

A Rob Royal
Spy Thriller

ROBERT
DEAN
BAIR



The
Cloisters of
Canterbury

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A Novel By

ROBERT DEAN BAIR



ArcheBooks Publishing

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By

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In Memory

The Reverend Canon Ferdie W. Phillips, M.C., B.A.
The Canterbury Cathedral
Canterbury, England

A percentage of the royalties from this novel
have been pledged to the H. LEE MOFFITT
CANCER CENTER & RESEARCH INSTI-
TUTE, Tampa, Florida

Dedication

This book is dedicated to those men and women who serve in our nation's intelligence community, and especially those who have taken their secrets to their graves. They dedicate their lives and many times give their lives for the safety of a grateful nation. They and their families make unknown sacrifices and never experience a normal life. They continue to fight terrorism, leaks and corruption today.

Appreciation

For the endless love of my parents,
William and Mona J. Bair

That special person, my loving wife, Mary
Dell Tinsley, my friend, a gifted artist, a dedi-
cated and caring teacher, who has been
supportive wherever I might be and for read-
ing my manuscripts, correcting and
wondering but not asking.

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Introduction

The United States of America was in a financial depression and still trying to heal from the wounds of the Civil War and World War One. With these things ever present in the minds of Americans on Memorial Day, they gathered around graves honoring those who had died while rifle shots and sorrowful tones from a bugler's horn sounded on a distant hill.

Government leaders tried desperately to avoid the war in Europe by supplying England with military supplies and equipment. But when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States had no other choice but to declare war on Japan and enter the war in Europe. The mobilization of the nation's resources to provide weapons for war was unprecedented: scrap metal and paper drives; gasoline,

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automobiles, tires, food, clothing and shoes, and treasured coffee—nothing escaped rationing. Many people worked two jobs...women joined the men in the factories...farmers left their fields at dark to work at night in army tank plants. Gone was the sight of men begging for a piece of bread or standing around a blazing fire in a metal barrel on a street corner. Everyone wanted to do what they could to help in the war effort.

A nation watched their love ones, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and fathers, board troop trains that would take them to the battle fields. 400,000 would not return. Gold stars were hung in the windows of houses on the streets across the nation, telling all that a loved one had been lost. Funerals and memorial services were held in each of the States for the fallen, and folded American flags were presented to the grieving mothers and wives.

Rumors of atrocities suddenly became reality when photographs of concentration camps in Germany and Poland liberated by Allied forces were printed on the front pages of newspapers and shown in the newsreels at local movie theatres. Many were outraged; they wondered why such horrible things had been hidden from them when they learned their government—the United States of America—had knowledge of the treatment of the Jews. Their concern grew. What was going on behind the closed doors of the government offices?



This story is an eye-witness account of courage exhibited by ordinary people with deep convictions, honor, patriotism, and integrity. They risked their lives to fight corruption, treason and murder during the months leading to the end of World War II and thereafter.

Rob Royal was a member of the Special Troops stationed at U.S. First Army Headquarters at Fort Jay on Governor's Island in New York Harbor, assigned to the Communication Section of Military Intelligence. The Commander of the First Army, Four-Star General William Courtney, ordered Royal to report to President Harry S. Truman at the White House in Washington. After Royal completed a confidential assignment for the President of the United States, his life was forever changed. As a result, and despite high security, an attempt was made on his life.

Royal was recruited by a *group* of ordinary citizens who were not part of the government. The covert Group had concerns about the effectiveness of the government's intelligence organizations and gathered information from many points of the world for the President of the United States and certain members of Congress. They were ordinary people who volunteered to do extraordinary things for their country.

Rob Royal was one of the ordinary people.

This is his story. These are his words.

Chapter 1

THE WHITE HOUSE

It was a beautiful fall October day in New York. Just before noon, I was looking out a window of the First Army military intelligence office at the Statue of Liberty when General William Courtney's staff car stopped in front of the building. I watched Harry, the general's driver, get out of the car and open the door for the general, who had just returned from a meeting in Washington. Everyone was aware when the general was off Governor's Island, but there was always enough brass on the island such that no one ever slacked off in his or her duties. It didn't make a lot of difference whether he was there or not, except that when walking by his office you didn't worry about him suddenly coming out, or the rare occasion when he walked past your open office

door and your feet were resting on top of the desk.

The general was only in the building for a few minutes when I was startled by the ringing of my telephone. I picked up the receiver, and before I could speak, the firm voice of the general's secretary said, "The general will see you now."

Instantly I stood at attention as if he was in the room. I remembered the general telling me, "If my secretary tells you to do something, it's the same as if *I did!*"

I hurried. No, I ran down the stairs and only slowed when I was in front of the military policeman standing guard at the entrance to the general's outer office. The look on the MP's face was obvious that he had been alerted by the sound of my running down the steps and it turned into a smile; he probably assumed that I was in trouble for something.

The general's secretary stood behind her desk. She always made me feel that she knew everything about me, even the color of my under shorts—and they'd better be khaki. She walked to the general's door and knocked.

"Come in," came the reply. She opened the door and I walked to the front of the general's desk and saluted.

The general said, "Stand at ease."

I did.

The general looked up from his desk. "I have just returned from a meeting with President Truman at the White House. He has requested that you report to him today, as soon as possible. You are to fly from the island airstrip within the hour. This is a confidential meeting. You are not to discuss the trip, or your meeting with the president, with anyone except me. Report to me when you return, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir." I saluted.

"That's all." The general returned his attention to his desk without returning my salute, which was not unusual.

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I turned and walked out of the office, pausing in front of his secretary's desk.

She looked up with her normal stern look. "Harry is waiting at the side entrance."

I left the office, strode past the MP and almost missed the smirk on his face.

Harry was behind the wheel of the general's car, the right front door of the car stood open; I promptly got in and closed the door. There was no conversation between us as he drove directly to the airstrip.

Why did the president want to see me at the White House? My mind considered all possibilities without coming to a positive conclusion, not even a hint.

A Piper, a single-engine, high-wing, two-passenger airplane was waiting at the airstrip. The engine of the small plane seemed to labor as we flew past the Statue of Liberty. I thought about Wilbur Wright when he made the first over-water flight from Governor's Island around the Statue of Liberty in 1909, wondering how the little engine in his plane sounded.

It was a short flight to Mitchell Field. When we landed, the pilot taxied to a waiting C-46 cargo plane with its engines running. The pilot and co-pilot, staff sergeant, plus an Army medical flight surgeon were the only other passengers. As soon as I was on board the staff sergeant closed the door and the plane started to move.

The landing at Andrews Field was smooth. The plane taxied off the landing strip to a group of hangers and before the pilot shut down the engines, the staff sergeant had the plane's door open. A military staff car pulled up; the driver got out and walked to the plane. The staff sergeant motioned to me. I moved to the door and dropped to the ground. The driver es-

corted me to the car.

The driver had obviously driven from Andrews to the White House many times. When we arrived at the gate, a guard instructed the driver to park and wait. A Secret Service agent escorted me into the White House. This particular visit to the White House was much different from my previous visit when I was part of a public tour.

Another Secret Service agent opened the door to the Oval Office. The agent announced, "Mr. President, Warrant Officer Royal is here."

President Truman was seated behind his desk. "Come in, Mr. Royal."

I approached the president's desk. He stood and extended his hand. His grip was firm. The president pointed to an armchair in front of the desk. "Have a seat, young man."

"Thank you, Mr. President."

He didn't waste any time. "When I was in the Senate, I chaired a committee investigating military contracts. When I became president after President Roosevelt's death, my concerns continued about the investigations. In fact, I still have major concerns.

"I received a report from General Courtney about the two German prisoners' escape attempt in a small plane from the Fort Jay airstrip on Governor's Island on New Year's Eve. He told me of your involvement in preventing the former German Luftwaffe pilots from escaping. When he told me that you were from Xenia, Ohio, near Dayton, the name of a military contractor in Dayton came to mind. I have been receiving some disturbing information about the company.

"I suggested to the general that you be sent to investigate S & M Precision Machine Company—to look around so to speak. They have received contracts to manufacture replace-

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ment parts for military aircraft. The government provided the funds for building about 100,000 square feet of building, fenced the property which was owned by the president of the company, and we also paid for the machinery and equipment for manufacturing the parts.”

The president paused, “It smells like there’s a ‘rat in the woodpile’ down there. When you return to Fort Jay, you’re going to receive a fourteen day furlough to go home, during which time I want you to nose around, see what you can learn and report back to the general—but spend some time with your family. This envelope has the information you will need. But remember, this is hush-hush. There is also a telephone number in there that you should use in case of an emergency.” The president stood and walked around to the front of his desk. “That was a fine job you did New Year’s Eve.”

I said, “Thank you, Mr. President.”

The president shook my hand and walked with me to the door. I had not been in the office for more than ten minutes. The same driver returned me to Andrews where the C-46 was waiting for the flight back to Mitchell. As soon as we landed I boarded the waiting Piper and was flown back to Governor’s Island.

Harry was waiting in the general’s staff car at the Governor’s Island airstrip when the pilot taxied to the guard shack. He drove me to the side entrance of the First Army Headquarters’ building. I went directly to the general’s office. His secretary was standing behind her desk. “Mr. Royal, here are your furlough papers.”

“Thank you. It looks like I may be home for an early Thanksgiving.”

I returned to the communication office and began putting things on my desk in order. Just as I was leaving, Army Ser-

geant Major Murphy came in and handed me a duffel bag. "You might need this. Have a safe trip."

"Thanks, Sergeant."

At the barracks I checked the train schedule. There was a train leaving for Dayton out of Grand Central at 10:15. I called the general's secretary and told her my plans.

Harry was waiting with the general's staff car in front of the barracks when I came out. "Rob, the general's secretary told me you had a train to catch."

As soon as I arrived at Grand Central Station, I called my parents and told them of my furlough, and that I would arrive in Dayton the following morning at 7:20. There were several vacant seats on the train. I located two seats that would allow me to sleep. It was going to be a long night.



My father met the train at the Dayton station the next morning. When we got to the house Mugs, my Boston terrier, greeted me, and mother had breakfast ready. That evening, Angel, my sister, and I walked down the street to a drugstore with a soda fountain, marble counter top and stools in front. We used to hang out there in high school; it was just like the old days.

On the walk home, I asked Angel for a favor. "Angel, there are several names on this list and if it is possible I would like to know if they own any property or have spent any time in the local jail."

Angel was a clerk in the Montgomery County Records office and had access to all of the public records. She looked at the list and at me but asked no questions. "That's not a problem."

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I enjoyed spending time with my family and eating all of the food Mother remembered that I liked. We looked at old photographs and talked until midnight. I slept until the smell of bacon drifted up to my room. Like so many mornings over the years, Mother opened the door to the back stairs and sent Mugs up to wake me. Old Mugs hadn't forgotten. He jumped onto the bed and licked my face just as he had done since he was only a few months old. After being sure that I was awake he jumped off the bed and returned downstairs to wait for his morning walk.

Chapter 2

CONFIDENTIAL ASSIGNMENT

After breakfast I borrowed my dad's car, a black 1941 Ford Tudor, and drove into Dayton to the Montgomery County Courthouse, to the Records office where Angel greeted me. Angel handed me a folded piece of paper without saying anything. I folded it again and placed it in my jacket pocket.

I hugged her and said, "Angel, I'll see you at home about six o'clock. Mother is having fried chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy and apple pie for dessert, don't be late."

Sitting in the car, I removed the paper from my jacket pocket. It was the list I had given Angel, and after each of the names, except one, she had written "No Record." The one exception was the name Frank A. Salvatore. His name appeared

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as the owner on two real estate deeds. There were no records of the S & M Precision Machine Company. However, I knew that Salvatore had signed the government contracts as president of the company.

Salvatore purchased ten acres, listing his address in Trenton, New Jersey, in June of 1939, from the estate of a deceased county judge. The land was part of a farm that had been owned by the judge for many years and the administrator of the estate, the judge's only son, whose address was in a bank building in Trenton, New Jersey. The estate had subdivided the property and sold ten parcels of ten acres each along a road named after the judge. Angel's notes indicated that there were ten more parcels not sold. The subject's property was the last one on the north side of the road.

Salvatore also owned a house in Oakwood, a suburb of Dayton, Ohio. Purchased in November of 1940, the address of record was the same Trenton, New Jersey, address as the other property. There was no record of mortgages, liens, marriage, divorce, births, lawsuits, judgments, or voting history. She listed the telephone numbers for Frank Salvatore and the S & M Precision Machine Company. Oh yes, Angel's information was certainly going to be helpful.

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I finally located S & M Precision Machine Company on a narrow gravel road off State Road 4. On both sides of the road there were cement block buildings, except for one building that was an old wooden barn probably part of the original farm. It had been modified and appeared to be used for storage; metal racks with angle iron were visible from the open barn door. All of the other properties had gravel parking lots

with cars parked in orderly rows.

The names on the buildings indicated that they were occupied by various types of service and manufacturing companies. There were nine buildings including the old barn, and the one at the end of the road fit Angel's information.

I drove to the end of the road. On the left side was a fenced parcel of land and a cement block building with a sign on the front, S & M Precision Machine Company. There were no cars parked in front or in the gravel parking lot.

At different times during the next several days and nights I drove down that gravel road looking at the S & M building. It was apparent that something was not right. It was surrounded by a chain link fence. A twenty-foot wide gate was secured with a chain and padlock that opened into a vacant gravel parking lot. The front of the building had one door and no windows. All of the glass in the windows on both sides of the building and in the skylights was painted white, preventing anyone from looking inside. I observed the building at various hours, day and night; I never saw a watchman. At night there was a faint light visible from the windows in the building. There were no signs of any activity, no employees reporting for work, no trucks arriving with materials or picking up out-going shipments.

I also took the opportunity to visit two local freight-trucking companies; both indicated that they had not delivered or picked up anything at the S & M Precision Machine Company.

I stopped at one of the other buildings on the road, the last one before a vacant property and the S & M Precision Machine building at the end of the road, and entered the door marked "Office." It was a small room about ten by ten feet. On a small table lay several employment applications.

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A woman with graying brown hair and brown eyes opened the sliding glass window. "May I help you?"

"Are you hiring?"

"Yes, milling machine operators for the third shift," was her answer.

I picked up one of the applications from the table and said, "I might be interested. I was looking for the S & M Precision Machine Company. Stopped at the office down the road, but there was no one around."

The woman replied, "There is nothing going on down there. In fact, it never opened after the building was completed. I've been working here since before they built it, and I haven't seen anything going on except for the red Buick that parks in front of the building for short periods."

Strange, no one knew of any employment at the company since the building was completed. No wonder the president and others found it suspicious.

"What are you paying mill operators?"

"It depends upon your experience, and there are additional hourly benefits for the third shift. Starting rate is \$1.50 an hour for experienced, with a ten-cent night bonus."

"What do you manufacture?"

"We have several government contracts."

"I'll take an application, look around, and might come back." I never found out what they manufactured.

Back in Dayton, I located Frank Salvatore's house in Oakwood, and drove around the neighborhood. It was a nice neighborhood with large lots and mature maple and oak trees. The homes were Georgian style, two-story brick, with attached two-car garages. I parked in front of the third house on the opposite side of the street from the Salvatore house, walked up to the door, and rang the doorbell.

No answer. I tried again; still no response. I walked down the steps to the sidewalk and up to the next house and rang the doorbell. It opened after the first ring, and a pleasant woman holding a black and white cat opened the door with a smile.

She said, "The Moore family is not home; they are visiting her sister in Cincinnati."

It was obvious that she had been watching me and probably knew about everything and everyone in the neighborhood.

"I am not looking for the Moore family. I am looking for Frank Salvatore."

The woman then pointed to the house across the street and said, "Mr. Salvatore lives in that house, but they are not home either. Mr. Salvatore plays a lot of golf, but I'm not sure where. He leaves the house in the morning with white or plaid knickers and various colors of socks and caps on his head like golfers do. He and his wife eat out most of the time. She is a pretty redhead and much younger. They have had a "C" Gasoline Ration Stamp on their red Buick convertible's windshield all the time during the war, so they didn't have to worry about gasoline and she doesn't even drive."

It certainly was obvious that this woman didn't particularly care for her neighbor—her eyes saying more than what came out of her mouth. No one seemed to know where Salvatore came from. They moved into the house after a widow of a local attorney joined her husband in the local cemetery.



Every day of my furlough I drove past the Oakwood house and the S & M Precision Machine Company building. One

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afternoon I saw the aforementioned red Buick convertible parked in front of the building, and two days later the car was in the driveway of the Oakwood house. Unfortunately, I had not seen anyone arriving or leaving the house.

One evening, after dark, I parked my dad's car three blocks from the Salvatore house and walked past it several times. There was light seeping through the edges of the draperies in the front windows. I even walked up the steps onto the front porch, but was not able to see through the openings. I returned to the car and left.

Four nights before I was to return to Governor's Island, dark clouds in the sky covered the new moon. I just hoped that it wouldn't rain or snow; the temperature was barely above freezing. I figured it was time for a look inside of the S & M building.

I drove down the gravel road and parked the Ford about a half-mile away in the parking lot of a tool and die shop that was operating 24 hours a day. The night shift workers had just returned to work after their lunch break, so I didn't think anyone would take notice of one more car.

I wore a pair of bib overalls, jump boots and a well-worn army khaki shirt, a field jacket, a knit army cap and a pair of canvas gloves from my dad's workbench in the garage. Other than the jump boots, I was dressed just like one of the factory workers.

The twenty feet of 3/8-inch rope wrapped around my upper torso made me look a lot heavier, but it wasn't very comfortable. I broke into a sweat walking the half-mile even with the temperature in the thirties. As I made my way along the road, I picked up several rocks from the side of the road and put them in my jacket pockets. About fifty yards from the building I moved off the road a few feet, stopped and looked

at the luminous dial on my wristwatch; it was 3:15 a.m. There was just a dim light shining from the windows of the building and no cars, as usual.

I looked back up the road—no sign of traffic. It was quiet except for the sounds of machinery from one of the factories with an open door.

After watching and listening for about ten minutes, I stood by a tree just across from the front of the S & M building, unbuttoned the field jacket, removed the rope from around my waist, and made a loop about two feet in diameter.

I took another look down the road—still no traffic or new sounds.

I crossed the road to the front of the building. After five or six tries, I was able to hook the loop of rope on an angle iron brace of the sign that extended above the roof.

I looked down the road again—still clear.

Using both hands I climbed up and stood on top of the 10-foot fence, paused for a moment, took a deep breath and clambered onto the edge of the roof. So far, so good.

I walked along the roof until I reached the middle of the building, selected one of the skylights and looked around. It was about as quiet as I could have asked and the moon was still cloud-covered.

I took a rock about the size of a golf ball from my field jacket and broke the glass in the skylight. I tossed the rest of the stones onto the roof so if someone looked around later they would blame it on some kids. I removed just enough glass for my head to fit in the opening and get a good look. Single light bulbs on electric cords hung down about six feet from the rafters every twenty feet in the middle of the building providing a clear view of the building from one end to the other.

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I was not sure what to expect, but what I saw surprised me—the building was completely empty. There was not one piece of equipment, no material, not even a broom. The concrete floor was bare except for the rock and glass that had fallen from the skylight.

Removing more glass allowed me to put both hands into the opening. From my jacket, I removed the camera that Murphy in Intelligence had included in the duffel bag. Lowering the camera with both hands, I put my head through the opening and took a sequence of eight pictures. The camera was capable of taking pictures with less light than was available, so I was not concerned about failing to have evidence that the building was vacant. It would be up to the Army's photo lab to develop the film. When finished, I sat down to catch my breath; perspiration rolled down my face.

I heard the sound of a car coming in the distance. I quietly moved to the edge of the roof to view the road, laying down flat on the roof and waiting. The car pulled up in front of the building and stopped. A door opened and closed, then another door opened and closed. I heard footsteps on the gravel and two distinct voices. They were not visible, I heard the front door of the building open and close, cutting off the sound of the voices. I looked at my watch; it was five minutes after four in the morning.

Twenty minutes passed. The front door opened and closed again. Footsteps on the gravel seemed to last longer than when they arrived. There was a sound, but not like a car door, more like a car's trunk lid, more sounds of feet on gravel, a car door opening and closing. I waited for the second car door to open and close but it didn't. The car motor turned but didn't start. The engine back-fired and then the motor finally started, gravel flew from the tires. It was leaving in one big

hurry.

I looked over the edge of the roof just as the clouds in the sky uncovered the slit of the new moon; the car's dash lights reflected on only one person—the driver of the Buick convertible. Now where was the second person? Had they seen the glass and rock on the floor? A night watchman just coming on duty? I hadn't seen anything that would indicate that a guard even existed. A guard for what? There wasn't anything to watch or protect!

Was the person looking around for the rock thrower? There was a noise from the other side of the roof; a person's head emerged from a skylight and then a beam from a flashlight started sweeping across the roof.

I had left the rope on the roof at the front of the building planning to leave from there. That was no longer an option. The ground sloped into a ditch on the right side of the building, but that was a thirty-foot drop. I wondered about the rear of the building. The gravel of the parking lot on the left was flat, but there was no way to get past the head sticking up from the skylight.

A man was climbing onto the roof from the skylight.

I started running along the right edge of the roof staying away from the skylights, hoping to reach the back of the building where I could jump. Suddenly something hit the roof to my left and then the sound of a gunshot. It wasn't a 45—something smaller, but it wouldn't make any difference if it hit me.

How I wished for a 45, or something, and was sorry that I had been instructed not to carry a weapon. I fell to the roof's hard surface and rolled closer to the edge with the intention of dropping off the roof regardless of the distance. There was a crashing sound of glass and words spoken in a foreign lan-

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guage that I didn't understand. More breaking glass and a blood-chilling scream followed by a thud.

I listened, hearing nothing, got up on one knee, looked and listened again—nothing.

Thinking that whoever was shooting at me had fallen through the skylight and was no longer a danger, I got up and walked slowly toward the skylight and looked through the opening. Indeed, a man was down there on the concrete floor. He had dark hair, wore a dark suit, and was laying on his right side. From his left ear to the left side of his mouth was a wide cut. Blood was flowing into his eye and over his nose that was almost flat against his left cheek. There was no movement and not a sound.

I said out loud, "This guy is dead."

I paused for a moment to think. The man in the Buick convertible could be on his way back with help. Why leave? Why not call the police? Then again, what was put into the trunk of the car? A skylight broken by a rock shouldn't be a reason to panic. Maybe the man was still alive. I was sure that if he was still alive he couldn't identify me; the beam from his flashlight never found my face.

Walking to the back right corner of the building's roof, I looked over the edge, wishing for a ladder, a tree, or maybe even some paratrooper training. All I had were jump boots, but it was time to be somewhere else. If I jumped and broke my neck or leg, or was found dead, President Truman had assured me that the flag on the White House would not be lowered. Well, at least I had enjoyed about two weeks of my mother's cooking and had a nice visit with my family. Slept in my old bed and Mugs had greeted me in the mornings.

I moved closer to the edge of the roof, took several deep breaths and jumped. I hit the ground on both feet and rolled

over onto my right side. After a few moments, I realized that life was still with me and I could feel no pain. I moved my head, it worked, and my arms didn't shout at me. When I attempted to get up my legs worked. Thank God for Sergeant Major Alan Murphy. The old Irishman always sent his charges out well equipped. He had included the jump boots in the bag.

Now, how to get out of a fenced area.

I walked along the side fence to the corner where the fence ran along the back of property. The corner post was larger than the line posts and had several strands of wire twisted together running on an angle to a metal stake in the ground bracing the post.

I removed my field jacket and put the camera into a pocket of my overalls. Several times I attempted to hook the field jacket onto the top of the corner post. Sweat ran down from my forehead into my eyes. It started to rain, and the slit of light from the new moon was still covered by dark clouds. Finally, the jacket hooked on the top of the corner post. I pulled myself up with the jacket using the bracing wire to support my feet. Just as I made the last pull a ripping noise of the jacket broke the silence. I swung my right leg over the top of the fence, held onto the jacket and fell over the other side; the jacket tore loose from the fence post just before I landed on my right hip on the wet ground. Out of breath, with sweat running down my face, I lay motionless on the ground.

The rain was turning to snow.

I got up, put on my jacket, and walked along the fence at the rear of the property. It was more difficult, but would provide adequate cover in case the man in the Buick or someone else drove down the road. The weeds along the fence were slippery from the snow. My feet tangled in the undergrowth

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and I fell to the ground every few feet. Reaching the end of the fence, I decided that the best option was to cross the adjacent field on an angle, keeping away from the road for as long as possible.

My path across the field would have been a better obstacle course than the Army used—unseen logs and ditches filled with water, I located all of them. Arriving at the edge of the road, wet and covered with mud, the torn field jacket provided very little warmth or protection from the snow that continued to increase and was now blowing against my wet face. I had been sweating, but now I was cold and shivering.

I paused in the ditch beside the road praying that there would be no cars. The noise of a car would give me time to fall into the ditch that had collected several inches of water. There would be no choice but the ditch. Car headlights would expose a wet, mud-covered person, and a local driver would probably stop and offer me a ride. I didn't need that.

I crossed the road and counted the snow-covered cars from the entrance and located my dad's car. I had not locked it. Looking around once more I slid my mud-covered body under the steering wheel, thinking that my dad was going to have a fit. The seat covers would help, but not enough. I reached under the seat for the keys where I always placed them. When using dad's car, I never wanted to wake him with a telephone call in the middle of the night because I had lost the keys while night fishing or on some other adventure.

I looked at my watch and drove out of the factory's parking lot. The car's windshield wipers moved the snow slowly. I reached Route 4 and made a left turn toward Dayton. I couldn't stop thinking of the man covered with blood on the floor of the building. The snow was still coming down; the wipers provided a small opening, barely enough to see the

road.

On the right side of the road there were lights, and after passing it, I realized that it was a gas station. There were no car lights in front and none from the rear. Slowly I made a u-turn in the middle of the road and returned to the gas station. The small Sinclair station had two pumps out front. I stopped the car in front of the pumps, opened the car door and got out. Snow covered the seat before I was able to close the door.

There was a light inside the small building of the station; a man was sitting near a potbelly stove attempting to stay warm. When I opened the door, the man jumped out of the chair; there was a surprised look on his face.

I said, "I want five gallons of gas and do you have a telephone?"

The man pointed to a phone hanging on the wall.

I dialed the operator and asked for the sheriff's office. After eight or more rings a sleepy voice said, "Sheriff's office."

"I'm the night watchman at S & M Precision Machine Company. Someone tried to break in and fell through a skylight."

"What's your telephone number?"

"The phone's not working. I'm calling from a gas station."

I clicked the receiver several times and said, "Can't hear you," and hung up.

The man returned from pumping my gas, said that it would be eighty cents, five gallons at sixteen cents a gallon.

I gave him a dollar. "Thanks for the use of the telephone."

The man returned to the chair and potbelly stove and started rubbing his hands together.

Forty minutes later, I pulled the Ford in behind my dad's shop. I opened the trunk of the car and removed a duffel bag with a change of clothes. On the ring that held the car key

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was a key to the small rear door of the shop. I turned on the light in the lavatory, hung a change of clothes on two nails on the wall. I pulled several rags from a bag by the door and returned to the car and removed all of the visible mud from the car seat.

I looked at my wristwatch. It was 7:15, which meant Dad would be walking in the front door at eight sharp. I had told my parents that I would be visiting friends in Springfield and might stay overnight. Not having the car wasn't a problem since dad walked to the shop most days.

I didn't have to return the car until sometime later in the day, so there was time to recheck for any mud that had been missed. In the lavatory I removed all of my clothes, shivering. The cold water was a shock as I washed the mud off my face and hands, put on GI khaki under shorts and shirt, an old flannel shirt and Army fatigue pants, clean socks and my jump boots. I would miss the destroyed field jacket. I knew the supply sergeant at Fort Jay would issue me another one, but I would have to pay for it. I rolled up all the wet and muddy clothes, put them in the duffel bag, and checked my clean-up job.

I went into the office and sat down in the chair. I opened my billfold and removed a slip of paper with the emergency phone number the president had given me. I picked up the telephone, dialed the operator, and placed a collect call to the Houston, Texas, number. I was sure that the events at S & M Precision Machine would be classified as an emergency. President Truman's concern that there was a "rat in the woodpile" was justified; in fact, there was probably a "pack of rats" running around.

After counting twenty rings, I started to wonder if it was the wrong number when a sleepy man's voice responded, "It's

too early in Texas to go coon hunting.”

The operator said, “Will you accept a collect call?”

The voice from Texas said, “Yes.”

I said, “I am from Missouri, show me.” Just as instructed.

His response was, “Tell me about it.”

I did not know the man or the voice, only that the call was answered, just as the president said it would be. I gave the details about S & M Precision Machine: empty building, no employees, details of the visit to the building, gunshot on the roof, the man falling through the skylight, his apparent condition and the report to the sheriff’s office by telephone. I told him about the man leaving in the red Buick and my plan to visit the Salvatore neighborhood and see what else I could learn.

“Be careful, and call me if you learn anything more.”

The receiver clicked. I wondered who he was. He sort of sounded like a Texan, but what would you expect when calling a Houston telephone number.

I checked around; didn’t see any mud on the desk or floor. I turned the light off and went out the back door, locked it and double-checked it. I put the duffel bag in the trunk. The clothes would have to be disposed of before returning home. I drove around the block and on to my parent’s house. When I got home, Mother was comfortably seated in a chair reading. I kissed her on her forehead.

“How about bacon and eggs?” she said. Mother placed a plate on the table with two eggs sunny side up, and four strips of bacon, two slices buttered toast and homemade strawberry preserves. She joined me with two cups of coffee and a pitcher of cream. She looked at me with that knowing look. “It looks like you didn’t get any sleep last night.”

I just smiled.

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After breakfast, I drove into Dayton and stopped at the courthouse to have a chat with Angel. I wanted to see if anyone had been making any comments. If so, Angel would tell me. With the activities at S & M Precision Machine during the night, there just might be some talk at the courthouse. Secrets were rarely kept in county or city offices.

When I walked into the Records office, everyone looked up; my appearance must not have been normal.

Angel came over, leaned on the counter and looked at me. "Looks like you need some sleep."

Ignoring her remark, I asked, "How are things at the house?"

"No problems," was her answer.



I drove to Oakwood to see if there was any activity at Salvatore's house. The sun had not emerged from behind the clouds and it was still snowing lightly. In front of several houses people were shoveling snow from their walks. Soon they would be covered with more snow; it seemed like a lot of wasted effort. I noticed the woman who had been so informative a few days before sweeping the snow from her front steps with a broom.

I stopped in front of her house and got out of the car. "There certainly has been a change in the weather."

"That is not all of the changes."

"What's that?"

"Just after five o'clock this morning our dog started bark-

ing and woke us up. My husband, Ralph, went downstairs, looked out the front window and saw lights on in the Salvatore house. I was a little slow joining my husband with all the lights out in the house. We watched the man and woman running back and forth to their Buick convertible with what appeared to be clothes over their arms, putting them in the trunk and inside the car. We watched for several minutes and then the lights went out in the house and they drove away, sliding all over the slippery street. It has always been so quiet and peaceful in our neighborhood. We never have had anything disturbing until those people moved in."

"I am sorry to have missed Mr. Salvatore. I wanted to talk with him about a building that he owns. I'll have to come back some other time."

"We won't miss them if they never came back," she said.



As soon as I was out of the neighborhood I started looking for a telephone. I needed to call the Texan. Several minutes later, I spotted a drugstore on a corner. There was a phone booth just inside the door. I closed the phone booth door, dialed the operator, and placed another collect call.

The same voice answered, "It's too early in Texas to go coon hunting."

"I am from Missouri, show me."

"Tell me about it," the man said in a slow Texan drawl.

I gave him a complete rundown on the activities at Salvatore's house during the early morning hours.

The Texan verified the license number on the red Buick convertible that I had previously given to him. I told him that it was still snowing in southern Ohio, northern Kentucky and

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that the Dayton paper had reported the snow was even heavier in northern Ohio and Michigan.

“Rob, where will you be for the next twenty-four hours?”

“At my parents’ house, the same telephone number.”

The Texan hung up the telephone.

I removed the snow from the windows of the car and drove back to my parents’ house. When I walked through the door from the garage into the mudroom, the aroma of Mother’s kitchen told me that she had been busy most of the day. Cinnamon was a guarantee of homemade apple pie and, yes, a turkey in the oven. Mother and Angel were setting the table in the dining room where we always had our evening meals, as well as Sundays at noon after church.

Mother handed me a telegram with a sad look on her face, “It arrived a few minutes ago.”

I kissed her on the forehead and took the telegram, opened it, and read it aloud. “You are ordered to report for duty by 1800 hours, 21 November. You have reservations on Eastern Airlines leaving at 1000 hours from Dayton airport to New York LaGuardia. You will be expected.” It was from General William Courtney.

My mother was obviously concerned.

I said cheerfully, “Nothing to worry about, just a change in my plans. I get to fly rather than having a long train ride. Let’s eat.”

We had a wonderful early Thanksgiving meal, turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans, and Mother’s great pumpkin pie for desert. The apple pie would be for a bedtime snack. We sat around the table, Mother, Dad, Angel and me, talking about many previous family holidays until just before midnight. Dad said that he would drive me to the airport in the morning, and in view of the heavy snow, he rec-

commended that we should leave in the morning by eight. Mother and Angel started to clear the dining room table.

“Come on, Mugs.” He followed me to my old bedroom and curled up next to the bed where he slept while I packed my bags to leave. Other nights, Mugs would sleep near the back door on his pillow. Mugs always seemed to know what was going on. I didn’t sleep much that night. I kept thinking how lucky I was to have such a loving home.



After breakfast the next morning, I finished dressing in my Army uniform and rechecked my bag. I picked up the envelope that contained my report. I placed the camera with the evidence of the empty building into my shirt pocket. Mugs followed me downstairs. I kissed Mother and Angel goodbye; there were tears in their eyes. Dad was in the car with the motor running. It was evident that he had shoveled some snow while I was upstairs.

It stopped snowing sometime during the night and the highway department trucks had scraped the snow to the sides of the roads and spread salt. The drive to Dayton airport was not nearly as slow as expected. We arrived at the airport just before nine. Dad pulled up in front of the terminal. I retrieved my bag from the backseat and with envelope in hand, walked around the car and said goodbye to my dad.

He said, “Safe journey, you are in God’s care.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

I watched him drive away until he was out of sight, then walked into the terminal to the Eastern Airlines counter. As promised, my ticket was waiting. Now I only had an hour to wait.

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When the plane landed at New York LaGuardia, the general's staff car with the four stars on the front license plate was waiting on the tarmac for me. Harry had the front passenger's door open.

As we drove off the tarmac and onto the street, I asked, "Harry, how are you able to drive onto the field?"

Without blinking an eye Harry said, "The four stars on the front of the general's car open all gates. How was your trip?"

"Swell. I had a nice visit with my parents and sister, and an early Thanksgiving dinner yesterday."

Harry drove to First Army Headquarters and let me out at the side entrance. I went directly to Army Sergeant Major Murphy's office and gave him the camera. I had not removed the film.

"Rob, I have been instructed to return the prints to you as soon as the film is developed."

I walked down the stairs, returned the MP's salute in front of the general's office and went in.

His secretary looked up. "He has been expecting you." She called the general and motioned for me to go in. I approached his desk and saluted.

The general returned my salute and motioned for me to an armchair.

"Give me a verbal report on your assignment."

I read the details from my report.

When I was finished, the general said, "As soon as the photographs are ready, Harry will take you to the airstrip. A plane is on standby to fly you to Mitchell. You will fly into Andrews and a car will be waiting to take you to the White

House. President Truman has been alerted. You are to hand the report and photographs to him and to no one else. He will be leaving for a meeting as soon as he has your report. The car will return you to Andrews, and then you will fly back here as you have before.”

The general added, “Remember your instructions—you are not to discuss this assignment or anything about it with anyone except the president and me.”

“I understand, sir.”

“Good job, Rob.”

I stood, saluted. “Thank you, sir.” I walked to the door as General Courtney’s secretary opened it.



Back at my desk there were a number of folders in my mailbox. Others had reviewed most of the mail while I was away but left several for me to review so that I would be informed. Some were transmissions from England.

Three hours after leaving the general’s office there was a knock on my door. It was Sergeant Major Murphy with the developed pictures.

“How did they come out?”

“Six of the eight were clear and made good prints.”

He gave me the photographs and the negatives for the photographs in an envelope. I examined the negatives and returned them to the envelope. Then I looked at the photographs. Indeed, six frames were clear and made good prints. The photographs clearly showed that the S & M Precision Machine building was vacant; nothing was on the floor of the building. On the back of the photographs, an ink stamp had been provided for information: date, location, description,

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photographer, and who developed and printed. As previously instructed, I initialed them, but did not provide my full name. The photo lab person had already signed them. In the event the photographs were presented as evidence in a trial and I was subpoenaed as a witness, I could identify the photographs. However, it was intended that I never be called as a witness.

“Thanks, sergeant, and especially for the contents in the duffle bag.”

“Any time, Rob.”

As soon as the sergeant left the office, I called the general's secretary and advised her that I was ready for the trip to Washington.

She said, “Harry will be at the side entrance when you arrive.”

Five minutes later I was in the right seat of the single engine Piper airplane. We landed at Mitchell Field and taxied directly to the C-46 waiting for the flight to Andrews. We landed in less than two hours.

When we arrived at the White House gate, as expected, a Secret Service agent verified my ID and told the MPs in the jeep to wait at the gate. Security seemed tighter than before. The agent got in the front passenger's seat of the staff car and told the driver to proceed to the front door of the White House. I was escorted to the door of the Oval Office; it was opened immediately from inside by another agent.

President Truman said, “Come in, Rob.”

By the time I reached the front of President Truman's desk, the president was standing. I handed him the sealed envelope with my report on S & M Precision Machine Company, along with the photographs and the negatives of the photos.

The president shook my hand. “Thank you very much.

This is a great service to the country.”

“It has been an honor, Mr. President.”

I turned and walked out of the Oval Office and followed the waiting Secret Service agent back to the staff car. The trip to Andrews was the opposite of my trip in. I smiled at the attention that I was getting. At the gate to Andrews, MPs waved us through, and we drove to the C-46 that was waiting with its propellers turning. I got in the plane and before my seatbelt was fastened, the door was closed and the plane moved to the runway. Even though the trip was routine for some people, it kept my adrenaline pumping. With the special treatment, nobody could have done it faster.

As soon as the C-46 landed at Mitchell Field, the pilot taxied to a hanger where the Piper was waiting. I walked twenty feet, got into the right seat of the small plane and was back in the air on the way to Governor’s Island.

The sun was setting when we flew past the Statue of Liberty. I really didn’t like landing on the short grass airstrip on Governor’s Island at night. The pilot approached Governor’s Island, landed and taxied to the tie-down in front of the guard shack.

Harry was waiting in the general’s staff car for me. My trip had been well coordinated.

It had all started here...on this grass airstrip in a blinding snow storm that eventful New Year’s Eve. If I had not been on guard duty that night, where would I be?

Chapter 3

NEW YEAR'S EVE

There is a view of the Statue of Liberty from Fort Jay on Governor's Island in the New York Harbor twenty-four hours a day except when fog blankets the harbor. The eerie sounds of foghorns haunt the air, and the bells of the channel marker buoys clang continuously. Winter snowstorms can move in from the Atlantic Ocean causing the Statue to disappear, and within a few hours, dump several feet of snow on Governor's Island. After the snow melts, then refreezes, the narrow road that runs around the island becomes a hazard to all. Only a rail of metal pipe and a few rocks prevent slipping into the frigid water of the harbor.

I remembered that the weather did not stop the Fort Jay

military police from patrolling the island in jeeps, with windshield wipers making no more than a feeble effort in removing the freezing snow.

It was especially cold on that New Year's Eve President Truman referred to when giving me the S & M assignment. I had just returned from Communications School at Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island. Rain, snow and rough water made the Staten Island Ferry ride to lower Manhattan anything but enjoyable. How relieved I was when I saw the Army staff car and driver from First Army Headquarters motor pool waiting for me at the ferry station. In the best of weather, carrying a barracks bag from the Staten Island Ferry to the Governor's Island Ferry was never very high on my list of travel options. Having a driver waiting in a staff car was one of several advantages of my assignment in Special Troops at First Army Headquarters.

The driver told me that he had a major to pickup at Grand Central Station and that he would drop me at the Governor's Island ferry before picking up the major. I thanked him for the ride and carried my barracks bag on to the Governor's Island ferry just as it was leaving.

I was glad that the ferry to Governor's Island was only about a ten-minute ride; the weather was deteriorating fast. The wind had increased and the snow prevented seeing the island. An MP in a jeep gave me a lift to my barracks. The impressive two-story brick building always reminded me of a college campus.

I carried my bag up the steps through the snow into the barracks. What weather to welcome in a New Year! I shook off the snow that had collected on my coat, kicked my boots against the metal radiator by the front door and proceeded to climb the steps to my room. Living conditions were good: a

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single room, bunk, a double metal wall locker and footlocker, a small desk with a lamp, even a matching chair. There was a stuffed chair that was satisfactory for reading, but I had very little time for reading. A bath was next door, just like home. However, one of the most enjoyable comforts of the quarters, other than not having a roommate, was the window that provided the view of New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty. There was a lot of boat traffic—Staten Island and Ellis Island ferries, and ocean freighters twenty-four hours a day.

Some nights when I was unable to sleep, I looked out the window at the boat traffic and tried to visualize Fort Jay during the American Revolution. George Washington declared Fort Jay the strongest fort in the American colonies. Americans defended their land against the British in the War of 1812, firing French-made 20- and 35-pound canons from Castle Williams at the British ships entering the harbor.

I unpacked my barracks bag and neatly hung as much in the metal locker as it would hold. The rest went into the footlocker. Yes, this was much better than a wooden barracks with twenty or more snoring bodies.

A knock on the door brought me back to reality. I opened the door and was surprised to see Captain Alan Dickie who had been my commanding officer in MP training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and now was the commanding officer of the Fort Jay Military Police Company.

Without the normal military salute, Dickie said, "How was communication school? And have you eaten dinner yet?"

I knew that the captain had something else on his mind. I replied, "School was better than most, and I haven't eaten."

"Get your jacket and we'll go to the PX."

I put on a field jacket over my Ike jacket, pulled on an overseas cap and followed Dickie down the stairs. We went

out in the snow and into the waiting staff car. We arrived at the PX and both ordered a hamburger and a glass of milk.

Captain Dickie gave me his winning smile, "Had a conversation with Captain Earl Smallwood, the CO at the Fort Wadsworth School, and he told me that you were on duty a few weekends ago while he and his English bride went into town to celebrate their wedding anniversary—and that you saved his backside in the crazy ward at the hospital. What happened?"

"Nothing really, just some patients overpowered the ward attendants and I talked them into releasing the attendants. The sound of a Browning 45 automatic's slide convinced them. They weren't *that* crazy!"

"That's what I heard, and that you had things cleaned up, and they were sleeping when he returned. Most of all you prevented a major problem."

It seemed to me that it was time to find out what Dickie really had on his mind. He had paid for the hamburgers and milk, which was unusual. Normally each person paid for his own meal.

I looked at Dickie's smiling face. "Well, what's on your mind?"

"We're short of manpower tonight, with men off on holiday passes and with the weather requiring extra patrols. Technically, you are not due back on duty until Monday, and you are not required to take MP duty with your current assignment. Nevertheless, I could use some help tonight. Could we say midnight until four at the airstrip? Best duty on the island. Sit in the nice warm shack. You can even take a pot of coffee from the officers' mess and keep it warm on the stove."

Governor's Island rarely had security problems; no one had ever escaped from Willie's Castle. It was a dungeon, dou-

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ble iron entrance gates, outside windows with steel bars and no glass, wood shutters in winter. Whenever I walked past the prison, it always reminded me of the European dungeon scenes in the movies. There were rumors that they hung prisoners behind its walls during the Civil War. No one had ever escaped the island by swimming due to a strong current of water between the island and the Bowery of lower Manhattan.

The ferry was the only way off the island and military police were on duty aboard the ferry as well as both boarding points. The only other possible escape route was from the airstrip and that wouldn't be possible, especially with the snow blowing horizontally at twenty miles an hour.

The prisoners were confined to Willie's Castle, except for the trustees, who had work assignments as janitors and tended the coal furnaces in the buildings around the clock. Some were German prisoners of war and they never had it so good. Those who kept the fires going had a cot near the furnaces and were allowed to sleep as long as the fires never died out. They also had the privilege of shoveling snow off the walks and roads.

I agreed to take the airstrip duty midnight until 4 a.m.

During the war, several high-wing single engine airplanes were at the Governor's Island airstrip. The planes were for air patrols looking for German submarines over the Atlantic Ocean off the Long Island shore, at the entrance to New York Harbor, and in the Hudson River. One of the air patrols did spot a German sub off Long Island. Other sightings were reported but not confirmed. The planes now flew staff to Mitchell Field and other airfields. One thing for sure, the planes would not be flying this stormy New Year's Eve.

Captain Dickie made me feel like I had volunteered. He could have given me a direct order, but with my agreement, it eliminated some paper work for him in his report.

“The sergeant of the guard will pick you up at 11:30, and oh, yeah, thanks.”

We exchanged salutes; I stepped out of the staff car into a couple feet of snow. Captain Dickie was a good officer and a nice man. I had a lot of respect for him. I kicked the snow off my boots at the front door, removed the field jacket, shook the snow off, and went up to my room. I set the alarm for ten-thirty. That would give me about three hours of sleep. I stretched out on the bunk and the next thing I heard was the clanging of the alarm.

I pulled on long underwear pants and shirt and hoped that the woolen shirt and pants, and woolen socks in combat boots would help me stay warm. I put on a long wool overcoat and fastened a web belt with a holstered Browning 45 automatic attached around my waist. As always, I slid the 45 from its holster and removed the clip; it was full, checked the chamber, replaced the clip and put the 45 back into the holster. Putting on a wool scarf, knit cap and gloves, I was ready for a cold windy ride in the jeep to the airstrip.

At 11:25 I was waiting outside the barracks. The snow was still falling. The wind continued blowing the snow into drifts against buildings, cars and any object that protruded above the ground. I did not see the jeep coming but heard the motor laboring. Its headlights became visible just as the sergeant of the guard stopped twenty feet in front of the building. The ride to the airstrip was slow; even with the jeep's four-wheel drive we slid on and off the road. The spinning tires screamed over the howling wind. Snow had accumulated over three feet and some of the drifts were six or more feet high. The sergeant of the guard knew the direction. Carefully avoiding all areas higher than the road, he drove between buildings and snow-covered humps that looked liked

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parked cars.

We arrived at the airstrip at midnight. I stepped out of the jeep into three feet of snow; it was almost impossible to walk. The guard that I was relieving came out of the shack and gave me his carbine. I opened the chamber; it was empty, and then checked to see that the clip was full.

The sergeant said, "We'll see you later."

The normal inspection would be once every hour and usually a surprise inspection sometime during a tour. I was sure that Captain Dickie would make more than one surprise inspection.

After the sergeant of the guard drove off, I went into the shack and checked the potbelly stove to be sure it was burning. It had a nice bed of coals, but I added another shovel anyway. Looking out of the glass in the door, it was impossible to see the single-engine planes—everything was white. My first thought was that no one would attempt to fly one of them on a night like this, not even one of the German prisoners who had been pilots in the Luftwaffe. The first rule when taking over a duty post was to make an inspection. I checked the stove again; it would burn more than an hour with the damper set. I buttoned up the long overcoat, returned the belt and 45 to my waist, pulled the wool knit cap down, and grabbed the carbine and flashlight. Opening the door, I stepped out into the blowing snow.

The first plane was always tied down about thirty yards from the guard shack. I trudged through three feet of snow and before covering fifteen feet sweat was pouring down my face. Even the snow was not cooling me down. I unbuttoned the top button of the overcoat and loosened the scarf from around my neck. Continuing a few feet more, I tripped over a plane's tie-down rope and fell into the snow headfirst, carbine

and all; my profanity should have melted the snow. This was not a good idea. After some more choice words that only I heard, I regained my footing and located the tie-down rope to use it to guide me to the plane. Standing next to the plane's fuselage, I felt for the plane's door latch, and after several tries, the door opened. I directed the flashlight into the plane to check it and closed the door. With my hand on the plane, I worked my way along the fuselage, under the propeller and under the wing. Then I checked the port tie-down; it was secure.

I went to the next plane and went through the same procedure. It was secure, too. It was difficult to locate the third plane. I had lost all sense of direction and but finally located it by falling over another tie-down. After opening the door, I pulled myself into the right seat and closed the door. It was time for a break; I had been out there over an hour.

On a normal night, the sergeant of the guard and the officer of the day would have already made their inspection. If they had tonight and I was not in the guard shack, they should be driving around in the jeep looking for me. If they did not find me, they would radio back to the guardhouse and order a search. In this case, they would find me out in the blizzard doing my duty. I remembered that Captain Dickie had said, "It was the best duty of the night." After all, I had as much as volunteered, forgetting the rule, "Never volunteer for anything in the Army."

I climbed out of the plane, closed the door and checked the tie-downs. The snow was not coming down as heavy, but the fourth and last plane was still not visible.

Plowing through the snow in the direction that should lead me to the last plane, I again tripped over a tie-down. This time I was not in a hurry to get up. Rolling over on my left

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side, I started to get up—but something caught my eye.

In the window of the right door there was a red glow, and then it disappeared. I waited. It reappeared and disappeared again, then in a few moments reappeared. There was no question about it...someone was in the plane smoking a cigarette, but who?

I stood up, loosened the leather sling on the carbine, and slung it over my left shoulder. I removed the 45 from its holster with my right hand, pulled the slide back, putting a cartridge into the chamber, and took the safety off with my thumb. The flashlight was in my left hand. Opening the plane's door was going to be difficult with the flashlight, but I expected the door to open easy since whoever was in the plane would have used the door and the latch would not be frozen. I moved slowly toward the plane; I did not want to fall against the plane and lose the element of surprise. Reaching the side of the plane just to the rear of the right door, I waited, heard nothing, and did not see the glow of the cigarette again.

I took one more deep breath and then opened the door, turned the flashlight on and pointed it into the plane. There were two men in the plane, one in the left pilot's seat and one in the right observer's seat. I would never know who was more surprised, the occupants or me. All I heard was a lot of German flowing from their mouths. The only thing that I understood was "No Shoot." They put their hands on the top of their heads.

At that point, I was no longer hot and sweating, but shivering in my boots. I shouted, "Don't move, don't move, keep hands on head!"

I stepped back slowly, the 45 pointed at the first man's head, and glanced in the direction of where the guard shack

should be. I couldn't see anything through the snow, but prayed that the sergeant of the guard and Captain Dickie were looking for me. I held the 45 away from the doorway of the plane, pointed it over my head away from the plane's wing, and fired two shots into the air. It sounded like a cannon; I returned the 45 in the direction of the men.

Both shouted, "No shoot! No shoot! No shoot!"

Within a few minutes, the sound of a siren penetrated the air and grew louder with every second. A jeep pulled up in front of the plane, lights flashing, and in a matter of seconds, two more jeeps arrived. Captain Dickie, the sergeant of the guard and six MPs surrounded the plane, 45s and carbines pointing at the plane. Captain Dickie's German was sufficient for the two German prisoners to understand. They came out of the plane. It was obvious that one German would need a change of pants. Both trouser legs were wet below his knees; even in the cold, it probably was not bothering him. The MPs took the prisoners back to Willie's Castle.

As Captain Dickie and I watched, two of the MPs searched the plane. They recovered a bag that contained civilian clothing, two hundred dollars in United States currency, two hundred in Canadian currency, and two US passports, birth certificates, and maps of the United States and Canada. There was going to be a lot of explaining and heads rolling before this investigation was over. Someone had certainly been helping them.

I was relieved from my post by one of the MPs, and I rode with Captain Dickie and the sergeant of the guard to Willie's Castle.

Captain Dickie, who was riding in the right front seat, looked back at me and said, "I told you that the airstrip was the best post."

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The sergeant of the guard carefully maneuvered the jeep through the snow. Captain Dickie remarked, "Reminds me of many days in Belgium and Germany." A few minutes later the jeep slid into a ditch, front wheels buried and snow covering the hood.

"Sergeant, where are you from?" Dickie shouted.

"Northern Michigan," the sergeant answered.

After shifting the gears from forward to reverse several times, the sergeant backed out of the ditch.

"Thank God for four-wheel drive," replied Captain Dickie.

The sergeant looked at Dickie. "Don't I get credit for anything?"

We arrived at Willie's Castle, the snow increasing again. I never thought that I would be glad to be inside the ancient prison walls. Around a beat-up desk that must have been as old as the prison, I gave Captain Dickie a detailed report of the activities at the airstrip.

The prisoners were interrogated most of the night and New Year's Day by First Army military intelligence officers. The prisoners, Fritz Bartels and Morris Hinkle, had been fighter pilots in the German Luftwaffe. They had been planning their escape for several months, expecting everything to be quiet on New Year's Eve. They planned to overpower the guard on duty at the airstrip after midnight, but the snowstorm had interfered with the plan. They then decided to wait until the snow stopped and the airstrip was clear before attempting to overpower the guard and fly the plane to Canada. Circled on the Canadian map was a private airport near Niagara Falls.

Intelligence officers learned from their interrogation that a cook in the headquarters company mess hall had aided the

prisoners. When the military police went to the man's barracks and to the mess hall, he was not located. Several days later, his body was recovered from the New York harbor near Ellis Island.

I realized that my training had been responsible for not panicking, but I never expected to have such an experience, certainly not on Governor's Island on New Year's Eve in a blinding snowstorm.



After sleeping most of New Year's Day, I reported for duty at the communications office and started reviewing documents that arrived from England during the holidays. On the second day before lunch Captain Dickie came into the communications office and stood with his volunteer smile on his face.

Remembering his previous visit that resulted in volunteering for duty on the airstrip I said, "No, thank you."

Without changing expressions, Captain Dickie said, "Follow me."

"Yes sir!" I stood up and followed him, two paces to his rear, down the hall to the stairs and down to the first floor. The MP honor guard stood at attention as we walked into the office.

The general's door was open, the secretary never looked up, and we walked through the door and stopped two paces in front of the general's desk.

We saluted, and the captain said, "Captain Dickie and Sergeant Royal reporting as ordered, sir."

The general stood, returned our salutes and walked around to the front of his desk. "Sergeant Royal, it is my privilege to

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advise you of your promotion to warrant officer.” The general placed the bar of a warrant officer in my left hand and shook my right hand.

The general continued, “Your dedication to duty under adverse conditions prevented the escape of two German prisoners who would have become a threat to the security of the United States and Canada.” The general stepped back and saluted; I returned his salute.

Captain Dickie said, “May I pin your bar on your collar, Mr. Royal?”

“Yes, sir.”

He pinned the warrant officer’s bar on my shirt collar. He then grasped the sergeant’s stripes on my right sleeve with his fingers and tore them off, and then did the same to the stripes on the left. The stripes had not been sewn on well; the threads broke with little effort. Capt. Dickie stepped back and saluted. I returned the salute.

Dickie then said, “Congratulations, Mister Royal.”

The general said in a stern voice, “It is of the most vital importance that nothing about the German prisoner escape attempt be told or relayed to anyone other than the investigating officers and those in this room. There is a major concern that there will be German soldiers attempting to enter the United States and Canada. Some of them may be on lists for war crimes. It is vital that the American press and citizens not become alarmed. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied.

“Dismissed,” the general said and returned to his chair.

We saluted, turned and left the office.

Walking back to the communications office Dickie said, “Now, aren’t you glad that you volunteered?”

For the next nine months I continued the daily task of

reading documents. British intelligence sent messages and newspaper articles, most of them unimportant. I was convinced that this was not the way I was going to spend the rest of my life.

Now, having completed the special assignment for President Truman concerning the S & M Precision Machine Company, I was even more convinced.

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