

Team Two – A Vignette

Jimmy “Jack” Cracker eased down into a crouch, signaling with his left hand for the three following him to do the same. Each passed the signal back to the next. Meredith Cracker, Jack’s wife, saw Jack’s signal and gave the same one to Richie Brownson, her brother. And he gave it to the Tail End Charlie of the four, Richie’s and Meredith’s brother Ralph.

With a pair of Steiner 7x50 Commander XPC binoculars held to his eyes, Jack studied the road in each direction, and the forest across the road. There could be a dozen hostiles over there, hidden, ready to spring an ambush when the group crossed the road, which they had to do, sooner or later. Sooner, preferably.

Jack gave the signal for Richie to come forward, quietly. “Yeah, Jack?”

“What do you think?” Jack handed Richie the binoculars.

Like Jack, Richie took his time and studied the situation carefully. They had a deadline to meet, but could not afford to make a mistake that got them captured or killed.

“Did you see the culvert down there just before the bend in the road?” Richie asked, handing the binoculars back to Jack so he could look where Richie indicated.

“Yeah. Missed it the first time. Man you have good eyes!”

“Lots of carrots,” Richie whispered back. “You want me to check it out and circle around?”

“Do it.”

Not quite a shadow in the heavy forest, Richie, like the others in the team, wore khaki color Dickies work clothes so they could blend into most areas, including urban, without standing out glaringly in others. Their FMCO combat vests were khaki and coyote tan/brown, maintaining the look in the field. Though Jack watched Richie move away, he suddenly couldn’t see him.

It was a long wait, but Jack had trained the others on the team himself. They would stick where they were, silently, until Jack signaled again, or action erupted. Jack saw the tiny movement on the other side of the road. It was Richie giving the all clear signal.

Despite it, Jack signaled Meredith to cross, in a hurry, alone. Then sent Ralph across. Waiting a couple more minutes, Jack crossed. The team was back to back, keeping a three hundred sixty degree watch.

“You look a mess,” Jack whispered to Richie.

Richie’s khakis were streaked with mud.

“Stinking culvert was smaller than I thought and full of stuff you don’t want to know about.”

“So that’s the smell?” Meredith asked softly, the humor in her voice obvious.

Richie didn’t answer, just giving his sister a droll look.

Ignoring the gentle back and forth, Jack pulled out the topographic map. It was zipped into a protective clear case. He held it where all three of the others could see it. “We’re here. We need to be here.” Jack pointed and pointed again. We have time, but we need to hurry a bit. But we don’t take chances. “Richie, take point and drive on unless you see something with those eagle eyes of yours. Ralph, second, Meredith, you’re three, and I’ll be Charlie. I may lag a bit, but don’t get worried unless you hear a ruckus.”

Meredith looked at Jack with some concern. “You think Clyde is following us?”

“I got to say, bro,” Ralph said, “I got nothing the last three hours.”

“Just don’t want that slime to get a chance to do his thing to my people.”

None of the other three begrudged his ‘my people’. They were a team, and related, but Jack was the leader, by force of personality and agreement between the other three. What he said went. After initial briefings and after action reports were where discussions took place, not in the field under the gun of the Blue Hats.

The four touched fists and Richie stood up and moved away. Just before Ralph lost sight of him, he followed. Then Meredith, and finally Jack. Jack’s head was like it was on a swivel. He never looked at one place long, but he looked deep.

Ralph, as number two, was keeping a sharp eye above the trail, as well as both sides forward. Meredith kept a close eye on Ralph, and looked back occasionally for Jack. She hated it when he took a long lead on point, or a long one as Tail End Charlie. But his instincts seemed remarkable and he tended to be where the action was, first.

She shivered when she thought about Clyde Longarm. She didn’t know if that was his real name or not, but that was how he was referred to. He was a US citizen, but he was working with the Blue Hats, flushing out resistors. He allegedly received a bounty on each one he turned in or killed.

Some of those he killed weren’t part of the resistance. Just on his bad side for some reason. And what he did to women and children before he killed them... And after, it was rumored. Meredith shivered again and looked again for Jack. He wasn’t in view. She wanted to slow and wait for him, but knew he’d have a chiding word for her if she did.

It was a quick march, and all four of the fighters were tired when Richie brought the group to a stop and signaled a powwow. “Just over the next ridge should be the compound.”

With topo map and a hand drawn overlay in hand, never doubting Richie, Jack pointed out the positions he wanted the three to take to assault the reported prisoner holding camp. All three looked at Jack. It was Meredith that asked the question. "And where will you be?"

Jack's confident grin appeared. "I'll be knocking on the front door. If things don't look like the camp map, then it is off and we regroup... here. If it is, we go in hot. Hack your watches at three after the hour... three, two, one, hack. Ten minutes and it's a go."

As much as she wanted to hold and give Jack a kiss, she knew it was neither the time nor the place. Seemed like there hardly was, anymore. She moved out, toward her assigned position, moving slowly and quietly.

Everything looked just like the map indicated. Meredith said a prayer and then double checked the Remington 11-87 12 gauge shotgun, set up for tactical use. It was ready, as it always was. Nine buckshot in the tube and a slug in the chamber. She had eighteen more rounds on the gun for quick reload. Eight in a side saddle, six in a butt sock, and four in the speed feed butt stock. Forty more rounds of 00 buck and eight slugs were in her FMCO vest.

Ralph and Richie were doing much the same. Ralph with his H&R/NEF single shot Handi-rifle .30-'06 and Bushnell Trophy scope already sighted in on his first target, the .30 M1 Carbine he carried for close in defense ready at hand, a thirty-round magazine in the gun, safety off. His vest had twelve more 30-round magazines and there was a pouch on the butt stock with a pair of 15-round magazines for last ditch.

Richie, like Jack, carried an M1A .308 rifle, and for this mission, had a one-hundred round C-Mag dual drum magazine on the rifle, just like Jack. The FMCO vest carried twelve 20-round magazines if they were needed.

Jack, too, said a prayer and then sighted the M1A around a tree and fired the first shot out of the one hundred round dual drum. Down went a gate guard and there was a surge of prisoners toward the gate. Ralph's .30-'06 sounded and the other gate guard dropped.

Meredith held her fire, seeking a suitable target for the slug. And there it appeared, out of the side of a white V-150, just putting on the hated blue helmet. The slug caught the man, high in the chest and he died, his body tripping two other men trying to exit the armored, but unarmed command car.

Three more rounds from Jack had the nearest Blue Hats diving for cover, or falling injured or dead. Jack ran forward, letting the M1A drop down onto the three point sling so he could hack at the wire holding the gate closed with his Cold Steel Rifleman's Tomahawk. The fence and gate were simple chain link fence, with the gate held closed not with a lock, but simply a couple of turns of mechanics wire. The gate guards were considered adequate to keep anyone from trying to get through it.

Slipping the tomahawk back into its loop on the MOLLE belt he wore with the vest, Jack threw the gate open, pointed to the forest where Meredith was, and then raised the M1A again, going to one knee to lower his silhouette, and gain a bit more accuracy from the gun.

Jack hastily changed aim when one of the Blue Hats appeared from behind the V-150 with a .30 caliber medium machinegun. He was aiming for the fleeing, unarmed, civilians. But Ralph beat him to it. The .30-'06 barked and the man fell forward, the muzzle of the machinegun going into the ground. A dead hand twitched and the machinegun fired. The blocked muzzle caused the gun to come apart, useless. Ralph frowned. He'd wanted that machine gun to give to the military that were resisting the Blue Hat take over.

As the group of prisoners ran toward Meredith, she stood up and waved them on, her eyes watching the battle going on behind them. Another of the Blue Hats decided to try and mow down the helpless prisoners from relatively close range. Nine pellets of 00-buck from the 11-87 changed his mind completely.

Richie had not been idle. He was carefully firing from one side of the small compound, making sure of what was behind each of his targets to avoid hitting an innocent. Meredith stayed where she was, the ex-prisoners milling behind her as the gunfire faded away. Jack and Richie advanced and checked the other two vehicles, both military trucks, one with benches and the other with boxes of supplies.

“Okay, Number Two! Send them back in!” Jack called from the gate.

Hesitatingly, the twenty or so people, both men and women, approached Jack at the gate. “There are supplies in the one truck and transportation to a Free City. I suggest you take what arms and ammunition the Blue Hats have and be on the lookout for patrols.

For a moment, when Richie brought a handcuffed and blindfolded live Blue Hat to the gate, he thought he might have to fight off the ex-prisoners wanting to get to the man. Jack stepped forward, the M1A across his chest. “We want him alive,” Jack said, his voice strong and powerful. The group moved on to the truck. None had been fed in twenty-four hours and they tore into the supplies with a vengeance.

Ralph had never made an appearance. He'd covered the cleanup with the Handi-rifle ready. Now he was waiting for the others at the rendezvous point. He took possession of the Blue Hat. Meredith opened up her enhanced medical pouch and cleaned a couple of scratches and small wounds the Blue Hat received in his attempts to get away. He'd hung up on the fence when trying to go over it in the back of the compound.

“You not kill me?” the man finally asked in broken English, his voice quivering.

“No. We don't act that way. Unlike your people. We take prisoners, make them talk, and then put them in a prison camp staffed by ex-prisoners of yours.” Ralph grinned and winked at Meredith when the man seemed to shrink in upon himself. Meredith just shook her head.

After a few minutes to make sure the ex-prisoners could manage the vehicles, Jack gave the signal for his Team to get moving again, this time with the prisoner directly in front of Ralph. The route Jack took was much easier and faster than the one they'd come in on. Partly for the

speed, and partly to allow Ralph to maneuver the blindfolded prisoner without slowing them down too much.

Jack took no chances, but they moved quickly toward the nearest friendly US military encampment in the area. Most of the military, all branches, had refused to fire on fellow US citizens when called upon to do so three months earlier. But a few went along with the call for the UN to send in troops to carry out the series of Presidential Executive Orders recently drafted and approved by a tiny margin in both houses of Congress.

It was a done deal before the US citizenry were aware of what was happening. Many of the US military took what hardware they could, but the Blue Hats were already staged just outside of most of the bases and took over in bloody assaults. It was only possible because of those in the military under the thumb of the President or his cadre made sure the Blue Hats had the upper hand, having issue weapons turned in for inspection timed to coincide with the attacks.

Those US troops overseas were left to their own devices, and close to half of those in the US were discharged over a several week period before the takeover. It had worked like a charm, coming so unexpectedly to most. A few were ready, both in and out of the military. But one of the first things the Blue Hats did was round up, or try to round up, a list of people based on firearms purchase paperwork.

The cry ‘from my cold, dead hand’ was heard many times, and, unfortunately, that was often the result of resistance. But the UN troops were not the best of the best. They were the worst of the worst, and that cost them dearly. So did their immediate perpetration of many atrocities that were recorded and broadcast on the internet in the few hours before it was finally taken down. Many that would have cooperated changed their minds, knowing their mothers, wives, daughters, and, sometimes brothers and sons, would be at risk of those atrocities even if they cooperated.

The pitched battles of the early days of the takeover were over. Now it was ambush, counter-ambush, assassination, booby traps, and operations like Jack and Team Two of the Brownson Family Mutual Aid Group had carried out and were almost finished with.

When they approached the friendly military camp, Jack brought the Team to a halt. He would take the prisoner in alone. He had made sure that only he dealt with the military, in case of a mole. All those in the camp that knew of Jack, and the fact that he was working with someone, had no idea who the other team members were and he meant to keep it that way.

The delivery took only a few minutes, and Jack was back with the team. “All done. Let’s see if we can make it home this time,” Jack said when he returned and Meredith, Richie, and Ralph showed themselves.

Without a word, they took up their normal march alignment and headed west once again. Jack called a halt an hour later, and the four came together. “I don’t like it. Everything looks the same, but there is something...”

“Clyde?” Meredith whispered, feeling that same chill down her spine she felt each time his name was mentioned.

“Yeah. I’ll go in alone and try to draw him out...”

“No,” Meredith said quietly, but firmly. “I’m a much better draw than you, Jack. And you know it. If he is going to break security of an ambush, it will be because of me.”

“I can’t let you...”

“Am I going to have to have Ralph and Richie hog tie you during this operation?”

Ralph and Richie gave each other an alarmed look. Hog tying Jack might be doable, but even the two of them would be hard pressed to do it.

“Okay. You made your point,” Jack replied, never even looking at Meredith’s brothers. “But you go in hot and we’re no more than pistol distance away.”

“Just what I had in mind.” Meredith took a deep breath, held it for long moments, and then released it. “Let’s get this done. My skin is crawling already.”

“Give us ten, and then go in. Ralph, you stay with her until time.”

“Right, Jack,” Ralph said. He had a lot of faith in Meredith, as did Richie. She’d proven herself several times. But she was their sister and they felt responsible.

The seconds ticked away, and then, at the designated time, Meredith began moving toward their cache of equipment and supplies. She moved fast, but not so fast as to make it appear anything was wrong.

“Hey, Sweetheart!” came a voice out of the forest just feet from her.

Meredith spun around, the shotgun coming up. She usually carried the gun cruiser carry, with the magazine loaded and the chamber empty. But for this situation, going in hot, she had a 9-pellet round of 00-buck, with a slug up next.

Her finger was squeezing the trigger when Clyde Longarm stepped into view. But she held her fire, terrified of what she saw. Clyde had Richie in a choke hold, in front of him, a pistol to Richie’s head.

“Run!” Richie managed to get out, just before he lost consciousness.

“Come on over here, Sweetheart, or I choke him to death. If I don’t blow his brains out first.”

She knew Jack and Ralph were close, but doubted either had a shot. Richie was in front of Clyde, and Clyde had his back against one large tree, and was flanked by two others. Thinking

quickly, Meredith held the gun out slightly in front of her, horizontally, never taking her eyes off Clyde.

Suddenly, her left hand swept back, caught the combat bolt handle and racked the action. The noise was deafening as the action slammed closed, having ejected the 00-buck and chambered the slug.

Clyde was fast, with good instincts and reflexes, but it never occurred to him that a woman could, or would, fight as hard as he could. His reflexes brought the pistol from Richie's head, even as his mind screamed to dodge away.

Meredith knew she only had the one chance. The rest of the tube magazine was full of more 00-bulk. She couldn't use it for fear of hitting Richie. So, despite it being only a fraction of a second, Meredith brought the shotgun up for a sighted snap shot.

Clyde's gun went off three times, but it was still pointed well away from Meredith. His head slammed back against the tree behind him and Richie slipped from his now dead hand. With Richie out of the way, Meredith triggered the 11-87 again, and then again, just to make sure Clyde would never hurt anyone ever again.

Jack and Ralph were suddenly there. Jack grabbed Meredith before she could fall to the ground, and Ralph grabbed the shotgun from her hands, just in case. Richie was slowly recovering, and upon seeing Ralph tried to shout, though it came out more of a squeak, "Clyde's here!"

"Yeah, we know, Bro. Meredith took him down."

"But she had a shotgun!" Richie looked a bit panicky.

"Don't worry. She used a slug first."

"But she always goes in hot with buck followed by one slug." Richie's color had started to come back, but he paled again, and began feeling over his torso, as if checking for wounds.

"You should have seen it, Bro! Racked that sucker, snap shot, and put him down like a rabid dog."

Richie looked over at his sister in awe. She was bent over, Jack's arm around her. "Just breathe," he crooned softly. "You'll be all right."

"I was so scared!" she said, straightening up. "Is Richie all right?"

"I'm fine, Sis. And thanks for not using the 00 first."

"Couldn't shoot my brother, now could I?"

Suddenly the four were in a group hug to beat all group hugs. But it didn't last long, Richie being Richie, and Ralph being Ralph.

"Let's get our stuff and get out of here," Ralph said.

"We need a potty break, first," Meredith said.

"How many times do I have to tell you, Sis, that men don't go 'potty'," Ralph chided her.

"Well, this Girlie Girl goes potty. Now turn around and stand guard."

The three men had been through the routine many times. Meredith did what she needed to do, and then took a turn standing guard as the men each decided to take advantage of the opportunity.

Business done, Jack coldly frisked Clyde's bloody body for anything of use, looking for paperwork that would, hopefully, give some intelligence that could help the Free Military fight the Blue Hats.

No such luck, but Jack had to whistle when he pulled a large leather pouch from one of the cargo pockets in Clyde's fatigue pants. "Jeez! He has been soaking the Blue Hats! Look at this! There's at least forty one-ounce gold Eagles here. And a bunch of fractionals."

Jack tossed the pouch toward Meredith. She grunted when she caught it one handed and almost dropped it. "You took him out. Spoils of war," Jack told her.

"I don't know if I want blood money, or not."

"Give it here, Sis. A little blood don't bother me," Richie immediately said.

"Not so fast, Brother. I didn't get caught. Give it to me," Ralph said.

"On the other hand, I can do a lot of good with this money. Sorry. I'm keeping it."

Jack smiled and gathered up the other items he'd found on Clyde. One thing you would have to say about Clyde. He liked expensive, quality items. The engraved and inlaid Para-Ordnance P-14 was matched with a similar P-10 in an ankle holster. And his fighting knife was a Damascus bladed showpiece. Jack shook his head and carried the gear over to a tree nearby.

Setting Clyde's stuff down, Jack called Ralph and Richie over. "Aw, man! Let Meredith get the rope! You weigh a ton!"

"You wimps," Meredith said, stepping forward as she slung the shotgun. She stepped into her brothers' cupped hands and they vaulted her up to stand on their shoulders. It was just a couple of seconds and she had the four looped ropes loose from where they were hidden in the branches of the tree.

She dropped nimbly from Ralph's and Richie's shoulders, the ropes still in hand. The four took turns of two each to lower the four sets of gear hidden high up in the tree. Soon all four of the Cabela's Super Magnum game carts with dual wheels were on the ground. Everything was inspected carefully for booby traps. Clyde almost surely had spotted them. That's why he was here. But it didn't appear that he had been able to tamper with them, either for lack of time, or inability to get to the ropes.

When they were convinced that everything was as it should be, all four began to rearrange some of their equipment. The small pack that came with the FMCO vest was exchanged for the larger packs they normally wore when on the move.

In Jack's and Richie's cases, they slipped into Kifaru EMR 7,500 ci packs. They were loaded well below capacity, but still carried more than Ralph's Kifaru Navagator 4,000 ci pack, and Meredith's 2,500 ci Kifaru Marauder.

Each member usually carried a specialized communication device, in addition to their FRS short range radios. The others had been left behind in the cached game carts. Richie took the time to fire up the Yaesu FT-897D man portable Amateur radio before he put it in the section of the EMR designed for a military radio. With the Yo-Yo six reel portable dipole deployed, he made contact with the retreat. Since the FT-897D had been broad-banded right after things began happening, Richie used one of the other frequencies the radio was now able to both receive and transmit on.

"Here you go, Jack," Richie said to Jack handing him the microphone of the radio.

In short, succinct sentences Jack explained why they were still not there, and gave an estimated ETA of two more weeks. The conversation finished, Richie rolled up the antenna and stowed it, put the radio in its pouch in the EMR, and was ready to go.

Jack had the Uniden/Bearcat BCD396XT in its pouch on his belt; Ralph, the Yaesu VR-500 all band/all mode handheld receiver; and Meredith the Oregon Scientific WR-108 All-hazards/S.A.M.E. weather radio.

The NOAA weather radio system was still up in places and being used to transmit information to the resistance movement. But the stations were going down one after another as the Blue Hats took control.

It was the same with the NIST WWV time standard broadcasts that Richie could pick up on the FT-897D. The station was still up and broadcasting, because it was helpful to the UN troops.

The public service bands were still pretty active, with police taking sides. It was difficult for Jack to tell if the conversations on both the open bands and the trunked systems were on the up and up or attempts to draw the unwary into traps. But the information was still useful, so batteries were kept charged with a Brunton Solar Port 4.4 solar cell unit with a Batt-jack battery charger each member of the team carried.

The VR-500 Ralph was a receiver only back up to the FT-897D transceiver so the team would have at least some information coming in from long distance stations.

Feeling much better again fully equipped, Jack headed out, followed by Meredith, and then Ralph, and finally Richie. Though the game carts would handle most terrain, Jack was careful to choose a route that made it easiest on Meredith, without compromising security.

They didn't travel far. It was well before dark when Jack called a halt for dinner. Out came the identical MSR Dragonfly multi-fuel back-packer's stoves and stainless steel tea kettles. What they chose to drink varied, the options being Folgers Singles, Swiss Miss Dark Chocolate cocoa, Earl Gray tea, and beef bouillon.

The meal was the same for each of the four. Homemade buffalo jerky, homemade Gorp, and a Millennium ration bar to round out the nutrition. Dinner didn't take long. Soon Jack had them moving again, this time to the spot they would set up camp for the night.

When they approached, Jack, Meredith, and Ralph waited for Richie to advance, circle the spot, and reconnoiter, just in case. A few minutes later, as it was getting dark, Richie waved the others in.

With practiced ease the two Mountain Hardwear Trango 3.1 3-person, 4-season tents were erected, Thermo-rest pads allowed to inflate, and Kifaru sleeping bags shaken out and put inside the tents.

Jack and Meredith would share one tent with Ralph and Richie sharing the other. Meredith would pull first watch, and then Richie, followed by Ralph, and finally Jack would take the early morning watch that the others all hated.

It was a quiet night, and then a week of the same. Over halfway back to the retreat they nearly ran into an ambush. As was his wont, Jack had stopped before entering what appeared to be a suitable spot for an ambush. An overwhelming amount of time it was safe. This time, when Jack saw a bit of movement that shouldn't be there, he quickly ordered everyone to go back down the trail a ways. They cached the game carts and heavy packs.

The four had a well practiced anti-ambush plan and began to execute it. With their FRS radios feeding earpieces for quiet, the four spread out and moved into position behind the probable ambush positions.

Jack readied the Tru-flare pen flare launcher with a BearBanger flare. He held the launcher away from him at a steep angle, and pressed the button release. A second or so later the BearBanger did its thing, 115 db of bear scaring sound.

When the bang came, just as he'd hoped, those in the ambush opened up on the killing field they'd laid out. Except no one was there. The firing pinpointed their positions. Ralph had the Handi-rifle ready and as soon as he saw the probable commanding officer he pulled the trigger.

The other three weren't idle. Moving forward, they fired into the now milling group of Blue Hats. It wasn't the best laid ambush to start with, and three of the dozen men died from wild gunfire from their compatriots.

Silence finally fell and the other three kept watch for those that had managed to get away, while Jack checked the dead. He found more weapons than dead, and decided that at least two of those that evaded the counter ambush had dropped their weapons and simply run away.

"Okay. This will re-arm some of the resistance," Jack said, stacking weapons, ammunition, and gear at the edge of the trail. "You three go get the carts. I'll stand watch here." Jack squatted down, the M1A across his knees. He listened for the slight sound of the others fade. When it was silent, he finally heard what he thought he'd seen.

One of the Blue Hats, much more professional than the rest, had held position and stayed silent. But he was scared and breathing heavily. That's what Jack was hearing. Jack stood and eased back into the forest. He heard the man get up and start running the opposite direction down the trail. Right into Jack's sights.

Even scared, he was game. The old FAL came up, but he was far too slow. Jack drilled him in the chest with a 147 grain 7.62 FMJ bullet from the M1A. The man went tumbling, dead before he hit the ground.

Jack heard his group returning, fast, and called out. "It's okay! Had one hiding out! I got him."

Again Jack gathered up the Blue Hat gear and carried it to where the others were loading the rest onto the game carts.

"How'd they know we were coming?" Richie asked just before they started up the trail again.

"Didn't. That ambush was set for someone else," Jack said. "We've got to be careful we don't wind up in a battle with some friendlies. Take a long point, Richie. Double click if you come up to someone, but don't expose yourself."

"Got it," Richie said. He started off in a brisk walk, leaving his cart behind.

Ralph took a second to lash the pull bar of Richie's cart to the rear of his own, and then the three began to follow Richie, slowly.

It wasn't long before the double click sounded in Jack's, Meredith's, and Ralph's ears. They quickly got off the path and waited attentively. Jack didn't know he shook his head upon sight of the group that was approaching. No discipline. No point person. Only a few weapons, none of them anywhere close to being in a ready position.

"Hey guys," Jack said quietly when he stepped out into the trail in front of the person in the lead.

“Easy there,” Richie said from behind the group as a couple of the men tried to get their weapons ready to use. “We’re friendlies.”

“We heard guns,” said the leader. He was a young man, looking like a stock broker out of his element. Which, truth be told, was pretty much the truth.

“There was an ambush set. For your group. Who are you and what are you doing out here?”

“We heard there was a Free Army group somewhere up ahead. The UN is in the town we come from. Killing, looting... Everything they said they would do.” The man looked affronted that ‘they’ had been right. “We thought they could protect us.”

“How about protecting yourselves?” Meredith said, her anger at the situation showing. “Jack, unload the weapons and gear for them.”

Jack decided not to argue. It wouldn’t pay, and he wouldn’t win. He’d halfway decided to do that exact thing, anyway.

Ten minutes of hasty training on the Blue Hat weapons and Jack had his people back on the trail. It was Richie, again pulling Tail End Charlie duty that spoke over the radio. “You think they’ll make it?”

“If they don’t shoot themselves,” Ralph said. “Or the Free Military does if they go rushing in.”

“We did what we could for them. They’re on their own now,” Meredith said. All three men knew she had no sympathy for anyone not willing to take care of their own affairs. Able bodied men, for sure, should be on the firing line, not looking for succor from someone with all ready more on their plate than they needed.

Silence fell and Jack kept the team moving quickly and quietly until they came to a county road that led in the direction they were going. But rather than getting on it, Jack turned them and they paralleled the road, just inside the edge of the forest. No one complained.

Despite the heroic efforts of many in the Air Force, Army Aviation, and Marine Aviation, there were still a few fixed wing and rotary wing craft flying. Those that had compromised the supplies so needed to keep aircraft going had made sure that those that were flying wouldn’t for long, without the parts needed to keep them in repair.

The UN had brought none of its own equipment, with the exception of a boatload of V-150 armored cars. The President had assured them that the military in his control would provide all the air and armor support needed.

In the same vein, by people of the same caliber, US armored units had their vehicles disabled and the supply line for replacement parts interrupted, to prevent their use on US citizens.

More than one Airman, Marine, Soldier, and Sailor died making sure others wouldn't. The UN Blue Hats had personal arms, with a few machineguns, and, reportedly, some mortars.

With the skill and propensity to use it, hunters and target shooters began to take a toll on the UN forces. Many wouldn't leave the V-150s unless inside their own compound. That soon changed when the Resistance forces repaired some of the tanks that the UN forces had tried to use and then abandoned when they broke down and couldn't be repaired.

But the former users had the parts needed in hiding and soon being caught in a V-150 was a death sentence.

Those that were keeping up with the Amateur radio reports of the action soon had a glimmer of hope. The Free Military, plus civilian resistance fighters were making good use of the millions of guns in the hands of US citizens. Often times the resistance fighters were better armed than the Blue Hats when it came to personal firearms.

That was the state of affairs when Team Two made it to the MAG retreat and compound. There were joyful greetings, tempered by the newly learned fact of the death of all four Team Five members in a skirmish with the Blue Hats. It was one of the few UN units that still had air support and some operating armor. Hand weapons were no match for the sophisticated weapons.

"Okay, Jack," Mr. Brownson said a few days later as information came in that the Blue Hats were on the run in several places, and the President was in custody of the handful of Congressmen, both Senators and Representatives, that had become a part of the Resistance.

"We can spare a couple of the Unimogs. For a while."

"Yes, sir," Jack replied.

Jack flushed then, when Mr. Brownson added, "And try to recover the MAG's equipment you left behind."

But Jack kept the peace and simply repeated the respectful, "Yes, sir." He turned and left, and went looking for Meredith, Richie, and Ralph. Meredith knew her husband very well. When she saw the small knot working in one cheek, she asked, "What did Father do? Say something about the gear?"

"Well... If you must know, yes."

"You know we had to leave everything behind, except the game carts. Trying to go through that checkpoint with the vehicles would have just got us all killed. I'll talk to Father and..."

"I prefer you don't, Meredith. It's in the past. It is just the way your father is. We'll recover what we can, but I'm not going to let it bother me. Getting rid of the Blue Hats and corrupt politicians is all I'm worried about."

Meredith sighed. "Very well. I just don't like the way he treats you sometimes."

"I'll live. You know where Richie and Ralph are?"

"On the off chance we might be going on a mission, they are getting things ready." Meredith grinned.

Jack couldn't help but smile at the sight of his wife's sparkling eyes. "Come, on, you. Let's go get things ready. The sooner we leave, the sooner the Blue Hats will be gone."

"And the less you have to deal with Father."

It didn't take long. The Blue Hats were on the run, and the US military made it easy for them. More and more critical parts were brought out of hiding and aircraft and armor units were soon herding the UN units to the nearest coast where they were allowed to board ocean transports and depart.

Team Two returned home, unfortunately with only the vehicles they'd abandoned, but none of the supplies. But Meredith had a word with her Father and the subject never came up again.

The former President was allowed to leave the country as new elections were held. There would be a new era of prosperity and peace for many years. But the need for Team Twos would always be there, sometime in the future.

End *****

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Jerry D Young