

WITH APOLOGIES TO SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND JOHN O'HARA

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Death Speaks:

There was a merchant in Baghdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the market-place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market-place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.

W. Somerset Maugham

I first met Ted Ruffner shortly after dawn on February 2, 1968. You probably wonder how I remember that date from so long ago, but that was the morning I was shot. I came to sometime around 0500 in the stinking muck of Viet Nam, about 4 clicks south of Hue. It had rained sometime during the night, and the air was cold and damp. Soaked and shivering, lying on a muddy green poncho with another on top, I was suddenly aware of a dull, burning pain in my left hip and upper leg. I couldn't really feel my leg, but my boot was still in the right place, so I hoped it was still there.

Through a morphine haze, I tried to remember what had happened. Our company, D, of the 1/5 Marines had been rushed behind the initial relief column of four M-68 tanks and Bravo and Charlie companies, that had been sent up Route 1 from the base at Phu Bai, to relieve the beleaguered Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) compound that was under vicious assault by the 4th and 6th Regiments of the Peoples Army of Viet Nam and the Vietcong. This was Tet 1968.

D Company was woefully under manned. Our commander, Captain Dunne was out with dysentery, and we could only field about 140 healthy guys. As a young Marine lieutenant, young but not inexperienced, having been in country for 7 months, I had been given command and ordered to get my ass up to the intersection of Route 1 and an unmarked secondary road leading to the Laotian border, protecting the main road at all costs. The relief column was under heavy attack by elements of the 4th Regiment and the Colonel did not want the road closed, cutting them off.

We arrived at the objective the afternoon before, and had only a little time before dark to dig in and throw up a make shift perimeter. We hoped that Charlie and his northern cousins would not figure out we were there for at least 24 hours, and give us some time to prepare a better defensive position. I picked a low hill overlooking the road that fortunately had taken some artillery fire in the distant past, and we were able to convert some of the shell holes and toppled trees into some minimal protection. We strung all the wire we had left and the last six claymores in the direction we figured they might come. We had six light M-60 machine guns, some mortars, and, thanks to our light fingered Gunny, enough grenades to keep us comfortable.

The day before, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, in two columns, had attacked Hue from the west in dense fog. Their major resistance had been the South Vietnamese 1st Infantry Division at the Citadel and Army and Marine Officer advisors with a few Australians in the MACV compound on the Perfume River. In the days preceding Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, the Vietcong had infiltrated the city and were now systematically executing pre-selected civilians en masse.

Battalion headquarters suspected that parts of the 4th North Vietnamese Regiment would try to move south and cut off Route 1. They were right. Shortly after midnight all hell broke loose. Green and red tracers lit up the sky like a laser show. Heavy mortar rounds started hitting behind us, but before long got our range. We replied in kind and the guys must have hit one of theirs because of a blinding secondary explosion that appeared just back of the tree line. Then they came. The noise escalated like an oncoming typhoon --- the whistling, whining and screaming of white-hot steel and B40 rockets flying through the air. The ghostly pfffffft sound of a metal-jacketed round passing nearby, interspersed with the ear splitting barrage of small arms and automatic weapons fire. The air bursts in the jungle from the 105's I had called in when the first rounds hit, practically knocked us down; and what always amazed me was the ability to dissect out human voices from the raging storm of sound all around.

My Vietnamese was marginal, but I heard their frightened high-pitched commands when they hit the wire and the first of the claymores sailed through them. The profanity and screaming from both sides filtered through the grenade explosions, machine gun fire, and the rapid cracks of the M-16's on full automatic. I was worried about the line and like an idiot began to run and slide through the muck and smoke to check the holes. A brilliant red flash knocked me off my feet into a hole with a dead marine sprawled in the mud. I still can't forget his bloody unseeing face. His right shoulder and arm gone. His flak jacket shredded and useless. Later, as I was crabbing my way out of another hole, I looked up in time to see a NVA trooper charging the hole with his AK-47 leveled at my head. I fired my 45 at his face and at almost the same instant there came a flaming white hot light and sheer quiet. I thought I was floating and then simply went to sleep.

I awakened suddenly to the dull thump and vibration of two mortar rounds hitting the soft mud near the road --- the good bye kisses from the remainder of the NVA regiment that had tried to kill us the night before. Doc, my corpsman, was leaning over me applying another pressure bandage to my left hip, his green flak jacket covered in blood.

"You're hit bad, Lieutenant. We got to get you out of here. I've called in a medevac."

Morphine is a great drug, but the syrettes Doc was using, just kind of took the edge off, at least I don't think I was hallucinating. The black was fading to a dull gray when I heard a pop and then another. I strained to look toward the north end of the tree line and saw a red smoke grenade, followed by a green one spewing their contents into the open area. Somebody wanted to come home and didn't want to get his ass shot off doing it. The ground fog was beginning to lift, but there was still plenty in the depressions near the trees. Then I saw three figures coming out of the mist. The two smaller ones were holding, half dragging a bigger guy; and as they got closer I could tell the big guy was a SEAL --- the mean kind that slips quietly onto your boat, slitting your throat to the bone before you even feel the pain.

As they helped him over to where the wounded and the dead had been collected, I could see that the front of his cammies were stained black down to his right knee. Through the smeared camouflage paint on his face, he was pale and grimacing. The two South Vietnamese marines laid him gently on a blanket next to me and yelled for the corpsman. One of them spoke quietly to him in Vietnamese, shook his hand formally and walked away. The other one reached down and pulled a pack of Marlboro's from the SEAL's pocket. The pack was bloody and crushed, but he pulled out a cigarette, lit it and gave it to him. The SEAL motioned for him to give me one and he did.

Doc came up, took one look and quickly started an IV in the guy's arm. The South Vietnamese looked up, said something very rapidly, saluted and scrambled down the hill. Doc said "What are you doing out here man? You're a hell of a long way from the Mekong".

"Just huntin" was the guy's response.

"Huntin? What the hell you hunt for up here".

"Very special people."

"Oh, yeah, I get it."

Someone yelled "corpsman" off to the left and Doc scurried away. The guy turned to me, and slowly said. "Well Lieutenant, they shot you guys up pretty bad, but you stopped the bastards".

"How did ya know my rank?"

"It's written all over you. You're not 19. You look smart and that Corpsman is scared shitless you're goin die."

"Name's Ted, but the guys call me Poncho". That's when I noticed the sinister Mexican style moustache on his upper lip.

Nineteen year olds don't think about death for very long; and, as they moved us closer to the LZ, I could hear a radio somewhere blasting out "Light My Fire" by the Doors. **"Come on baby light my fire; try to set the night on fire."** Well, the night had been set on fire, and I now had the marks to prove it. Doc slipped another pressure

bandage from under his helmet band, and pushed it hard on my groin. The searing pain knocked me out.

The thump-thump-thump-thump-thump of the twin rotor CH-46 seemed to suck the air right out of me. I awakened with a start, and saw a mud-splattered marine guiding the helo onto a fairly level area near the road. The chopper had come in fast and low to avoid any remaining ground fire, and was now slowly descending and rotating like a gigantic ungainly green elephant looking for its circus stool to park its behind. The sky was overcast and the color of stone and the rotors were spraying a fine mist in the damp cool morning air as it settled with a lurch in the mud. The blue haze of the exhaust gave a surreal wave like pattern to the scene. The ramp came down and the crew chief hurriedly motioned for help in offloading some litters, as the rotor wind blew the grass flat.

I don't remember much of that ride as I drifted in and out of consciousness. I had assumed that it would be a short one to the 27th Surgical at Phu Bai, but my corpsman thought a major artery had been ripped apart and begged the pilot to take me to Naval Hospital DaNang.

DaNang was a blur, like a toboggan ride on amphetamine. I came to my senses two days later to discover myself in one piece and in a bed next to Ted. We were both ticketed to Naval Hospital San Diego, after a brief layover at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. The Navy Docs never quite figured out what hit me. I had left a portion of my upper femur, the long leg bone, in the mud of Southeast Asia, along with a chunk of muscle. They weren't sure whether it was a point blank AK-47 round or a fairly substantial metal fragment from exploding ordnance. I have always claimed that I'd been shot. It seemed so much more personal, an individual one on one act of violence; not just getting clipped with an anonymous piece of steel that just happened to be going in the same direction as you. Whatever, I was left with a permanent limp that only really bothers me in cold weather.

Ted fared a little better. He had apparently taken a point blank pistol round in the right lower belly. It was a hell of a way to get an appendectomy, since he ended up losing a lot of blood and small part of his large intestine. He wouldn't tell me how he got the injury, just sloughing it off as no big deal. Months later, when I pressed him over too many beers, he calmly said "Lieutenant, it's a security matter, I can't tell you," and we left it at that.

San Diego was heaven. The pale yellow hospital buildings sat on a hill overlooking the city and the bay with Balboa Park behind. The nurses all seemed absolutely gorgeous and kind. I was in officer's country in Building 26-6-D and Ted was in the enlisted ward 26-1-A. When I was able to get around on crutches, I would visit him since the 6th floor of Building 26 was off limits to enlisted patients and the wards were larger and brighter with big windows letting in the morning sun. One afternoon, I was surprised to find he had visitors. Two guys both dressed in garish Hawaiian shirts with buzz cuts, bull necks, and rock hard bodies. They looked like ex-prize fighters or Division II linebackers, and I thought they might be SEALs; but almost instinctively I knew they weren't. They reminded me of some of those Air America guys that we would

occasionally see in the bars of Saigon, tough, loudmouthed, exuding uncontrolled rage --- the button men of Southeast Asia.

"Sid, this is the Lieutenant I was telling you about. Lieutenant, this is Sid and Mike. Guys I know from Nam."

I shook hands and said, "You guys SEAL's?"

"Nah, Lieutenant. We're with another company."

"Air America?" He laughed.

"Nah, let's just say we're in exporting and importing and leave it at that. Since our old buddy here is getting out soon, we just stopped by to see if he might need a job sometime. What about you, Lieutenant. You lookin' for work".

"No, I think I'm going on to Law School in D.C. That is if can get in."

"D.C. huh. Nice town. Smart guy like you shouldn't have any trouble there, but watch your back, just like the boonies in some ways. Right, Mike?"

Mike, the quieter one, smiled, and said "Yeah, just like the boonies, never know where they're coming from and you can't always be sure of your friends. Be careful Lieutenant."

A week later, at a formal muster of the hospital staff, in the beautiful outdoor courtyard of Building 1, I was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for conspicuous gallantry in action while serving as Company Commander with Company D, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. The citation went on in great detail about a lot of stuff I didn't even remember, but I was surprised a few minutes later when they were awarding the enlisted men. The last guy was Ted. He was given the Navy Cross but his citation was only one sentence -- "For Extraordinary Heroism against the enemy, Republic of South Vietnam 1968". He seemed very embarrassed as the Admiral pinned the Navy Cross and Purple Heart on his blue hospital robe.

Since Ted couldn't report back to his unit and his tour was just about up anyway, he was assigned to the Medical Holding Company at the Naval Hospital. As an officer, I went on convalescent leave, but since I needed a lot of Physical Therapy, I decided to stay in San Diego. I rented a cheap apartment near the water in Imperial Beach, which became party central for Ted and me and our friends, including a lot of nurses and techs who enjoyed sleeping with a decorated marine and a former SEAL. You're only young once was our motto. After one particular blistering evening of San Miguel beer and a tour at the Body Shop watching the co-eds from San Diego State take off their clothes to loud, tribal music and spiraling lights, we stumbled past a tattoo parlor. We were both drunk, and Ted, slurring his words, said "Let's get a tattoo". I was kinda surprised that he didn't have two or three already.

Tattoos are not my bag, but he dragged me in and I watched in stuporous amazement as he had the words "Semper Fi" tattooed in bold, blue letters on his right shoulder.

"What in the hell are you doing that for. They'll never let you back in the SEALS now".

"I don't give a shit. I'm gettin' out in a few weeks and I want something to remember all the great guys I've served with, and you're one of them." He slapped me on the back, and laughed so hard I thought he would choke. When he stopped laughing, he looked at me and said, "You know, we got to stick together. You never know when one of us will need a horse to get out of Dodge," and then he laughed some more.

How did twenty three year old guys say good-bye in 1968? They shook hands; maybe put their left hand on the guy's right shoulder or arm, and said "See ya man. Take care, keep in touch." They think they will live forever and honestly believe they will see each other again. There were no tears and certainly no hugs. And then they walk away. Ted and I did just that on a bright sunny day in front of the apartment in Imperial Beach. I was heading for Georgetown Law School, and he was taking over the apartment and looking into temporary security jobs until he decided what to do. We traded addresses, but when I called the apartment two months later, the phone had been disconnected, and later my letter was returned "addressee unknown".

I saw Ted twice in the 20 years since I left the Marines. The first time was in Amsterdam. It was 1973, and my first wife, Jennifer, and I were taking the grand honeymoon tour of Europe. It was a cool October and we were staying in the Hotel Pulitzer on the Prinsengracht Canal. It was a beautiful morning, and golden leaves were covering the cobblestones and floating lazily in the canal's black water. We had just left the lobby and turned right along the canal towards the Westerkirk and the Anne Frank House. There was Ted pushing a bicycle down the inclined walk from the main street. Dressed in a Navy pea coat, jeans, and a Greek fisherman's hat, I knew him immediately despite the close-cropped beard -- the Mexican mustache was back. Beside him was a petite and stunning woman with flaming red hair stuffed under a beige watch cap. She had on a black leather coat, jeans and was also pushing a bicycle. I stopped in my tracks and my face must have lit up to a million-candle power of recognition, but then I saw it. His eyes, almost absolute panic, no smile, only a subtle nod of his head -- NO. I squeezed Jennifer's arm hard and stepped out of the way as they passed us. The woman looked at me with the coldest green eyes I have ever seen. Then they were gone. Jennifer said, "What's wrong, you're white as a sheet. Are you sick?"

"No", I said. "I, ah, I just thought I recognized an old college buddy, but I was wrong".

"Must have been some buddy to do that to you".

The next morning as I was walking past the desk, the clerk said, "Sir, I believe you have a message." He handed me an envelope of the Hotel's stationary. Opening it, I found a single sheet of paper with the Hotel's monogram. In the center in black, block letters were two words **Semper Fi**.

"When was this delivered?"

"I don't know sir. I noticed it when I came on at 7. Is it troublesome? Can I be of help?"

"No... Thank you." Jennifer's father was Chief of Staff for Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana. Jennifer had grown up in DC and graduated from Trinity where I met her at a Friday mixer. When I was about to graduate from Georgetown and it was

apparent we were going to be married, her father told me that an old dear friend of his was looking for a young associate interested in corporate law and contracts. Believe it or not, I enjoyed that part of the law. I no longer had much stomach for confrontation. I about passed out when he told me that his friend was Edward Bennett Williams, of Williams & Connolly. Williams was "the man to see" if you had a problem in Washington, D.C. He and Connolly were both Georgetown graduates and had started the firm in 1967. They were the premier litigators in the region. Williams, a larger than life personality, was famous for his statement "Don't necessarily pray for Justice, you might just get it."

With the grease provided by Jennifer's father, a kind letter from the Senator and my record at Georgetown, my meeting with Mr. Williams in his spacious mahogany paneled office, covered with pictures of him with the famous and the infamous, lasted all of about five minutes. He welcomed me, and I was assigned to a new and minuscule section of the firm.

My second meeting with Ted took place at the Hay-Adams Hotel across Lafayette Park from the White House. I was just leaving the dining room after a client lunch, and there was Ted standing in the small lobby near the front desk. It was the fall of 1987. He was casually dressed in a light brown tweed jacket, slacks, blue shirt, dark burgundy sweater, and no tie. He smiled the broad smile I always remembered. I quickly walked over, dropped my brief case, and gave him a huge bear hug. He seemed embarrassed, and that's when I noticed the hard object under his left arm.

I stepped back. "Are you carrying?"

"Yeah, I'm working. Nothing serious".

"Man, I don't believe it. Where the hell have you been? It's been almost 20 years".

We began a somewhat stilted conversation about the what, the when, the who of the past 20 years. We were going to need more time than this to warm up. He couldn't meet me at 5 o'clock for drinks, but acted like he would really want to talk to me. I pressed my business card on him, and said sincerely "We have got to meet".

He looked at me and said, "We do. You never know when that horse will come in handy."

I laughed and just then the elevator doors opened and out stepped Richard Helms, former director of the CIA and two young powerfully built men in conservative dark business suits. One of them nodded to Ted, and they quickly walked out to a black Suburban with tinted windows, waiting at the curb. Ted shook my hand, hugged me again and said, "Got to go. I'll call you." I watched as he walked out, turned left and disappeared into a crowd of Japanese tourists.

August in Washington is hot, muggy and unpleasant. If you wear a suit coat downtown at that time of the year, all the tourists think you're a native and ask for directions. All I wanted to do was finish the day's work early and maybe get a head start on the weekend crowd to the beach. Kathy, my wife of 6 years and our three-year-old son were anxious to get to our house in Bethany Beach, Delaware. It wasn't nearly as nice as the place I had on the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay, but Jennifer got that as

part of the settlement. It was August 3rd 1992 and I thought I was finished following my 11:30 appointment. Walking to the outer office, I saw Rosemary, my secretary, on the phone. When she hung up, I said "My book's empty for the rest of the day so I'm leaving to pick up Kathy and Jeff and get some sun."

Rosemary smiled and said, "I'm sorry. I hope I've done the right thing. An old friend of yours called and wanted to schedule an appointment today and asked me not to tell you he was coming. I didn't see anything in the book, so I told him 12:30 would be fine. He said he knew you very well in Viet Nam and it was a big surprise."

"Did he give you a name?"

"Yes, Ted Ruffner, and he said something about a horse that you had, that he needed. I didn't know you and Kathy had horses."

"We don't. It's just a figure of speech I think".

A few minutes later, Rosemary's voice came across the intercom. "Mr. Ruffner is in the sitting room." With some anxiety, I got up and walked into the small sitting area to greet Ted, as I did with so many clients. Ted smiled when he saw me open the door and got up. I didn't say a word, but just walked over to him and hugged him. "Where the fuck have you been you old bastard. 5 years is a long time."

"What do mean old?" he responded.

Back in my office overlooking "G" Street, I stared at him across the table. It had been almost 25 years since I first saw him being dragged out of the mist. It was like a dream. Did it really happen? Is this the same guy I knew in 1968? He looked exhausted, as if the effort of speaking had worn him out. Something had changed and I couldn't put my finger on it. The hair was still there, thinner, gray strands here and there. The build was right, but it seemed smaller somehow. Weighted down. Compressed. It was then that I realized, Ted had gotten older. We all had gotten older, but somehow, some way he had paid a higher toll.

"Ok, what's this shit about a horse?"

"Ah, Lieutenant, always cutting to the chase. Right to the bone. Get those coordinates lined up even before they hit you. You haven't changed a bit".

"Jesus, Ted, don't call me Lieutenant. That was a lifetime ago. I've forgotten that whole mess."

"Nobody forgets that. It keeps coming back in the dark of the deepest night. Slips up, silently, and grabs you by the throat. You haven't forgotten it; you just don't want to remember it."

"Ok, ok, what's the price? What do I have to pay to get a straight answer out of you?"

"We can't talk here. I don't feel comfortable. I want you to meet me somewhere else."

"What do you mean we can't talk here? This is my law office. No body is going to bother us here. The walls DO NOT HAVE EARS."

"Well that hasn't changed either. You're still refreshingly naive. Perhaps you've forgotten. Ollie North was a client of this firm. All walls have ears. Even the ones I'm going to take you to, but at least they're made of granite."

I had always figured Ted as a spook, agent, spy, whatever; but he was wearing his paranoia like a shirt, with the slightest hint of manic behavior. "Ok, where to?" "Meet me tomorrow morning at 08:30 on the south side of Constitution Avenue across from the National Academy of Sciences. It's between 21st and 22nd."

"I know where it is, but I've taken the day off and I'm going to the beach with my wife and kid."

"I know, but humor me. Remember that day in Imperial Beach, we promised we'd stick together. You've never needed me, but now I need you."

At 08:30 the next morning, I was standing, in the rising heat, on Constitution Avenue directly across the street from the National Academy of Sciences. At my back was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, two immense slabs of polished black granite sliced into the earth of West Potomac Park, the western end of the Mall. A cab pulled up out of the morning rush, and Ted got out. The traffic noise was ferocious. I had forgotten how bad it could be after taking the Metro to work for so many years.

"Pretty loud this time of morning" I said.

"That's the whole point. That, plus the reflected sound where we're going will distort damn near anything we say. Hard for folks to listen in."

We walked down the winding path to the beginning of the Memorial. I had only been here once before, and could never come back. I knew the faces of 37 men whose gray names were etched deep into the stone along with over 58,000 others. The emotion was too much. Too painful. Too much to remember. I made a point of not looking at the panels.

"Did you know that this is the number one place in the District of Columbia to commit suicide?" he said.

I didn't.

"Yea, sometimes two or three a month. As you can imagine, the Park Service doesn't make an effort to publicize it and the papers have an unwritten rule that it never appears".

We walked slowly past the polished black granite. Even at this early hour there was a small brown teddy bear with a red bow tie propped against a panel, some flowers here and there, some real, some plastic, an occasional written message held to the ground with a Popsicle stick, and even one taped to panel 19 crying out "Bobby we miss you". We spent the next ten minutes slowing walking past the names discussing what had happened to us over the last 20 years.

"Ted, are you a spy, spook, or whatever you guys are called?"

"I'm a 'Case Officer' but with some of my assignments, it's been pretty close to being a Case Worker, like a social worker." He laughed.

"And I do work for the Company as you suspected, but more specifically a subsidiary."

"When I saw you in Amsterdam in '73, what was going on? You looked terrified, and who was that gorgeous broad you were with?"

"You almost got me killed, schmuck. I worked very deep cover for almost 20 years in some unpleasant places in this world. The lady was Mary O'Neil, an enforcer for the provisional wing of the IRA. The meanest psychopathic colleen you'll ever meet. Guy's used to smile when she approached them with her beauty, not knowing they were about to receive a couple of 9 mm presents. My story was the angry Marine Vietnam vet. Remember the tattoo? I was supposed to be a conduit, mainly for explosives, C-4, etc. to that group. If you had blown my cover, I would have been floating in that canal in 5 minutes and you and your lovely lady might have been there with me."

"What ever happened to her?"

"She and her boyfriend ended up on the wrong end of a car bomb in '79 in Armagh. When you saw me in '87 I was out of the deep cover business and temporarily assigned as a back up security to Helms. Backup guys are just that. They don't draw attention to themselves, like with the President's Secret Service detail. A backup guy fits into the background: the young guy with the ball cap and backpack, the nicely dressed lady with the brief case. They are supposed to spot a move or something suspicious before a shooter can take the shot. The guys in the dark suits are just as much a target as the main target himself."

When we reached the end of the Memorial, Ted casually turned around and surveyed the area in a quick 360.

"We've been here too long. I've got to go. You like to sail? Sure you do. Meet me Monday at 1400. Jacobson's Marina on Back Creek in Annapolis. Slip 10. Pretty little sailboat

"El Caballo".

"El Caballo?"

"Yeah, Spanish for 'Horse'. Nice name for a boat, huh".

He turned and walked toward Constitution Avenue.

Monday was bright and hot. We sailed comfortably in Ted's 35-foot Catalina, nicely appointed and rigged for single-handed sailing. After we passed Thomas Point Light, we tacked and headed back for the Bay Bridge.

"Should be tough for somebody to hear us out here and we can see everything," he said.

The bay was surprisingly empty of both pleasure and commercial craft.

"Why all the super secret stuff. Somebody after you?"

"Somebody wants me gone and they don't particularly care how I leave. I need help in getting away in one piece. I either disappear or turn myself in and hope for the best. Turning myself in doesn't appeal to me since I would probably end up on the wrong

end of a sheet in a holding cell labeled "suicide", but I'll do whatever you tell me. I have to tell you though, I'm really getting spooked; and frankly I see no way out."

Ted then began a complex story of arms and explosives dealing involving mid-level and a few senior-level CIA personnel and contract players, some case officers, some retired, some not, that had netted a few of them millions of dollars. This was 1992, the Gulf War was over and the Middle East was simmering towards the blasting point.

"I was recruited through a 'false flag' approach, believing that the operation was sanctioned by the Associate Deputy Director of Operations, Chuck Briggs. Through a series of shell companies I purchased a considerable amount of C-4 from compliant dealers in Austria and Romania. Because of the hoops you have to jump through, we don't buy from the largest manufacturer, the United States. I admit I had the opportunity to "moon light" a bit, picking up some extra cash, but I had no idea that the bulk of that stuff was going to Lebanon and some crazy Palestinians, and not to our friends in Columbia and Nicaragua. The current Director wants this problem gone, no matter how."

I left Ted at the dock, after insisting that he had to talk to my partner Dan Hartle, our firm's young hot shot defense guy. He told me he would think about that, and a lot of other things. He looked washed out, almost gray when we shook hands.

Four days later, I received a call from the Calvert County Police. Ted's boat, **El Caballo**, had been found on the rocks about a quarter mile south of the power plant on the western shore of the bay. It was relatively undamaged, but when boarded there was dried blood and human tissue all over the transom and swim ladder. In the cabin, they had found two empty fifths of scotch rolling around on the deck and a hand written suicide note taped to the nav station table telling who ever found her to call me. There was also a personal note to me asking me to do whatever I wanted with the boat, if it was recovered, and what turned out to be a sparsely furnished one bedroom apartment in Arlington, just off Shirley Highway. The note ended with "don't be sorry, I'm not".

Five days later, Ted's bloated and decomposing body was found caught in the tidal shallows near the Kent Narrows. I was called again to make identification. A body floating in the August heat is not a pretty sight and a 12-gauge shotgun fired beneath the chin blows off the face and most of the head. Unfortunately a common method of suicide. The body had been dressed in the clothes I last saw him with, and his wallet was a soaking wad in the trouser pocket. The crabs and other bay creatures had feasted on the fingers and toes so prints, and, of course, dental records were not a factor.

I stood for a long time on the dock looking at **El Caballo's** old slip. Then I opened the canister and slowly poured the ashes into the backwaters of Chesapeake Bay. I wasn't really sure who I was burying that day. Who was the man I had known so many years before? What had he become? Something else had been tearing at me for days, what had I become.

The evening after I had identified the body in the morgue, it had hit me. Despite the decomposition, I had seen the ugly scar on his massively swollen belly, but it had looked smaller than I remembered, but there was no tattoo. "**Semper Fi**" was not there.

I walked slowly up the gravel path toward the parking lot. Blocking the path at the lot's edge was a black sedan. Leaning against the driver's door panel, was a once

powerfully built man with close-cropped gray hair, a dark suit, and aviator sunglasses. His shape and features looked somehow familiar.

He spoke hoarsely "Your ceremony was very touching counselor. I just hope the bastard is really dead. What do you think Lieutenant?"

It was Mike.

"Your friend was slime, counselor. A good guy gone real bad. He was special ops, the knuckle dragger division, a professional assassin. His weapon of choice was explosives, and he was damn good. But, he got in with the wrong company so to speak, and he got greedy. Remember Wilson and Terpil, the guys that sold all that C-4 to Libya? Think they did that all by themselves? They were smart, but not that smart, and they needed a guy who knew explosives. How he managed to get out of that mess, I'll never know; but he was good. But even the good, can get sloppy. Getting in bed with that Lebanese guy Khashoggi was a big mistake, but you know a million here, a million there and pretty soon it gets to be big money. There are going to be a lot of folks killed because of your friend, counselor. That stuff he sold has gone to some real crazy people."

He turned and opened the door. "Remember what I told you Lieutenant? Watch your back. You can't always trust your friends. Ever want to have a drink. Call me."

He handed me a card, shut the door, and drove slowly up the crunching stones, the gray dust floating on the wind.

My Special Thanks for Technical Advice and Comments to:

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(Except for Richard Helms, Senator Michael Mansfield, Frank Terpil, Edward Bennett Williams, and Edwin Wilson, the characters in this paper are fictitious. A resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.)
