you're clear to land. Minutes later, he called Nadi and said "Allakaket on Final" and landed minutes later. They were met by a plane handler who parked the plane, and got a \$5 tip from Josh. They grabbed their carry-on bags and walked to the Customs office. Since they were just staying overnight with nothing to declare, they basically walked through customs. The cab took them to hotel he recommended, and they unpacked and fell right to sleep. The next morning they pigged out since they hadn't eaten hardly anything for 12 hours, then caught a cab to the airport, refueled and did a quick walk around, then started the turbines and finished the pre-flight checklist. Next stop Brisbane Australia.

2 hours later, Josh practically jumped out of his pilots seat, ran as fast as he could to the porta-potty, and barely got his pants down before the local Fijian food made a sudden and violent exit. No sooner did he get cleaned up and buttoned up, when Sheila practically flattened him in her haste to make it to the porta-potty. Josh took out the first aid kit, and gave each of them a healthy dose of Imodium, and told Sheila only to drink their stored filtered water from now on, and they had plenty of safe food aboard. Sheila told him that unless they stopped in new Caledonia, it shouldn't be a problem, since Brisbane was a major town. Josh just hoped he lived that long. A little over 3 hours later, he had Sheila call the Brisbane tower, figuring the Australian Accent might fool them into thinking it was a domestic flight, and it worked. They landed, emptied the porta-potty, refueled and took off bound for Sydney. About 1 hour later, Sheila called her friend Nick at the RAAF base in Sydney, and he got them permission to land, especially when she said they were flying a SuperGoose. They landed at the RAAF base, and Nick met them just off the flight line with his Hummer, and guided them to an out-of-the way parking spot, and helped them unload. Once they had their personal stuff in his Hummer, he called for a mechanic and an assistant to take the fuel bladder out. Nick wanted a ride in the worst way, but Josh asked Nick if they could do it tomorrow, they were dog tired, and their stomachs were still bugging them.

Nick called his CO, and drove them to his house, and showed them to their room. The room was already furnished, so they unpacked, drank some water from his filtered supply. He didn't need the filter, but he hadn't gotten sick all his life. Nick said he had to get back to work, and to help themselves. They ate some fruit just to get some food in their stomachs, took a shower and went to bed.

## Chapter 77 - Back in the Saddle

Nick came home that evening, and they were still asleep, so when they got up the next morning, Sheila made breakfast for the 3 of them, and Nick (Commander Nicholas Klaus RAAF) told Josh he had a very interesting conversation with his Wing Commander (Gen. Karl Ratliff, RAAF) about the Super Goose. The gist of it was that if Josh had the time, they'd both like to take a familiarization ride in it, since the RAAF had been trying to buy them ever since Northrop/Grumman started building them. Josh said that he'd love to, so after breakfast Nick drove Josh to his RAAF base, and right up to his WC's office. Once they were admitted, Nick saluted, and Josh stood at attention, since he was out of uniform. Once Gen. Ratliff finished whatever paperwork he was working on, he looked up, and returned the salute.

"At ease. Mr. Williams, Commander Klaus tells me you actually own a SuperGoose, and it's parked on base. With your permission, I'd like to take a look at it, and hopefully we can go for a familiarization ride."

"I'd love to. Do you have any small bodies of water nearby, a large pond or small lake that I can demonstrate the aircraft's STOL capabilities?"

The general pulled out a chart showing a nearby reservoir that was right between HelpMeJack lake and the lake at Allakaket. Best news was it had only 50 foot obstructions within 1/4 mile. It would be a walk in the park for Josh to land and take off there. He explained to the General that the aircraft was still configured for long-distance ferrying, and needed a jump seat and a headset multiplexer installed if the 3 of them wanted to be in the cockpit. General Ratliff lifted a phone, and asked that a Mechanic be sent to where the SuperGoose was parked, with a multiplexer and a jump seat. Josh took that as a Yes, and they all got into Nick's Hummer and drove to the plane. Nick was in love, and General Ratliff was really impressed. Even after flying halfway across the Pacific island hopping, the plane was still beautiful. Josh could tell that someone had cleaned and detailed it, and guessed Nick was behind that. Josh climbed aboard, flipped a couple of switches, and lowered the rear hatch and air stairs for the General to get a better look.

"Bloody Hell, you could just about fit a Jeep in here!"

"Yes Sir, the SEALs were looking at it as well, since you could fit at least 1 and maybe 2 RHIB boats, and 2 teams of SEALs aboard with a little crowding, or 1 complete team with their gear and the boat. In Allakaket, one of my friends builds a VW dunebuggy conversion for driving on snow called the Snow Bug, and it fits easily with room to spare, and the tail ramp is structured to act as an actual loading ramp. The ramp can be deployed on land or water, and has a feedback system that stops the ramp's downward travel when enough resistance is reached to keep the ramp from getting damaged."



“What are these things?”

The General was pointing to the Oxygen hookups, and Josh explained the aircraft was also configured for Medevac in the Convertible setup. He had 8 VIP seats stowed somewhere to convert it to a passenger aircraft. All Allakaket Airlines Pilots were certified Paramedics in Alaska. The general asked why, and Josh explained that Alaska was about as remote as The Northern Territories, and the only way to get help to someone who was sick or injured was to fly to them and fly them out. They had a couple of Sikorsky helicopters, but they were relatively slow and had short legs. With a normal fuel load, he had just over 2,000nm of range at 280 knots, or if he kicked it up to 300 knots, the range dropped to 1800nm, on down to 1200nm at 350 knots, which was it's maximum recommended straight and level speed. The plane could climb at 2,500 feet per minute lightly loaded, with a max emergency climb rate of 3,000 feet per minute for short periods, since it could easily induce a stall and a crash. With the fully reversible turboprops, the plane had an amazing STOL capability, and it could land on lakes even smaller and with higher and closer obstructions than the reservoir. Josh described the size and obstructions of HelpMeJack lake, and the General looked at him like he was crazy. He realized that the only way to find out was to get aboard and find out. Right then the mechanic finished installing the removable jump seat and multiplexer, so they climbed aboard. Josh talked them through the preflight checklist, and started the turbines using the on-board APU. As soon as the turbines were in the green, the General received clearance for a demonstration flight, and made sure the airspace around the plane was clear. Josh took his hint, and configured the plane for a max-performance take-off. Once he was at the end of the runway, he pushed the throttles to 100%, held the brakes for a second, then released them and as soon as the airspeed indicator hit 85 knots, he hauled back on the yoke until they were climbing at 2500 feet per minute. Josh held the climb until they were at 5,000 feet, then he turned toward the reservoir. Once he was right where he wanted to be, he performed a wing-over, bottomed out at 500AGL, and cranked madly on the flaps until he was at 500 feet AGL at 80 knots. Once he cleared the rise, he further reduced throttle, and they floated right on down to the lake. As soon as they were down, he flipped the pitch reverse switch, and throttled up to 30% throttle. They stopped on a dime, floating there in the middle of the lake. The General had a glassy-eyed stare, and Nick was grinning from ear to ear. Finally the General said “I knew the plane had STOL capabilities, but I never knew it could do that!”

“General, in parts of Alaska, we have to land planes on what you would consider postage stamps, so we had to develop techniques as bush pilots to land on small lakes.”

“Josh, I just got word from Grumman that they are shipping our initial order of 200 Super Goose aircraft this week. I wanted to hire you as a Consultant and trainer to teach our IP's how to do what you just did. It doesn't do us a lot of good to have a plane with this capability, and not have the pilots trained to do it. We could pay you say \$100,000 per year as a consultant plus expenses. I ran your background, and I found out you just resigned from the SEALS.”

“Sir, what can I say, I just lost my Team Leader and friend to a training accident caused by the

Fat Cats in DC not budgeting enough funds to replace older obsolete training aircraft. According to my CO, the plane should have been cut up for scrap years ago, but it was all they had. A couple of years ago, my swim buddy got shot through the leg because someone in DC couldn't keep their lips zipped, and compromised our mission. We were lucky to get out with only 1 SEAL wounded. We were up against FARC guerillas, and if they'd had the manpower, I might not be here. I have a trust fund worth \$25 Million, and I just got married in Alaska to a beautiful Australian woman who is finishing her doctorate in Marine Biology at the UNSW, so we came back here."

"That would be Sheila Bannon, Nick told me all about it. Anyway, sounds like you've got an interesting skill set. From what I read you could out-shoot most of my snipers, and your Dad was working on a project with Barrett firearms. Do you know anything about that?"

"Sir, I have a letter right here if you wanted to read it."

Josh handed the general the letter.

"This sounds to me like you have the rifle nearby. Mind if I take a look at it?"

"It's over at Nick's house if you don't mind."

"Ok, let's get this crate back to the barn and get a look at your new toy."

They landed at the RAAF base, and once Josh was parked, they shut down and went to Nick's Hummer, which someone had thoughtfully added the General's flags to, so he could ride in style. Josh jumped in back, and they drove to Nick's house. Sheila was sitting there doing her homework when they came in. She jumped up and walked over to Nick and the General. Josh made the introductions, and she shook the General's hand, then went back to her studies. Nick and Josh manhandled a huge crate marked US Government Property onto the dining room table, and opened it. Inside was a Pelican case containing the M -200, and a case of Black Hills BMG 50 Match ammo. They opened the Pelican case, and the General got really interested.

"We'd heard about the M -200, and wanted to buy some, but this is the first one I've seen."

Sheila overheard them and said with a note of pride in her voice, "Just last week Josh here shot a 5-inch 5-shot group at 1,000 yards with it at Bear's Survival School range in Alaska." The General got REALLY interested, no one shot 5-inch groups at 1,000 yards with any rifle in the RDF inventory including their Barrett M82A1. Josh explained the program his Dad and Gene worked on for all those years. It was hopefully not classified any more, and the general realized that they had a real asset here, and he needed to take care of him and keep him in Australia as long as possible to work with the RDF. He'd heard about the Robo-gun project, and hoped Parliament would let them buy some of the LAV-25's equipped with the new Robo-gun, which was supposed to be sniper accurate out past a mile. The General came out of his reverie and

told Josh that the RDF could really use the help, and he wanted to make it worth Josh's time. Not only with the SuperGoose, but the M -200 if they could buy some, and maybe with the Robo-gun equipped LAV-25. Josh said he had some problems, and he might be able to help. He told him about the time they got mugged at Observatory Hill Park, and the totally anti-gun attitude of the local politicians. He showed the general his Federal CCW, and explained that it would allow him to legally carry concealed anywhere in the US, and he wanted something comparable that was good all over Australia, since he'd probably have to travel, and he wanted one for Sheila too. General Ratliff knew he could take care of that, and asked Josh if he got them both concealed carry permits good anywhere in Australia, and the consulting contract for say \$250,000 per year plus expenses, would he be willing to stay there for at least 5 years?

Josh excused himself, saying he needed to ask Sheila, who gave him a big kiss and told him to go for it, then he walked back into the room, wiping lipstick off his face.

"I take it Sheila approves."

"General, if you can come through with the permits, including paperwork for any military hardware I have including the rifle, and a consulting contract for \$250,000 per year plus expenses, you've got a deal!"

"What military hardware?"

"General, I used to be a SEAL, and let's leave it at that."

"Ok, I'll get my aide started on the paperwork. For organizational purposes, Commander Klaus will be the project manager, if that's ok with you."

Josh thought he could trust Nick, and he seemed OK for an Aussie, so he said OK.

Nick drove the General back to the base, and 2 days later, he gave Josh and Sheila some very valuable and rare permits that allowed them to carry any weapons, including Military hardware concealed anywhere in the Commonwealth of Australia. It identified them as being consultants on a classified RDF project as a cover. Josh thought that it was really neat when you had people with connections like that. He called his Dad and said they were staying in Australia for a while, and told him about the Consulting contract. Ron told him they were going to ship his Hummer and all the parts and manuals they'd need to maintain the SuperGoose to Australia on a container ship that should be arriving in Sydney Harbor in a month or so. Josh asked him to ship 2 M -25's with scopes, 20 magazines, and 5 cases of ammo as well, since their permits allowed ANY military hardware. Josh thought about that and added several other things to the list including cases of SS-109 ammo, Corbon 45acp 200gr JHP, and a couple more cases of .308 and 50-BMG match ammo. Ron said he'd take care of it, and told Josh he loved him right before he hung up. Josh said "Bye Dad" and heard a click in response.

Later that week Sheila's parents called up and asked if the two of them could fly to their Station for a family party that Saturday. Sheila checked with Josh, and they were available, so she said "sure". Jack said something about making sure to bring their rifles, so Sheila told Josh when they hung up. Josh assumed he meant all of them. Since he had the paperwork making it official, he brought the M - 25 and the M - 200 when they flew the SuperGoose there Saturday morning. 1200nm at 280 knots took a little over 4 hours so they landed around noon, and Sheila's dad Jack was there to pick them up. Good thing too, since the case carrying the M - 200 weighed a ton, and the 2 of them barely managed to get it into the pickup bed. The M -25 and the case of match ammo was light in comparison. When they arrived at the ranch, there were trucks and Land Cruisers parked all over the place. Josh guessed that the entire family showed up this time. Nellie greeted them at the door, and said that since they couldn't all fly to Alaska, they decided to have another reception/reunion for them when they got back, and this was the soonest they could get everyone together. When Josh told Jack and Nellie about the RDF consulting contract, and they'd be in Australia for at least the next 5 years, Nellie was overjoyed since Sheila had always been her "baby". Josh met so many people he lost track, and Sheila helped him out. Most of them were middle-aged with anywhere from 4-8 kids each.

Sheila explained that in the Outback everyone had large families since everyone needed to pitch in when there was work to do, like shearing the sheep, and culling the roos. Josh looked at her funny, and she explained that if they didn't keep the kangaroo populations down to size, they'd eat all the forage and starve anyway, but destroy the stations in the process, so each year they shot anywhere from 500-5,000 kangaroos on each station. Josh asked if they ate them or kept the skins. Sheila explained that they weren't very good eating, and their coats left a lot to be desired. Lately they had been donating the carcasses to the local aboriginal tribes, who would eat almost anything, and appreciated the meat and the skins, as long as they were fresh. They were going out to shoot roos tomorrow, and wanted to know if Josh wanted to come along. With the Springfield rifle, he could take a lot of them. He wondered what they'd say if he shot a kangaroo with the BMG-50 M - 200 at over 1,000 yards! Later that evening he asked Jack if he should bring the M -200, or if the M -25 would be enough. Jack said he wouldn't waste such a fine rifle shooting kangaroos, which he considered oversized rats, so Josh dropped it.

First thing the next morning, they drove out in their pickups and Jeeps. Josh brought the M -25 and left the M -200 at home. Sheila grabbed a Bushmaster HBAR AR-15 with a scope at Josh's advice. 2 hours later, they noticed a mob of thousands of red kangaroos all feeding. They set up their rifles, and Josh brought all 30 20-round magazines for his rifle, and Sheila brought 30 20-round mags as well. Josh concentrated on the biggest kangaroos over 300 yards out, and as soon as Jack started shooting, Josh was dropping kangaroos with 1 shot at over 300 yards at a rate of 1 every 5 seconds or better. When he ran out of ammo, the barrel was smoking hot, and he left the action open to cool. When they went out to collect the carcasses and saw the ones Josh shot, Jack commented that you didn't need to shoot the kangaroos in the head. Then he realized that Josh was making head shots on a kangaroo at 300-400 yards and dropping 10-12 of them per minute until his ammo ran out, and some of them were trying to get away!

He suddenly realized his son-in-law would make several professional kangaroo hunters look like amateurs. They waited for the bodies to bleed out, then piled the carcasses in a huge 6x6 diesel truck that took a load to a disposal site where the Aboriginal tribes collected the ones that were in better shape. Jack thought that they'd appreciate Josh's shooting, since they'd get pelts without holes in them. Later that evening after dinner, Jack broke out a jug of sipping whiskey and the men sat down to talk. The subject quickly turned to shooting, and Josh described growing up in a wilderness much like Australia, but much colder, to which Jack said "here, here!" He told them about hunting Caribou and Moose, and shooting the occasional grizzly bear. When he said that they had a pack of wolves sharing the area, Jack looked at him like he was nuts until Josh explained that once the wolves habituated to the humans, as long as they were both hunter-gatherers there was no conflict. The conflict started when Man started raising livestock, and the wolves saw the livestock as prey, which they normally were; so man had to use the domesticated cousins of the wolf to keep the wild wolves from their flocks, and that was when the problems started. Josh explained it was too flipping cold to raise livestock in Alaska, so there was no reason not to get along with the wolves. He told them about Oliver, Sam, and the other wolves they'd adopted over the years, and how domesticated dogs were genetically identical to a wild wolf, and were only a case of arrested development and inbreeding for selected traits. If you outbred dogs like German shepards and huskies, they quickly resembled their wild cousins.

When the men were through, Sheila came in to collect her husband. She was disappointed when he fell asleep right when she laid him in the bed. She got him undressed, and pulled the covers over them, then went to bed. The next morning, Josh woke up with a major hangover. Sheila was ready for it, and handed him a large glass of water and several aspirin. Half an hour later, Nellie called out that Breakfast was ready. Judging by the looks on his male relative's faces, he wasn't the only one suffering that morning. He couldn't understand how anyone with a hangover could eat a big breakfast, but after some tomato juice, his stomach settled right down, and he dug in as well. They sat around the rest of the day recuperating from the excesses of last night while the women cleaned up and talked. All of her sisters were either pregnant, had a baby on their hip, or were pregnant with a baby on their hip. Sheila hoped that she would soon settle down and start popping babies out one after another, but she knew her clock was ticking, and she would have to make a choice of her career or kids. With Josh around, she wanted it to be kids. Before she was totally dedicated to her career, now she wanted to be a mommy in the worst way, and stopped taking her Birth Control pills as soon as they were married. She didn't tell Josh, because she never told him she was on the Pill in the first place. They spent the rest of the afternoon socializing, and they had a large roast lamb for dinner with all the trimmings. Josh and Sheila excused themselves after dinner, since they wanted to get an early flight back, and Josh was exhausted ... at least he was when Sheila was through with him!

The next morning they got up in time for breakfast, packed their bags, and Jack drove them out to the plane. They refueled the plane from Jack's tank farm and flew home to Sydney.

## Chapter 78 - The Ship comes in

Josh received a phone call a month later, his Hummer was in, and he had a container to pick up. Josh asked if they could deliver everything to Nick's house, and they said that local delivery was included in the cost, so he gave them Nick's address. Later that afternoon, the Hummer and a 40-foot shipping container showed up within minutes of each other. When he unlocked the container, Josh realized he'd need a huge storage facility to store all of it, since they needed the container back in 3 days or they'd charge him for the use of the container. He called Nick and explained the situation. He told Nick that he'd send some Airmen over with a six-by and a huge trailer, and a forklift to transfer the load. They'd help him unload the ammunition and stuff, then load the parts and manuals into the truck and trailer so they could store everything at an unused hangar on the RAAF base, which was the same hangar his SuperGoose was currently parked in, so everything would be together. The next day, a 6x6 showed up at Nick's place with 4 of the biggest airmen Josh had ever seen. They loaded the crates of ammunition and stuff into Nick's huge garage, then transferred the pallets of parts into the 6x6 and the trailer, then drove off.

Josh was curious what was in the boxes stamped US Government Property. He pried the first one open, and there was a note from Gene saying he included some surprises that he didn't order, and found 4 Mini-Uzis just like his with 10 30+ round magazines each including the suppressor and 5 cases of Corbon 200gr JHP ammo. Josh liked the way Gene thought, and guessed that the Supply sergeant at MacDill unloaded the rest of his Uzi's and shipped them to Gene years ago, because they were still in their original packaging and grease. In the next box was 4 Springfield Armory M - 25's with the tactical BDC scopes, 50 20-round magazines, and 10 cases of Black Hills Match Ammo, all with the same lot number. The next case held 2 more SOPMOD M - 4 kits, 10 cases of SS-109 ammo, and 10 cases of 40mm grenades. The final case was the heaviest of all, and contained another M - 200 and 10 cases of BMG-50 Match ammo. Josh hoped he never had to move this stuff again, because the cases weighed a ton! He walked inside Nick's house, and asked Sheila if she could come down to the garage for a minute, he had a surprise for her. He showed her all the stuff his dad shipped them, and her eyes fixated on the M -200. She'd always wanted to shoot one, and Josh told her that rifle was her's to keep. She squealed like a little girl, hugged the stuffing out of him, and kissed him as hard as he could remember. He told her they could fly to her dad's station and shoot their M - 200's that weekend if she didn't have anything else to do. She saw the M - 25's and suggested they bring those too. She suggested giving 1 each to her mom and dad, and 3 cases of the match ammo. When she saw the Uzis, she asked what the heck they were for. Josh said that he wanted her to store her Land Cruiser, since he wanted to buy her a Hummer H1 just like his. He was going to get them both ballistically armored, and have a false bed put in the back to store their bug-out kits including the M -4 SOPMOD kits. She gave him another kiss, and went back to her studies.

Josh walked inside the house, logged onto the internet, located a HUMMER dealer, ordered a brand-new 2004 H-1 Hummer with the 6.5 liter Cummins turbo-diesel, and had them deliver it. He called Nick, and he suggested a body shop that did ballistic armoring for VIP vehicles, and had done dozens of Hummers. He called them, talked to the owner, and drove his old Hummer to the shop after getting directions. He told the owner what he needed, and the owner said that much armor, including a full-length skid plate backed by Kevlar armor, ballistic panels inside the doors and the rest of the body, bullet resistant windows, upgraded front and rear bumpers with push bars and side nerf bars weighed enough that he should install the full Banks kit in his diesel engine, that would bump the horsepower from 205 to almost 300hp, and the torque from 440 ft-lb to almost 600ft-lb. He said that the propane injection kit, and the dual fuel tank setup came with the kit. Josh said he also needed a large hidden compartment behind the back seat running the full width and length of the back, and at least 6 inches deep, with a high-security lock. The whole installation needed to look stock. The owner suggested he tint the windows as dark as the law allowed, to prevent anyone from getting a good look inside, and he'd install sliding gun ports into the doors. He quoted Josh between \$100 and \$150 thousand to do everything, and Josh asked him what the price would be if he did 2 Hummers at once, since he was buying his wife a brand-new 2004 H-1 Hummer. He said the price for both would be substantially less, since the 2004 Hummer had a better turbocharger, so the kit was cheaper. He'd charge him \$220 thousand for both, cash. Josh asked if he'd take a check, and when he said he would, he wrote a check for \$220 thousand dollars without batting an eye and handed it to the owner. He told Josh to bring both vehicles over first thing tomorrow, and it would take about a week to install everything. Josh called the Hummer dealer, and asked them to deliver the vehicle to the body shop instead.

The next day, he drove his Hummer to the body shop, and they were already working on Sheila's vehicle. He got a ride back home, and started putting things together for their trip that Saturday to her parent's station. He called Nick at work, and asked him if they could have his SuperGoose fueled and ready at 0800 Saturday morning, and if they could use his Hummer to transport some equipment to the RAAF field they were bringing with them to her parent's station. Nick agreed to drive them over there, since he needed his Hummer for later that morning. The next day, Nick drove them to the hangar, and helped load the SuperGoose, then shook Josh's hand and gave Sheila a hug, and they were off to her parent's house.

4 hours later, they arrived at her parent's station. This time Jack brought his big diesel F-350 and some help. The ranch hands made quick work of loading the rifles and ammo in the bed of the truck. Josh wasn't worried, since the Pelican case was designed for rough handling. When they got to Jack's ranch house, Josh told Jack he had a present for him and Nellie, and handed him 2 cases containing a scoped M - 25 each, and 3 cases of .308 Match ammo. Jack wasn't the hugging type, but Nellie made up for him. Jack knew how much the M -25 cost, he'd looked one up on the Internet when they got home, and thought he couldn't afford one. He told Josh that was too big of a gift to give them. Josh said that he shouldn't worry about it, he had plenty of money where that came from, and he knew how much they wanted one. He asked Jack how big his Jet fuel tank was, and he said he had a 10,000 gallon tank. Josh suggested he'd help him

afford doubling it, because if they wanted to visit, he'd need to fill up at the station before flying back, and if he were flying anywhere North or Northwest of Sydney, this would be a good stopping place to fuel up, and said that he'd help Jack buy the bigger tank, and fill it full of fuel. Jack said they were buying JP-5, since it stored longer than Jet Fuel A, and was about the same price. Josh mentioned that he'd talk to Nick at the RAAF base, and see if they could get a bigger tank, and a better price for the larger deliveries, since a KC-130 could haul 10,000 gallons at once with enough fuel to fly the round trip to Sydney. Jack pointed out that they had regular tanker truck deliveries, and didn't need to use a KC-130. Josh laughed, saying that he was still thinking how they did stuff in Alaska, where there weren't many roads.

Jack said he'd love to have 20,000 gallons of jet fuel on hand, and he thought about increasing his diesel tanks while he was at it. He only stored 1,000 gallons of stabilized diesel for the station. Josh asked him to check if they could truck in another 10,000 gallon jet fuel tank, and another 1,000 gallon tank of diesel, and he'd pay for it. All they had to do was reimburse Josh for the fuel they used, and let him know when the tank got below half full. He called his Dad, and Ron told him to use the Allakaket Airlines purchase orders for fuel, so he could get better pricing, since they still owned the SuperGoose for tax purposes. Josh didn't give a rip who owned his plane, as long as he got to fly it. He'd already guessed that his Dad had made the same arrangements he'd made with Jake and Ralph, since maintaining the planes was expensive, and it would be a write-off for Allakaket Airlines. He told Jack what his dad had said, and knew that Ron could get much better pricing billing the fuel to Allakaket, and paying them, instead of buying it and paying retail or better himself. He gave Josh the number of his fuel distributor, and after Josh talked to him and indicated just how much fuel he'd use during a year, he checked and realized Allakaket Airlines was a major feeder airline for Alaska Airlines, which had a contract with their parent company, so he offered Josh 20% over wholesale pricing for 10,000 gallons of JP-5 and 1,000 gallons of stabilized diesel, and cost on the tanks and installation. Josh gave him a verbal PO, and said that he could e-mail the original if they would give him their e-mail address. Josh e-mailed the address and billing information including pricing to his dad, and asked him to e-mail a Purchase Order back to the fuel distributor, and to start an account for him so they could keep track of the fuel delivered to Jack's station. Ron took care of the details, and opened an account for the Outback Station under Allakaket Airlines in the billing system, with a note that the account would be reimbursed by Jack Bannon for personal use of fuel.

With that out of the way, they drove to their "shooting range" and spent the rest of the afternoon shooting. Josh taught Sheila how to shoot the M - 25 first, got her zero established, then once she was shooting small groups at the 600 yard line, switched her to her new M - 200, and set her up on the 600 yard line to get a zero. After 5 shots, he had her make a scope correction, then fire 5 more. Satisfied with her zero, and her group size, he moved her to the 1,000 yard range, and spent the rest of the day getting her group size under 10 inches. Her last group right before it got dark measured 9.5 inches, which was great for someone who had never shot that rifle before. Jack and Nellie were shooting 10-inch groups on the 600-yard line with their new rifles, and Josh promised their groups would get smaller with practice, as long as they shot the same



way every time.

Later that evening, a truck drove up to the front of the house, and 2 aborigines got out. Jack immediately recognized them as the eldest and 2<sup>nd</sup> son of the tribal chief of the closest aboriginal tribe. He had met them before, and they were very polite, proper, and British when they wanted to be. They shook Jack's hand when he stepped out on the porch to meet them, and they asked Jack if he knew about the hunter who had shot all the kangaroos through the head.

"You must mean my Son-in-law Josh Williams. I'll get him for you."

The two of them were back in minutes.

"Jack tells us you're the man that shot the kangaroos through the head?"

"Is there a problem?"

"No, we were just wondering why someone would bother shooting them in the head?"

"I didn't want them to suffer, and it was close enough for head shots."

"How far away were you?"

Jack spoke up and told them that Josh was shooting Kangaroos between 300 and 400 yards away. They were doubtful to say the least. Josh spoke up and asked them if they wanted a demonstration. When they said yes, Jack asked them if they could be back at first light tomorrow, because it was too dark to see. Josh whispered in his ear that he had brought his night vision scope, and it should still be zeroed for the M - 25. Jack nodded his head, and got a big grin on his face.

"Gentlemen, not only can Josh hit kangaroos at 300 yards, he wanted to show you now that he can do it at night as well!"

They were eager to see this, so they loaded up in Jack's 4x4 pickup, and the brothers followed in theirs. While they were driving, Josh swapped the daylight for the night scope, and loaded a magazine with match ammo. They drove out to 1 of the target stands, put a fresh target up, then drove a quarter-mile by Jack's odometer away from the target. Josh got out, set up his tarp, then the rifle, and after reciting the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm a couple of times, got behind the rifle, and adjusted the scope. He asked for a trial shot to verify his zero, and the scope was still zeroed, since the round was less than half an inch outside the center of the bullseye. He proceeded to fire off 10 rounds, then locked the action open, and put up the rifle. When they drove back to the targets, the brothers were amazed that Josh had shot a 4-inch group at night at 400 yards. Finally Josh let them look through the scope, and they realized he had a night vision scope when they spotted some kangaroos moving about 300 yards away. They asked if they could

take the target with them, and Josh said yes, and they left. They drove back to the house to eat dinner and thought nothing of it.

The next day they went back to the range to shoot pistols. Sheila and Josh were shooting their P-14 Limiteds, and Jack had an assortment of pistols, ranging from an old Webley .455 break-top to a Broomhandle Mauser in 7.62x25mm. Josh wasn't into old British guns, but was impressed by the size of the Webley. It kind of reminded him of his Colt Anaconda. He told Jack that he left his Colt Anaconda and a suppressed Ruger 22/45 in Alaska. Jack said he'd fired the Blackhawk before, and once was enough. Just as they were finishing up, the pickup with the two brothers showed up again. They asked Jack if Josh could attend a ceremony in his honor that evening. They'd drive him over and back later that night. Jack looked at Josh, who looked at Sheila, who shrugged. Josh said "I don't know anything about Aboriginal customs, what do you think Jack?"

"You might want to go, it should be fun, and basically harmless. My guess is the Chief wanted to meet you in person and thank you for the skins."

"Ok, when and where?"

The elder brother looked at the sun, and said, "We'll be back when the sun sets." They climbed into their truck and left. Jack recommended that Josh not bring any modern weapons to the ceremony, that would be offensive to the Aborigines. Josh asked if he could bring his Bowie knife. Not knowing what a vicious weapon a Bowie knife was in the hands of a trained knife fighter, Jack said that they all carried knives, so they'd understand. Josh just grinned, He was as well armed with a Bowie knife as some people were with a gun. When the sun set, the brothers returned. Josh climbed into the truck, and they drove off. On the way there, they talked about everything and nothing at all. Finally they arrived at their camp. Josh was seated at the place of honor next to the chief, and his Eldest son sat next to Josh. He explained that he'd try to answer any of Jack's questions. Jack started off with "Why am I here?"

"You took special trouble to make sure the animals didn't suffer, you're not like the rest of the white men from around here. You also speak English differently than they do."

"I'm from Alaska, it's in the Northern part of the United States."

The elder brother, Bill, translated for his father, who had a limited knowledge of English since he didn't go to an English speaking school like his sons did.

"You seem to care for the animals you hunt, we feel the same, but don't understand why you feel that way."

"We have native people in Alaska called the Inuit, they've lived there forever. They believe in a web of life, and that you shouldn't unnecessarily harm another living being. If you need an

animal for it's fur and flesh, you are not to waste it, and they are thankful to the animal's spirit when they kill it. I don't believe everything they do, but I do value an animal enough not to waste it, or to cause them unnecessary pain."

"Thanks for answering honestly, My father has decided to have a feast in your honor. You will be presented with native foods, some familiar, some unfamiliar. None of which will harm you, If you eat everything placed before you, you will gain status in my father's eyes, and they will respect you. First we will do some dancing, chanting and storytelling. This may seem strange to you, but don't be alarmed. Please don't talk during the chanting or storytelling, it's considered rude. I have to get ready for my part in the ceremony. See you later."

Josh sat there not knowing what to expect when suddenly several men wearing only loincloths were dancing and stomping the ground. One man was playing a strange instrument that Josh learned later was a Didgeridu. Then they started chanting, and Josh appreciated the rhythmic beat, even if he couldn't understand the words. While they were chanting, dishes were being passed around, and every man ate from it. First was grubs. Josh almost passed, then remembered what his E&E instructor said "SEALS can eat anything that doesn't eat them first." and choked down several of them. Next came a beverage that tasted like a cross between tea and beer. It wasn't half bad, so he drank enough to get the taste of the grubs out of his mouth. Next he was handed a bowl of meat that looked like chicken. Bill told him it was lizard. Josh had eaten all kinds of snakes before, and this was no different. Finally they set a huge hind of meat over the coals and roasted it. As it became done, each man got up and sliced a piece off with their knives. Finally Josh got up and sliced a large piece off with his Bowie knife and ate it. It was kind of gamey, and Bill told him it was Kangaroo leg meat. Josh told him it tasted better than that old Grizzly Bear he shot years ago in Alaska. Bill translated, and suddenly the entire camp was whispering. His Dad whispered something back to Bill, who asked him how he killed the Bear.

"It was attacking us while we were out fishing. My Dad and I each shot it with our pistols in the chest, and it dropped deader than a doornail less than 20 yards away."

Bill translated, and his Dad nodded. Josh wasn't rude enough to ask, he guessed if the chief wanted him to know, Bill would translate what he said.

Hours later, when the feast was over, Bill's dad put a leather thong over Josh's neck with a crocodile tooth hanging from the center. Josh thanked the Chief, then they went back home. When they got home, Jack was waiting for them, and Bill was talking to him, and pointed to Josh. When they left Jack told Josh that he made quite an impression on the Chief. He saw the tooth hanging from his neck and said "I guess you really made an impression. The only 2 other white men I know that wear a crocodile tooth are kind of honorary members of the tribe."

Sheila saw the tooth hanging from Josh's neck and told him the same thing. They went inside, sat down and talked, then went to bed since it was late.

## Chapter 79 Bond...James Bond

The next day, Josh and Sheila flew home, she had a meeting Monday with her Doctorate mentor. Nick drove Josh to the RAAF base on Monday to meet some people that he was going to work with getting the RAAF up to speed with their new SuperGoose aircraft. They were a cross-section of the wing's personnel. There were mechanics, instructor pilots, supply clerks, and enough brass to make a dozen spittoons. After the first hour or so, the Brass left to get back to their administrative duties. The Supply Clerks were the next to bug out once they got the lists of parts they needed to order, and an idea of how many they were going to use. The mechanics asked the most questions, and got the fewest answers. Some of their questions were so technical that Josh suggested contacting the Tech rep at Northrop/Grumman, or Allakaket Airlines chief mechanic. The maintenance questions were answered by giving them a piece of paper with the recommenced service intervals. Finally he got down to talking with the Instructor Pilots.

“Most of the stuff I’m going to show you is pretty much SOP, but the short field water landing technique is something I’ll have to show you, then coach you through. Most of you are probably used to landing on big long wide runways. The SuperGoose is capable of landing and taking off from tiny lakes that are maybe 1 mile long, and less than 1/4 mile wide with obstructions on both ends.” Josh went along to describe the exact conditions at his home lake HelpMeJack lake, and brought a photocopy of the relevant chart to prove it. They were astounded that anyone would try to land on such a small lake. Josh explained that Alaskan Bush Pilots did it all the time. People didn’t have the luxury of living where there were huge lakes that were easy to land on, so the bush pilots learned to float their planes in just above stall and land as close to the shore as possible to give them the maximum run length to slow down once they hit the lake. He said that with the reversible pitch props, the SuperGoose was capable of landing and stopping within 50 yards of touch down. Several hands flew up at this point.

“Sir, how do you keep the plane from nosing over when you apply that much reverse thrust?”

“With the wing-mounted engines and props, you’ve got a lot of leeway before you endanger the props. The plane usually comes to a complete stop before the nose digs in much. I’ve backed and turned the aircraft using prop thrust only, and the prop tips never get close to the ground or the water.”

Josh told them he’d spend the next several weeks teaching them how to perform the short-field landing and take off, then he’d be available for questions. He handed the IP’s his schedule showing each IP had 2 sessions with him in the next two weeks, so they had to concentrate and not waste his time. General Ratliff wanted the IP’s training his C-130 pilots in 30 days, so they had to learn how to fly the SuperGoose in a hurry. One of the IP’s asked Josh why they called the plane the SuperGoose, and he sat down to explain it.

“Back in WWII, Grumman built the original Grumman Goose with 2 Wasp radial engines. It was supposed to be a mini-Catalina, except it was underpowered, and didn’t have much range, so the military never bought as many of them as the much bigger Catalina. Later a Canadian company installed turboprop engines in the aircraft, but they weren’t much better. Allison Engines designed a much bigger turboprop that would barely fit inside the engine nacelles that closely resembled the current C-130 turboprop, but about half to two-thirds the size. They only made 4 turboprops, and never installed them in an aircraft, reserving them for bench test use. My Dad was flying a DeHaviland in Alaska, when he wrecked the plane making an emergency landing. He had just inherited several million dollars, and used the money to retrofit the Grumman Goose with the Allison turboprops. He knew the Chief mechanic at Elmendorf Air Force base, who knew the Chief Mechanic at RCAF Vancouver, who had several old Grumman Goose airframes sitting in the boneyard, and the knowledge to install the turboprops in the Goose since they worked on C-130s. Later, He wanted some more airplanes, but was out of engines, so he contacted Allison, and they were astounded that someone had installed their test-bench engines into an aircraft, and they were flying. They flew to Allakaket, saw the engines, and decided they could install newer more powerful modern engines into the spot where the old ones were designed to fit. The RCAF got wind of the new engines, and suggested some improvements, like a 6 foot fuselage stretch, and a tail ramp with a twin-boom tail to clear the ramp. Between the new engines, the longer fuselage, and other improvements, Northrop/Grumman decided the plane needed a new name, and my Dad came up with the SuperGoose, and it stuck.”

“Wow, that’s some history. I hope it flies as good as it looks!”

Josh decided to take the Senior Instructor up that afternoon, and show him what the plane was capable of. After he dismissed the class, he asked the Senior IP if he had some time that afternoon to go flying. Josh wanted to show him the STOL capabilities of the aircraft, so he wouldn’t have to show everyone. He was eager to try it, and told Josh his name was Commander Miles. Josh shook his hand, opened up the SuperGoose to show him just how big the passenger/cargo area was. His comment echoed the WC, “Bloody Hell, you could fit a Jeep back here!”

He took Commander Miles around the plane, showing him everything you needed to check in the walk-around, then he climbed into the cockpit, and with an airman standing by with a fire extinguisher, fired up the APU, and started turbine 1, then turbine 2. When both were in the green, he waved for the airman to pull the chocks, and advanced the throttles out of idle, then contacted the tower, got permission for a flight demonstration, taxied to the active runway while configuring the plane for a max-performance take-off. Once he reached the end of the runway, he advised Commander Miles to tighten his belts, and called the tower for clearance. They gave him immediate clearance, and advised the pattern was clear. That was all Josh needed to hear. He replied “rolling” and quickly advanced the throttles to Max. A second later, he released the brakes, and the SuperGoose rapidly accelerated down the runway. The screaming turbines were drowned out by the roar of the propellers, and as soon as he reached 85 knots, he pulled back on

the yoke aggressively, and the SuperGoose practically jumped into the air. He held his maximum climb rate while cleaning up the plane, retracting the flaps and the wheels. 2 minutes later, they were at 5,000 AGL. Commander Miles was shaking his head and grinning from ear to ear. Once he was over the reservoir, Josh performed a wingover, and bottomed out right at 500 feet AGL. He slowed to 85 knots while cranking madly on the flaps control. Once the flaps were at full, he turned to the downwind end of the lake, and reduced his throttles until he had achieved the sink rate he wanted. When he cleared the rise, he reduced throttle even further, and maintained a 10 degree nose-up attitude while he floated down to the lake like he was on a parachute. Right before touchdown, he pushed the nose forward and landed conventionally, then flipped the pitch reverse switch, and went to 30% throttle on both turbines. They stopped like someone had thrown out an anchor less than 50 yards after touchdown. When they turned around, Commander Miles couldn't believe how close to the edge of the lake they were. He'd never attempt a landing like that with a conventional plane, but obviously the SuperGoose could do it, because Josh was sitting there, and they just did it!

"I don't know how you did it, but you just did - can you talk me through it?"

"Ok, basically I'm landing on the ragged edge of a stall. With the high wing, leading edge slats, and large flaps, we can stay in control closer to a stall, and float down with a slight nose-up attitude, say like 10 degrees at 65 knots airspeed. Once I touched down, I flipped the pitch reversing switch, and advanced the throttles to 30%. You can use 100% in an emergency, but you risk putting the plane on it's nose. I use 30% lightly loaded, and 50% when I'm fully loaded. Between the drag of the water and the thrust of the props, you stop like you threw out an anchor. Fully loaded, the plane takes longer to land, but it still lands much shorter with the reversing props than without. The plane can land on snow with the auxiliary skis, but it takes longer to land due to the lower drag."

"Ok, so you can land on a dime, how about the short take-off characteristics."

"Since it's an amphibian, it needs a longer run to take off from water, but once you're airborne, you've got a 2500 feet per minute climb rate, and an emergency climb rate of 3,000 feet per minute. The Vr is 85 knots with 20% flaps on water or land. On most small lakes, there is no V1, once you start your take-off roll, you're committed, since it takes too long to slow back down."

"How about using the reversing switch in an emergency abort?"

"Never been tried to my knowledge. If it were a choice between damaging the engines and crashing, I'd sacrifice the engines, but it's never came up before. You'd have to be awfully quick to successfully abort a water take off from most of the lakes I landed on in Alaska."

"Ok, from what I've been told, the RAAF is thinking about using the SuperGoose as a coastal patrol craft, so we'd be landing in bays or the ocean."

“You might want to talk to Northrop/Grumman about that. My dad told me they did a testing series with the prototype SuperGoose, and they know what kind of sea states they could successfully land the plane on.”

“Thanks, Josh, that’s good to know.”

Commander Miles was writing notes feverishly, he’d wished he’d brought a tape recorder, and made a note to bring one next time.

“Commander, I just thought of something. The KC-130 is set up for midair refueling. If you could have Grumman install a Navy-style refueling probe, you could have a KC-130 set up as a mother ship for several SuperGoose planes, and keep them in the air much longer.”

“Several of our turboprops can be configured for midair refueling. It’s a good idea, and I’ll pass it along. Ok, now let’s see how this plane takes off from water!”

Josh taxied to the downwind end of the lake, turned around, set the flaps for 20%, then quickly advanced the throttles. After covering about half the lake, the airspeed indicator read 85, knots, and he pulled back gently on the yoke. He had already shown Commander Miles a max-performance take-off, so he took it easy this time. Once they were 2,000 feet AGL, he turned toward the RAAF base, and explained to the Commander that he’d left a lot of performance behind, since he’d already seen a max performance take-off, and there were no real obstructions around the lake. In the event that they were taking off with close high obstructions, he could use a higher rate of climb to clear the obstruction, trading speed for altitude. When they set back down at the RAAF base, Commander Miles shook Josh’s hand and said he was looking forward to training with him on the SuperGoose, turned and left. Nick walked up and said their Hummers were done, the body shop called, and said they were ready for pickup. He wasn’t doing anything the rest of the afternoon, and Sheila was available, so he could drop them off at the shop so they could drive both Hummers home.

They drove home, picked up Sheila, and drove to the body shop. Josh was greeted by a scene straight out of a James Bond movie when a guy who vaguely resembled Q popped out of the Hummer and proceeded to describe all the upgrades he had installed.

“Pay attention young man, I’ve installed several upgrades you need to know about. Don’t touch anything.”

Josh took his hands off the vehicle and put them in his pockets, patiently waiting for the old man to tell him what he did to his precious Hummer.

The old geezer resumed his monologue “Right, first off, instead of just lining the body with Kevlar fabric, I took the liberty of installing rigid molded Kevlar plate, just like the Apache. It saved the weight of all the steel plate I’d have to use to back the Kevlar fabric, and the 1/4”

plates I installed have the same bullet resistance of 1 inch of steel armor plate, with the weight of aluminum. The entire engine compartment including the hood, all 4 doors, and the rear body panels have the kevlar plates. The roof is kevlar armored and structurally reinforced in the event of a rollover, and I installed a continuous 1/4" steel skid plate backed up by more rigid kevlar. You could trip your average anti-vehicle mine in your new Hummer, and walk away from it. I also installed a smoke screen device that sprays motor oil into the exhaust pipe from a large reservoir, which should make a huge smoke screen. I also installed front and rear 5 million candlepower strobes to blind anyone chasing or shooting at you. Also, I installed an anti-carjacking device that charges the door handles to 50,000 volts when you press the button on the center of your smart stalk. Your remote control also activates it, make sure you don't push button #2 by accident, or you'll have a shocking experience."

Josh stood there open-mouthed "What no ejection seat?"

"That costs extra!"

"Good thing, I don't think Sheila would approve."

"Who's Sheila?"

"That's me gramps!"

The old man started laughing hysterically "A Sheila named Sheila, your dad must have a twisted sense of humor."

Sheila stared at him darkly, and said in a low menacing voice "Yeah, he does, and your point was?"

"Nothing my dear, just enjoying life where I can."

He continued to describe the modifications, and told Josh that with the Kevlar and the Banks kit, including the propane injector, he might want to take it easy on the throttle until he got used to it. Sheila's Hummer (he snickered) had even more power due to the better designed turbocharger. He highly suggested carrying spare axle shafts, since that was the weak point in the Hummer's drive train. All 4 tires were already set up from the factory as run-flats, so he didn't need to do anything to them. He modified the roller fairlead to fit his new bumper, and showed Josh where the kangaroo bars went from the front bumper to the roof rack. Josh looked at the roof rack, and there were a half-dozen 100-watt Hella driving lights mounted up there that weren't there before. He asked the guy, and he said "Oh, I just threw that in, and I upgraded the charging system by adding a second high-output alternator and a dual battery set-up. I added a remote air tank to supplement your Central Tire Inflation System. Any Questions?"

"Where's the rocket launcher?"



“I skipped the rocket launcher and BMG-50, you can add it later if you want.”

Josh climbed up into his Hummer, turned the key, and the diesel roared to life. Sheila found it much easier to step on the nerf bar step on the way up to the driver’s seat. Josh checked the gun port, and saw it was 1 inch in diameter, so he could fire a witness protection shotgun out of it if he wanted to. He saw a bag on the floor with 6 body plugs to replace the plugs if he had to. The old geezer showed him the controls to the special accessories. He had hid the switches in the center console, and Josh was thinking “Bond...James Bond!” The old geezer turned on his CD player, and the Bond theme started playing. Josh started laughing his head off as he drove out of the garage.

## Chapter 80 Sex & Guns

When they got home, Sheila picked up on the “Bond” theme, and thought that he’d think it was funny to make love to a “Bond Girl”, and set the scene before Josh could get home. Josh came home to a scene right out of “From Russia with Love” - the strange naked girl in your bed. Josh thought it was funny as heck as soon as he figured it out, and played along. Later, he was checking around the house for “KGB Assassins” when Nick came home. Josh was glad he put his clothes on, and he realized something - they really needed a house of their own! Once he explained to Nick why he was skulking around the house in his boxers, he asked him if he had any spring steel straps. Nick thought that logic disconnect was strange, even for a Yank. Josh explained that he had 4 Uzis, and 2 Hummers. He wanted His and Hers under-seat mounts for the Uzis, to keep them out of plain sight, but handy. Nick said he’d call the base mechanic tomorrow, since he was a gun nut as well, and ask if he could fab up 4 sets of retaining straps for a Mini-Uzi. With that out of the way, Josh asked him if he knew of any good building sites in Sydney, or any houses with a good watertight concrete basement with at least 4 bedrooms that could be retrofitted into a high-security house. Nick offered to sell him his house, but Josh told him it was smack in the middle of town, and if TSHTF, it would be one of the first houses to get attacked and raided by the starving masses. Nick laughed at the image, then realized Josh was dead serious. Nick had never considered security past keeping out the occasional hooligan. The house had always been in the family, and it screamed old money with a red brick wall topped with a wrought iron palisade. It looked intimidating, but Josh had showed him one day that you could get over it easily if you knew how. Finally Nick told him to contact a friend of his that was a Real Estate Agent, who knew the area like the back of his hand.

Sheila heard Nick talking to Josh, got dressed quickly and erased all evidence of their “Bond” scene, then came out to say Hi to Nick. “I heard you guys talking, what’s this about wanting to move?”

“Sheila, much as I like staying with Nick, we need our privacy, and it doesn’t do us a lot of good to own 2 Urban Assault Vehicles if our house is as easy to break into as a Cracker Jack Box.”

“See here Old Man - I’ve upgraded the security since our last conversation.”

“Yeah, and it all presupposes that the Police will be available to respond to your alarm call. You’ve got too many huge windows, and they’re too low for safety. Also they’re the old style windows with individual panes, and all you need to pop out a pane is a good knife that you’re not too worried about breaking the tip. Let’s say TSHTF, and the cops can’t respond. What are you going to do if a dozen hooligans attack the house at once, and try to break in. Now let’s say that 1 or 2 have Molotov Cocktails.”

“I’ve got my Enfield!”

“Great, while you’re firing that old warhorse, the rest of the mob swarms you and sets the house ablaze. Now you call the Fire Department, and the phone just keeps ringing...get my drift?”

“I guess you’re saying this big old house is almost totally defenseless if things went bad and the Police weren’t around. It’s been in the family for hundreds of years. Not that I’m that attached to the old drafty castle!”

“So why don’t you sell, and build a modern much more defensible house over by us in the suburbs.”

“Thanks Mate, I think I’ll do just that!”

“DAMN!”

“What’s wrong Josh?”

“I forgot a big huge part of our plans - I’ve got 2 Hummers with 50-gallon diesel tanks, and it’s over 1,000 miles to Sheila’s parents station. Unloaded, I’m getting maybe 10 miles per gallon. Loaded, I’ll be lucky if I get 5. That means if both tanks are fully loaded when the balloon goes up, I’ll only make it 250-500 miles before running out of fuel!”

“Well you could always fly the SuperGoose over there?”

“Right, the RAAF field’s practically in Downtown Sydney. What if I can’t get there, or the field’s been hit?”

“Bloody Hell, I forgot about that! How much weight can you tow with those Hummers?”

“Stock, maybe 7,000 pounds. With the upgraded motors, and everything maybe 15,000.”

“Why not just tow an old M -5 Trailer behind you?”

“Good Idea, but I’ve got 1 better, I’ll call Q and see if he can build me something. Doesn’t do a lot of good to have an armored Hummer attached to an unarmored trailer full of Diesel!”

“Yikes! And it’s not like you can’t afford it.”

Josh called the Body Shop “Is Q there?”

“One minute.” (laughter in the background - off phone he hears “Q - Telly” and more laughter.)

When Q picked up, Josh said “Q it’s Josh, yeah the guy with the 2 Hummers you did. Say, I need a favor. Can you build me 2 heavy duty trailers for my Hummers? Great, I’ll be right over.”

“Sheila, I’m going to the body shop to talk with Q, you want to come with me?”

“Not really, if he makes one more crack about my name, I’m liable to shoot him.”

“Ok, I’ll be home for dinner.”

When Josh got to the shop, Q was busy at his blackboard designing his version of the Bug Out trailer. It used a heavy torsion bar suspension to eliminate the axle, so if it high-centered, it would contact the skid plate and Teflon sliders running under the trailer. He had a brilliant idea to make the entire trailer out of rigid molded Kevlar and build it around a huge box frame so it could haul 20,000 pounds easy. Q decided to use the same wheels and tires that were on the Hummers to make things easy, and designed the trailer to haul 100 gallons of fresh water with a high-tech Reverse Osmosis/desalinator filter and a dual-pump setup with a high-lift and a high-pressure pump so he could use any source of water he found, even sea water. Josh told him how far he had to go, and he told Josh that water weighed around 8 pounds per gallon, and the 100 gallon tank added 800 pounds already. Josh suggested cutting it down to 50 gallons, since he had the RO/Desalinator, and double the diesel tank. Q nodded and went back to his figures. What he came up with was sheer genius in Josh’s eyes. The trailer itself was rated at 25,000 pounds, yet only weighed around 1,000, all the wiring was hidden in the box tubing that made up the frame, and was covered with Kevlar and a continuous skid plate. Q used the space between the frame rails to store Diesel fuel and water tanks, freeing up the huge space inside for storage. He designed a healthy battery bank made up of 800Ah worth of Optima deep cycle AGM type batteries, and 2,000 watt inverter, and all of it charged by the vehicle through the custom trailer plug mounted next to the standard trailer plug on the towing hitch. With 2 huge alternators and a dual-battery set-up, Josh thought the battery bank and inverters was overkill until Q asked him “What if you need AC power, and you don’t want to run the diesel and make a lot of noise?”

Q went back to his figures, and Josh sat there and marveled at the genius at work. Finally Q said “I can do it, but it won’t be cheap.”

“Good, I need 2 of them, what would you charge me for 2?”

“Say \$100 thousand a piece, that Kevlar’s bloody expensive.”

Josh called Nick and asked him if he’d like a trailer, and he said that the Hummer wasn’t his, it belonged to the RAAF, and his wasn’t bulletproof. Josh ended the call and told Q he’d take 2 for now. Q went over his figures, and told Josh that he could squeeze 50 gallons of water, and 200 gallons of diesel tanks between the frame rails, but that only gave him 1,000 miles worth of

extra diesel. Josh said it was only 500 miles up the coast to Brisbane, and he'd work something out.

Later that evening, when he got home, he asked Nick if there were any small airports in Brisbane. Sheila said "Yeah, the one we landed at you dork!"

Josh shook his head, sometimes he'd forget his head if it wasn't attached. Josh told Sheila and Nick his idea about leasing a hangar at the airport, and installing his own tanks for JP-5 and Diesel. It wouldn't cost that much, and if he hid them well and buried them, no one would find them, even if they ransacked the hangar. Nick thought it was a good idea for more reasons than 1, including a place to stop overnight if he had to whether he was flying or driving between Sydney and wherever. Nick told Josh he had talked to his friend the real estate friend, and he told him that he could get \$100 million for the old family estate, sight unseen, since developers had lusted after his 100 acres of prime downtown real estate for decades. Nick was the last member of his family which could trace their roots back to the original convict ships. He had a huge trust fund, but he wasn't in any hurry to marry. He was an only child, and his parents had died years ago in a car crash. Sheila's eldest brother Tim was his best friend, and when he got killed in a plane crash, he withdrew into himself and threw himself into his work. Even before the crash, he had a steady stream of girlfriends, or as Tim used to say his "playmate of the week" since they were usually stunningly beautiful models with not much else going for them. When Sheila applied to the University of New South Wales, she was already good friends with Nick, so he had no problem letting her room in his 50-room mansion. All he asked was that she do some light housekeeping when she had time, since most of his girlfriends couldn't figure out how to turn on a vacuum cleaner. Now that Josh and Sheila were looking for a new home of their own, there was no reason to hold on to the old white elephant.

Nick told them he'd located 2 10-acre lots on the far edge of town, and they were surrounded by farmland so it would be decades before anyone could build around them. Then he told them that he wanted to build a secure 4-bedroom house and he'd leave the design of the outer shell up to Josh. Josh and Sheila had talked, and she said they had better plan on having 4 kids if they kept up the way they were going, so for each kid to have their own bedroom, with a spare for an office and study for Sheila, they wanted a 6-bedroom design with 3 full-size bathrooms. In order to make the bedrooms big and roomy, they settled on a 3,000 square foot ranch design. Josh had called Ralph, and got his design for his house in Anchorage, and thought it would be perfect with a few modifications. He liked Ralph's ideas about the ham radios, and talked to Sheila, only to find out she already had her unrestricted license. Josh checked into the requirements, and realized that he could already pass the test for an unrestricted license since he could transmit and copy Morse at 20wpm. He located a local Australian radio dealer, who recommended the same units Ralph bought, but set up for Australian frequencies. Everyone world-wide used the same 10 meter frequencies so they could talk to each other, but they alternated frequencies on the mid-range bands to avoid interference. Josh knew he could wait until they built their house to get their long-range communications, but he wanted to get some mobile long distance equipment as soon as he could. He asked Nick what the RDF used, and

they had an older version of the SINGARS system. He asked Nick how tough it would be to get a radio installed in each of their Hummers. Nick said he'd ask his Wing Commander, but was pretty sure it would be OK as long as they didn't cause a problem.

Josh asked Nick if he could use his computer for a minute, logged onto the internet, and quickly located the site for the Australian Communications Association, the governing body for radio communications in Australia. He was referred to another site, and discovered that what he wanted was an Unrestricted license, like Sheila already had. She had her old study guide, so when he wasn't working with the RAAF Instructor Pilots for the next two weeks, he would be studying to pass his Unrestricted exam. The next day, Nick talked to his Wing Commander, who authorised him to have 2 Military radios installed in Josh and Sheila's Hummers. He called Josh and gave him the good news, so Josh met him at the base radio shop, and several hours later, had a full-spectrum military radio installed in his Hummer. He told Nick he'd drive Sheila's rig tomorrow so they could install one in her's. The next day he drove Sheila's rig to work, and they installed a military radio in her rig as well. Josh suddenly remembered he'd forgotten to load the 'secret compartment' in the backs of the Hummers, and took care of that little detail when he got home. The case was so well hidden that Josh wasn't sure it was there until he lifted a corner of the carpet, and noticed it was only velcroed down. He pulled up the corner, folded the carpet back, and inserted a high-security key he found on his keychain into the lock, and turned it. Once the lock was unlocked, the lid opened by itself. Evidently Q had used the same type of gas lifts that they used for the rear hatch of an SUV. He loaded the M - 4 SOPMOD kit with 20 loaded 30 round magazines, and the rest of his Militia kit that Bear had shipped him, including his ballistic vest with front and rear chicken plates, and his LBV full of gear. He made sure all the grenade pockets were full of 40mm grenades for his M -203, then transferred the loaded 30 round mags into the magazine pockets and checked the rest of his gear. When he was satisfied everything was where it belonged, he did the same with Sheila's vehicle. When he finished, he loaded a combat pack of 600 rounds of SS-109 on stripper clips into the compartment of each vehicle, then added anything else they could use for a bug-out, evacuation, or get-home situation. He still had room left over, so he doubled the .223 and .45acp ammo storage.

Several weeks later, Q called to tell him the trailers were done, and he'd appreciate if he could pick them up soon, because they were taking up room. Since Sheila wasn't doing anything, they drove over to Q's shop, connected the hitches, drove them back to Nick's place and parked them in his garage. Josh made a list of stuff he wanted to fill the trailers with, and got on the Internet and ordered enough so he'd be able to stock both trailers. He showed the list to Sheila, and she added several items he never would have thought about. Next they went to the stores and bought some stuff locally to save shipping. They had food, water, clothing, misc. supplies, shelter, spare ammo and parts for the guns and the Hummers, Jerry cans of diesel and water, and a whole bunch of stuff Josh just threw in there because he thought that they might need it. Later, He drove his loaded trailer over to a shipping yard and borrowed their scales. Fully loaded with water and diesel, the trailer only weighed 7500 pounds. Josh was very happy, since that was only 500 pounds over the design limit before modifications. The trailer was

fitted with a rear ramp door to allow easy loading and unloading, that was powered by an electric winch in the front of the trailer that used cables and pulleys to raise and lower the fully armored and braced door. Q told him he designed the ramp to handle 5,000 pounds, although he never expected Josh to try and load anything over half that heavy since the ramp was pretty steep and the winch was only rated at 12,000 pounds. Q being the clever chap he was decided that once the ramp was down, the winch should be able to help him load the trailer, and devised a quick-disconnect device for the ramp cables. He told Josh the trailer was as bullet-proof as the Hummer, and between the skid plate and rigid Kevlar, it could handle an anti-vehicle mine too without blowing up. Josh noticed that Q had installed brackets on each corner of the trailer, and rummaging around found 4 12vdc 100-watt work lights that Q had designed to mount to the bracket with full freedom of movement to tilt 120 degrees, and swivel almost 180 degrees before they ran out of room. Evidently the only thing Q didn't think of was an electric toothbrush, but Josh was pretty sure he'd find one if he looked hard enough. One thing that amazed him was the fully-loaded trailer had the same manners as trailer designed for hauling long distances at high speeds on roads. He traced the wiring, and realized Q had installed electric trailer brakes and hidden the wiring so well that Josh only discovered it by a diligent search. Another neat feature was the way the ramp worked. Q programmed a button on his remote to raise and lower the ramp, and also installed a switch inside the Hummer.

Josh wanted to try a trial run with the Hummers, so he asked Sheila if they could go tent camping in the desert that weekend. She looked at him like he was from Mars until he said that they needed a trial run to make sure everything worked before they needed it for real. Sheila said she knew of a primitive camping ground right outside Sydney, so they were only a couple of hours away if they needed help. Remembering his desert survival training, Josh made sure he had several large tarps with aluminum tent poles and stakes in the kits, as well as a large dome tent and sleeping bags. He knew that the large tarps would keep the sun off the tent and off them as they sat underneath it, making the conditions more livable. He remembered to pack camping chairs as well, then didn't think about it again until Friday night after work, when he double-checked everything, then they went to bed. The next morning after breakfast, they packed the rest of the stuff they needed in Josh's Hummer, hitched up the trailer, and hit the road. Sheila gave him directions, and 2 hours later, they arrived at the campsite. Josh thought it was the most God-forsaken place on the planet. He was used to things being green and wet, not dry and desolate. He was glad that they had filled up 2 5-gallon Jerry cans full of water before they left, and the trailer's water and diesel tanks were full. They pitched the tarps and the tent, and Sheila asked him why he pitched the tent under the tarp, so he said that it would be 20 degrees cooler during the heat of the day under the dark blue tarp than without it, even with the tent's integral rain fly. The tarp was several feet above the tent, and the tent was in full shade most of the day. Josh decided to save 2 poles and attached the dining fly to the same poles as the front of the tent, to shade that area even further. Once the tent and tarps were up and staked, Josh tied some yellow surveyor's tape to the guy lines so they wouldn't trip, while Sheila set up the kitchen. Josh picked up their folding shovel, and went 50 yards downwind behind some large bushes and built their latrine. He stuck the shovel in the ground next to the pile of dirt, and put a roll of TP on the handle of the shovel. He walked back to the camp and told Sheila

where the bathroom was. She'd forgotten that little detail, and he could tell she wasn't happy about it. "Dear, if you want to survive if TSHTF, you'll have to accept some things. The first one is there won't always be a convenient bathroom when you need to go. Learning to use a latrine is a good skill to learn. First thing you want to do before you drop your drawers is to look around for snakes and stuff. Since there's no one around here, it might be better for you to take your pants off before you go until you get used to squatting to avoid any embarrassing incidents."

"Thanks for that infobit, Tarzan. I think I can figure it out, I wasn't always a city girl!"

"OK, don't say I didn't warn you."

Josh spent the rest of the day patiently explaining various ways of navigating in the wilderness without a map or compass, and how to start a fire without using a lighter, matches, or flint and steel. He explained that you always wanted to have 3 means of starting a fire on your person, but you should also know how to start a fire without them just in case. He helped her build a fire bow and drill, and soon she had a fire going. Josh was proud of her, because he feared she didn't have any survival knowledge. When they finished she told him that her Dad had taught her all this stuff when she was a little girl, but the refresher training was helpful since she hadn't done most of it for 20 years. He showed her how to count paces, estimate distances, get a rough sense of direction using a watch and the sun (he laughed when he remembered the joke they used to tell about the guy who tried to do it with a digital watch). Finally he took out his fanny pack kit, and went through all of it with her. 99% of it was review for her, but she thought the snare wire and PJ saturated cotton balls in a film can was a neat trick. He showed her his altoids kit, and she amazed him by showing him hers. She said her dad made one up for her almost 20 years ago, and she never went anywhere without it. It was like putting on her watch in the morning to slip her Altoids tin into her front pocket. Josh was glad that Jack had taken the time to teach his kids about wilderness survival, because there certainly was a lot of it around! When it got dark, he lit the propane lantern, and started dinner. A large can of Chilli and a box of Macaroni and Cheese made a quick and easy dinner, then they went to bed early. The next morning Josh heard a familiar shriek, and quickly located the sound as coming from the latrine. As he ran over, he saw Sheila's red face peaking over the bushes.

"Damn it - I thought I knew how to do this!"

"When was the last time you used a latrine?"

"I was about 12 - why?"

"Sheila, your body shape has radically changed since then. I hate to be indelicate, but you might try a deep squat next time." He came back several minutes later with a trash bag for her dirty clothes. "Here, put your pants and underwear in here. I didn't bring any way to wash clothes. I guess that's the first thing I should add to my list."



Josh came back 2 minutes later with another pair of pants and underwear for her. Sheila cleaned herself up as best as possible, then said “Did you bring a shower with you?”

Josh rummaged through their kit, and located 1. Since they had 60 gallons of water on them, he felt it was worth it to fill the shower with 3 gallons of water and hang it off the trailer.

“Sheila, I found the shower, but I’m fresh out of tarps.”

“That’s OK, I ran around buck naked until I reached puberty, and there’s no one around to notice.” She stepped around the bush wearing only her top and her boots, and walked over to the trailer like she had been doing it all her life. She traded her boots and socks for sandals, and took her top off. Josh handed her some liquid soap, and she stood there and took a shower totally unconcerned that she was totally naked in the wilderness. Josh handed her a towel, and she dried herself off, then Josh handed her a fresh set of clothes.

“Talk about Tarzan, I don’t think I could just get naked in front of everyone and take a shower like that.”

“For one thing, you’re the only 1 here that we know about, second of all, you’ve showered with me before, and 3<sup>rd</sup> of all, like I said, I used to run around naked until I was a teenager all summer at the station. It was too damn hot to wear clothes all summer, and I got a great tan. Ever since we were out of nappies, all of us used to run around naked, and didn’t think anything about it. Once we started puberty, we had to wear at least a sun dress during the summer, and the boys wore shorts. I didn’t wear a bra until Nick suggested I wear one when I went to College, since the city kids weren’t used to our country ways, and might assume I was a loose woman. I still don’t like wearing them, but I’ve been wearing one so long that I sag if I don’t.”

“Don’t worry what you’re wearing around me. Once we get our own home, if you want to run around buck naked, go for it - won’t bother me in the least!”

“What about the neighbors?”

“Close the blinds silly, or get some heavy shears so they can’t see in.”

“I always did like nude sunbathing, but it gave Nick fits when he found me out back in the all-together. Guess he thought of me as a kid sister.”

“If you like, I can add a privacy screen to our back yard, and a pool, so you can sunbathe or go swimming in the buff on the back patio all you want.”

Sheila gave Josh a big kiss, and she was glad he wasn’t a prude.

## Chapter 81 - In the Wilderness

Later that afternoon, Sheila started teaching Josh some of the stuff the aboriginal kids that they hung out with showed them, including tracking and locating water in the desert. Josh was glad that Sheila knew so much about the Australian Outback, because his survival briefing and Desert Survival Training course was pretty generic. The location-specific information, coupled with his general desert survival knowledge meant if they got stranded or had to bug out, they had a pretty good chance of survival. Sheila located 2 brackish water sources, and Josh told her that with the Trailer and the filter, they could use almost any water including seawater. She said that some water in Australia was alkali or contaminated with heavy metals. Josh was pretty sure that the RO system would take care of it, and made a note to double-check, and stock a spare filter. She also pointed out that some water sources were too far from the beaten path to get the trailer near them. Josh made a note to add a siphon pump and a large water container, since the RO made 1 gallon of fresh water for every 10 gallons it took in. He decided to add an interesting device he'd seen that combined wheels and a sled, so if the sand or snow was too deep, he could drag the heavy plastic sled, and when he was on hard pack, he could use the wheels, which came off with 1 bolt each. He showed Sheila his idea, and she suggested a double-harness setup so she could help pull, and they could max out the trailer/sled setup's maximum hauling weight. Josh knew that he could use a simple filter with a good strong pump and a simple easily replaceable filter to pre-filter any water he wanted to run through the RO system, or filter any water he knew wasn't carrying bugs or anything else that could harm them. He knew that 10 gallons of water weighted 80 pounds, and the two of them could haul 200 pounds easy with the cart, so all he had to come up with was the proper containers to haul that much water on the standard-sized trailer, which would carry around 200 pounds worth of deer or other large game animal. All this stuff went into a notebook he'd review when he got back.

When it got dark, Josh gathered anything that would burn, and was surprised at how little vegetation there was in the area. Sheila said that the city slickers had been camping here for decades, and since they were too lazy to haul wood from town, or willing to walk far to gather their own, the area was pretty sparsely covered in useable stuff. Josh thought that if he collected newspapers, and rolled them into bundles, they'd make a good emergency fuel supply for campfires and stuff. If he treated them with paraffin, they'd work even better. He asked Sheila if they had any cabinetmaker's shops nearby, or anyone that made huge piles of sawdust. When she looked at him funny, he explained if you collected the sawdust cheaply, as long as it wasn't pressure-treated lumber, you could make your own "presto logs" by mixing the sawdust and paraffin into a log shape. You could do the same thing with rolled up newspaper bundles, but the color ink made it not a good idea to cook over. He told her that 100% cotton dryer lint made an excellent firestarter, and to save all the lint she took off the screens after she dried the towels, but not to save the lint from synthetics, since it didn't work too good. He said that if you saved egg cartons, and added a mixture of dryer lint and paraffin, you could break it into individual "eggs" and have 12 good firestarters from a carton of 12 eggs.

Thinking about the water, Josh had another brilliant idea. “Sheila, how deep is the water table around here?”

“Some spots, hundreds of feet, some maybe 10-20. Why?”

“Just an idea I just had to build a mini-well. If I could drive a pipe that was just slightly bigger than the pickup tube of the RO system, it can draft water, and can lift water up to 50 feet to the filter. All I need is a small sand point, and a fence-post driver to drive a 1" steel tube into the ground deep enough to strike water, then the RO's pump can pump it up and into the system.”

“Have you ever driven anything into the ground?”

“Fenceposts - why?”

“After you get down maybe 4-5 feet, it gets REAL hard - even a big strong SEAL like you would take forever getting much past 6 feet, maybe you ought to build a driver that could repeatedly drive a heavy weight onto the pipe - like a pile driver, but much smaller!”

“Sounds like I've got some research to do! Ok, I can buy the threaded pipe in 5 foot sections, and, if I dropped a 50-lb weight 3 feet, it should move it pretty good. I'd need an 10-foot derrick with a single pulley and a motor that could repeatedly lift and drop the weight, or a compound pulley and muscle power. I'll start making a list, and make some phone calls.”

Josh started sketching some ideas, and showing them to Sheila. She took a pad and pencil, and drew a much simpler design that was portable, and under the right conditions, could drive a 1-2" water pipe with a sand point down 50 feet. Josh figured out an easy way to raise the weight repeatedly using a dc motor, and they congratulated themselves..

After dinner, they crawled into their sleeping bags, and several hours later, they awoke with their teeth chattering. Josh said “Sheila, you awake?”

“Can't you hear my teeth chattering?”

“I might be able to help that, I'll be back in a second.”

2 minutes later, Josh returned with 2 Mylar bags, and told Sheila to get out of her sleeping bag, and slip the Mylar bag inside the sleeping bag. She was too cold to argue, so she slid out, and hurriedly slid back in. 2 hours later she was warm and asleep. The next morning she woke to Josh brewing coffee. She got dressed quickly (it was still cold out) and came out of the tent just in time for Josh to hand her a nice hot cup of coffee, and breakfast of powdered scrambled eggs and freeze-dried hash browns mixed with TVP bacon. It was OK, but not what she would consider haute cuisine. Once she finished eating, she asked Josh “What's the deal with the Mylar Bags? I was warm within an hour or two.”

“The Mylar bags acted as a vapor barrier. Since you loose a lot of heat through sweating, if you hold it close to your skin, you reach equilibrium and stop sweating, and you stay warmer as a result. The military figured that out a couple of years ago, and all our cold-weather bags contain a vapor barrier layer, and we sleep in polypropylene long johns, since it keeps the moisture off our skin so we don’t feel so clammy. I noticed you slept in the buff last night. Much as I like you to sleep naked, If it’s cold out, you might want to try polypro long johns.”

“Thanks for being so considerate!”

“You’re welcome, now we have to try out some other stuff to make sure we didn’t forget anything. First of all, let’s go through our BOB’s and see if there’s anything you don’t know how to use, or if I’ve forgotten anything that might be useful. Once we’re done there, let’s check our fanny pack/E&E kits, then let’s check our raid vests in the Secret Compartment.”

Sheila went through her BOB, and made a couple of suggestions. They weren’t essential for survival, but they didn’t weigh much either, and could make them more comfortable. She also suggested a 6-foot nylon casting/gill net with a small mesh to catch anything in the water, because even minnows or small crustaceans were edible, or made good bait. Josh wrote everything she said down, because you never knew what might be significant. She thought the E&E kits were fine, but didn’t know how to use some of the stuff that was in there, so Josh showed her how.

They broke camp before dark and headed home so they could sleep in their nice warm beds and have a real shower and real food before they went to work Monday. Josh made some phone calls, and found everything he needed to build his drilling rig, including the pipe, sand point threaded connectors, driving caps, and materials to make the drilling rig itself including a DC motor, baseplate (used heavy truck flywheel with the right sized hole in the middle that he had 2 2-inch holes drilled and tapped for Pipe thread, 4 5-foot sections of pipe, and the pulley/axle assembly. He had Nick ask the Base Mechanic’s shop to fabricate the necessary parts and trial assemble it for him, in exchange for a 2 cases of beer. The chief in charge of the Mechanic’s shop loved doing stuff like that on the side, and was a well-renowned beer drinker, who did favors for guys on base like that all the time. He was intrigued when Josh explained why he wanted it, and asked Josh if he could make some copies. Josh said “Make all you want.” The next thing Josh knew, The Chief had a good little side business building small portable well drillers. Josh didn’t begrudge him the money, and was glad that the Chief was making a tidy profit on this project, because Josh knew he always needed stuff built, and the Chief would owe him a bunch of favors for the money he was making from Josh’s simple design. He had the Chief make another drilling rig for him and put 1 in each trailer, along with 100 feet of draft tubing for each pump setup.

The next weekend, Josh took everything out into the desert again, and after Sheila suggested at spot for him to try, Josh assembled the drilling rig, connected it to the trailer power supply, and started it. Every 4 feet, he stopped the machine long enough to add more pipe, and was soon 20

feet down. He dropped a weighted string down the hole, and 6 inches of the string were wet, so he decided to drill another 10 feet, and see how wet the string got. 2 sections and almost 2 hours later, he was down 30 feet, and he dropped another weighted string down the hole, and 3 feet of it were wet. He shut off the machine, dropped the draft hose down the hole, and flipped the switch that turned on the pump. 2 minutes later the discharge hose was pumping excess water, which looked pretty good to him. Half an hour later, he had 5 gallons of RO water in the output tank. He tested the discharge water, and realized it was perfectly good, at least for PH, and he could assume any water 30 feet underground wouldn't be biologically contaminated. He needed to re-plumb his system so he could switch between a standard pleated spun fiber filter and a carbon filter, or his Reverse Osmosis system, which wasted way too much water if the source was deep underground and not contaminated by salt, heavy metals, or anything else.

He packed back up and drove home to fix things. He bought 10 sand points and twice as much pipe, connectors, and driving caps as he thought he needed, then put half of the sand points in each trailer, and split the pipe, connectors and caps between the two trailers. He found a Y connector with a valve and a Culligan water filter system that would work perfectly. It would filter 3,000 gallons between replacements, used a simple tool to open the case and replace filters, and combined a pleated filter and an activated carbon center element. It was rated for everything except viruses. He knew the RO unit could handle viruses, so he bought 2 filter housings, the connectors needed to plumb it into his filter system, and 20 filters. He never would use that many in the foreseeable future, but it was better to have and not need, than need and not have. Besides, the trailer was huge, and they'd only managed to fill half of it when they did their practice Bug out the last weekend. Their stored food would take more room, but that still left a bunch of room, and water or filters wasn't something you wanted to run out of in the outback.

With that out of the way, Josh remembered he needed fuel storage and hangar space in Brisbane, which was almost half way toward Sheila's parents station just northeast of Alice Springs. He called the Airport Manager in Brisbane, who said they had a huge hangar on the far end of the field that no one bothered, it was left over from WWII, and had been refurbished 5 years ago for some celebration or another, and was available. Josh asked about fuel, etc. and he said they had a fuel farm with 50,000 gallons of jet fuel. Josh asked if he had any problems with him installing his own private tanks. He told Josh that as long as he purchased the hangar outright, they wouldn't care what he did, as long as it didn't affect other hangars, cause an objectionable noise after dark, or an objectionable odor. Josh asked him what they wanted for the hangar, and he said \$50,000. Josh said he'd fly up there the next day to check it out, and if he liked it, he'd buy it. The manager gave him instructions for locating the hangar after he landed, and Josh said he'd be there first thing tomorrow morning.

Later that afternoon, Josh got a call from Nick. The Real Estate agent wanted them to check the property, then sign the offers they had made on the property. Nick drove home, and they drove in Josh's Hummer to the Real Estate Agent's office, who gave them directions to the properties. Half an hour out of town, and up a hill was a small valley full of farms raising sheep and produce. They were glad they were on the upwind end of the valley, because Sheila had once

told Josh that if he ever got downwind of a flock of sheep, he'd never want to be downwind of them again. He made sure that he asked the realtor about the wind direction, and if he could provide a wind map that not only showed prevailing wind direction, but how often the wind reversed itself. He said he had one in his office he could show him. They liked the lots, they were big, flat, and already had deep wells that tied into the aquifer, which had been recently tested and passed with flying colors. Josh took that with a grain of salt. With all those farms around, he could imagine the ground water was well saturated with all kinds of stuff he didn't want to drink, then he remembered the filters, and realized if he hooked several up at his house, he'd have much better tasting and probably safer water.

When they got back to the office, they found out by looking at the legal descriptions that Josh's lot was actually 10.5 acres, and Nick's was 10.75 acres. There were no restrictions on the lots since they were zoned for agricultural use. Josh took a look at the wind map, and realized that 10% of the time, the wind reversed, but it was during stormy periods, and hopefully the sheepherders would have the sheep under cover, or in a different location. Josh talked to Sheila, and then they signed their cash offer for \$50,000, and once Nick saw them signing, he signed too, then signed paperwork selling his old house with a 6-month Escrow to allow plenty of time to build their new houses. The realtor told Nick that if their houses were finished sooner, Nick could close early and get his payment in full. Once the offers were accepted, Nick and Josh contacted contractors and engineers, and showed them Ralph's plans. Finally their third engineer and contractor said they'd love to build the building, which was similar to some commercial buildings they had built, with a facade to make it appear like a conventional house. He couldn't understand why they wanted to dig the basements so deep until Josh made 2 points crystal clear: 1) They were so rich that the money didn't matter, and 2) Josh was an ex-SEAL and wanted to make sure the basement would be proof against fall-out or a small nuke more than 10 miles away, like if it hit Sydney. The contractor gulped, since his main office was in a downtown Sydney Skyscraper. He said he'd work up a quote and get back to them. Several things they wanted would take some figuring, but he was sure he could get his engineer to certify this design for 2psi over-pressure.

Josh flew up to Brisbane between the realtor and contractor meetings, liked what he saw, and paid \$50,000 for the building and the land underneath it, then contracted the local fuel distributor to install a 5,000 gallon underground tank full of stabilized JP-5, and he said that JP-5 was stabilized by the manufacturer for at least 5 years of storage. Next he had him install a 2,000 gallon diesel tank, and make sure the diesel was stabilized with Pri-D for storage. When Josh showed him the Allakaket Airlines paperwork, he checked, and the tail number of Josh's plane was registered to Allakaket Airlines, so he quickly cut his figures in half, and estimated half the time to install everything he was going to. Josh's request to disguise the tank's locations and the fill tubes was highly irregular, but he went along with it when he realized that the SuperGoose would make a great plane to leave Australia in if someone had to leave in a hurry. The fuel distributor was into preparedness, and had already paid a large sum of money to protect his fuel tanks from RPG's. Someone might have called him paranoid before 09/11, but with Indonesia just a short hop away, his fuel tanks would have been an easy target, and would have leveled

much of Brisbane with just a couple of RPG's. With that out of the way, Josh flew home for dinner, then met the next day with the contractor.

1 week later, the contractor called, saying he had engineering approval for his design, and a hard quote. Josh wanted him to dig down 25 feet, backfill to 22 feet with gravel and compact, then pour a reinforced concrete floor 8 inches thick, then pour walls 12 feet high, and 6 inches thick, steel reinforced, then 3 interior walls of reinforced concrete with steel beams to carry the load of the 6-inch roof, 8 feet of dirt, plus a 3,000 square feet house made of reinforced concrete with glued-on siding, a fireproof roof on top of the 6-inch concrete roof with Thin-film solar Shingles on the southern exposure of the roof. In the basement they were going to install a huge Outback Power Systems Grid interconnect system. With the liberal AE credits in Australia, Josh could make most of the installation costs back, so he went overkill, and built a system capable of handling a 300-amp load, or a 36KWH capacity. At 2500 watts each, that was a huge system of inverters and controls, so he contacted Outback directly, and one of their application engineers put it together for him. Josh told him he wanted 2 identical systems, and price was no object, but reliability was. He suggested several upgrades that weren't available to the general public, but with a system as big as his, he would need them. He told Josh that if it were his system, and it was installed in his basement, he'd go with AGM batteries, and he thought the Optima deep cycles were the best, but he shipping to Australia would be pretty high. Josh asked if they could co-ordinate shipping with Optima so they could all travel in the same shipping container, it would reduce his costs and headaches. He told Josh that they had everything in stock, so all they needed was to contact Optima for the batteries. Josh suggested that Outback secure the batteries from Optima and bill him, or better yet, he'd wire transfer the money once he received the bill of lading from the shipper. He highly suggested shipping the order insured. He called his manager, who got on the line, and asked for half up front. Josh replied he'd only pay up front for the Optima batteries unless they were willing to pay for expedited shipping. The manager knew that expedited shipping cost over \$1,000 more than standard sea shipment, but he was talking about at least half a million dollars worth of equipment. He told Josh if he pre-paid by wire transfer, they'd pay for expedited sea shipment, and ship the order from Optima with it. That would save Josh anywhere from several days to a week in shipping time. He asked the factory manager to e-mail his wire-transfer info to his e-mail address, and he'd authorize the bank to wire transfer the funds as soon as he had a complete and itemized invoice via e-mail. He put the engineer back on, who told Josh that he'd have the order finished by tomorrow, and the invoice would be e-mailed by close-of-business that day.

Josh was glad he was so filthy stinking rich, the quote he got for the house was almost half a million, the AE systems were going for around \$100 thousand each plus shipping, and they hadn't even priced out the furniture or appliances. Then again, he had most of his \$25 million invested and returning over a million per year, plus a salary of \$250,000 per year. His dad was also making regular disbursements to his trust fund, as well as his brothers and sisters. The last time he talked to his Dad, he was worth almost \$250 Million, not including what he could sell Allakaket Airlines for. His dad had been very smart with his investments, and all the money he invested was starting to increase in value geometrically. Several businesses had located to

Allakaket once the last boom had started, and tourism was at a record pace. He had to double the number of SuperGoose aircraft flying all over Alaska, and they had also doubled the capacity of the airport to include ramp space for all the small pilots flying tourists throughout Alaska on photo safaris, and Bill had doubled the size of the Inn again. They added an extra turbogenerator to the geothermal power plant due to the expanding town. Seems instead of growing up and moving away like they did in most Northern Alaskan villages, the children were growing up, getting good jobs, getting married, and raising families in Allakaket. He told Josh that he might not recognize the place the next time he saw it.

Ron told Josh that Doc had suffered a major stroke, and might not live much longer. Josh asked if they should fly home for the funeral. It was a 18-hour flight via commercial, or 14-hour via charter jet if they could charter a high-speed jet with trans-continental range that had the range to make Hawaii easily. Ron said he'd keep Josh posted, but he'd do some checking into the charter jet, since he was sure that he could afford it. Ron was more affected by the serious illness of Doc than he admitted. Doc had become more than a friend over his lifetime, almost a father figure in his later years, since Roy was long dead, and he was too close in age to Gene.

2 days later, Josh got the dreaded call. Not only did Doc die, but his long-time butler and companion Nelson died from a heart attack from all the stress. They wanted to do the funeral that weekend, which meant that they'd have to fly charter, since it was faster. Josh asked his Dad to e-mail the details, and he needed to go tell Sheila. Sheila liked old Doc, but barely knew him, and wondered why he wanted to go.

"My Dad is awfully torn up about this. He and Doc go way back. I'll tell you on the flight over. Make sure you pack several days worth of clothes, and pack something warm. It's fall up there, and it gets cold early. I just wanted to be there for my Dad."

"Ok, I'll start packing stuff right now. What about our guns?"

"Bring them, we still have Federal CCW's and Australian permits. Just the P-14's, I think we can leave the Uzis at home!" Sheila giggled, Josh was always such a tease.

5 minutes later, the E-mail server beeped. Ron had located a Charter service with a Gulfstream V, with a 6500nm cruise range and a cruising speed of 450-500 knots, it could make it to Anchorage in 1 hop, and take 14 hours. The best news was it was configured for VIP travel with 8 seats, a dining/conference area, and a 3-seater couch that converts into a bed. They were going to fly it to Georgia for scheduled Annual Maintenance anyway, so the agreed to only charge them for the extra fuel to fly to Anchorage. They'd be back 4 days later to fly them back to Australia. Sheila saw the word "bed" and started giggling, remembering the last time they flew a charter jet, and she was all alone with her Husband this time!



## Chapter 82 - The Very Friendly Skies

Josh packed quickly, then they went to bed. The next morning Sheila suggested that Josh drink a lot of water, and he knew he was in trouble. He skipped the morning coffee, and made sure he was well hydrated before they left. Nick dropped them off at the airport, and since it was a charter, they went to the General Aviation side of the airport without the screening equipment. They were met at the Gulfstream V by the pilot and copilot. The pilot introduced himself, and shook their hands. He hoped it was OK if they left the stewards behind on this trip. Sheila quipped that she doubted they would need anything during the flight except privacy. The pilot said they had stored enough food and beverages for 3 meals each plus snacks in the small galley, and they could help themselves. He said that they could lock the privacy door between the cockpit and passenger cabin, leaving them a small galley and head for the pilot's use, so they'd have the rest of the cabin to themselves. Since the trip to Anchorage would be near their maximum unrefueled range, leaving the stewards and excess baggage off the plane would allow them to load the fuel tanks to 100% capacity, giving them another 1000nm of range at 500 knots, which would easily put them within FAA limits of a non-stop routing to Anchorage. Josh and Sheila told them they were both commercial pilots, and they were flying to Anchorage for a funeral in Allakaket.

"Did you say Allakaket, I have a friend that just accepted a job flying for Allakaket Airlines."

"That's my Dad's airline. Our SuperGoose is owned by the airline, and I'm still on the books as a pilot for the airline so they can write off the fuel and maintenance costs on the SG."

"Must be nice to be able to fly that sweet airplane that often."

"If you want to see her, and take a check ride, it's hangared over at the RAAF base, either ask for me, Josh Williams, or Commander Nick Klaus, my project manager."

"Thanks Josh I might just do that! I'd like to get a nice cushy job flying a short-hop commuter like that."

"It's not that easy, you also have to land on water, and in an emergency, you have to be capable of setting it down on a lake just slightly bigger than a mile long, and half a mile wide that might have anywhere between 200-500 foot obstructions within a mile."

"That's a bloody steep approach."

"The SuperGoose is designed and built to do it. It's got fantastic STOL capability with the twin Allison reversing turboprops and the high wing."

"I'm Definitely going to have to take you up on that check ride now! Ok, go ahead and get on

board, we'll fuel this baby as full as we can get and do the walk-around."

Josh and Sheila carried their baggage on board, since they had way more room than they needed. Sheila quickly made the bed while they were fueling and checking out the aircraft. Once they were ready to take off, the pilots came on the intercom. "You two have to be in seats with your seatbelts fastened for take-off." Josh and Sheila took their seats, and buckled their belts as the plane rolled toward the runway. Finally the plane made a sharp turn and came to a complete stop. Seconds later, they heard the engines spooling up to take-off power, and were amazed at how quiet they were inside the cabin. Gulfstream must have paid a fortune for the insulating and sound deadening material in the cabin walls. They could easily carry on normal conversations while the engines were screaming at 100% power outside. The pilot released the brakes, and they quickly accelerated to take-off speed. Josh could tell when they took off, because the plane took an aggressive nose-up attitude suddenly. Just as soon as they were flying, and had everything cleaned up, the pilot throttled back to cruise climb, he needed to conserve fuel. He thought Josh might appreciate the max performance take-off, but they didn't have the fuel to spare. Once they were comfortably cruising, the pilot took off the seatbelts sign, and Sheila said that if Josh wasn't in the bed in 30 seconds, she was going to start without him.

14 hours later, Josh looked and felt like he'd been through Hell Week all over again. He was sore all over, and whatever wasn't sore was numb. He drank a lot of water and ate his first meal in 14 hours, and tried to make himself presentable. Josh got one whiff of himself, and decided to take advantage of the shower, and was glad there wasn't enough room for Sheila in there. He took a quick shower, to make sure he saved enough water for Sheila. When he walked back into the bedroom, she was still asleep, laying on her back with a huge grin on her face. Josh looked at his beautiful sleeping wife, and was filled with love for her. He hoped that soon she'd be the mother of his children. Secretly he hoped that she had gotten pregnant during this flight. They'd been married 6 months, and he didn't know why she wasn't pregnant yet. They were doing everything right, and the doctor said that everything was fine with him. He decided that the best thing he could do about it was to pray, then he realized he hadn't been praying, or even thinking about God for a long time, and he was very remorseful, and promised himself when they got back to Australia to locate a good church, and get right with God again, after all they'd soon have a family to care for, and children to raise. It was time to stop acting like Peter Pan and start acting like an adult. He realized his life had been compartmentalized for so long that he'd matured only as much as it was needed for him to be the best SEAL he could be. Now he needed to grow up spiritually so he could be the best father and husband he could be. Sheila woke up to her husband sitting on the foot of the bed looking at her with a blank look. As she slid out from under the covers, Josh realized she was awake, and feasted his eyes on her nude body. Somehow a satisfied woman was very erotic, at least in Josh's eyes. Josh and Sheila made eye contact, and something passed between them. She slipped out from under the covers, slipped into one of Josh's tee shirts and stood to give him a hug. "I love you dear, thanks for marrying me and loving me. I know we've been trying for a while, and I found out why I wasn't getting pregnant. I've been on the pill for years, and just stopped when we got married. The doc said that it could take 6 months for everything to return to normal so I can get pregnant. It's

been 6 months, so hopefully I'll be pregnant soon, because I really want to bear your children." They tearfully embraced, then Josh said he made sure to leave enough water for her to take a shower. Sheila thought it wouldn't be such a hot idea to meet the in-laws for a funeral in the state she was in, so she padded off to the bathroom while Josh got dressed. She finished in the bathroom 10 minutes before they were to land, and got dressed quickly. They got seated right when the "fasten seatbelts" sign lit, indicating they were landing, and when the plane taxied up to the VIP area, Jake was standing there waiting for them.

"Josh, dad's kind of torn up, and asked if I could pick up you guys. Hope you don't mind."

"I kind of figured that this would hit dad harder than he let on. Doc's practically been a Father figure to him. Jake climbed up front, and Josh and Sheila settled into the nice comfortable leather VIP seats for the short ride home. When they got home, his entire family was waiting there to greet them. Josh immediately noticed his dad looked almost 10 years older since the wedding. He hoped it was temporary due to the grief of losing Doc. His mom looked pretty good considering, and he was glad to see his nieces and nephews. They car pooled back to the house, where they all got together for a reunion of sorts. They were reminiscing about Doc and later Sam, Ralph, and their kids showed up. Bert and Larry seemed to really miss their "grandpa", and Sam looked like she'd spent most of the day crying. Ralph took Ron aside, and said that Bill had already delivered Doc's will, leaving all his money to him and Sam, with huge trust funds for Bert and Larry. Ralph said he'd rather have Doc back. Ron told him he felt exactly the way he did when his "grandpa" Jim died. Ron took a minute to tell Ralph about Jim, and Ralph realized they both had something in common. Ron put his hands on Ralph's shoulders and prayed with him. They both felt peace and a sense of closure, like they'd both see Jim and Doc again. Ralph told Ron that he had better spend some more time with Anne and Gene, since Gene wasn't doing too good, and his mom was a candidate for a stroke. Ordinarily such conversations violated doctor-patient privilege, but Ralph realized that Anne probably was too worried about Gene, and not paying attention to her health. Ron thanked Ralph, and they went back into the living room to join the crowd. Finally someone suggested adjourning to Doc's Lodge, since there wasn't going to be funeral in accordance with Doc's wishes, and he'd already been cremated. Ralph and Sam thought it was an excellent idea, and they drove to the airport. Gene, Anne, Bear and Mary took the 007. Ron and Nancy flew one of the SuperGoose with 8 passengers, Ralph and Sam took another, and they had room for 6 more, Jake and Josh both piloted a SuperGoose, and the other 007 carried anyone that was left. They lined up and flew in formation to HelpMeJack lake, where Ron touched down first, and the rest of the aircraft followed him down at a safe interval. Once they were all on the lake, the 007's dropped off their passengers, and got out of the way, then the planes taxied up to the lodges and unloaded. Once they were all inside, they passed out sparkling cider, and they drank a toast to Doc.

Sam started "Here's to one of the kindest men on the planet - thanks for giving me a new life!"

Then Ralph said "Thanks for everything Doc, Merci Beaucoup!"

Then Ron said “Doc, I’m going to miss you, but I know you’re with Bert again, and I’ll see you again. Thanks for believing in me!”

Bert held up his glass and said “Bye Grandpa!” then Larry did the same as his older brother.

Finally Samantha held up her glass and said “Here’s to Doc!” and they all drank in his memory.

Later Ron and Ralph walked outside, and Ralph said “I can’t believe how much money Doc had accumulated. When Bill finished tallying up everything, Doc’s estate was worth almost \$200 million, not including his share of the ownership of Doc’s lodge. He gave it to me with instructions to keep it open, and maintain the status quo. I know you and Doc were close, and the place has made money for both of you, so I’m going to bow to his wishes and keep the place open as a lodge. It’s just got too many memories for me right now. Maybe when the pain of missing him goes away, I’ll be able to come up here again. I wanted to ask you if you wanted to buy me out, but Doc told me not to - there’s some stuff about this lodge I don’t know about.”

“Ralph, remember the setup you had in your Anchorage basement? Under the hangar is an emergency shelter stocked for 10 years of self-sufficient survival including food, water, medicine, and everything you’d need to survive. Bear helped Doc design the ultimate bug-out shelter, and from what I saw, he succeeded. We’ve got one similar to yours right under our lodge. If the stuff hits the fan, get to the lake, and get to your hangar. Bear built a fallout and blast shelter under there, and the 3 of us are the only people who know about it. Your family would be safer in there than in your home bunker, since this would be much harder to find. The keys to the lodge include a key to the bunker. Once you’re inside, and seal the door, it’s a blast door, and would take a huge explosion for someone to get at you. There’s plenty of game for both our families, and our grandkids.”

“Thanks Ron. I’m glad you feel that way. By the way, I never did thank you for saving Sam’s life. Sam told me you probably still love her, but you’re not in love with her.”

“Samantha and I will always be close, but not ever more than friends, but I’d do anything short of hurting my wife and family to help Sam and your family.”

Ralph stuck his hand out and told Ron that he’d do the same for Ron and his family.

They went back inside the lodge, and the gathering was winding down, and Ron said that they needed to start heading home if they wanted to land with good daylight. When they agreed, he called the airport, who said the choppers were waiting for them parked by the lake. Ron told them to come on in, they were ready to go.

On the way out, Ron stopped his mom. “Mom, is there anything I should know?”

“Not really son, your mom’s getting old, and Gene is really getting old. We’re alright.”

“Mom, I just wanted to tell you I love you!”

Ron leaned into his Mom, and burst into tears. “I just lost Doc, I don’t want to loose you too!”

“I’m not going anywhere dear!”

“Ralph told me that you were so worried about Gene that you were working yourself into a stroke. PLEASE mom, take it easy. If you need some help, just ask. Both Nancy and I are retired for all practical purposes, and can do stuff for you or Gene.”

“We’re not a couple of frail old people just yet. Ralph’s just like all the rest of the doctors, they worry too much. No one lives forever, and I want to enjoy what time I have left with Gene.”

“Ok Mom, but if you need me, I’m right here, and I love you!”

“I love you too son, but we’ve got a helicopter to catch.”

Ron gave his mom one last hug before he let her go, and helped her out to the waiting chopper. Once the choppers were clear, they loaded up the airplanes and taxied out to the lake.

The mood after the flight home was somber, and finally Bear had to resolve the tension.

“Any of you guys want to go shooting at the range tomorrow? I’m going to break out some Full-auto stuff for you to play with!”

That suggestion could have resurrected the dead, and the resulting pandemonium indicated that he better get some more ammunition out of the Armory. He had a cool idea, and decided to take some of his personal weapons out of his collection, and let everyone shoot them. He had a real surprise for them waiting for when it got dark that night!

The next day Bear, Tom, and Gary, along with Hunter’s kids, were busy transporting junk to the shooting range for targets, hauling cases of belted ammo and cases of ammo for the rifles and subguns. At noon everyone started arriving, and Bear gathered them around the conference table to do his safety indoctrination. The range would be hot all afternoon, and there would be no one going downrange unless it was him and an absolute emergency. All the weapons, with the exception of the M-16a2 rifles with the 3-round burst were full auto, and you really had to pay attention to muzzle climb. All of his subguns were suppressed, but since they were firing belt-fed and various non-suppressed rifles, eye and ear protection would be worn at all times.

He started with the M-16a2, showed everyone how to work it, then issued 1 to everyone who wasn’t in the Militia (basically all the kids - Bear believed that the .223 poodle shooter, with it’s neutered 3-round burst trigger, was only fit for kids, or your average draftee Army puke that couldn’t hit anything outside of 100 yards anyway.) Once they were set up on the 100-yard line,

he showed everyone else what he had for them to shoot. He had the rest of the .45 Mini-Uzi's left at MacDill (minus the ones he'd given to Josh and others), dozens of H&K MP-5/10-SD subguns, and from his personal collection, a Czech 7.62x25mm Skorpion, a Sten MK V, a Soviet PPSH-41 7.62x25 and several 75-round drums full of com-bloc ammo for it. Next he showed them his personal Ingram MAC-10 in .45acp. Just in case anyone was interested, he had several Yugoslavian AK-47s and cases of 7.62x39 ammo for them. Josh grabbed a pair of the .45 Mini-Uzis, since this would be a good time to teach Sheila how to shoot it, since the fastest way to draw attention to yourself in the outback was to fire full-auto all afternoon. He picked up 20 30-rd mags and started loading them, then carried them to Bear's Subgun range, which was set up for 25 yard maximum. He taught Sheila trigger control, and explained that the Uzi was much more accurate when you limited yourself to 3-round bursts, even with the suppressor. After a couple of magazines, Sheila was getting the hang of just tapping the trigger, instead of squeezing it like a rifle or pistol, which would usually result in her emptying the magazine. Next he worked on her accuracy, since the Uzi had primitive sights at best. With the suppressor mounted, the normal sights were almost totally obscured, so he had to teach her instinctive shooting. For having never fired the UZI, she was getting pretty good at it by the end of the day.

Meanwhile, Jake and Sarah's kids were all on the 100 yard line with their M-16a2's, having the time of their lives. Jake's and Diane's kids Dan (12), Rebecca (10), Samuel (8), and John (5) Had shot guns since they were old enough to shoot them. John was the youngest competitive shooter in the Youth Shooting League, and was a VERY mature 5-year old. He wanted to do everything his older brothers and sister did, so Jake couldn't really tell him no. John learned very quickly, and was a very serious shooter. He shot Jake's old tricked-out 10/22 in the Youth shooting league, and was soon the top shooter in the 12 and under category. He loved shooting the scoped AR-15 when Jake was with them at Bear's place, and he treated the M-16a2 like the AR-15, except for 1 magazine that Jake let him fire in 3-round burst mode. John told his dad that he thought the 3-round burst mode was a waste of ammo. If you killed the target with the first round, you didn't need the 2 others. Jake smiled and thought "Spoken like a true sharpshooter, just like his dad!" Samuel wasn't as good of a shot as his younger brother, but he was smart as a tack, and Jake thought he might have inherited his grandpa's vision, because he could spot stuff much further away than Jake could. Rebecca was at that awkward age between teenager and child, yet Jake loved her deeply, and was probably the closest to his daughter of all his kids. She reminded him of Sarah, who could go from cute little girl to tomboy so fast it made his head hurt. Dan was the "grownup" of his kids, and helped doing adult things like felling and splitting wood, and he'd already shot his first caribou. When Jake saw him gutting the caribou with his Mom's Ulu, he knew that he must have been listening to his Mom, because Jake remembered his first caribou, and the poor job he'd done skinning and gutting it. Dan was the oldest kid shooting the M-16a2, but he didn't mind, since he was looking out for his younger siblings.

Sarah and Neil's kids Rachael (11), Russell (9), Robert (7) and Rebecca(4) came with them, but Robert and Rebecca were with their mom, since Robert wasn't into guns yet, and Rebecca was too young. Rachael and Russell were doing OK on the 100 yard line, but weren't as good shots

as Jake's kids, probably because they had started shooting much later. Neil was a pretty good shot with his HBAR Bushmaster AR-15 on the 300-yard line, but was shooting with Rachael and Russell on the 100-yard line to try and encourage them. David and Isabel were there, and they were shooting too. Josh thought something was odd about his younger brother, but he couldn't put his finger on it. He seemed dominated by Isabel, and didn't seem to be really into guns like his other siblings. Josh realized his brother was more sensitive and in touch with his feelings, and was just different.

BA and Sally were there with their kids and their grandkids. Mike and Jill were both married, and had 2 kids each. Jill was pregnant with #3, so she wasn't shooting. Jill's husband Jack, on the other hand, was really into hunting and shooting. He worked with Jake at the lodge, as was as good of a guide as Jake. With Ron looking to retirement, he was grooming Jake to take over the airline, so Jake was grooming Jack to take over guiding and flying at the lodge. He was studying for his commercial license so he could fly customers back and forth to the lodge as well. BA was spending more and more time with Jake, tutoring him on the ins and outs of the business world. Bill had totally retired, and was in the process of selling the Inn to Mike, who had a head for business like his dad. BA was so rich that he could buy the inn for cash and not hurt his investments, so he was negotiating with his son to buy the inn, and have his son pay him back out of the profits. Ron had talked to Sarah and Neil, and decided to groom Neil to run the mine when Bear retired in a few years. Ron wanted Josh to take over running the Survival School from Bear, but now he had a 5-year contract to consult with the RAAF in Australia. Ron thought he could use that to their advantage, and offer the RDF the use of the survival school for training like the US, Canada, and several other countries were. Since Josh was a former SEAL officer, he had the credentials to run the place. Hunter's sons were trained by their Dad, and were in the process of taking over some training programs from their dad, who was getting long in the tooth. Since the Survival School was a mature program, with established contracts, all they needed was someone to run the place, and a SEAL Officer would make a nice image for the head of the school. Bear and Ron decided that Bear would approach Josh before he left for Australia.

While the kids shot the M-16a2, most of the adults wanted to try the Belt fed machine guns. Ron was first behind the M-60, and after a few bursts was able to easily control the trigger, and send short bursts into each of the targets ranging from 300-1,000 yards on the range. Diane got behind the M-249 SAW, and after getting everything figured out, was putting short bursts into the targets between 100-400 yards. Bear was impressed that she was picking it up so fast, and remembered that she was Jake's sniper partner, so she probably had enough practice with the M-25 and the scoped AR-15 to make shooting the SAW off the bipod a walk in the park. Nancy decided to try the M-60 next, and was a pretty good shot too. By the time it was starting to get dark, Bear brought out his personal "toy" - A GE Minigun converted to fire .223 rounds, since they had millions of them. Bear must have seen Predator to even think about converting a GE minigun to a backpack man-portable weapon. Normally 1,000 rounds of .223 ammo would be a heavy load, but Bear had built a 2,000 round backpack and a flexible feed just like the movie. At 6,000 rpm, the 2,000 round pack wouldn't last long, but with every 10<sup>th</sup> round a tracer, it

would make a cool light show! Once everyone was clear of the firing line, he picked up the gun, and walked to the firing line. Once he was sure it was safe, he flipped the safety, which powered the motors. All he had to do was squeeze the trigger, and watch the light show. He pointed the gun at a wrecked car body, squeezed the trigger, and wrecked it some more. Next he fired at an old refrigerator, and turned it into a shredded wreck with a short burst. He had put an old Ford pickup on the far side of the line, and so far the only bullet holes in it were from Ron's firing the M -60 at it. Unknown to Ron, there was a gallon gas container in the bed, which Bear ignited with his second burst, resulting in "4<sup>th</sup> of July" fireworks as the truck burned. When Bear was finally out of ammo, he said "Sorry people, show's over!" and they packed everything up and went back into Bear's lodge. Bear took Josh aside, and talked to him.

"Josh, I need you to do me and your dad a favor. I'm getting too old to run this school, and I'm thinking about retiring. I know you just signed a 5-year contract, and I can wait that long, but I need you back in Alaska once the contract's finished to pick up the reins here. The school is in great shape, with repeat business from all over the world. You could teach any classes you wanted to, but what I really need is an administrator. The fact that you're a former SEAL officer doesn't hurt either. Your Dad's already grooming Josh to take over the Airline, and Neil and Sally are going to run the mine, so you're the best qualified of his kids to run the survival school. You'll never need to think about money again, since your dad is accelerating the deposit schedule into your trusts, so the IRS won't get it all. Last time I talked with him, your dad was worth over \$200 million conservatively, and his investments are returning \$40 million per year. He decided to increase the trust fund deposits to \$15 million per year, and eventually he'll have to double that to \$30 if the market keeps going up."

"Bear, it's never been about the money. I'm honored that you wanted me to run your school. You're right, I'm tied into a 5-year contract, but Sheila's already said she wants to move to Alaska, so as soon as the contract's up, we're coming back. Just hold down the fort for another 4 years. Thanks Bear!"

"Make sure you talk to your Dad before you leave, he's trying to coordinate the 3 of you taking over the company so he can retire."

"Three of us, what about David?"

"He's not interested in the "responsibility" and is happy with the money in his trust fund. Just to be on the safe side, BA has advised Ron to totally cut Isabel out of the loop since she's got David totally dominated and BA doesn't trust her as far as he can throw her. He even went so far as to suggest that Ron not make David an officer in the company, and place his money in an air-tight trust fund that she can't get hold of."

"That's pretty severe - why did BA suggest that?"

"BA's got a nose for Barracudas, and Isabel has Barracuda written all over her. She didn't even



bother to change her name, and she's got David so dominated that he can't fart without her permission."

Josh started to laugh, then just shook his head. He knew it was probably pointless to talk to his brother, he'd just think his older brother was interfering, and make a bad situation worse. He agreed with BA's suggestions, and told Bear he'd talk with his Dad soon.

Later that evening, before they went to bed, Josh met his Dad in his study.

"Dad, I talked to Bear, and I agreed to run the Survival School. I'm pretty much in agreement with BA about the situation with David, but I need your advice."

"Josh, I've had years to study the problem, and I still can't come to a good decision. I can't disinherit my son just because he married a barracuda. David said he was happy running his Graphic Arts business, and all he wanted was the money in the trust fund. He told me he had no interest in flying hunting or mining, and he was busy enough with his business. I think part of the problem is Isabel has him so thoroughly dominated that he can't fart without her permission - that was a pretty accurate quote of BA's and I thought it was funny as hell until I realized he was talking about my youngest son. Nancy and I talked about it, and she blamed herself for being too "mothering" and overprotective of David. If she would have known this was going to happen to him, she would have booted his butt out the door on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and made him fend for himself, and learn some independence."

"Dad, there's no way you or mom could have known. Hopefully once Isabel figures out she can't touch David's money, she'll leave him and he can rebuild his life."

"Son, that's a hard way to resolve the issue, but I think you're right. I've already signed the paperwork putting all his disbursements into an irrevocable trust, and removing him from all connections to the Corporation. BA's lawyer claims that the contract is so airtight that F. Lee Bailey wouldn't try to change it. I've included a proviso that if the 3 of you vote unanimously to rescind the trust, he'd be fully restored. You understand that the ONLY time you should ever consider it is if David gets his act together, and isn't living with a barracuda. I highly doubt you should, but I left that option just in case David comes to his senses. Make sure you hurry back, Bear's getting older by the day."

"Dad, I'm worried about you - when I saw you yesterday, you looked like you'd aged 10 years since our wedding."

"I'm pretty sure it was the stress of losing Doc. Ralph said I was fine at my last physical, and if I keep going the way I'm going, I'll have at least another good 10-20 years. You and Sheila enjoy your stay in Australia. You might consider keeping your house in Sydney in case you want to go back there for vacation, like winter, or if you want to retire there."

Josh started laughing. “Hey, we could be the Ultimate Snowbirds. Summer in Alaska, Winter in Australia!” Josh gave his dad a hug, then went and joined Sheila in bed. The next morning, the charter company called, and said their jet was finished with their scheduled maintenance, and they’d be in Anchorage 6 hours after they took off at 0900 local. Georgia was 4 hours ahead of Alaska, and it was 6am Alaska Standard Time. That meant they’d been in the air for an hour, which gave them 5 hours to get to Anchorage. Since it was a 2-hour flight via SuperGoose, they needed to get packed and out the door in 3 hours. He told Sheila to get showered and packed, they had to be in Anchorage in 5 hours to meet their ride home. Josh told his Mom and Dad they would have to cut it short to catch their flight, and Ron said it was OK, and he was glad he got to see them again, even under the circumstances. Josh gave his Mom and Dad a big hug, and said he’d see them in the next 4 years, if not sooner. Sheila just got out of the shower when Josh got in, so he smacked her playfully on the rump on his way in. She yelped and blew him a kiss. Josh made sure that he drank a lot of water with breakfast after he got out of the shower. They left the house with 20 minutes to spare. Jake was going to fly them to Anchorage and pick up a load of hunters on the way back with the VIP SuperGoose. When they got to the airport, the engines were already turning on the Goose, so Josh gave his Mom and Dad another quick hug, then they hugged Sheila, and they ran to the plane. Once they were in and seated, the ground crewman lifted and locked the air stair door, pulled the chocks out from under the wheels, and walked in front of the aircraft to show Jake he was good to go. Jake had already received take-off clearance, and as soon as the crewman was clear, he taxied to the lake and took off. As they taxied up to the VIP terminal, the Gulfstream came in for a landing. It taxied right up next to them, so Josh and Sheila just transferred from one aircraft to the other, and the ground crew closed and locked the doors of both aircraft. Jake taxied over to the General Aviation loading area, and the Gulfstream taxied to the fuel pumps, took on as much fuel as they could hold, then got take-off clearance, and took off bound for Australia.

## Chapter 83 - Flying Home

Josh knew he was in for a long flight when Sheila started making the bed as soon as the cabin doors were secured. They got into their seats right as the plane started taxiing, and as soon as the seatbelt signs came off, so did Sheila's clothes! He knew she really wanted to get pregnant in the worst way when she moaned and said she hoped it would be twins. Josh realized that moments like this called for a cigarette, but neither of them smoked. For some reason Sheila was content to cuddle and talk the rest of the flight, which suited Josh just fine. When he woke up it was just turning light outside, so he knew they must have slept most of the flight. He rolled over to see the most beautiful sight in the world. His wife was sleeping quietly next to him and she had the most beautiful smile on her face. Josh hoped he had gotten her pregnant this time, and slid back in bed next to his sleeping wife and just held her. 2 hours later, they were both awake and hungry. Josh said he'd shower first, and warm it up for her, and make sure he left her plenty of water. She smiled sweetly and gave him a kiss, then he crawled out of bed before she had any other ideas since they should be landing in a few hours. Once he got out of the shower, he got dressed and Sheila walked past him to get into the shower. Josh decided to give her a hug, and said "Do you know how beautiful you are right now?"

"Right, my hair's a mess and I smell!"

"You still look beautiful to me. Soon you'll be the mother of my children. That makes you extra beautiful in my eyes."

Sheila gave Josh a rather passionate kiss, then Josh said she'd better get into the shower, or they might not get dressed in time. She reluctantly let Josh go, but not before telling him she was just taking a rain check for when they got home. Josh checked the galley for something to eat while Sheila took a quick shower. The galley had a microwave oven that was just big enough to heat two trays of what looked like eggs, sausage, hash and toast. There was a #1 tag on the tray, and he noticed there was a matching #1 button on the microwave's control pad. Evidently they had planned ahead, so Josh stuck the trays in the microwave, closed the door, and pressed the #1 button. 3 minutes later, the microwave dinged, and he opened the door, set the tray on the counter, and took the wrapping off. He spotted a coffee maker, checked to make sure there was coffee in the basket, and pressed the Brew button. 6 minutes later, he had 6 cups of fresh brewed coffee. The aroma filled the cabin, and Sheila came out in one of Josh's tee-shirts, saying she was too hungry to get dressed the rest of the way, she wanted to eat now. He set the trays down on the dinette, added 2 coffee mugs, and the place settings. Before they ate, Josh bowed his head and said Grace. Sheila thought this was an interesting development, and said Amen when he was finished. Judging by the portions, each tray was designed to feed 2 people, but they had no problems eating it all since they hadn't eaten anything in 14 hours. When she finished eating, she took off Josh's shirt and sashayed back to the bathroom to get dressed, making Josh wish he had another 4 hours of flight time. He decided instead to make her pay for that when they got home. 2 could play that game.

Once they landed an hour later, they were seated and presentable, or at least dressed. Nick met them at the airport, and saw the looks on their faces, and made his best time getting back home, then stayed out of their way. Nick hoped that his favorite Pizzeria had a special on delivery today, because he knew they wouldn't come out of their room until tomorrow. He wished he wasn't between girlfriends, then spent the next 30 minutes thinking about why he hadn't settled down like Josh and Sheila. It's not like he didn't have the opportunity. Finally he called up an old girlfriend that could have been "Mrs. Right" if he wasn't a confirmed bachelor, and talked with her. She had just broken up with her boyfriend, so she agreed to meet him for Pizza. She was a beautiful schoolteacher, who unlike his Playmates, had something going for her besides her looks. They spent the evening talking and laughing, and Nick came right out and asked her why they never got serious. She turned to him and said "Nick, I've always loved you, even when you were fooling around with those bimbos. I don't care about the money, I just wanted you. The last time we were dating was right after Tim died, and you were in no condition to make a commitment."

"Karen, I know I'm ready now. I see Josh and Sheila so happy together, and planning their future, and all I see is growing old and lonely. I've never had the nerve to ask you, but I'd like to live with you for 30 days, and if everything works out, I'd like to marry you."

"Nick that's the most unusual proposal I've ever heard. Are you sure you mean it?"

"I see the 30 days as an escape clause in case you decide you can't stand me. I've been a bachelor all my life, and I'm pretty set in my ways."

"As long as you clean up after yourself and leave the seat down, I can handle the rest."

"I'm building a house out in the country, right next to Josh and Sheila, well not right next- they're on adjacent 10-acre lots, and they both have an emergency shelter in the basement. I think I'd like to have kids if you wanted to."

"I've always wanted to have kids - especially yours!"

"So why didn't we do this years ago?"

"Nick, you weren't ready to settle down, your best friend had just died, and you were a depressed drunk. Still I loved you, but you didn't want me around."

"Well I do now - and forever!"

Karen kissed Nick, and he realized that he really did love her. His arms came around her shoulders, and he cried when he held her. Karen told him that she needed to give 30 days notice at her flat, or she'd lose her deposit.

“Sod the deposit - I just sold that old white elephant of a house of mine for \$100 million, you’ll never need money again.”

“Well in that case, if you can get tomorrow off, can you help me move in to your house?”

“Would you mind if Josh and Sheila helped?”

“I’ve never met Josh, but Sheila and I get along fabulously.”

“Josh is just like Tim, he just resigned from the US NAVY as a SEAL. He was a Lieutenant Commander right before he quit to marry Sheila.”

“Wow, I’ve never met an actual SEAL.”

“They’re just like the rest of us, except they’ve got a much tougher job, kind of like the Royal Marines during WWII.”

“Nick, could you take me to your house tonight. I want to spend the night with you.”

“Ok, can we finish our pizza first!”

Karen laughed, Nick really liked the sound of her laughter, and gave her another hug.

He drove her home later that evening, and found Josh and Sheila sitting on the couch watching a movie. Sheila stood up and hugged her old friend, and Nick introduced her to Josh as his Fiancé.

Sheila turned to Karen and said “How’d you get this old tomcat to settle down?”

Nick said “Actually it was living with you two. I never knew a married couple could be so happy together. All my parents did was fight.”

“Nick, the trick is to grow together, not apart. As Bill said at our wedding, if God’s in the middle of your marriage, and you’re both looking at him, you don’t see each other’s imperfections, you see them as God sees them.”

“Thanks Sheila, I’ll remember that. I wanted to ask you two if it’s OK if Karen lives here while our house gets built.”

“Nick, it’s your house. I guess this means we’ll have to wear clothes now!”

Nick realized Sheila was teasing him, and started laughing.

“Well, now that’s decided, Karen and I wanted to go to bed. Goodnight you two.”

“Don’t kill him Karen, he’s not as young as he used to be, or he thinks he is!”

Nick held his hand to his ear, like he couldn’t hear her, and said “Aye, you were saying?”

Everyone was laughing their heads off, and Nick took his chance to tear Karen away from them so he could have her all to himself. The next morning, he decided that Sheila was right, he wasn’t as young as he used to be. His arm was wrapped around Karen and they were both staring at the ceiling basking in the afterglow. She was the first one to speak. Dear, I don’t care if we can have kids or not, I love you so much right now I don’t ever want to leave your side.”

“What about work?”

“If we start having kids, I’ll quit my job, and spend all my time raising our kids. In another 5 years, you should have enough years in for full military retirement, then we’ll just have to think of something to do.”

“Hopefully outside of the bedroom, or else I’ll need a bigger house.”

Karen rolled over and kissed Nick rather passionately.

Later that afternoon, the 4 of them met in the dining area. Josh and Sheila were going up to see her parents that weekend, and asked Nick and Karen to come along. Josh told Nick they were planning on shooting his M -25 and maybe the M - 200.

Karen was confused and asked “what’s that?”

Nick said “A couple of bloody accurate rifles. The M -25 is twice as good as my Enfield, and Josh here can shoot a 3-inch group at 600 yards with it. The M -200 is an even bigger rifle made by Barrett’s. The RDF Special Forces used an older model in Desert Storm to destroy Scud missiles at over a mile. They’re thinking of buying the newer model, and Josh just happens to be an expert with it, so he’s working as a consultant for the RDF.”

“Bloody Hell, and I thought my Weatherby kicked like a mule.”

“Actually the M -200 kicks less than your average shotgun - it’s got a suppressor on it that also doubles as one heck of a muzzle brake. If you like, I’ll teach you to shoot it this weekend.”

Karen looked like Christmas had came early “Well, let’s get going!”

“Sheila’s got meetings the rest of this week, the soonest we can go is Saturday morning.”

“Ok, We’ll be ready to go bright and early.”

Saturday morning rolled around, and the 4 of them got into Josh's Hummer. Karen commented that it didn't look like any Hummer she'd seen.

"Dear, Josh built 2 armored Hummers, 1 for him, and 1 for Sheila, and 2 armored trailers."

"What for, we're perfectly safe here?"

"Right now, but almost anything could happen to disrupt that. Remember all the footage of the rioting in Indonesia. What if we were caught in the middle of that?"

Karen sat there thinking. The more she thought, the less she liked where her mind was taking her. Nick could see her walls of invulnerability crumbling, but it was for her own good.

"If that happened Sydney wouldn't be a very safe place."

"That's why we're moving out to the country. Josh gave me some plans for a house his friend Ralph built in Anchorage that could withstand a near miss and fallout."

"How could a house stand up to that?"

"Not necessarily the house, but the bunker underneath it. He designed a bunker that was 20 feet deep, 12 feet high, with 8 feet of dirt on top to shield it from fallout. The house itself is fireproof, and blast-resistant, and will stand up to anything less than a TOW missile."

"You guys planning on fighting WWII?"

"With a military base so close, if we want to survive, we'd have to assume the guys attacking us might have access to military weapons. Nick's house wouldn't survive your average band of hooligans, let alone someone with modern weapons. When he found out we were moving, and his house was worth \$100 million, he decided to move with us to a safer location."

"Ok, in that case, maybe you should buy an armored hummer too!"

Nick looked at Josh who shrugged his shoulders, he wasn't about to get into the middle of this discussion. Nick thought of a safe way out.

"Ok, if my Wing Commander says it's OK to drive on base, I'll get 1. If we need to, we might as well get 2."

"Great Nick, do you want me to call Q?"

"Who the heck is Q?"

Sheila chimed in “He’s the funny old codger that built both Hummers and our trailers. Obviously he’s seen 1 too many James Bond movies because he acts just like Q.”

“Well, let’s give the old codger a call!”

“Not so fast, I’ve got to talk to my Wing Commander on Monday.”

“Nick, you’ve got a cell phone, give him a call now while you’re thinking about it.”

“Yes Dear!”

Much as he thought it was a waste of money, he was rolling in it, and if he ever needed it, besides he had a wife to think about now, and maybe some kids. Also, there was the “Cool factor” but the rest of the lads at the RAAF would just accuse him of going through a second childhood. He picked up his cell phone and dialed.

“General Ratliff, Commander Klaus. What would be the procedure for bringing a personal vehicle on base. Josh has me convinced that I should buy an armored Hummer. You will? Thank you sir! See you Monday at 0800 sharp.”

Nick shook his head. “My Wing Commander said that if I wanted one, he had no objection as long as it wasn’t armed.” Nick knew that he meant a TOW or Ma Deuce armed Hummer. Josh gave him the number for the Hummer dealer in town, and he had 2 H1 Hummers just like Sheila’s for sale. Nick told Karen the dealer had 2 just like Sheila’s left. Karen’s smile told Nick her answer. “Sir, could you hold those two for me until Monday. Yes, I said I wanted both, and I’ll pay by check. Yeah, I do know him, we’re driving in his Hummer right now.” Nick handed the phone to Josh, who told the Dealer to take his referral fee out of the price he would normally have charged Nick for 2 Hummers then handed the phone back to Nick. “Right, I’ll see you Monday with a check, right around 1200 noon.”

“Thanks Josh, he knocked \$10 grand off the price of the Hummers instead of paying you your referral fee.”

“What would it take for you to get a weapons permit like mine?”

“Just a couple of hours of paperwork - why?”

“This Hummer’s equipped with gun ports, and there’s a loaded Mini UZI under each of the front seats. Remember those straps you had the mechanic make? He made 1 so I can carry a loaded UZI and 3 extra mags under each seat, and the only way they’d find them if by a deliberate search. Driving an armored car is nice, but being able to fight back is even better.”

“Yeah, I saw those Mini-UZIs, and they’d make a formidable vehicle defense gun. Even better



than a Witness protection shotgun.”

“That’s not all, I’ve also got a smoke screen, high-power strobes, and high -voltage door handles to prevent car jacking.”

“What no ejection seat?”

“Nope, Sheila wouldn’t appreciate it.”

Nick looked at Sheila sitting in the passenger seat, and guessed she’d be pretty mad if Josh pressed the ejection seat button while she was in it! When they got to the RAAF base, Josh showed his ID, and they drove to his hangar. The SuperGoose had already been fueled and washed, and there were 2 Airmen standing there to load the plane and help them get it ready for flight. Nick and Karen climbed the air stairs into the passenger cabin. Karen really liked the VIP seats. Once the plane was loaded, Josh and Sheila did a walk-around, and climbed into the cockpit. With an airman standing there with a fire extinguisher, he started #1 then #2, then once the turbines were in the green, bumped the throttles out of idle, then waited while the airman pulled the chocks, and taxied to the runway while contacting the tower. When he received clearance, he took off for Sheila’s parents Station.

4 hours later, they landed at the station, Jack was waiting for them, and as soon as they got out, he gave Sheila a hug, then walked over to Nick, shook his hand, and said “Long time no see!” Nick remembered the last time he saw Tim’s parents was when he delivered the news that he was lost at sea and presumed dead, then 2 days later, told them they’d found Tim’s body. When Karen got out, Nick introduced her as his fiancé Karen Sullivan. Jack shook her hand, and told them to get in the truck while 2 ranch hands loaded all the rifles into the bed of the truck along with their suitcases. Sheila must have called ahead, because Nellie had 2 bedrooms ready. She gave Nick a big hug, then broke down crying “Nick you’ve been gone far too long, please come over more often. You were Tim’s best friend, and part of the family.”

“Thanks Nellie, I really missed the place. Between Sheila staying with me, and having the two of them living with me, they’ve finally drawn me out of my self-imposed prison. I’d like you to meet my fiancé Karen Sullivan. If you remember correctly, we were dating when Tim died. In my grief I pushed away the one woman I loved, and turned into a womanizing drunk. Seeing how much Sheila and Josh love each other reminded me of what I was missing, so I called up Karen, and she’d just broken up with her boyfriend, and we got talking, and one thing led to another. I tell you God works in mysterious ways. If you hadn’t sent Sheila to live with me, I’d have never met her and Josh, and see what a married couple is really like. Thank God Karen was still in love with me, so everything worked out. Do you have a justice of the peace here, I’d like to marry Karen here, because this is where my family is.”

Nick turned to Karen. “I know it’s sudden, but I feel home here. If not now, in a week or so, but I wanted to get married right here at the Station.”

“Nick, if you remember, I’m an only child, and my parents died in a car wreck like yours several years ago, so this is as good as any place. I can see that Jack and Nellie are like family to you. If they can locate a JP this quick, let’s get married this weekend, if not whenever we can arrange it. I’m not going anywhere, and I don’t need a piece of paper to feel like I’m married to you. When you drove me out, I never really left - that’s probably why I broke up with my boyfriend, because I was still in love with you.”

Jack told them that the JP lived in the next station over, and if they wanted to, they could get married tomorrow. Josh asked them if they wanted to go shooting today. They both eagerly said yes. Jack came back and said that the JP could be there at noon tomorrow, so they could go shooting that afternoon, and have a small wedding with the immediate family tomorrow. The rifles were still in the truck, and they’d be good to go as soon as he put his and Nellie’s M -25's in the bed. Nick’s eyebrows lifted almost an inch - Jack didn’t have the kind of money to buy \$5,000 dollar rifles. Josh walked over to him and explained that his dad bought them for them when they were in Alaska the last time. Nick realized he could easily own a pair too with the kind of money he had, and decided to ask Josh after they were done shooting that afternoon. When Jack came out with 2 Pelican cases, and Nellie carrying a case of ammo, Nick knew they were ready and they all piled into the truck for the short drive to the range. Jack stapled targets onto the 6 target boards, then drove them back to the shooting line. In deference to Nick and Karen, they started on the 300-yard line. Jack and Nellie set up their positions, and as soon as they were ready, they started shooting. Josh set Nick and Karen up with the other 2 M -25's, and once they had their zeros set, they both proved to be pretty good shooters, shooting 4 inch groups at 300 yards prone with the bipod. Once their groups shrank, Josh suggested that they move back to the 600-yard line.

Since neither Nick or Karen seemed to need a shooting coach, Josh uncased his personal M - 25 and set up Sheila on the 600 yard line. He didn’t change her zero from his setting to see if she could shoot his zero. Josh was pleased but not surprised that Sheila’s group was right around 6 inches, and half an inch to the right from being well-centered. As long as she didn’t have to make head shots at 600 yards, she could shoot his zero with his M -25. He uncased his M -200 and left the scope set to his settings. Sheila got set up, and got behind the scope. When she was ready, he handed her a loaded magazine, and when she was done shooting, she still shot a 10-inch group, and 1 inch to the right. Josh picked her up and kissed her, and when she asked what that was for, Josh told her she was shooting his rifles, with his zeros, and all it did was move her group to the right, which meant she could shoot his zero, so when they went back to Alaska, they could form a second husband-wife sniper team. His older brother Jake was the prime sniper now that his dad was older, and his wife Diane was his back-up. Bear was going to pair Josh and Jake up until Josh joined the SEALs, so he was short a team. Everyone in Allakaket was part of the militia in case the village got attacked. She said “Whoa wait a minute there sailor - what do you mean attacked?”

Josh explained what had previously happened, and unless the Russians or Chinese invaded, they were safer in Alaska than they were in Australia. Sniper teams had to be able to shoot each

other's zeros, since they only brought 2 rifles with them, an M -200, and an M -25. The primary sniper was supposed to engage targets at 1,000 yards or beyond if necessary, and the backup was to spot and provide defensive firepower if necessary, or engage closer forces with aimed rapid fire shots.

"So you want me for your Sniper Partner? What about our kids?"

"Jake told me that he and Diane had this conversation, and she realized that the kids would be safe in town, and if they ran into such a superior force that they both were killed, the civilians in town even in the shelter didn't stand much of a chance either. It's our job to engage high-value and strategic targets at extreme range. We've got plenty of backup ranging from riflemen with Grenade launchers to Bradleys with the new Robogun system, to anti-air systems and Vulcan weapons systems, to the Snow Fox armed reconnaissance vehicles. If the town gets attacked, every able bodied person will either be defending it, or protecting the women and children in the bunker. At least in Alaska, we're properly armed and trained to repel any invader or attacker. Even my sister Sarah is a sniper. Ralph's wife Samantha was her back-up shooter."

"Wow, I married into a family of snipers. OK, this will take some getting used to."

Josh handed her back her M -25, then set up next to her to practice and hopefully encourage her to get her groups smaller. He hoped it wouldn't depress her to see him shooting 3 inch groups at 600 yards when she was shooting 6-inch groups. Over the day, her groups continued to shrink, and by the end of the day, she was averaging 5 inches at 600 yards. Josh thought not bad for a rookie. They packed it up before dinner and drove back to the ranch house. The discussion around the dinner table revolved around shooting and weddings. Josh decided to tell a story that combined both. He was only a little kid when his dad told it to him, but he remembered it well enough to joke about it when he was talking to Sheila before their wedding.

Karen said she was glad that they were getting married at the Station since she had a couple of ex-boyfriends that she could say were psychos. Josh said not to worry, both Sheila and him would be packing. Karen got an interesting reaction from Nick when she opened her purse and pulled out a stainless .38 special Chief's Special and said "Me Too."

"What the bloody hell are you doing with that?"

"Settle down Nick. Years ago, before I met you, an ex-boyfriend tried to kill me, and nearly succeeded. My dad was still alive, and bought me the gun and taught me how to shoot it. He said that it was illegal as heck in Sydney, but it was better to be tried by 12 than carried by 6, and I've carried it every day since then."

"The first thing I'm going to do when we get back on Monday is to process the paperwork to make us both legal to carry anywhere."

Josh said, "In that case, you both might want to up-gun a little." He reached into his waistband and carefully drew his P-14 Limited, making sure not to point the barrel at anyone, dropped the mag, cycled the slide, and caught the round in midair. He locked the slide open and handed the whole thing to Nick.

"You've been carrying these cannons around?"

"Sheila's got 1 too, they're not that heavy once you get used to it, and the Cor-bon 200 grain jacketed hollow point "flying ashcan" has the best 1-shot stopping specs of all non-magnum rounds in the latest Marshall/Sanow tests. The SEALs prefer the .45acp or the 10mm round for their sidearms or subguns. Some teams use the H&K MP-5SD, but that's because they've got a ton of them, and they're suppressed. The few teams that can get hold of the MP-5/10SD prefer the 10mm round over the 9mm since it's a better stopper."

"I'll have to check and see if I can get any of these P-14's any more, ParaOrd stopped making them years ago, and getting any modern handgun in a military caliber is pretty tough now in Australia since they enacted their tough gun control laws years ago."

"We're sitting on several cases of them in Allakaket. If necessary, I'll have Bear ship a couple to you."

"Thanks Josh, but the paperwork to import pistols is almost as much as to get a concealed weapons permit."

"Don't worry, if you want them, I'll get them."

They talked until it was time to go to bed. Nick and Karen went to bed together, and Sheila was wondering why Nellie didn't give them a hard time, then he realized that Nellie wasn't Nick's Mother, and they were both adults. Nick was in his early 40's, and Karen was in her mid-30's, so they'd been around the block a few times, and from what he'd heard, they were already lovers from the last time they were living together before Tim died almost 10 years ago.

Josh and Sheila were too tired to fool around, so he held her until they fell asleep in each other's arms. Josh woke up to a numb arm, and as soon as Sheila moved, he stifled a scream as the blood flowed back into his arm. He made enough noise to wake the house, and he apologized at breakfast saying his arm went numb, and the return of circulation was painful. Nick and Jack had both been there before and nodded understandingly. The 3 women made breakfast, then they got ready for the wedding lunch and got dressed in the best clothes they had brought. At Noon, the Justice of the Peace showed up, and they were married on their porch. It was a simple ceremony, then they signed the license and Nick paid the JP the fee for the license and ceremony. He told Nick he'd file the license on Monday when he went back to his office, and gave Nick and Karen each a copy. Nick told Karen he had a huge safe deposit box at the bank, so they could put it in there. They spent the rest of the afternoon sitting on the porch eating

finger food and drinking iced tea, since they had to fly back before dark, and Josh never drank at least 12 hours before flying. Right before dark, they boarded the SuperGoose and flew back to Sydney. Nick was glad that their bedrooms were on opposite wings of the huge mansion, because he knew Karen was a noisy lover, and he'd heard the sounds of passion coming from Josh and Sheila's bedroom more than once. Monday morning, Nick looked like something the cat dragged in, and that was after a shower. Sheila made breakfast for the 4 of them, since she was in the best condition to do so. Once breakfast was over, Nick drove Karen to work to pick up her final check, then dropped her off at the house, and barely made it to work by 0800. He had a pile of paperwork to fill out. Once the paperwork was done, he requested the rest of the afternoon off, picked up Karen and drove to the Hummer dealer, picked up the Hummers, and drove them to Q's shop. Josh met them at Q's shop and drove them home. Nick ordered 2 armor setups just like Josh's, and 2 armored trailers. Q muttered something about "why didn't you order them last month, I could have gotten a better price on the Kevlar panels" and went to work.

Nick still had his Government issue Hummer, so he drove it until Q called and said their Hummers and trailers were done. Josh dropped them off, and shook his head when Q went through the same routine with Nick as he did with Josh. This guy must have been cast as a stand-in for Q, he was a dead-ringer, and acted just like him. He was about to ask Q if he ever worked for MI-5, but realized if he did, he wouldn't be able to tell them anyway. When Nick met up with Josh at his house, Nick said "Now I know why you call him Q - he acts just like the old geezer. I can't believe all the stuff he threw in at no charge."

"Trust me, the quote they gave you included everything, that's just Q being Q."

2 weeks later, a big box showed up for Josh when the UPS driver showed up. Josh signed for the package, then got Sheila to help him haul it inside the house. When he opened it up, inside was a note from Bear, 2 cased M -25's with the Springfield Scope and 20 20-round Magazines, 4 Mini-UZIs with 20 30-round magazines, 4 ParaOrd P-14's and 20 14-round magazines for the P-14's. What weighed so much was the 4 cases each of Cor-bon 200gr. JHP ammo and Black Hills .308 Match ammo. The note read "I hope you don't have any more friends in Australia, it's getting tough to ship stuff there. Bear"

Josh called Bear on his shoe phone, and thanked him for the package. Bear said that was all the guns he could ship, but he could send them more ammo if necessary. He'd just have to slip it into a shipment of SuperGoose parts. Josh was glad that his shoe phone came with an unbreakable encryption system, and that he'd given a copy to Bear and his Dad, or else he'd probably be getting a knock on the door in a couple of days. He guaranteed the security of the system by constantly calling on it with routine traffic, so he was pretty sure the NSA had put his phone on their Ignore list.

When Nick and Karen came home later that day, Josh made them a present of 2 P-14's with 5 mags each, and 2 Mini-Uzis with 5 mags each, and 1,000 rounds of Cor-bon ammo. Nick nearly

fainted when Josh handed him 2 Pelican cases and said that they each contained an M -25 just like the ones they shot last week. Finally, he added a case of .308 Match ammo to the pile.

“How the bloody hell did you get these past customs?”

“Ask me no questions, I’ll tell you no lies!”

“Good thing our Concealed Weapons permits came through today. You realize we’re going to have to fly out to the station this weekend to learn how to shoot these bloody things?”

“I was planning on it!”

Josh decided to offer the 2 spare UZIs and P-14s to Jack and Nellie when they flew up there on Friday afternoon. Jack was woefully under-gunned with the Webley and the broomhandle Mauser. He’d probably have puppies when he realized the UZI was full-auto, but Josh hoped he’d get over it quick.

## Chapter 84 - The Station

Thursday afternoon, Sheila got a call saying her doctorate mentor was cancelling their Friday meeting. He had to go to a conference he couldn't get out of. Instead of getting mad, she checked with Nick and Karen, and they decided to fly to her parent's station Friday morning instead of Saturday, giving them another day to shoot. When Josh came home that afternoon, he was glad Sheila had taken care of things for him. The IP he was supposed to train on Friday was admitted to the base hospital that afternoon with acute food poisoning, and was off flight status for 2 weeks. Nick called the Maintenance supervisor, and requested the SuperGoose be cleaned and fueled, and ready for departure at 0800 Friday morning. Nick wasn't one to waste daylight either.

The next morning they drove Josh's Hummer onto the RAAF base, parked next to the hangar, and 2 airmen transferred their baggage onto the SuperGoose while Josh and Sheila did a walk-around. When they finished loading, Josh reached inside to raise and lock the rear loading ramp. Once their walk-around was complete, they all climbed aboard. Nick and Karen took adjoining seats, and Josh and Sheila got into the Pilot and Co-pilot's chairs respectively. Once the turbines were started, the airman pulled the chocks, Josh contacted the tower, then taxied to the runway. Once they were airborne, it only took 4 hours to reach the station. Jack was waiting for them again, and was glad that he brought 2 ranch hands with him when he saw how many cases Josh had with him. When they reached the ranch, Nellie was standing on the porch to greet them. Once everyone was inside, Josh asked Nick to help him remove some cases from the truck. They used a dolly to remove the case with the 2 P-14's with 10 magazines, 2 Mini-UZIs with 10 magazines, and the case of Cor-bon ammo. When they wheeled it into the center of the living room, Jack stood there looking puzzled until Josh told him that they had a little present for the both of them, and opened the cases. First he handed Jack the 2 holstered P-14's, then the 10 magazines. He noticed they were IWB holsters, and asked Josh what was going on.

"Bear shipped me some stuff for Nick and Karen, and gave me some extra hardware while he was at it. He said that this would have to be it on the hardware since it was getting harder to ship stuff, so he doubled what I ordered. Since the 4 of us are all carrying, and Sheila said you 2 rarely leave the station anymore, we felt that you 2 could use and appreciate the hardware. Even if you carry openly, if things keep going the way they do, the government might try to make you stop carrying openly, leaving you the choice of carrying concealed or being disarmed. If you get used to carrying concealed now, all you'll have to do when the gov't makes it illegal to carry openly is to stop carrying that old Webley on your belt, and keep carrying the concealed P-14. That IWB holster completely conceals the pistol if you wear your shirts out, and there are 5 magazines for each pistol, and 5 single magazine carriers for each as well. You might want to start by only carrying 2 spares, but having the rest handy could mean the difference between running out of ammo and dying or not. Way out here, you could get attacked by bands of brigands. I'm assuming you've seen Mad Max. If things go nuts in Sydney, Brisbane, or the Cairns, the survivors would be headed this way because they would know that the stations all

have a reliable source of water. The next present would come in real handy if that were to happen.” Josh reached into the case and extracted the 2 Mini-UZIs. Jack’s eyes lit up like Christmas had come early.

“I always wanted 1 of those!”

Josh handed it to him, and when Jack realized it was a Full-auto Uzi, he exclaimed “Bloody Hell, this is a Full-Auto Weapon, what are you trying to do, get us thrown in Prison?”

“Jack, I highly doubt most of the weapons you own are strictly legal, and will probably be worth major prison time later. Basically they can only hang you once.”

“You’ve got a point there. Even my semi-auto Mini-14 could get me 10-20. At my age, that’s basically life in prison.”

“Nick brought their UZIs as well, would it be OK if we practiced with them here?”

“Sure, all the ranch hands wouldn’t care, and our nearest neighbors are almost 100 miles away.” Josh put everything back in the case, and they hauled them back out to the truck. They spent the rest of the day learning how to shoot the Para Ordinance P-14 Limited, and the .45 acp Mini-Uzis. Jack didn’t even comment about the suppressors, but he really appreciated the fact that they were really quiet. By the end of the day, they’d learned trigger control. The 4 of them were already pretty good pistol shots, so the P-14 only took a little while to get used to. Nick was amazed at how accurate his P-14 was, since he had shot several Colt .45's that friends had owned before the government “got stupid” as he put it.

The next day, they were shooting their M -25 rifles, and later that afternoon, they put them up, and moved back to the 1000-yard line to shoot Josh and Sheila’s M -200s. They set up 2 positions on the line, then Josh and Sheila went first. It had been a while since Josh had shot the M -200 at 1,000 yards, and it showed. His first group measured about 6 inches through the spotting scope. Sheila’s first group measured 10 inches, and the first round was in the bullseye. Jack was watching his daughter shoot through the spotting scope, and couldn’t believe his “little Sheila” just put 10 rounds into a target 1,000 yards downrange, and the biggest spread he could see was about 10 inches! He switched his view to Josh’s target, and was totally stunned. Josh’s group was maybe 6 inches across, and 2 rounds were in the bullseye!

When they were finished and swapped fresh targets, Jack and Nellie were next. Josh was coaching Jack, and Sheila was coaching her Mom. They both were pretty good shots, but hadn’t tried shooting at anything much past 300 yards. Looking through the scope, Jack was amazed how big the target was, the 10-inch x-ring looked huge through the scope. Josh explained that Swarovski put a brand-new 10-25x 80mm scope on the M -200. Once the rifle was adjusted, Jack looked through it again, and the crosshairs were sitting right on the x-ring. Josh told him to go ahead and take a firing grip, and take 10 dry fires to get used to the trigger, and to pay



attention to where the crosshair was when the trigger broke. Jack had been trained by the Royal Marines how to shoot rifle, but realized he was out of his league, and paid attention to Josh's every word.

Once he was through with the dry firing, Josh handed him a loaded magazine, and had him cycle the action. Josh got onto the spotting scope and told Jack to go ahead whenever he was ready. Jack took Josh's word that the kick was about equal to a shotgun or 30-caliber magnum rifle. He was amazed when he touched the trigger the first time that the stock barely kicked him. He was expecting something in the order of his .460 Weatherby out of the huge round he was firing. Josh explained that the suppressor not only suppressed muzzle blast, but acted as one heck of a muzzle brake, and was probably on the order of 3-5 times more efficient than the brake on the model 82. Jack had seen pictures of the Barrett's Model 82, and thought that the muzzle break on that gun belonged on a tank.

In the next lane over, Sheila was working with her Mom, who was a little uneasy about shooting such a huge round. Sheila said "Relax Mom, it's like shooting your .308 Remington." Nellie got behind the scope and was amazed at how big and clear the image was through the scope. She could see the target over 1,000 yards away better through this scope than she could see a target 300 yards away through her Redfield. Once she got settled down, she started dry firing the rifle, and calmed down further. Sheila handed her a loaded magazine, and she cycled the action. She knew how to shoot through her wobble, and she was amazed when the first round went through the 10-inch X-ring. She kept shooting, and when she had 10 rounds fired, Sheila told her that she did pretty good with a 15-inch group. Sheila let her shoot the rifle for a couple more hours, and her groups eventually got down to 13 inches. Jack's smallest group turned out to be 11 inches. They packed everything back up and headed back to the ranch house when it got dark, and decided to shoot their M -25's the next day.

The next morning Jack, Nick and Josh set up 6 shooting positions on the 600 yard line, then uncased their M - 25's. Nick was surprised to see that Bear had included 10 20-round magazines with each of their rifles. Everyone loaded their magazines, then carried their rifles to the shooting line, and got ready to shoot. Over the next 8 hours, they shot the entire case of 1,000 rounds between the 4 of them. Josh knew that they needed to get their hands on some more Lake City Match ammo, and asked Nick if his Wing Commander would let them ship a 20,000 round container full of .308 Match, and another 10,000 rounds of the BMG-50 Match ammo through the RAAF base, since he needed to stay in practice for the M -200 project that was coming up. Nick pulled out his cell phone, and the General told him what they wanted to do, and said it was OK with him, since Josh had to stay in shape to teach the shooting instructors. It wouldn't do to have Josh embarrassed in front of the instructors by them shooting much smaller groups than he did, since he'd lose all credibility with the instructors if that happened. Nick told Josh he'd fill out the import paper Monday morning. When they were done shooting, Jack was looking at Josh's targets, and none of his groups were much bigger than 3 inches at 600 yards, with usually 1 or more rounds in the bullseye. Now he knew how Josh could shoot all those Kangaroos in the head, a 6-inch target at 300-400 yards was a walk in the park for Josh. Josh

was a better shot than just about any professional hunters he had met. Once they had everything packed back up, they drove back to the ranch house for an early dinner, Josh had to fly them home that evening since Nick had to be at work at 0800 sharp, and Sheila had to reschedule her mentor meeting. After they landed at the RAAF base, Josh drove them back to the house, and they all went to sleep.

After breakfast, Nick drove to the RAAF base with Josh, who was training IP pilots all that week in the SuperGoose. Nick got the ammunition importation paperwork started first thing. Josh picked him up when he was through, and they ate dinner together at Nick's place. Karen told them that the Contractor called and had a couple of questions about their houses. Nick deferred to Josh saying "It's your design."

"What if it's an interior decorating question, or an appliance selection question?"

"In that case either Sheila or Karen can handle it. Just call the guy and find out what he wants."

Josh called the contractor "Mr. Williams, glad you called. Outback Power Systems called to say the shipment will be delivered tomorrow."

"Ok, so install it per the instructions."

"I don't have a copy of the instructions."

"I'm sure the installation manual is with the shipment, I thought you'd done this kind of building before, and you knew your way around an AE system."

"I'm not an expert."

"If you need to hire one, you pay for them. I gave you this contract because you assured me you were competent to do it, now I'm starting to have my doubts."

"Don't worry Mr. Williams, I'll handle it."

"Just make sure it's done on time and done right. There's a 5 thousand dollar per day penalty for not completing on time, plus a \$1 million surety bond for quality of workmanship. Is there any thing else?"

"No sir, I'll take care of it!"

"See that you do!"

Once he hung up, Josh swore to himself "How come I always get stuck with the Amateurs - it would be nice to be working with pros again for a change."

Nick heard the exchange, and Josh's oath. "Josh that's not really fair. You're comparing a competent contractor to the SEALs you're used to working with. Of course he's not going to be as professional or positive. SEALs are in the top 1% of the Military, and the Military is usually the top 10% as far as professionalism and discipline."

"Nick, this guy is supposed to be a General Contractor. He shouldn't be calling me for piddly stuff like this. If he can't do it, he should have hired a sub that could. I'm not paying him half a mill per building for this BS!"

"Ok Josh you're right, do you want to fire him and hire a new General, or give him a chance to get his act together."

"It was a lot of work finding this guy, I don't want to go through this again."

"Maybe you should call your dad - he'd probably know what to do."

"Good idea Nick, I'm not used to being a civilian or rich."

"Hello dad, you got a minute?"

"Of course Josh. What can I do for you."

"I'm having problems with my General Contractor."

"Well call your lawyer."

"I don't have one."

"That's your first problem. Son, you're worth over \$50 million now, your time is too valuable to be dealing with contractors. Get a good legal firm, and put them on retainer, and let them handle it."

"Ok, can you help me locate a really good one in Sydney, Maybe BA or someone knows who is really good, and won't charge an arm and a leg."

"Josh the good ones always charge an arm and a leg, but they're worth it!"

A couple of hours later, Josh's e-mail beeped. He opened it, and it was an e-mail from BA saying that his Corporate Counsel recommended Goldrick, Farrell & Mullan in Sydney, and listed their contact numbers and e-mail address.

Josh forwarded the e-mail to the address BA gave him, and the next day, one of their partners, Vincent Goldrick called.

“Mr. Williams, you come highly recommended, what can we do for you?”

“My dad suggested I get a law firm on retainer to handle all my business dealings.”

“Great we can set you up with an Associate, a Legal Clerk, and a Private Secretary for a \$250,000 retainer and a \$100,000 annual fee.”

“OK, my friend Commander Nicolas Klaus needs the same services.”

“In that case, if you’re willing to share their services, I can offer you a \$300 thousand retainer, and \$100 thousand annual fee. If you could come to the office to sign some paperwork and deposit the retainer, we’ll get started.”

“Great, thanks Mr. Goldrick.”

“Nick, we need to see Vincent Goldrick at Goldrick, Farrell & Mullan.”

“I can take a long lunch tomorrow if you like.”

“Ok, works for me.”

The next day, they drove to the law offices in downtown Sydney, or more exactly the skyscraper they were in. The valet parked their Hummer, and they rode the elevator to the 35<sup>th</sup> floor. The door opened into the G, F & M lobby. Josh walked up to the receptionist.

“Hi, Josh Williams here to see Mr. Goldrick.”

The receptionist picked up the phone, and 30 seconds later, they were escorted to Vincent Goldrick’s office. It was huge and had a commanding view of the Sydney harbor skyline. Mr. Goldrick spent 5 minutes with them, shook their hands, and handed them off to an Associate, Mr. Heinz, who did all the actual work. He had them signing their lives away, including a limited power of attorney for the firm, the retainer, and disclosure forms. Once they were finished signing, they were introduced to the rest of Mr. Heinz’ staff, Jeb Stuart, his Law Clerk, and Mrs. Francis, one of his legal secretaries, who would also be their Personal Assistant and point of contact with the firm. She handed them her card, and said if they needed anything to call her. Josh asked her “Am I a Client yet?”

“If you signed the forms and paid the retainer fee - why?”

“Nick and I are building houses next to each other, and the Contractor’s charging us half a million each, but he doesn’t seem to be on the top of everything, and called me the other day for something he should have taken care of.”

“Mr. Williams, I can handle that with 1 phone call. If you could leave me the contractor’s name and number, I’m sure it will be taken care of to your satisfaction.”

“Thank you Mrs. Francis.”

They both shook her hand, and Josh programmed her number into his shoe phone, then Nick did the same. By the time Josh got home that afternoon, Josh had a message from Mrs. Francis who said she’d taken care of the matter, and if Mr. Conroy had any more questions, he was instructed to contact the Law Firm. Nick smiled and told Josh that having a high-powered law firm do your work for you got people’s attention, and he shouldn’t have any further problems with that contractor. After dinner, they sat down, and read the paperwork the firm gave them. They discussed using the firm’s investment services, and other services they offered. Right now, neither one of them had much in the way of investments. Josh’s trust fund was administered by his Dad’s legal firm, and Nick hadn’t receive the proceeds of his house yet.

The next morning, Sheila got up early, then 10 minutes later ran into the bedroom, and woke Josh up with a very passionate kiss. “Wake up Daddy!”

“Huh, what time is it?”

“In 9 months, it will be time to say hello to you’re new Child. I used an EPT, and I’m definitely pregnant!”

Josh grabbed his wife, swung her around like a rag doll, and hugged her hard until she pounded on his shoulder. When he loosened his grip, she said “Unhand me you Aquatic Freak - you almost suffocated me!” Josh relaxed his grip, but kept holding Sheila. Finally they decided to get dressed and tell Nick and Karen. When they got out to the living room, Nick and Karen were sitting on the couch practically glowing. Sheila blurted out “I’m Pregnant!” Karen jumped up, ran over and gave her a big hug, and said “Me too!”

“I thought you were on the pill?”

“I stopped taking them over a year ago, and insisted my ex-boyfriend use a condom. That was one of the reasons he left, said it didn’t feel right to him. I read a pamphlet about STDs, and that was all it took to convince me. Once I got back with Nick and realized we wanted to start a family, I suggested he not use a condom, and now I’m pregnant too!”

Josh spoke up “Congratulations you two, I guess this calls for a celebration. Do you want to go out to eat, or is it OK if Sheila and I cook for the 2 of you?”

“What were you thinking of?”

“How about Steaks and shrimp on the barbeque?”

Sounds like a plan, I'll pick up a small bottle of Champagne. Say 5:00 tonight?"

Josh remembered he hadn't told his parents, so he picked his shoe phone off the nightstand and dialed his parent's number then called Sheila over. "Mom, Dad, Sheila and I have some great news. Go ahead honey."

"Ron, Nancy, I just found out this morning you're going to be grandparents. I'm pregnant!"

Nancy hugged Ron, then the two women talked for a while. Finally, Sheila handed the phone to Josh. "He Did? Is everything OK? Let me know if I can do anything to help. I'm already praying for them. Thanks, Bye Dad."

"Is everyone OK?"

"Isabel blew up when she found out that Dad had effectively cut her off from the family fortune, and ordered David to have a "word" with his dad. Bear and BA were there when he confronted him, and made him realize that Isabel was manipulating him, and as BA said "David, She's got you so dominated you can't fart without her permission." David laughed then cried as he realized they were right. He told Dad that he didn't love Isabel, and just wanted someone to take care of him. What he got instead was a nightmare of verbal and mental abuse. He confided in his dad that they never consummated their marriage, and that they slept in separate beds. It was so bad that she basically ordered him around the house, and treated him like her slave. Dad was furious, and Bear wanted to go over there, shoot her, and stash the body somewhere. BA had a better idea, and called the Corporate lawyer, who had already got a judges signature on a separation and temporary restraining order, pending either a criminal investigation or annulment, depending on whether or not Isabel contested the annulment. BA had wisely insisted on a Pre-nuptial agreement, so the most she could get was the funds in their joint savings account which amounted to half a million dollars, and her personal belongings. Since Allakaket had grown so much they now had a Sheriff and 1 deputy, so BA called the Sheriff, who went with his Deputy to enforce the order, remove her from the house, and give her the choice of a flight to Anchorage or Fairbanks, or a weekend in Jail until she could arrange bail. She decided to take the ticket. They watched while she packed her few possessions, then drove her straight to the airport and put her aboard the flight to Fairbanks. Jake made sure she got off the plane in Fairbanks, then handed her a letter from the Corporate attorney indicating that if she signed the attached annulment agreement, she'd receive a settlement check worth \$100,000.00. If she didn't sign, or attempted to contact David, she'd get nothing, and he could guarantee that she would be prosecuted for several felonies including spouse abuse and theft by fraud. She wisely decided to cut her losses, signed the agreement, and took the check. The last Jake saw of her, she was in line to buy a ticket to the far northern region of Alaska, where Jake vaguely remembered Isabel was from. He thought "Good riddance" and turned around to go home."

## Chapter 85 - David's new love

Several weeks later, David went with his parents to services on Sunday and noticed a young woman sitting by herself. She looked like she had been crying. After the service, he saw her go to the Nursery and pick up an infant. Then he heard "Poor Heather, did you hear her husband just died in a Fishing accident. He never even saw his newborn son." David's sensitive heart was moved with compassion for her, and walked up to her. "Hi Heather, I'm David. I know you really don't feel like talking to anyone right now, but I just wanted you to know that if you want someone to talk to, call me."

"David, that's awfully sweet of you, but I just lost my Husband."

"I know, I just lost my wife. She didn't die or anything, she just left and never came back."

"How sad. I guess it wouldn't hurt to talk." He walked her to his truck, since she walked to church, and he said she didn't have to walk home. They drove to her small house, and she set Levon's carrier down. "Would you like some coffee?"

"Please, black with Sugar."

10 minutes later she came back with 2 huge mugs of coffee. He was looking at the pictures, and spotted her husband's. He sighed, since the guy looked like a nice guy, and now he was dead. When she sat down, he sat on the chair opposite her.

"I saw that picture of your husband, he seems like a nice guy."

"He was. He decided to take the job working on a crab fishing boat when his friend couldn't. He told him how much money he could make in a couple of weeks. What he forgot to tell him was how dangerous crabbing is. They normally loose 1 ship and crew every couple of seasons. They work 24-hours a day with minimal sleep, sometimes the arctic waves are taller than the 30-foot mast, and every now and then when it gets really bad, they're double that tall. They try to set pots to trap crabs, then haul them back aboard hours later. If they get lucky, you can earn several hundred thousand dollars per season. If you're unlucky, you're broke or dead. Gene was unlucky. One of the other captains told me that they got caught out in a storm they had no business being out in. All the other boats were headed to safety, but his captain decided to risk it to bring in another line of pots. One minute they were on the radio, the next silence. The other boats searched for them, but usually if a ship goes down out there, there aren't any survivors. They either drown or freeze to death. He said he preferred freezing to death. It took longer, but wasn't supposed to be painful in the frigid waters. You kind of went to sleep and never woke up. Anyway, that's what I hope happened to Gene. So tell me your story."

"I married an older woman last year named Isabel. She was an Inuit woman from a Northern

Alaskan tribe. I'd been living at home, and I guess I wanted someone to take care of me, and Mom was giving me some pretty serious hints that they wanted their privacy, so I asked her to marry me. It was the biggest mistake of my life. She had the headache from Hell on our wedding night, and we never had sex after that. Slowly but surely, I let her manipulate me to the point that BA said that I couldn't fart without her permission. I was miserable and suicidal. Finally my Dad took the extraordinary measure of putting me on an allowance, with no disbursements from my trust fund beyond that without his written permission. I didn't care, I had millions in the bank, but Isabel went ballistic, and ordered me to talk to my Dad and get the payments restored. When I went there, my Dad's friends Bear and BA were waiting for me, and confronted me with the truth that Isabel was using me to get to my family's money. She'd been sending checks out of our account every month for anywhere from 25 thousand dollars to 100 thousand, and never bought anything. After a year, she'd transferred almost a million dollars to another bank in Nome Alaska. My Dad showed me the transfers, and that's when I realized I had been had. By the time I made it back home, she was gone without a note. All her stuff was packed, and it looked like she left in a hurry. I think my Dad had something to do with it because he handed me a signed Annulment agreement and told me I didn't need to worry about her anymore. I'm not mad at him, in fact I'm grateful. I've got this big beautiful empty house, so Dad suggested I move back in with them until I get my act together, whatever that means."

"You seem to have your act pretty together. I'm guessing they don't want you to get hurt again."

"The last thing I want to do is to rush right into another marriage."

"David, I wanted to thank you for the drive home and the conversation. You're a really good listener, and it helps to talk about it. Some nights I just lay in bed and pray that this is all a nightmare, and then I roll over to an empty bed, and realize it's all real. I need a husband, and Levon needs a father, but I'm not in a hurry either. Problem is all the guys who hang at the Moose Café where I work are a bunch of drunken bums, and they'd make lousy fathers."

"Heather, do you have any other skills?"

"Yeah now that you mention it, Gene and I met in Art School, I was studying Graphic Art, and had almost finished my Associates degree when Gene proposed, and we moved to Alaska."

"Do you know your way around a computer?"

"I've used both Mac and Windows systems, and all the major graphics software."

"How'd you like a job. I've got more work than I can handle."

"I've never seen you in town, where do you work?"



“I’ve got a huge studio in my house. If you want, you can move into one of the spare rooms, and I’ll set the other up for your office so you have some privacy. I can afford to pay you way more than the Moose Café does, and there are absolutely no strings attached. I happen to still be a virgin, and plan on staying that way until I’m married.”

“David, this is all so sudden, but it is an answer to my prayers, the rent’s due next week, and I never got Gene’s last check since his boss went down with the ship.”

“Heather, let’s pray about this, and talk to Pastor Bill and my Parents. If they say OK, then it should be a good idea.”

“Thanks David, you’re so sweet for offering. My best offer up until now was to shack up with one of the boozers at the bar. That would have been a horrible life, but at least we would have a roof over our heads, and food on the table.”

“Heather - how much is the rent here?”

“\$200 per month, why?”

“Here’s a check for \$500. That will give you some time so you don’t have to rush into anything.”

“I can’t take this. It’s too much!”

“Nonsense, You’re a Sister in Christ, and you’re in need. I’ve got money to burn, and I’d rather be helping someone who needs it, then lining the pockets of someone who is trying to steal it from me.”

“Ok David, if you put it that way. Thanks.”

Heather stood up, put her arms around David, and kissed him on the cheek. The tender innocent hug and kiss meant more to him than the most passionate kiss he’d ever gotten in his life.

“Heather, I’ve got to go now. Here’s my number. Feel free to call me.” David handed her his business card, with all his numbers and e-mail addresses on it. She gave him another hug, then he set the mug down, walked over to Levon, and looked into his eyes. When they connected, David felt something he’d never felt before in his life, and he couldn’t put his finger on it. His best guess is he felt “connected” somehow to Levon. When he turned to go, he could see the tears in Heather’s eyes.

“Don’t cry, I’m not going anywhere.”

Heather took 3 quick strides, and threw herself into David’s arms, sobbing hysterically. David

held her until she stopped sobbing, and helped her wipe her tears.

“I can stay for a while if you need me to, but it wouldn’t be a good idea if I were still here after dark.”

“Why, do you change into a werewolf?”

“No a pumpkin!”

“David, just hold me for a minute more please. I feel like I’m drowning in tears.”

“You’ll be ok Heather. As long as you’ve got Levon, you’ll always have a part of Gene with you.”

Heather looked into David’s eyes, and something passed between them. David didn’t know what it was, but from that moment on, their lives would be different.

Later that afternoon, when he arrived back home, David sat down in the living room with Ron and Nancy “Mom, Dad, I need your advice. Remember that woman at church that lost her husband, and she was left with an infant to raise.”

“Vaguely, what’s up.”

“I had an idea, I need your advice. We spent the afternoon talking, and Heather works at the Moose café to pay her bills, but the rent’s due, and she didn’t have enough money to pay for it. She never asked for money, and didn’t want to take the \$500 check I gave her to tide her over. She was about to get evicted, and her only solution would have been to shack up with 1 of the town drunks at the café if I hadn’t helped. She’s got a degree in Graphic Arts and knows her way around a computer. I offered her a job and a place to stay with no strings attached. I told her I was still a virgin, and planned on staying that way until I was married. I’d like to help her, but I need your advice. Her husband just died, and I don’t want her reputation damaged by living with me, even though it would be totally platonic.”

Ron looked at his son with newfound pride. “David, I’m proud of you. You’ve got a really compassionate heart, but be careful, it can get you in trouble to trust the wrong people. Would you mind if I discretely checked out her story and talked to Bill. If her story is true, and she’s not trying to fleece you for your money, it sounds like a good idea. If you have an assistant, you can expand your business, take on bigger contracts, and it will give you someone your own age to talk to. Heather would benefit by having a stable job in a much better environment than a bar, and Levon will have a stable home environment. Just make sure you two don’t get romantically involved too soon, because it would be wrong for both of you, since you’re still in mourning over your last spouses, even though Isabel didn’t die. I knew you had feelings for her, otherwise you wouldn’t have married her. If you can wait a day or so, wait a minute, I can call the Sheriff

right now, and he can check her story. How did you say her husband died ?”

“In a fishing accident, they were crabbing when a storm came up, and they lost a whole vessel and crew. His name was Gene.”

“That should be easy enough to verify. I’ll be back in a minute.”

10 minutes later, Ron returned. “Her story checks. They did have a crabber go down with all hands 2 weeks ago, and one of the crew members was newly married. The Sheriff checked with the Fisheries department for a list of the missing crewmen, and the young newlywed was named Gene.”

“Ok Dad, so I can go ahead with my plan?”

“Let’s pray about it first.” The three of them gathered in the center of the living room with their arms around each other, silently praying for God to tell them what to do. Half an hour later, they were sure it was the right thing to do. Right then the phone rang. Nancy answered it, then called David to the phone, saying it was Heather.

“David, the weirdest thing just happened. I was sitting there praying when I felt compelled to call you. I don’t know how I know it, but this arrangement you were talking about would be perfect. I’d have a nice stable job, I wouldn’t be stuck in a bar 8 hours per day, and I’d have Levon right there next to me.”

“Heather, we just got done praying about it, and I know you’re right. It will take a couple of days to set up a studio in the other bedroom, and convert another bedroom so you and Levon would have your own room to stay in. I can pay you a salary of \$800 per week rent free, all you pay is half the utilities, your own phone bills, and either your personal food and supplies, or half of the food.”

“Levon’s going to need diapers and stuff I don’t think you should have to pay for. Why are you paying me so much?”

“I figured you’re worth \$20 dollars an hour for 40 hours per week, that equals \$800 per week. I’ve got a huge contract coming up with a New York Advertising agency for a major corporation with an annual renewal clause. If the two of us can handle the work, this contract has the potential to last several years.”

“Ok, let me know as soon as you want me to move in. I called the bar and gave my notice. Can you pick me up and take us to the General Store, I need to stock up on some stuff.”

“How about first thing tomorrow morning, the store will be closed in an hour, and I don’t know

if we can get there that soon.”

“Ok, if I can ask 1 more favor, if you can drop me off at the Credit Union so I can deposit your check first.”

“Sure, it’s right on the way. Say 8 o’clock tomorrow morning.”

“Thanks David, see you then.”

No sooner had they hung up, then David got on the computer to order another set of computer equipment to set up another office in his house. They had it in stock, so he requested 2<sup>nd</sup> day delivery to Anchorage AK, and delivery by private delivery company from there. Next he checked on furniture, then called her back to find out her trailer was furnished, and almost all of their furniture stayed. He asked her what she would need for her and Levon’s bedroom. When he hung up, he ordered it delivered ASAP. Next he told his Mom and Dad he needed to go back to his house, clean it up and get it ready for Heather and the baby. Ron suggested he sleep there that night, and get started in the morning.

Right after breakfast the next morning, Dave drove his pickup to Heather’s small trailer. He was amazed that a couple with a new baby could live there. His 4-bedroom house was over 3,000 square feet, not including the full basement. Their whole trailer was maybe 500-800 square feet. Heather brought Levon out in his baby carrier, all bundled up in even though it was over 40 degrees out. David walked around and opened both passenger side doors. Heather strapped Levon into the safer back seat, then climbed up front with David. “I don’t know how to thank you David - you’ve been so nice to me, and you don’t want anything in return.”

“All I wanted was a friend. You need a place to stay and a job, and I need someone to talk to, and you’re a trained Graphic Artist. This should work out pretty good. Once we’re done shopping, you should start transferring anything you won’t need in the next couple of days to my house. I’m having the furniture delivered tomorrow, and the computer and office stuff should be here the day after.”

“I talked to my Landlord, and explained the situation. He said he’d only charge me \$50 for the week, so I can spend the rest buying baby food and supplies. Let’s get your house cleaned up so I can move in as soon as possible.”

They stopped at the credit union where she cashed David’s check, then they stopped at her landlord’s place, and gave him a \$50 for the week. They drove over to the General Store, and Heather took a shopping list out of her purse and a calculator, and went down the aisles putting stuff in her cart. David did the same, but he was buying foodstuffs for the two of them. She checked out her baby food and supplies, then he handed the cashier his debit card, and bought over \$500 worth of food and supplies. Good thing he brought the truck, because the bed was full when they finished. They left Levon in the truck, and unloaded the bed, then they moved him

inside and set him on the middle of the kitchen table. Heather started in the kitchen, and David started in the bathroom, cleaning the house from top to bottom. Heather was careful what she used around Levon, but David used some heavy-duty disinfectants in the bathrooms, since they hadn't been cleaned in weeks. When they were finished, they drove back to Heather's trailer, and he helped her pack and move stuff over. She found a twin bed in another bedroom that David had forgotten about and asked if she could stay the night, since she needed some company and couldn't stand living in that trailer by herself one more night. David called his parents to let them know he was staying at his house with Heather that night. Ron reminded him of his promise, and David said that he had nothing to worry about. After he hung up, David made a simple dinner of steak and frozen vegetables. When he went to call Heather to dinner, he walked in on her nursing Levon. He was transfixed by the simple, beautiful and perfectly natural scene before him of Mother and son. Heather must have been tired, because she sat there with her eyes closed nursing her son. After a minute, David quietly walked out to wait for her to finish. 10 minutes later, he heard her finish nursing her son, so David told her that dinner was ready. She put Levon back in his carrier and went in to David.

"I'm sorry, I forgot I wasn't at my house. I hope I didn't bother you."

"Heather, this is your home too. I've got no problem with a mother nursing her son. It's what breasts were made for. My mom breast fed the 4 of us, and Jake told me some stories of Mom opening her blouse right in front of them to feed me like it was no big deal. They were so used to seeing mom feeding me that it didn't bother them. Breasts are nice to play with, but they're meant for feeding children, so feel free to nurse anywhere in the house. I accidentally walked in on you, and you're real discrete, so I don't think anyone else should have a problem."

"Heather walked right up to David, and gave him a gentle kiss on the cheek. "Thanks, you're so understanding. Let's eat, I'm starved." David quickly reheated the steaks and vegetables in the microwave, then brought the plates out to the table. After he said grace, they ate quietly. Later that evening, he was sitting down watching TV when Heather sat next to him, slipped his arm around her shoulder, and leaned against him while he watched TV. He understood that she just needed to feel his physical presence, and she didn't mean anything sexual by it. A couple of hours later, he reached for the remote, and she slid away and got up. "Thanks for holding me. Goodnight - see you tomorrow morning." David got up, took a shower and went to bed. He didn't know what was going on, but assumed that she just needed to feel someone close to her.

## Chapter 86 - Moving Day

With the help of their new lawyers, Josh and Nick's houses were finished under budget and ahead of schedule. The law firm had hired an independent inspector to make sure the house was built to spec, resulting in some delays as they fixed any shortcomings, then all of a sudden the contractor went into overdrive when Mrs. Francis pointed out the penalty clause for not being finished on time. The General Contractor was forced to hire a local electrical contractor to install the AE system when he found out the crew he had hired was not familiar with the Outback System. The resulting losses made him mad, but he was caught between a rock and a hard place since the penalties for being late were several times his overtime costs and the contract was a firm fixed-price contract with no provision for cost-overruns, so he bit the bullet and did whatever it took to make sure it was done on time and to spec. They hired movers to move all the furniture and stuff to the new houses. Nick bribed some buddies of his to help move the cases of ammo and weapons after hours. They knew Josh was a contractor on a classified RDF project, so the US Government Property stencils on the crates didn't even rate a second glance. Once everything was in place, they drove to the furniture store in Sydney and ordered enough furniture to fill both houses. Josh had radios, scanners and every sort of communications device he could think of installed in the basement and connected to a 100 foot tower outside with the best antennas he could buy. He had computer interfaces so most of the functions were automated and controlled by the computer. He had several news-bot programs installed that did nothing but surf the Internet news sites for certain keywords that would alert him that all was not well with the world. It took him several weeks to adjust the program to eliminate false alarms yet still alert him to urgent emergencies.

Nick and Karen had equipped their trailers exactly like Josh and Sheila's, down to the last detail. Nick thought of several things Josh had missed, so they all added them to their trailers. The trailers were parked fully loaded, with the battery bank connected to a trickle charger, and facing out so they could hook them up and go with a minute's notice. Everything else that they had in storage was boxed in stackable waterproof cases so they could be quickly loaded into the trailer if they had time.

Early one Monday morning, Josh was awakened by a rumble, then saw the lamp in the center of the bedroom shaking. He told Sheila to get out of bed now and lay on the floor next to the bed just in case. Seconds later the shaking stopped. Sheila hadn't felt an earthquake before, but Josh was aware of them since he grew up in Alaska and knew what to do. They got quickly dressed, then the phone rang. Nick was on the line asking what that was.

"I think it was an earthquake, let me turn my computer on, and see if the news-bots found anything. I'll call you right back if it's anything significant."

Once he got downstairs and turned the computer on, the screen was flashing RED, which meant the bot had located a news story that warranted emergency notification. He clicked the box and

read the bad news. It was the USGS site, which had registered a huge earthquake right between New Zealand and Sydney, and they were forecasting a Tsunami Alert, with a possible wave height of 10-20 meters, and a landfall within 2 hours. Suddenly another web-bot overrode the USGS site with an urgent crawler message from a local TV station with a Tsunami Warning, and an evacuation order. Josh was glad he had picked this site for their new houses which was 500 meters above sea level and surrounded by thousand meter hills. There was no way any flood waters would make it into their valley. He called Nick back, and told him about the alert. Nick told him that his pager just went off, and when he called the number, he heard a recorded message telling him the base was on lock-down, and to find a secure location off-base and stay put until further notice. Nick laughed and said "That's one way to avoid going to work on Monday."

"Nick, I don't know about you, but I saw those pictures from Indonesia, and let me tell you, it's nothing to laugh at. Most of downtown Sydney will either be damaged by the wave or the resulting flooding, and I can guarantee the power will go out. I need to check our bug-out route just in case. I'll get back to you, but make sure neither one of you leave your house without letting me know first, we might have to bug-out if things get too hot."

While Josh reviewed their Bug out route, Sheila called her mom and dad. They advised taking the inland route to their place, and Sheila wrote a note for Josh. She told them they were fine for now, and would only come to their place if their Bunker was in jeopardy. With that, their phone call got cut off by the system, so Sheila replaced the receiver, walked into the office where Josh was working, slipped her parents' note next to his keyboard, kissed the top of his head and headed out. Josh saw the note, and decided to plot both routes into his GPS just in case. Sheila turned on the TV right in time to see live coverage of the huge Tsunami coming ashore from the viewpoint of the remote weather camera mounted high atop the TV station's 30-story building in downtown Sydney. With the airport only 21 feet above sea level, the wave did considerable damage, then continued inland, flooding most of the area around Sydney until it ran into the foothills. Most of the rivers experienced severe reverse flooding as the in-rushing seawater sought the path of least resistance. She hoped their SuperGoose wouldn't be damaged by the flood waters.

Josh was downstairs listening to the scanner. The police, fire and EMS were doing everything they could, but there wasn't enough of them around to take care of everyone. Josh was worried about what would happen when the Sheeple down in Sydney ran out of food and water. All the city water was infiltrated with salt water and undrinkable. Several people got sick despite warnings over the TV and Radio not to drink their tap water unless they could desalinate it. They even described a simple distillation desalinator, but virtually no one in the "big city" was prepared for anything more than a flat tire on the way to work. Even some of the prepared people died when their houses flooded. They'd sited their houses to prevent a normal flood, but never counted on a 50-foot plus Tsunami reversing the flow of the rivers and flooding them from the sea. Most of Sydney was low-lying, and the only people who were safe lived in the Blue Mountains, or other areas that were higher than 500 feet above sea level. All the grocery stores

and warehouses were flooded, and the warehouses along the harbor were destroyed in the Tsunami, and the goods they housed were either washed out to sea when the wave retreated, or piled up in huge mounds of debris with the combined wreckage of buildings, cars, and people. Streets in downtown Sydney quickly became impassable, those that still existed after the Tsunami and flooding. Millions of people were either dead or dying, or stranded without food and water. Military and civilian helicopters were performing heroic rescues, but barely made a dent in the carnage. Death was random and unpredictable. Josh and Sheila realized how fortunate they were that the Tsunami struck in the early morning. If it had been several hours later when they were at work, they would have either been dead or stranded. All the Evacuation order did was create pandemonium and crashes as everyone who could get into a car was driving like a madman to escape the tsunami, resulting in multiple car pileups, and death from stress-induced heart attacks, which further clogged the escape routes. A few people survived by escaping on foot who happened to live near high ground, and headed there as soon as they got the warning with whatever they could grab and carry on their backs. Rioting and looting weren't a problem right now, but they would be in the following days and weeks once the lawless elements surfaced, and desperate starving people fought for what little food and water were left in the area.

Josh knew that eventually people would head out to their area, but he felt reasonably secure. They had installed a 6-foot cyclone fence around the property with 3 strands of barbed wire on top, and keeping with the rural farm culture, told everyone they were raising a flock of free-range geese. Josh knew from experience in the SEALs that a flock of geese made better "watchdogs" than a canine watchdog. They would honk like crazy and aggressively mob and peck any intruder. If they didn't stop them, they each had a pair of K-9 trained German Shepards as backup. Both houses were wired with sensors and day/night cameras. Josh turned on the cameras in case survivors were in the area and watching the house. The walls were so thick and well insulated that a thermal camera wouldn't show the house as being occupied, and all the exhaust pipes for the heater and other heat-producing appliances were routed through heat exchangers that captured the excess heat, and exhausted air that was near outside temperature and humidity so there would be no tell-tale steam plumes from their pipes on a cold morning. The house was fully self-sufficient for energy and water, and the well was located in the basement away from any possible harm. Once the house was locked down, the only things moving outside were the geese and the wind turbines so the place looked empty.

Nick and Josh had converted several million dollars each into gold and silver coins right after the developer handed Nick a \$100 Million dollar check, and he paid Josh back the cost of his house. Nick was amazed at how much \$5 Million in 1oz Gold coins weighed. They bought money belts and all 4 of them carried 10 1-ounce Canadian Maple Leafs and 20 Liberty Silver dollars. Josh added 100 ounces of gold and silver coins to each vehicle's secure storage case. Nick did the same with his vehicles. To them it was "only money" but it could be a lifesaver if they had to buy something like fuel, and they weren't accepting cash, checks or credit cards.

2 days after the Tsunami, Nick was relieved to find out the base was on high ground, and had



survived OK. Planes were damaged, and some older buildings collapsed when their foundations were compromised. He found out that Josh's SuperGoose came through with flying colors, since the old hangar where they stashed it turned out to be the highest ground on the base. Except for some mud on the floor, everything was fine. Nick's wing commander told him to stay put, that the roads were impassable, and he wasn't considered "Essential Emergency Personnel" by the RAAF, since he didn't have any medical skills, or couldn't pilot a helicopter or heavy transport plane. Nick realized his days working for the RAAF were numbered, but he didn't care. He had been a fighter pilot, and a good one at that, and had done his time for Queen and Country. He was now the Administrative Assistant to the CO of the base, but right now, there wasn't much administrating to be done.

The next day, Josh spotted a small group walking up the road headed to their house. They stopped at the gate, and through the cameras, Josh could see they were unarmed and in pretty sad shape. One of them pushed the intercom button, and said "For God's sake, if you have any food or water, we've walked all the way from Sydney and we're out."

Josh pressed the PTT button "Hi there, we're short of supplies ourselves, but if you walk to the far corner of the lot, you'll see a water faucet with a cup hooked to it. Feel free to take all the water you need, but don't waste it. There's several farms further up the road that might be better able to help you. I'd recommend not trying to climb the fence, because if you make it past the geese, the dogs will get you."

"Thanks for the water mister, whoever you are." They walked to the end of the property, and sure enough, there was a hydrant with a steel cup attached with a string right outside the fence. They filled up all their water containers, drank their fill, walked across the street and peed in the bushes, then drank some more water, then waved and started walking down the road to the farmhouse they could see. Josh and Sheila had a discussion about what to do about survivors in an emergency like this. Josh didn't want to do anything, and Sheila, being from the water-scarce Outback argued the least they could do was give some thirsty people all the water they could drink, so Josh installed a hydrant, and a cut-off valve in the basement so if someone left the water running to try and force them to come out, he could turn it off from the basement. The pipe wasn't connected to anything else either.

Josh had anticipated survivors and brigands coming to their area, and had hit upon a novel idea when he realized that their double layer roof had a large crawl space between the flat concrete roof and the pitched roof that the solar panels were mounted to. He installed an "attic access" system including a drop-down ladder to the crawl space between the roofs. He built a 10x10 area between the roofs made of armored steel plate to protect him from gunfire, with a roof hatch that blended so well into the roofing material that even when he pointed it out to Sheila, she had to concentrate to realize it was there. He decided it would make a perfect "crow's nest" to convince attackers to move on and select an easier target. After the Tsunami, he brought up an M -16/M -203 with a day/night scope setup that Bear had shipped him a while ago, his Springfield Armory M -25 with the day and night scopes, and enough ammo to fight a pitched

battle. He had 20 40mm grenades ranging from smoke and CS to HEDP rounds, 1,000 rounds of 5.56 NATO, and 1,000 rounds of .308 Match ammo, with the first 200 rounds loaded in magazines, plus food, water, and a honey pot in case he had to stay up there longer than 8-10 hours. The cameras and surveillance equipment could cover the whole property, but not defend it once the shooting started. He taught Sheila how to work the surveillance cameras in the basement, and wired an intercom to the room so they could talk. He connected a lip mike and earpiece to his end so he would be able to hear and talk to her without making much noise. He had a switch on the intercom for a loudspeaker in case he decided to talk to the intruders. 2 days after the first group came through, he had a chance to try out his crow's nest when an armed group tried sneaking up on the house. The geese were honking and carrying on before they got within 100 yards of the fence. Josh woke Sheila, sat her at the console monitoring the cameras, and crawled up into his crow's nest. Right as he got comfortable, Sheila told him there was movement outside the fence line, and told him where. He set up the M -25 on the bipod, and spotted them in the Night Vision scope. As he scanned the group, they were a pretty motley crew, armed mostly with shotguns and pistols. Looking closer, he spotted a Police gun belt, but was pretty sure the puss-gut wearing it wasn't a cop. He looked more like a convict. That convinced Josh that they weren't there to collect for the Salvation Army, and had Sheila call Nick and tell him Red Alert, and the bearing and range to the threat. Nick had Josh install a matching Crow's nest in his roof, so he could defend his house too. They were out of range for Nick, but getting Nick up and alert would be a good idea, so he and Karen could watch his back. As one of them tried climbing the fence, Nick put a round right at the feet of the Puss-gut, and pressed the PA button. "One more step, and you're dead. Leave now and don't come back. If I see any of you again, I'll shoot you where you stand without warning."

The puss-gut must either have been drunk or stupid when he raised the barrel of his SKS and cranked off a round at the house, missing it by several feet. Josh's next round gave him a 3<sup>rd</sup> eye, and dropped him to the ground while spraying the rest of his gang that were behind him with what was left of his brains. They were over 400 yards from the house, and knew that anyone capable of blowing someone's head apart with 1 shot at over 400 yards was someone they didn't want to mess with, and ran away from the house as quickly as their feet could carry them. The next morning, Josh had a brilliant idea, and fashioned a hangman's noose, and hung the dead body from a tree across the road with a sign around his neck that read "Looter". He hoped anyone coming down that road would see that grisly reminder, and seek an easier target.

A couple of days later, an older man in an old beat up truck stopped outside and was admiring his handiwork. He walked over to the intercom and introduced himself. Josh recognized the name as one of his neighboring farmers. Josh walked out to the driveway, and shook the old farmer's hand after they had introduced themselves in person. He pointed with his thumb to the carcass of the dead looter hanging by a rope from the tree, and said "Nice shot. I like the noose and the note, kind of adds an interesting macabre touch to it. Hopefully once this is over, you'll cut him down and bury him."

"I kind of figured he'd serve as an object lesson to any other people coming up here to loot."

“I appreciate it, because anyone coming into the valley from Sydney have to go by your place first. Knowing you’re on guard makes it easier for me to get stuff done. You seem to be pretty selective about who you let by your place. A couple of days ago, a family knocked very politely on our door and asked for help saying you’d given them water but not much else. Judging by your setup here, I think you’re very well prepared, but it’s your choice how much you want to help. As long as they’re willing to work for the food, water and clothing we give them, I’ve got no problems helping.”

“Ray, hold on a second, and I’ll see what we can give you so if anyone else comes through, we can send them to your house knowing we at least contributed to helping them.”

“What I really need is basic staples to feed them.”

“Great, I’ll be right back.”

Josh jogged to the house, and came back 10 minutes later with several 5 gallon buckets of rice, beans, and wheat berries. He put them in the back of Ray’s truck, and Ray thanked him, climbed back into the truck, and said “I can see the antenna, so you must be a ham. Call me on the local 2-meter repeater frequency if you’re sending anyone our way, or if you need help.”

“Ok Ray, if you guys need anything, we’ll try to listen to the repeater as well.”

Ray backed out of Josh’s driveway and drove back home to his farm.

Josh was glad he had purchased a direct satellite connection to the internet when the lights flickered, and he knew that the Grid had gone down, maybe for a long while. He fully expected Sydney to lose power, but he had hoped that the grid would stay up, since they were almost 60 kilometers Northwest of Sydney. He checked the 2-meter radio, and the repeater was still up, so he called Ray for a radio check.

“Read you 5x5 Josh, the power’s out here, but our radio is on a huge battery backup, with enough power to last a week.”

“How you set for everything else?”

“We cook and heat with wood, and we’ve got wells and windmills. The tanks are full, so we’re fine.”

“OK, if those batteries start running low, let me know.”

“I’ve got a PTO generator for the diesel tractor and 500 gallons of diesel, so I can recharge my battery bank if necessary.”

“Ok Ray, looks like you’re set. If you need anything, let us know.”

“Just keep watching the front door.”

“Ok, Ray talk to you later.”

Once he turned off the radio, he started listening to the scanner, and what he heard made him call Nick and start preparations to bug out. Sydney was starting to burn. With the power out, there was no water pressure to fight fires, and with no means of heating and cooking, people were resorting to fires to keep warm and cook food, and most had no experience with setting and controlling fires, and they started getting out of hand. One guy tried to use gasoline in a pan to heat his soup, and the resulting explosion burned his house to the ground, and his neighbors’ as well. Fires were started by electrical shorts before the disconnects activated and automatically cut power to the city, and they were spreading too. Despite the City Fathers best attempts to disarm the population, if you had the cash, you could purchase a gun, and the various street gangs were now better armed than the local constables, since the hanky-wavers thought that the police shouldn’t have those bad “Assault Rifles” either. All over the city, good cops, firefighters, and EMS workers died as the gangs attacked the very people trying to help them. The home guard units were busy trying to rescue people, and weren’t equipped to fight a gang war anyway.

Josh looked at his routes, and realized that his best route to Sheila’s parents station skirted Sydney on the North side of the water, and hopefully there wasn’t as much gang activity on that shore. Their plan was to take their dogs and combat load all 4 Hummers and trailers. The geese would have to fend for themselves. They’d have sufficient water for a month left in their water tank, and since they were free-range anyway, they were used to scouring the ground for bugs to eat. Josh knew that if they were gone for more than a month, they probably weren’t coming back. While he was loading the Hummer, he saw something he missed before. He flipped a lever in the center of the roof, and the center of the roof retracted, leaving an opening the full width of the cab, and 3 feet deep, more than enough room to stand up with his LBV and body armor on. He went to the basement and distributed their stored LAW rockets equally among the 4 Hummers. He’d already shown Nick, Karen and Sheila how to aim and fire the LAW using a dummy training unit. Each Hummer had 6 rockets, their personal M -4 with the suppressor and M -203 grenade launcher mounted. Each of them also had 2 UZIs mounted under the seats with 4 magazines each. Josh hoped that would be enough firepower to keep the gangs away, then he had another idea, and grabbed an airless sprayer, and his stored paint cans. Using latex-based paint so he could wash it off later, he sprayed each Hummer and trailer with a credible facsimile of the NATO desert cammo pattern. Hopefully looking like a Military convoy would prevent more attacks than it would encourage.

Josh checked their GPS units, and all 4 had their primary, secondary, third and fourth backup routes programmed in and clearly marked. Josh realized a major hole in his preparations was that he had put all his eggs in one basket by selecting Brisbane as a refueling stop, since it was

only served by the coastal road and Brisbane itself was low enough to suffer from Tsunami damage. Hopefully the contractor followed his explicit instructions, and even if the hangar itself were destroyed, the sealed tanks of diesel and JP-5 would be intact. They didn't have enough fuel to make their outback station, and he couldn't locate any likely sources of diesel using his mapping software. He asked Sheila, and she said that there were just 2 fueling stations along their interior route, and they might be out of fuel if they didn't get their weekly delivery. That was not the news that Josh wanted to hear. His alternate would be to set up camp in the desert, and drill a well for water, which would last as long as they had power to run the well pump. He was glad that he had included the huge folding solar panel to keep the trailer's batteries charged in his storage plans for each trailer. He brought some extra plumbing connections in case they found a good well, and had more than 1 trailer available to double their water production. Once the on-board tanks were filled, they could fill their water 5-gallon water cans in a matter of hours since the RO units made 10 gallons of water per hour, or the ceramic and carbon filter made 60 gallons per hour. He'd built a do-dad to flush debris out of the well pipe before they started pumping, which included a pipe cap, some Teflon tape, and a Shraeder valve. He'd connect the air compressor to the valve and pressurize the pipe to about 60psi, driving all the dirt out the bottom of the pipe through the openings in the sand point, and hopefully blowing a clear pocket of water around the pipe head so they could draw a lot of water fairly fast through the pipe. It only took a minute to connect, so if they got clogged or started pumping a lot of sand, he should be able to blow it clear again.

Josh hoped he had planned for every eventuality, and prayed that they'd make it to Sheila's parents place OK. They spent the rest of the day loading essential items like food, water, clothing, weapons and ammunition in the 4 vehicles and trailers. Josh made sure the load was combat-loaded, so if they lost a vehicle and trailer on the way, they wouldn't lose something critical. He sat down and told Nick, Karen and Sheila of his plan, and his discovery of the hatch Q had built into their Hummers. Nick came up with RDF kevlar helmets and armbands indicating they were MP's to complete their masquerade. He even had fake orders generated for an emergency convoy into the outback in case they ran into a roadblock. Josh suggested keeping the UZIs out of sight unless they were in a last ditch defense of their vehicles, and to use the M - 4 with the grenade launchers instead. The LAW rockets in each vehicle were for clearing any roadblocks put up by roving gangs. Josh told them the ROE was anyone who was armed was fair game, and their priority was to escape by any means necessary, and not to stop for anything, especially a mob of unarmed people, who could flip over a Hummer just by the sheer mass of humanity. Josh looked straight at Sheila and Karen when he said that during the Rodney King riots, people who stopped instead of mowing down the rioters were pulled from their vehicles and beaten to death. They were both pregnant, and that hopefully would increase their defensive resolve, and push their normal compassionate natures aside. Josh decided to take lead, followed by Sheila and Karen, with Nick bringing up the back, since he had combat experience as well, even though it was at 30,000 feet against MIGs. He took Nick aside and explained they were all that stood between the women and the mobs, and to use deadly force at the first sign of trouble, none of this "firing over their heads" BS. Nick gulped when he saw the look in Josh's eyes, and realized he was deadly serious.

When he was finished with the briefing, they ate dinner, and went to bed early, Josh wanted to be on the road at first light. Hopefully the gangs slept late. After breakfast, he made sure everyone drank their fill of water and used the bathroom, since there would be no pit stops until they reached the outback. They donned their BDUs and bullet-resistant vests, then finally their LBVs. Sheila and Karen felt like the Michelin Man since they were each 3 months pregnant. Josh took Sarge, his favorite K-9 companion in his Hummer, and Sheila took Bruno, her favorite dog in hers. Nick and Karen loaded their dogs in their Hummers, and they drove out their driveways, then locked the gates behind them. Josh gave Ray a quick call telling him they were bugging out, and that the front door wasn't guarded anymore. Ray wished them well, and said he'd look after their homes as best as he could.

The sight that greeted them as they descended the hill into Sydney was right out of Dante's Inferno, and Josh was glad that he had installed the brackets that held their M -4s with the barrel pointing straight up, a round in the chamber, and a HEDP round in the breech of the M -203. Before they left, he told everyone "Lock and load, we're in Indian country." Josh and Sarge scanned the scene ahead of them for danger. Josh had learned to trust Sarge's instincts and knew that 2 sets of eyes were better than 1. On an impulse he opened the roof hatch. No sooner had he sat back down when Sarge whooffed, and Josh saw what he was barking at. 50 yards in front of them was an improvised barricade of cars, and he saw some heads peeking around the backs wearing bandanas. He had a solution for that problem, hit the brakes, and as soon as the Hummer was stopped, popped up through the hatch with his M -4, fired a HEDP round through one of the cars in the blockade, and popped back down quickly to avoid the shrapnel blast that followed. When the smoke cleared, both vehicles were burning, and several gang members were missing large parts of their anatomy. The few that survived were running away as fast as they could. Josh got on the radio, and said "button up" then closed the hatch, locked his seatbelt, and put the bumper of his Hummer against the rear quarter panel of 1 of the cars and pushed it out of the way. Once he had a big enough hole, he told them "follow me" and he accelerated rapidly to clear the area. Once they were clear, he reached up and opened the hatch again. Having it open was a risk he was willing to take to gain a fraction of a second's advantage against any further attackers. A couple of miles down the road, he heard a couple of pings against the body, and knew they were under fire, and then he saw a small mob of maybe 100 people trying to rush the convoy and steal what they had. He radioed "Charge" and accelerated directly at the crowd. The mob hadn't anticipated this tactic, and scattered just in time to avoid getting steam rolled by a short convoy of Hummers.

They made it the next 20 miles without anything more than some small arms fire impacting the Hummer's armor. Josh was glad he had spent the money now, since even those 5.56 and 30-caliber rounds would cause serious damage to an un-armored car, and injuries to the occupants. The next roadblock they ran into was a serious threat, with a tractor-trailer blocking the road, and a sizable army of gangsters behind cover. Josh knew that until they took out the roadblock and whittled this gang down to size, backing up would be fatal. He picked up a LAW rocket, opened it, then popped up and fired the rocket into the truck. He felt several rounds striking his vest while he was exposed, but he knew that if he didn't take out that tractor trailer, and get the

gang whittled down to size, they were dead. He popped back down with the empty launcher, and came back up with his M -4 after radioing “Delta” to the rest of the convoy, which would execute a pre-planned barrage of 40mm rounds. Josh fired to his 10 o’clock, Sheila to her 2 o’clock, Karen to Josh’s 8 o’clock, and Nick to his 4 o’clock. While Josh reloaded, he surveyed the scene before him. Some gang bangers were dead, others were regrouping behind cover to attack. He decided to put a stop to that with his next grenade. The car they were hiding behind blew up, throwing shrapnel all around, cutting Josh on his cheek. Now that the group was cut down to size, Josh called and told Nick to turn around and go two blocks to their right and see if the way was clear, and if not, Karen would check two blocks to their left, and so on until they found a route out of the jam they were in. Nick radioed back that they were clear on his route. Josh said “Go”, then Karen and Sheila followed Nick. Finally Josh got out of there and Nick was the temporary point until they came to a point where they could switch. Nick reached into his kit, and slapped a large band-aid on the cut, since he didn’t have time to stop and do it right. He called on the radio “Sitrep”, and got 4 Ok’s back.

While they drove, Josh took the opportunity to reload his 40mm grenade bandoleer full of HEDP rounds and reached into the back seat to open the case of grenades, when he looked out the back window and saw a truck full of armed gang members following them. He grabbed the radio and said “Back door” then stopped long enough to pop up through the hatch, turn around, and nail the truck with a 40mm grenade, which struck the radiator and detonated, destroying the truck and wiping out the gangsters. He turned around, grabbed the radio, and said “Situation resolved” and stepped on the throttle to catch up.

## Chapter 87 - FUBAR

They finally cleared the city only to discover that the bridge over a small tributary to a major river that emptied into the bay at Sydney was too badly damaged to risk crossing. Josh got out to inspect the bridge on foot, and he could clearly see the piers and pilings were knocked off plumb by the force of the flood waters, and debris was piled up against the bridge. The concrete roadbed had gaping cracks and holes in it, and Josh could see daylight through several holes. They unrolled a topo map looking for a bypass when Sheila suggested a ford about a mile up river that should be passable since they all had their snorkels mounted. Josh mounted the snorkels a couple of days ago to match the look of the Military Hummers, now that little detail could wind up saving their lives. He explained what they were going to try to Nick and Karen, and pointed out it was a choice of the ford, or going back through the gauntlet they had just gone through. Sheila found a 2-wheel track leading upstream, and they hoped to the fording spot. After half an hour of slow wheeling, they arrived at what must be the ford. At least the ground was fairly flat on both sides, so they wouldn't have to climb a riverbank on top of everything else. The tributary was only about 20 feet wide, and he spotted a huge tree on the other side, which gave him an idea. He talked it over with everyone, and decided to park his rig on this side, free-spool his winch while he crossed the water, and connect the cable to the tree on the other side with a tree-saver. He'd then have to re-cross then drive the rig across while winching in to keep the cable taut. Once he was across, he'd turn around, anchor the rig to the tree, and toss the cable across the creek, and while they drove over, he'd winch them across in case they got stuck.

Josh unlocked his winch, took off everything but his boots and BDU shorts, and waded across. The water was cold, but not any worse than what he'd endured during Hell Week. Once he was across, he connected a tree saver to the tree, and connected the hook to the tree saver, then had Nick take up the slack. Going back across was much easier, and he idled down to the water's edge, then engaged the winch. Once the winch started pulling him, he released the brakes and idled through the water. The only scary moment was when the trailer tried to float away, since it was sealed and buoyant, even with the heavy load. Once he was on the opposite shore, he got out and unhooked, then carefully turned the rig around, and using a short choker cable, connected the tree saver to the rear bumper of the Hummer, then free-spooled the cable off and threw it across the water. Sheila was next in line, and Nick connected the cable to her towing clevis, and she idled down to the water just like Josh did. Once the cable started pulling her, she released the brakes and idled into the water. Her trailer floated briefly too, and then she was on the other shore. There was just enough room to get by, so she drove past once Josh disconnected the cable. He tossed the cable across and pulled Karen across next, then finally Nick. Once they were all across, Josh secured his winch and got fully dressed, including his BRV and LBV. Several hours later, they made their way back to the main road and drove as far away from Sydney before stopping for the night at a clearing 50 yards off the road. Josh told them it would be a cold camp with no lights or unnecessary noise. After surviving riots and Mother Nature, eating MRE's in the dark wasn't that big of a deal. They got some sleep and trusted the dogs to



alert them to danger.

The next morning, they took turns watering trees and standing guard, then they quickly ate another MRE, then got back into their Hummers to put some mileage between them and Sydney.

The roads they were driving on were little more than gravel tracks, yet Sheila said that this was the quickest way to her parent's station without going through Brisbane, and they already decided that wasn't a good idea, since the hangar was probably destroyed. Finally they came to a small town that Sheila said was called Dubbo, Josh spotted a truck stop, and it looked like they might actually have fuel, They'd only traveled 200 miles, but Josh was determined to fill up whenever possible. The place was ran by an old desert rat who charged twice what the going rate for fuel was in Sydney, almost \$4 per gallon. Josh asked him if he took checks or credit cards, and the old man laughed. "Cash, gold or silver only." Josh decided to save his gold and silver for a real emergency and gave the old man 5 \$100 bills thinking they could use 125 gallons of diesel between the 4 rigs. All that heavy 4-wheeling had cut into their gas mileage, and they needed the 125 gallons to fill their main tanks. Josh asked Nick if he could squeeze any diesel into his trailer, and he said that they had enough room for 25 gallons between the two, since he didn't fill them to the gills. Josh was glad he found out now, and gave the owner another \$100 bill and filled Nick and Karen's trailers, then topped theirs off with the remaining 5 gallons. They left the station with their diesel tanks as full as they could get, and their bladders empty since he had a bathroom that wasn't too dirty. Sheila brought some disinfectant wipes in with her and Karen to clean the toilet seat. They left and pressed onward to Sheila's parents station. Sheila had recommended at turn northwards toward Bourke based on what the old man had told her about the fuel situation, it was amazing what a beautiful woman can do to an old man just by flirting with him. He told her that the roads to the west didn't get their fuel shipments, and the last fuel truck was stranded in Alice Springs after delivering his station and the one in Bourke since the depot in Brisbane was still flooded. Josh felt badly for the man, since he'd taken every precaution except locating his business on high ground. Seems the Terrorists didn't get him, but the Tsunami did! From Bourke, there was a network of roads leading all over Queensland westward to her parents station just west of the border between Queensland and the Northern Territory.

At their current speed, they would be to Bourke some time tomorrow. Josh checked his map and realized they were traveling on Mitchell Highway. They needed to find some place to stay overnight, so Josh asked Sheila over the radio if she knew of any campgrounds on Mitchell Highway between here and Bourke. She said there should be a private campground with flush toilets and showers about an hour north closer to Nyngan. Josh looked at his watch, and thought that would be about perfect. Sheila called on the radio when they got close, and they were glad to see that the campground was open. Josh booked 2 adjacent campsites with water and electric hookups for 2 nights, in case they wanted to rest and recuperate from their long journey. They parked their Hummers so they were surrounding their campsite and they could pitch the tents between the rigs to give them some protection from any incoming small arms fire, and strung the tarps between the 4 Hummers, giving them a huge shady area to pitch the tents under. Once they were all set, they left the dogs guarding the site, and walked past several sites to use the

bathrooms and the showers. With that out of the way, they made a big pot of stew for dinner, since it only used 1 burner and pot, then fed the dogs and played with them. At dusk they built a small fire in the fire ring with the provided wood, and sat around socializing.

They were up at first light, and once they were dressed, Sheila made breakfast of powdered eggs mixed with TVP bacon, and dehydrated potato hash. They all pitched in cleaning up. After breakfast they looked around, and it seemed they had the campground to themselves except for the park manager. Josh went up to talk to him, found out his name was Eric he was a retired member of the Royal Marines, and they talked for a while about “military life” and he gave Josh some critical information. The reason the campground was deserted was there were some heavily armed brigands roaming around in the Outback after the Tsunami knocked out the power at a nearby prison. There was a huge escape, and some of the most dangerous criminals in Australia were roaming the outback raping and Pillaging. The only good news was they were armed with small arms only. Josh told Eric about his Hummer, and he told Josh that if he had a Ma Deuce or a M -60 to mount on it, that they’d outgun the brigands who were driving around in unarmored pickups armed with M-16's, SKS, shotguns, 30-caliber rifles, and various pistols. Josh asked him if he knew of a place he could purchase an M -60 or Ma Deuce with at least 1,000 rounds of ammo.

Eric was evasive, but finally admitted he could get Josh just about anything he wanted for cash, gold or silver. Since he had over a million dollars of gold and silver with him, he asked if he could get his hands on 2 full-auto Ma Deuces with 2 spare barrels each, and 6,000 rounds of belted ammo. He realized Josh was dead serious, and asked him if he had the proper mount for his Hummers. Josh said that Q didn’t provide one with the Hummers.

“Who the heck is Q?”

Josh explained the body shop that he had build the Hummers and trailers, and Eric laughed “I’ve met a few old codgers who reminded me of Q, but this guy sounds like he’s from Central Casting! I’ll see what I can do, but it will take me until tomorrow to get everything you need, and I’m pretty sure they will want gold.”

“What’s gold trading for now?”

“Last I heard was \$600 an ounce. I imagine if they have what you want, they’ll probably want around \$100 grand for both including 2 thousand rounds of belted ammo and the pedestal mounts for your Hummers.”

“See if you can get combat load. If all they have is Ball, that’s OK but I’d prefer combat loaded belts.”

“I see you really do know your way around the old broad.”

“I’ve fired the Ma Deuce in training exercises on board the Mark V.”

“That’s one sweet craft, I wish the Royal Marines would have bought some.”

“It might take me a day or two to get them and get them installed. You’re more than welcome to stay here, matter of fact I feel safer with you guys around just in case those brigands show up.”

Josh told Eric to go ahead and get the M2's if he could, and as much ammo as he could, at least 2K and not more than 10K worth of belted ammo in ammo cans. Josh walked back to the campground and gave everyone a heads-up. Next he pulled out his shoe phone and called Sheila’s parents. They already knew about the Brigands, and had taken the appropriate precautions. Jack warned Josh that the Brigands were reported to be somewhere between where they were and the station, and to keep a sharp eye out. Josh ended the call to save batteries, and talked to Sheila, Nick and Karen. From that point onward, they’d carry their M-4s wherever they went and wear their BRV and LBV unless they were going to the bathroom, and when they were going to use bathrooms or showers, at least 1 member of their group should stay armed and geared up, and in plain sight of the rest of them. They groaned, but Josh said it was either that, or no showers, etc. Sheila realized that they were in deadly danger, and talked to Karen later. The 3 of them started taking security seriously after Sheila had that little talk with them, especially when she explained to Karen in graphic detail what would happen to her if she were captured alive. For all intents and purposes, they were wide out in the open in a very indefensible position. If it weren’t for the water for showers and toilets, they’d be better in the open desert.

The next day Eric showed up with 2 Browning M2 Heavy Barrel machine guns in their original crates including cleaning kits, a re-linker, manuals, a gauge set for head space and timing, and 2 spare barrels each. Eric had a crate next to it filled with ammo boxes full of 200 rounds of linked combat mix. The crate contained 20 boxes of 200 rounds. Eric explained that if they went through 4,000 rounds of ammo, they would have shot their barrels out, and would be better off with an APC. Josh realized how big and heavy that case was, and was glad that Eric was using his head. They distributed the ammo among the 4 Hummers, then Eric showed Josh how to head space and time the weapons. Once they were finished, Eric showed him 2 mounts designed to fit the Hummer, which included a short pedestal and a travel lock which kept the M2 from bouncing on rough roads. It mounted behind the hatch Q built into the Hummer, but Josh realized that they could fire over the back of the Hummer as well as the front with the huge hatch, and the bulk of the trailer would make him harder to hit when he was firing the big gun. Eric knew exactly what he was doing when he mounted the pedestal to the Hummer, drilling several half-inch holes through the Kevlar armor and the thick-wall oval tubing that made up the heavy duty roll cage that Q built into the Hummers he built for them. When he finished, Eric said you could practically lift the Hummer from that pedestal mount, so the Ma Deuce would be fine up there. The 3 men horsed the M2 onto the pedestal mount once Eric attached the MK64 gun cradle to the machine gun.

Once they were finished, Eric showed them how to attach an ammo box to the left side of the gun mount and lock it in place. With the box locked into place, Eric showed them how to load the gun and fire it. He suggested leaving the sights set at the 1000 yard setting, then walked them both through loading and unloading the gun. He then told them to leave the gun half-loaded in automatic mode, so all you had to do was to jerk the slide handle back once to fire. Once that was accomplished, he had them disconnect a Hummer from the trailer, and drive it out a ways to test fire the gun and get them used to shooting it. By the time they had fired 1 box of ammo each, they were pretty sure they could defend themselves. They wouldn't get any prizes for accuracy, but Eric said that if they could hit a pickup at half a mile, they would be way ahead of the game. Josh's superior shooting skills were obvious when after 3 short bursts, he fired a short burst into an old abandoned truck Eric used for target practice from time to time, which was ½ mile away from their shooting position. Nick needed most of the box, but his last burst hit the truck, and they said that was good enough. They drove back to the campground, locked a fresh box of ammo onto the gun carrier, and made ready to leave the next morning. They were tired of resting and recuperating, and wanted to get to Sheila's folks place soon in case they were attacked. With the armed Hummers, they'd stand a better chance of defending the ranch than just the 2 of them with their M -25 rifles and Uzis.

The next morning before they pulled out, Josh asked Eric if he'd like to come to Sheila's parents station with them at least until things got back to normal. Josh realized that Eric really knew the Ma Deuce, and Nick would basically be wasting ammo. Eric lived in a trailer, and all his stuff was well hidden, so he could come back to it later. He realized once they left, he was a sitting duck if any brigands showed up, since the park was totally indefensible, and the huge sign would attract people for miles, in this case probably the wrong sorts. He decided he'd be safest with them, and told Josh he had to get some stuff, and he'd be right back. 10 minutes later, he drove up in a diesel IH Traveler with a Browning M2 HB mounted on a pedestal in the back just like the WWII Desert Rats. Josh was standing there with his mouth open. With Eric's machine gun, they could put out some serious fire power. He had to re-think his battle plans. Josh had everyone gather around, and he asked Eric if he had any ideas about defense.

"Since your Hummers are pretty much bullet proof, you should be point and rear guard. I should ride in the middle were I hopefully won't get too much incoming, yet I'll be able to provide defensive firepower for the Sheila's Hummers."

Nick and Josh started to snicker a little.

"Ok, what's so funny?"

Sheila stood up, and held out her hand and said "Hi, I'm Sheila!"

"Young lady, your dad has an interesting sense of humor - I'd like to meet him."

Josh told Eric about his ideas for defending them against any attack when they were on the road.

Eric made a few modifications, then Josh checked Eric's radio. It was an older model of the radio that they had installed in their Hummers, so Josh told him the frequencies they were using, and he set the radio for their common frequency, and the power switch at LOW. Next Josh explained their radio calls, and Eric was taking notes. Once they were ready, everyone suited up, including Eric, who, Josh was glad to see, had basically the same equipment as they did, except he had a CAR-15 instead of a full-auto suppressed M -4. He had an M -203 grenade launcher, and his vest pockets were full of 20-round magazines and 40mm grenades. Josh could see a 20-round bandoleer full of HEDP 40mm grenades sitting on the seat next to Eric, so he knew Eric was set. His pistol looked like a Colt Commander, but he didn't have time to check. They got into their Hummers, started their engines, and Josh lead the way to Burke.

They arrived in Burke later that afternoon, and managed to fill their diesel tanks with fuel, except this time the owner was asking for Silver or Gold only. Josh guessed that the Australian Dollar wasn't worth much if the banks were closed. Before they drove off, Eric told Josh that he thought it was too far to try and drive to Sheila's parents station tonight, so they should stay in the desert that night. He knew of an isolated box canyon that would be more defensible than sleeping in the open desert. Josh asked Sheila, since she knew the area better than he did. She knew which canyon Eric was referring to, and since it was in the dry season, it would be safe. During the Monsoon, the canyon was subject to flash flooding, and would be a deathtrap. They drove down the road, crossed from New South Wales into Queensland, and made the canyon turnout before nightfall. Since people camped in the canyon all the time, Josh wasn't too worried about leaving tire tracks, since they would blend in with past tracks, and it would take an expert tracker to tell when the trail was last used.

20 miles later, they arrived at the mouth of the box canyon. When they were to Sheila's favorite camping site, she radioed the convoy to stop. She got out and looked for signs of water while Josh, Nick and Eric set up the drilling rig. She pointed out a likely spot, and they set up on that spot. The rig worked like a charm until several hours later when Josh heard a loud banging noise, and ran to shut off the drill. He could see the pipe hadn't moved since the last time he added pipe. They were down maybe 10 feet, and when he sent a weighted string down the hole, it came back dry. Josh was frustrated, and thought they'd hit a bolder. Since they had enough water if they skipped showers, he decided it wasn't worth making that much noise for hot showers. Sheila and Karen were disappointed until Josh offered them the use of the Solar shower, but they were limited to 3 gallons each. Karen protested until Sheila told her that she'd tell her how to get a good shower with only 3 gallons of water. They parked their rigs in a loose square again for security, and stretched the tarps between them and pitched the tents under the tarps, then Josh erected the shower enclosure for the ladies' modesty. Sheila suggested bathing in a bathing suit unless Karen was used to such primitive conditions, telling her that the tarp covering the shower might blow up in a sudden breeze, leaving her standing there like "Hot Lips Hoollihan" in MASH. Remembering the scene, Karen decided that bathing in a bathing suit might be a good idea, even if she didn't get as clean as she would have liked. Sheila went first, then Karen took a shower without incident after the water heated up again. They ate MREs for dinner, since they wanted to be able to evacuate the site as quickly as possible during an

emergency, and didn't set up anything that wasn't essential to sleeping overnight. At first light, they took everything down and packed up.

They drove back to the road, and made it most of the way to Sheila's parents place when Josh heard "Back Door - Big time!" Josh said "Execute Alpha" and the convoy accelerated to their maximum speed. They slowed down for the next right turn, then Josh watched his odometer, and when they were well past the turn, they couldn't see the attackers any more, and he said "Now!" Josh pulled off the left side of the shoulder, while Sheila and Karen stopped 50 feet past him, crossing the T of the road with their vehicles. Eric pulled his rig between the 2 groups, and Nick pulled up next to Josh. The 3 of them quickly manned their Ma Deuces and racked the charging handles back, arming the guns. Nick and Josh would engage the attackers at long range, forcing them to stop, while Sheila and Karen got behind their rigs where it was relatively safe, and use their 40mm grenade launchers as area weapons, dropping rounds at maximum range around the attacker's vehicles to kill as many as possible, and keep the rest from moving. Eric's job was to prevent any attackers from flanking them, and cover their 6. Josh hoped 3 machine guns would be enough to decimate the attackers. He had heard of the viciousness of some of their attacks, and didn't want to leave any of them alive.

As soon as they were behind their guns, Josh engaged the lead truck at almost half a mile, and the short burst blew through the radiator and wrecked the motor. He aimed his next burst at the driver and it looked like he scored. Nick saw trucks trying to get around the wrecked truck, and hoped he could hit them. His first group was short, so he raised his point of aim slightly, and walked a long burst into first one truck then another. Josh saw what he was doing, and realized they had ammo to burn, and started firing longer bursts. Soon all the vehicles were burning, but the brigands weren't out of the fight yet. Dozens of choppers came roaring up the road, and were too agile for them to successfully engage with the Ma Deuces. Quickly they got within range of the M-203s, and Josh turned and waved his hand to his wife, who recognized the signal, and they started firing rounds as quickly as they could. They were firing almost blind, so Josh raised and lowered his hand to indicate range changes. Josh was amazed that the girls were hitting the road at that range, he had guessed that most of their grenades would land harmlessly out on the desert, but after they got the hang of it, most of their rounds wound up in the roadway. Josh reached into his cab when they got close enough and started engaging with his grenade launcher and firing short bursts from his M -4. During the attack, Eric had seen the motorcycles coming, and abandoned his machine gun, and grabbed his CAR-15, the rest of this battle would be up close and personal. Right when they thought things were over, Josh looked up and Nick was slumped over. Eric saw the problem, and ran forward between the Hummers to engage the remaining MZB's while Josh got Nick down on the ground and started working on him. He was afraid that Nick might have been dead by the way he was slumped over, but he just had a bad shoulder wound. He couldn't see any obvious bone fragments, so he hoped it was a through and through wound to the meat of the shoulder. He started an IV of Ringers to replace the lost blood volume, and gave him a syringe of Morphine, since they were a long way from help. He pulled Nick's battle dressing out of his right thigh pocket, and bandaged the shoulder as well as possible while under fire. Once he was stabilized, he picked up his M -4 to make sure all the

MZBs were dead. He shot several anyway, he was furious that these dirtbags almost cost his friend's life!

Once they were sure that all the MZBs were dead, Josh went back to check on Nick only to find Sheila and Karen tending him. They had managed to load him back into the passenger seat of his Hummer and shut the doors just in case. Eric and Josh walked back to survey the damage, and were amazed that they'd made it through so well until they checked Eric's Traveler, which was had several bullet holes, and was leaking radiator fluid from a lucky shot. He tried to crank the motor, but it wouldn't run, so they must have gotten something critical. Josh yelled for him to take Nick's Hummer and follow them. They transferred as much stuff to the other Hummers as possible, including all of Eric's weapons and ammo. He removed the Ma Deuce from the truck by disconnecting the pintle mount from the pedestal, and loaded it in a trailer. Once they were ready to go, Josh loaded a 40mm round into his grenade launcher, and making sure they were a safe distance away told Eric "I hate to do this, but we need to try and destroy your vehicle in case we left anything useful behind. Don't worry, I'll buy you another 1." With that, he fired into the open window of the truck, and the grenade exploded, setting the truck ablaze. They climbed back aboard their Hummers and drove to Sheila's parents place.

Josh was fuming on the drive to Sheila's parents place, then he thought of Nick, and realized he wasn't qualified to do exploratory surgery on the shoulder to make sure the bullet didn't hit bone when he remembered that Ralph and Samantha were. He grabbed his Shoe phone, and dialed Ralph's number. He told Ralph what had happened, what he did for Nick, and the fact that any hospitals in the area were heavily damaged in the Tsunami. He told Ralph that they were headed to Susan's parents station in the Outback and gave him the GPS coordinates. He told him that it had a runway big enough to land a 737, and thousands of gallons of JP-5. Ralph said he'd talk to Ron and get there as quick as possible. In this case, it would be easier for the doctors to come to the patient, instead of vice versa. Ralph gave Josh a long list of instructions, which Josh already knew, but he didn't interrupt Ralph in case he said something Josh had forgotten. As soon as they hung up, Ralph called Ron, who called Anchorage and chartered their fastest private jet for a medical emergency flight to Australia. The leasing agent checked, and they had a Gulfstream V available with the required range. Ron told them to get it ready, they'd be there in 2 hours. Ralph yelled for Samantha to grab whatever she might need to do an exploratory or reconstructive surgery on a shoulder with a small-caliber gun shot wound, a suitcase, and her Militia gear. Ralph guessed that Nick was hit by a SS-109 bullet, which tended to make little holes when they went through and through. As long as it didn't hit anything major, Nick should be fine.

Once Samantha was all packed, including their Militia gear, since they might be jumping into a war zone, Jake met them at the plane, and flew them at max cruise to Anchorage. When they landed, the G was already idling and ready to take off. They loaded their gear aboard, buckled in, and the lightly loaded G took off, flying as fast as the range to Hawaii would allow. 5 hours later, they landed in Honolulu international. Since they were flying a Medical Emergency flight, they were quickly serviced and in the air an hour later, on the long leg to Australia.

Josh and the rest of the convoy made it to the station right before dark. First they got Nick comfortable, and Josh checked on him, then called Ralph's satellite phone number. He gave Ralph an update on Nick's condition, and Ralph suggested adding a Morphine drip to the IV for pain, but at a very low dosage level since they'd be there in 8 hours for surgery. Josh promised to taper off the morphine after 6 hours so he could tolerate the anesthesia. Once Nick was stable and resting as comfortably as possible, Josh introduced Eric to Jack. It turned out that they served in the same Royal Marines Company, and vaguely remembered each other. It was like Old Home weekend for the two old Marines. Karen was worried about her husband until Josh told her that Nick's injury wasn't life threatening, and a great emergency surgeon and an ER Doc were flying there to care for him, and would be there in 8 hours. Karen was glad that Josh had low friends in high places, since there wasn't much medical help available in the Eastern half of Australia right now. Once they were finished, Sheila held Josh and cried. She wasn't used to being in a major firefight, and her emotions were whipsawing from raging anger at the SOBs that had tried to kill them to remorse for killing them, to fear for Nick's life, and an empty drained feeling that Josh knew was due to the huge adrenalin dump combat causes, and the inevitable crash afterward. He suggested Karen and Sheila go to bed immediately, and Sheila told Josh she wouldn't be able to sleep without him. Eric told Josh to go ahead, he'd keep an eye on Nick, and if his vitals changed, he'd wake him up. The two old warhorses moved their chairs into the room where Nick was sleeping, and continued their conversation. Eric told Jack about the firefight, and how Josh had acted under fire. Jack realized that Josh was a seasoned combat veteran, even at his relatively young age. He was glad that Eric had the presence of mind to charge the MZB's positions so Josh could care for Nick. Jack knew how deadly the 40mm grenade was since he carried a M -79 "thumper" in the Royal Marines.



## Chapter 88 - Homeward Bound

9 hours after they left Honolulu, they landed at Sheila's parents station. Sheila drove out with her dad to meet them, and asked the pilots to come with them, since they'd have return passengers in a day or so, and they'd make it worth their time. When they got to the Station, Ralph and Samantha took over Nick's care, and came out an hour later.

"Why did you call us to come all the way over here, that was a simple bullet wound, you're trained to treat it as well as we are?"

"When I called you, I was in no condition to do anything more than simple first aid. I was shaking like a leaf from Adrenalin, and I could barely get the IV in. I wasn't about to go poking around my best friend's shoulder shaking like a leaf."

Right then, Nick's pager buzzed, and Josh picked it up. He called the number on it, and it was General Ratliff.

"Josh, I'm glad it's you. I'm afraid I've got some bad news. Commander Klaus wasn't promoted, so he'll be Riff'ed in 90 days. Also, the base is so heavily damaged that we're going to have to suspend your consulting contract indefinitely."

"General, actually that works for me. We went through hell getting to Sheila's parents place in the Outback, and Nick was shot in the shoulder. He'll recover, but he won't be doing any typing for a while. Do you have a working runway so I can get the SuperGoose out of there?"

"I was going to suggest just that, and we'll ship all the spare parts and your personal effects back to Allakaket at the government's cost if you wish."

"That would be nice of you. We've got a G sitting here, maybe they can give me a lift to the RAAF base if you could refuel them."

"Ok Josh, I'll have someone clean up your SuperGoose and make it ready for flight."

"It probably won't be today, I have to ask Nick what he wants to do. Hopefully he'll fly back with us to Allakaket."

"Under the circumstances that would be best. Sydney's a disaster area, and it's not going to get any better any time soon."

Josh thanked the General and hung up. He gave Karen the bad news, and she said that Nick was expecting it anyways, and was eligible for retirement, so he was going to retire anyway. He asked her if she thought Nick would like to live in Allakaket. Karen said he needed to ask Nick,

but she didn't have any problems moving, especially since most of Sydney was destroyed, there wasn't anything to stay there for. Josh called Mrs. Francis' phone number, and was amazed when someone from the law office answered the call. They explained that all the incoming lines to Sydney were forwarded to their Perth office. Josh told them to find buyers for both his and Nick's houses, as is. The receptionist was amazed that their houses had survived the flood, and the 2 general partner's houses were destroyed in the flood, and they needed houses in Sydney so they could rebuild the law firm, and take care of their Sydney clients. Jack told her where they were, and quoted a ridiculously high \$1.5 Million USD each, cash or wire transfer to his bank in Allakaket. She wrote everything down, and if they were interested, or found another buyer, she'd call them back. 2 hours later, she called him back and said that the partners would take both houses as is, as long as they were still standing, and not damaged. They would be flying into Sydney tomorrow. Josh asked if they could meet him at the RAAF base, and he'd fly them to the house. He knew the road out front of their houses was more than wide enough to land the SuperGoose, and there were no real obstructions. He gave the receptionist all the information, and she said they'd be there, or call him by 0800 tomorrow.

Later that afternoon, Nick was awake and alert, and asking questions. Josh decided to give it to him all at once.

"Nick, your boss, General Ratliff called. He had some bad news. You weren't on the promotions list, and will probably be RIFed in the next 90 days. Your shoulder will be fine, you took a through and through wound in that last gun battle with the MZB's. Ralph and Sam flew here from Alaska to check on you, and they said you're OK, and you should recover 100%. If you want to move to Allakaket with us, I've got an offer of \$1.5 Million for each of our houses from the General Partners of our law firm. Samantha said you were OK to travel tomorrow, if you laid in the seat and took it easy. Sheila and I will be flying the SuperGoose back to Allakaket, and will arrive a couple of days after you."

"Ok, if I'm going to be retired, might as well be someplace safe like Allakaket."

"Nick, I hope you enjoy snow, because that's all you'll see 6 months of the year."

"Actually, it would be a nice change from all the desert and salt air. Besides, from what you tell me, you guys have got quite an armed camp set up there."

"The JSOC retired to Allakaket years ago, and before he did, he transferred tons of military hardware there. My dad met him during a T&E session for the M -200, and they became friends."

"Ok, Karen and I will fly back tomorrow in the Gulfstream, and you guys will join us in a couple of days."

"I need to make some calls and take care of some stuff, but I'll make sure to see you before you

go.”

Right as Josh finished, Nick fell asleep again. He called his Dad, and asked if the 4 of them could stay with them for a while, until they built new houses. Ron was glad that the snow was just starting to melt, otherwise they'd have to wait to build. Ron said he'd take care of things on his end, and they said goodbye. Ron called Bill, and purchased several 100 acre lots near Jake's house, then he got lumberjacks busy clearing the pad for the house and pulling the stumps. By the time they got there, he should have 2 building sites ready for them. Josh talked to Sheila and Karen, and decided to leave all 4 of their Hummers and trailers there, and give 1 to Eric, since they blew up his truck. Karen quipped “Nice trade! Any time you want to blow up one of my trucks, feel free!”

Josh had to laugh when he realized that Eric would be trading a \$5,000 truck for a truck and trailer worth almost \$500,000. But he did help save their lives, and it was only money. He told Eric what he was going to do, and Eric said he was staying with Jack and Nellie for the duration. Jack needed help on the station, and with the brigands running loose, there wasn't going to be any business at the trailer park anyways. Eric was really grateful for the Hummer, then Josh remembered that he had to remove some stuff from it first. Eric told him he'd help him unload his personal stuff, since it was the least he could do. They unloaded the Hummer onto a hand cart, and Eric couldn't believe all the stuff he had stored in there. The 2 mini-Uzis, the rest of the SOPMOD kit, his medical kit and BOB all came out. Josh made sure he got all the gold and silver out of the Hummers as well. He took Sheila's kit out as well, but even with all their personal stuff removed, there was still a whole bunch of gear left that Eric could use. Over to 1 side, Josh had stacked his and Sheila's personal M -25's and M -200's, and all the ammo for them. He added Nick and Karen's M-25's to the stack, since they would probably want to shoot them in Alaska. He asked Karen what to do with the UZIs, since they wouldn't need them in Alaska, and Karen said to leave them for Sheila's parents and Eric to use. Josh moved 2 UZIs back to Eric's vehicle out of Karen's Hummer, and left Nick's Hummer alone except for removing the long rifles, the SOPMOD kit, and the gold. He told Eric to tell Jack that Nick's Hummer had 2 UZIs under the front seats, and gun ports in the doors. Eric knew that Josh was a serious survivalist when he went to the trouble of installing gun ports in the doors of an armored Hummer. Then he saw the paint damage, and realized that they must have run some serious gauntlets to get there.

Later that evening, Josh was talking with Nick.

“Josh, why did we have to bring all 4 vehicles? Wouldn't we have been better off doubling up and driving 2?”

“Nick, we got very lucky, and only got into 3 firefights. I was anticipating a much tougher trip, and the possible loss of at least 1 rig. That's why I had the vehicles combat loaded, so if we lost 1 or had to abandon it, we wouldn't have lost our only whatever. Remember when I walked out on that bridge? What if we were crossing it under fire, and my Hummer got stuck and badly

wrecked. I would have had to abandon it since we wouldn't have had time to tow it out. Also what if we would have done that creek crossing under fire, and I didn't have time to set up the winch, and one of the vehicles started floating away or sinking? We would have been forced to abandon the vehicle. If we would have only taken 2 vehicles, when we lost the 2<sup>nd</sup> vehicle, we would have been walking with what we could carry on our backs in the middle of the Outback, and hundreds of miles from the nearest town."

"Yikes, I never thought of that!"

"Unless you're trained to think that way, or someone teaches you, most people walk around in a daze until TSHTF, then they run around like decapitated chickens, since they don't know what to do. The trick is to think "what if" in advance, and then plan accordingly. Most of the people who died in the Tsunami died because they didn't know what to do, and panicked. I'd already planned our bug-out in advance, including what if we would have lost 1 or more vehicles on the way. Even still with all my planning, I screwed up royally by leaving all my eggs in 1 basket when we set up a fuel depot in Brisbane, and no where else. I never thought one incident would take them both out, then the Tsunami hit and flooded them both. If those 2 stations didn't have diesel, we wouldn't have made it."

"Glad we survived, I'll be even more glad when I regain the use of my shoulder. Whatever Ralph gave me, those pills are working great!"

"Just don't try to use your left arm for at least a month, or until Ralph tells you it's OK. That bullet did a lot of damage to muscle and tissue, but thankfully missed any arteries or bones. You got shot in the 1 spot in the shoulder where the bullet could go through and through. If it would have hit your collarbone, or your shoulder joint, you would have needed surgery."

"Well, I'm right handed and retired, so I can take it easy for a while."

"Just concentrate on raising your kids, if you get bored later, I'll find something for you to do part time for Allakaket Airlines."

The next morning, Josh had Sheila fly him to the RAAF base in her Turbo Commander. Josh asked General Ratliff if they had a helicopter they could borrow, he needed to check on their houses, and fly some buyers out to see it. He said that he had his personal Huey available, and they could use it as long as it wasn't needed for relief flights. Since his Huey wasn't equipped for Search and Rescue, and couldn't carry much cargo, it was sitting on the tarmac. They walked up to the chopper, and the pilot happened to be a friend of Nick's, so he agreed to fly them to their house. Josh waved Sheila and the 2 General Partners to the helicopter, then they flew to his house and landed in the roadway out front. They checked on both houses, and they were in excellent condition. Josh called Ray on the radio, and Ray told him that right after he left, a National Guard unit established a checkpoint on the road to their valley and kept the riff-raff out. Josh hadn't planned on that, but at the same time he realized he was right to bug out,

since he didn't know they would do that in advance, so he had to assume that they would have been invaded by survivors and brigands. He told Josh that the Lieutenant in charge of the team had the dead looter cut down, and his only comment was "Nice shot".

When the men saw the houses, they were impressed. Josh said all the food and furnishings were staying, and all they were taking was their clothes and other personal stuff, since everything had to fit inside the SuperGoose. Josh knew how much room they had last time, and decided to quickly box up their personal stuff. He asked the buyers if they wanted the ham radios, and they said that neither of them knew how to use them, so Josh disconnected the radios and took them, leaving the cables and tower. He showed them the basement shelter, and they immediately grasped that the shelter was built to withstand darn near anything. They were puzzled by the empty gun safe, since no one was supposed to own most guns. Once they were through, they called the receptionist, and authorized 2 wire transfers in the amount of \$1.5 Million USD each to Josh and Nick's accounts. While Josh was giving them the grand tour, Sheila was busy packing up their stuff, and a list of stuff Karen gave them for their house. They too were leaving almost everything behind except personal effects. Neither Nick nor Josh had much of a book or CD collection, so all they had were their clothes and memorabilia. Josh helped Sheila load the Huey, then Josh called the bank, and verified the transfers, and signed some forms transferring title, and handed them the keys. They asked for a lift back to the RAAF base, so Josh obliged.

Josh was glad that the SuperGoose already had a large fuel bladder installed, then realized the new bladder was bigger than the old one, and asked the Chief Mechanic about it. "We had some old 600 gallon bladders hanging around, so I swapped your 500 gallon bladder for a 600 gallon bladder so you could safely reach Hawaii. Josh was glad that nothing they were carrying was that heavy. Thinking quickly, he called General Ratliff, and asked him if he could make a shuttle trip with a cargo plane to Sheila's parents station so they could ship their stuff back to Alaska instead of overloading the SG. He asked Josh how much they wanted to ship, and suddenly Josh wished they had taken more time to take more stuff from the house, then he remembered it was all easily replaced, they had got the important stuff, and the 4 of them were OK. Josh said he could easily get it all in the SuperGoose, but they'd have to take out the fuel bladder and re-install it. The general said that would be easy, and they'd have some airmen handy to unload it when he got back, and store it in the shipping container. It would take a couple of weeks for the Royal Navy to clean up the harbor enough to get shipping back into the harbor, but since most of their stuff came by boat, harbor repair was a priority, and he was pretty sure he could get it on an outbound container ship, but it might take a while to get back to him.

Josh had a real problem. The \$5 Million in gold and silver weighed almost 600 pounds, and the 600 gallons of fuel weighed almost 4,000 pounds. They had 4600 pounds of payload without any of their personal effects. He decided to ship the ammo, since they had plenty of ammo in Allakaket and keep the M-25's and M-200's with them on the SuperGoose. They'd be heavy, but not dangerously so. Since the leg from Hawaii to Anchorage was a little over 2800 nautical miles, he only needed another 150 gallons of fuel to make it there with a good safety margin, so he'd only need to fill the bladder less than half-way, saving over 2400 pounds of payload weight.

He had the mechanic remove the fuel bladder and the seats, then flew to the station, loaded everything they were going to ship, then once they unloaded the plane at the base, he flew it back to the Station with the bladder installed.

They packed most of Karen and Nick's personal effects into the Gulfstream, then loaded the SuperGoose with Josh and Sheila's stuff, the rifles, and the Gold. Sheila said goodbye to her parents while Ralph, Samantha, Nick, Karen, and the 4 dogs boarded the Gulfstream for the long flight back home to Alaska. Josh spent a couple of minutes with Jack and Eric, assuring them that he'd take good care of Jack's little girl, and if they ever got into a pinch, and wanted to relocate to Alaska, to give him a call, or if they just wanted to visit. Josh and Sheila bid their goodbyes and the plane was loaded with their personal effects, clothes, and rifles. Next, he taxied to the fuel tanks, and squeezed every drop of JP-5 he could into the tanks and bladder, then taxied to the runway, waved goodbye to Jack, Nellie and Eric and took off. Josh was in no hurry to climb since there were no obstructions nearby, and he was way heavy. He slowly turned toward Hawaii and set the autopilot. They spent the next 14 hours flying to Hawaii, catnapping in their seats between conversations, books and CD's they'd brought to fight the boredom of a long overwater flight. Sheila was glad Josh had decided to ship the VIP seats, which left just enough room in the passenger cabin for the porta-potty and a tarp for privacy. Between the bladder, boxes, and rifle cases, the SuperGoose was stuffed to the ceiling. Josh didn't want to know how heavy they were, he was just glad that by the time they reached Hawaii they would be landing light, having burned off over 600 gallons of JP-5.

Josh's alarm went off 14 hours later, and they were right on schedule. He called in to the National Air Traffic center, and got a route into Honolulu. They landed, taxied up to the fuel depot, topped off the tanks, added 200 gallons to the bladder just to be on the safe side, then parked it in a secured lot they used on their last trip. Since they left everything in the plane except their carry-on bags, they went through the "Nothing to declare" line in Customs, and were soon through. They stayed at the same hotel as last time, and fell right to sleep after a quick hot shower. They weren't hungry, because this time Sheila remembered what happened last time, and had packed enough snacks and drinking water for the entire flight. The next morning, they took another shower, used the bathroom, and checked the plane out thoroughly. Once they were satisfied that everything was in the green, they boarded, pre-flighted the plane, and flew to Allakaket, since they didn't need to stop in Anchorage since they already went through Customs in Hawaii (not really, but it worked for them, they DID go through customs, but no one inspected the plane!) They endured the long overwater flight, and 11 hours later, landed at Allakaket. Ron met them with his pickup, and drove the weary travelers to his house, and had some baggage handlers unload the aircraft after Josh removed their clothes and the strongbox full of gold. He slid it out the side door, where a forklift operator loaded it into the back of Ron's pickup, where it sat until they unloaded it the next day. Josh and Sheila slept for almost 18 hours, and woke hungry as bears. Nancy had anticipated this, and had a huge pot of stew simmering on the stove, and a large loaf of fresh sourdough bread sitting on the counter.

## Chapter 89 - Taps

2 weeks after Josh came home, Anne called Ron sobbing and said that Gene died in his sleep. Ron tried to console his mom, when all of a sudden she dropped the phone. Ron disconnected the call after yelling “Mom...Mom” and realized she couldn’t answer. He yelled for Josh to grab his Paramedic bag and get in the truck ASAP. On the way over, he explained what he thought happened. Thinking quickly, Josh called Ralph at the ER, and alerted him they were coming in with Anne as soon as they got her in the truck. When they reached Anne’s house, the door was locked, so Josh kicked it in, knocking the door off it’s hinges. When they reached Anne, she was unconscious but breathing. Josh did a quick evaluation, took her vitals, and she had a good pulse, and her respiration was OK, when he looked into her eyes, the pupils didn’t look right, and he thought she might have had a stroke. She was wearing her nightgown and housecoat, so as gently and carefully as possible, they carried her to the open crew cab door of the truck, and secured her as best as possible. Josh and Ron jumped into the front seat of the still-running truck and drove to the ER, where Ralph assessed her more thoroughly and agreed with Josh’s initial assessment of a major stroke. He told them he’d keep her under observation and had her on anti-coagulants to keep her from throwing another clot.

All of a sudden, Ron remembered that Gene’s body was cooling in Anne’s house. He told Ralph about Gene, and Ralph gave them a body bag, and asked them to bring Gene back to the ER so he could write the death certificate. It was freezing in the house, and Gene’s body was cold and stiff, which made their job easier. They handled Gene’s body with as much respect as possible, and got him into the bag, and once they were at the hospital, transferred him to a wheeled gurney. Once he was finished with Anne, Ralph filled out Gene’s Death Certificate, then called Bill, who acted as the County Clerk as well, and told him. Bill told Ralph to hold 1 minute, and came back on saying that Gene had left instructions to leave the body intact unless an autopsy was legally required, and to notify the Pentagon for burial at Arlington. With that out of the way, Ralph realized they didn’t have any cold storage, but he had a uninsulated storage building that should be cold enough. Josh said he’d be back in a minute, and took the American Flag flying out front down and draped the body bag with it. They wheeled the gurney out to the garage, and Josh offered Gene’s body one last salute, then he turned and left.

When they got back to the house, they all sat down and talked. Josh told them it was premature to make any long term plans for Anne. Her short-term needs would include round-the clock nursing or at least supervision, and rehabilitation depending on how much motor control she lost. Ron said he’d feel better with Anne living with them, and Josh volunteered to clean out his Grandma’s house, move Anne’s stuff and Gene’s memorabilia to Ron’s house, and stay at Anne’s until their house was made. Nick spoke up, and said, “If anyone should move to Anne’s house, it should be Karen and I, since Anne’s your grandmother, and Ron and Nancy are your Mom and Dad.” Josh agreed, but for different reasons. Anne might be lucid enough to be disturbed by the “strangers” living in her house.

The 4 of them quickly cleaned out Anne's house, actually the 3 cleaned, and Nick supervised when he wasn't crashing in a chair. Ron called them and told them that they were planning a Memorial for Gene the next day, so they should plan on being at the church at noon. Gene's body was now in a sealed casket since he wasn't embalmed, and right after the memorial, he would be flown to Washington for a full Military Funeral. Josh, Bear, Steve and Ron would be attending the body, with the Ex-Military personnel in dress uniform. Bear and Steve were looking pretty old and haggard, yet dignified in their military uniforms, Ron sat there in his best suit, and Josh was wearing his Dress Whites for the first time in years. They spent the long flight reminiscing about Gene.

When they landed, they were met by a Military Honor Guard which took possession of the body. They drove in procession to Arlington National Cemetery where the burial would occur. Once they reached the outer gate, the flag-draped casket was transferred from the hearse to a wheeled horse-drawn caisson. As it reached the grave site, they heard the familiar "Ruffles and Flourishes" with 3 flourishes by the bugles, denoting Gene's 3-star rank. When the NCOIC of the Honor guard commanded "Present Arms" all those in uniform saluted the casket, and the rifle team snapped smartly to "present arms". Once the Casket Team had secured the casket, the Military Chaplain and OIC give the "final salute" then lead the procession to the grave. The casket team set the casket down over the grave, and the OIC straightened and smoothed the flag. Once the Military Chaplain finished the service, everyone jumped at the sound of a volley of rifle fire, which was performed only for flag-rank officers and above. Once the Chaplain finished the Benediction, he stepped back from the Casket, and the OIC presented arms, indicating the start of the 21-gun salute. Once the echoes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> volley ended, the haunting strains of "Taps" echoed over the rolling hills. By a strange coincidence, another bugler on the far side of Arlington Cemetery echoed the first player's Taps, resulting in the strange but beautiful sound of "Echo Taps". With the conclusion of Taps, the OIC started folding the flag with practiced military precision. When he was finished, he handed the flag to the Military Chaplain, and since there was no Next of Kin present, Ron accepted the flag for his mom. As they left the lonely grave site, Josh saw a lone Marine standing at Present Arms, guarding the casket until it was buried. He wanted to snap a salute at the Marine, but knew he was under orders, so he refrained. He caught up with Bear and Steve, and the 3 military men just stood there and drank in the sight of all the fallen heroes. On the way out, they passed the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and asked the limousine driver to stop, so they could render honors. They got out and walked to the rope cordoning off public access to the tomb, and read the inscription. "Here Rests In Honored Glory An American Soldier, Known But To God." After several minutes, Master Chief "Bear" Simmons, USN SEALs (ret.) performed one last honor to his fallen CO, and those buried in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

"Attention!"

At his command 3 Old Soldiers snapped to attention, and 1 hand went to heart.

Being the Senior Officer present, Col. Steve Fellows, US Army (ret.) commanded "As You



Were.” since there was no officer present to return their salute. A Marine in Dress Blues coughed discretely behind them, and offered his condolences.

“Gentlemen, General Gene Shepard’s body will be interred before dusk, as is tradition. You’d be surprised how many military men stop here after a Military Funeral to pay their respects.” Before he turned to leave, he shook everyone’s hand, then they walked back to the limousine as a light rain began to fall.

They drove back to Dulles, and flew home on the same VC-120 they flew to Arlington. The mood was even more somber and subdued because they were drained by the experience. When Ron got home, Ralph was waiting for him. “I tried to reach you, but you had your cell phone off. Your Mom’s taken a turn for the worse. She’s paralyzed and on a respirator.”

“Ok, what’s her chances for recovery?”

“Barring a Medical Miracle, zero.”

“Ok Ralph, no heroic measures from here on out, keep her comfortable.”

“Ron, she’s going to have to stay in the hospital. You really should come with me, she might not make it much longer.”

They drove back to the Hospital. Anne was a shadow of her former self. Ron remembered his mom as a vivacious woman, full of life, now he looked at her, and knew her death wasn’t far off. He walked up and held her hand. The familiar touch must have woke her up, because she turned toward Ron, and Ron said “Rest Easy Mom, The Kids are Alright!”

Right then, she smiled, and suddenly alarms were going off as Ralph rushed in.

“What’s wrong?”

“Her heart’s stopped. She probably threw a clot, and stopped her heart. She’s already unconscious, and she’ll be dead in 6 minutes, and they’re nothing I can do, she’s already receiving a large dose of clot-busters.”

Ron leaned forward with tears in his eyes, kissed her forehead and said “Bye Mom.”

Ralph checked her vitals, and wrote the time of death on her chart.

The next day, Ron and Nancy’s kids, their families, Steve, and Bear - along with his family, met at the site of Ron’s lodge near HelpMeJack Lake for a private funeral and interment next to Roy, Oliver, and his pups just like she had requested. Every one of Ron’s sons pitched in to dig a deep grave for their Grandmother. Ron, Steve and Bear each moved a shovelful, but left the

heavy work to the men with the strong backs. After a brief funeral service, including Anne's favorite Bible passages, she was buried next to her Husband and Dog near the cabin she always called home. Once everyone had left, Ron spent some final time with his Mom, and knelt next to her grave. He brushed some dirt off her tombstone and whispered "Rest Easy Mom, The Kids are Alright!"

**End of Book 3**  
**To Be Continued in**  
**Book IV**  
**"The Kids Are Alright"**