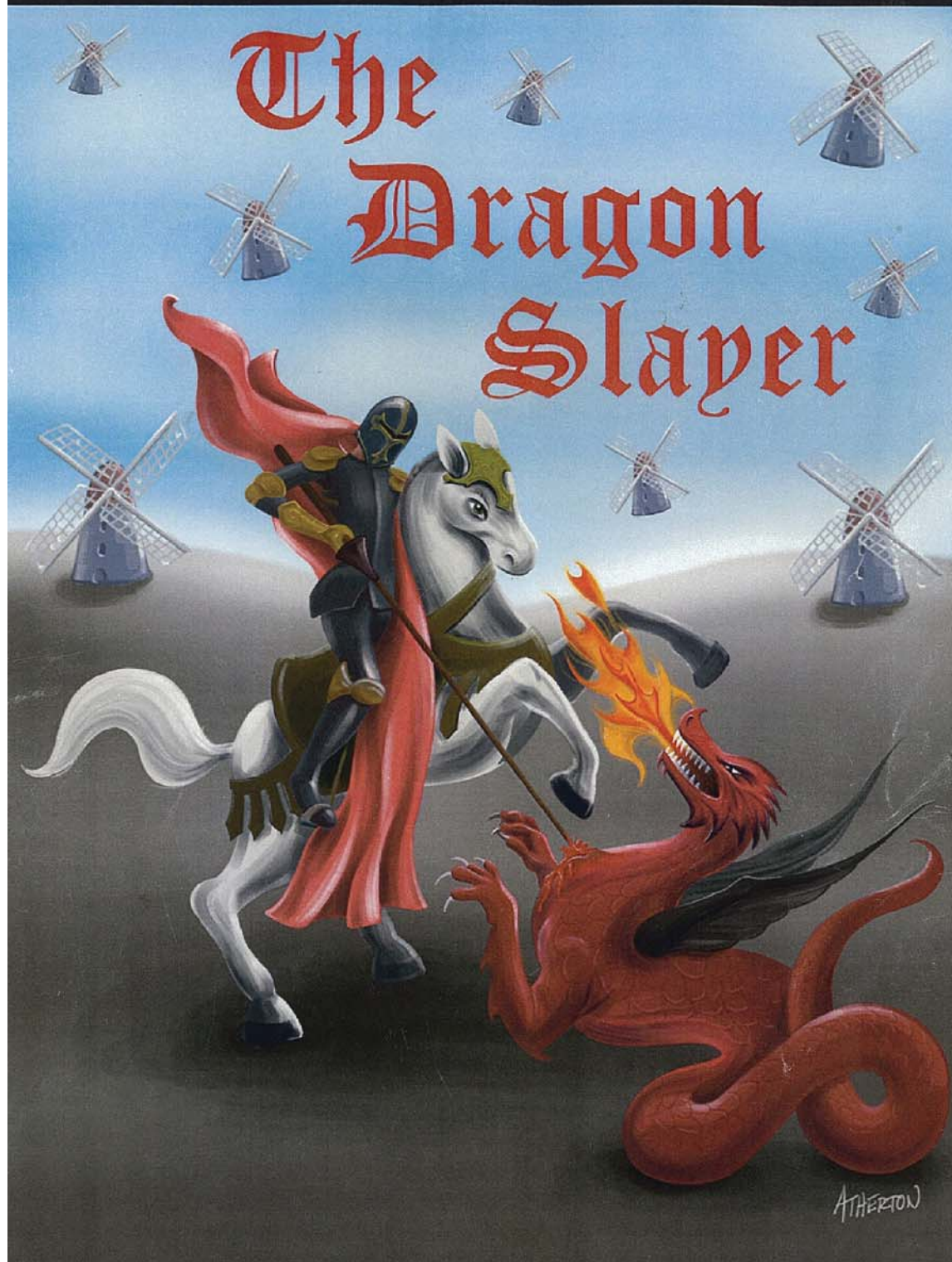


ROBERT X. LEEDS



Revised January 4, 2018

ROBERT X. LEEDS



THE
DRAGON
SLAYER

EPIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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AUTHOR OR HIS AGENT.
Contact: Robert X. Leeds, 1405 Ten Palms Ct.
Las Vegas, NV 89117-1404
Telephone: (702) 871-7263
Cell Telephone: (702) 279-7263

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FIRST EDITION

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DEDICATION

Don Quixote had his Dulcinea
and his squire Sancho Panza.
I dedicate this book to my own Dulcinea and squire
embodied in one, my wife Peggy,
Greater than wealth and landed estates,
true knights hoped by their courage and prowess in
battle, to win the betrothal of a beautiful princess.

This was my goal in life.
Peggy was the greatest prize I ever won.
She is my real life Princess Dulcinea, who has also served
as my squire for over seven decades.
With all my promises and my trials, she accepted the
admonishment of Don Quixote:
“Leave it to God.”

I also dedicate this book to all my warrior comrades.
To the knight-errants who have stood
to the tides of tyranny
throughout the world and throughout all time.
This effort salutes all who have
endured and suffered the hardships
attendant with upholding the virtues of Chivalry.
No knight has ever given his life
in the pursuit of righteousness,
but indeed, bartered it and extracted an imposing price
to the detriment of his/her enemy.
Herein I salute the new generation of men and women.
who have come forward wearing with pride
the tunic of the American Military,
our modern knight-errants.

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PREFACE

(The author recently turned eight-two years old while flying in a Blackhawk helicopter from Baghdad to a forward combat base near the Iranian border to slay another dragon.)

When I was only ten years old, I was bed ridden, paralyzed from the waist down, by heart disease.

After reading some fictional books about knight-hood, the Age of Chivalry, and a four hundred year-old story titled Don Quixote, I decided I wanted to live and become a knight. My battle against the “dragon” of heart disease was one of my earliest conquests.

Miraculously cured after 12 months, I went out into a raging snowstorm and cut out a wooden sword from a discarded orange crate. I plunged the point of the sword into the frozen ground, knelt on one knee, and placing my forehead against the sword’s hilt, swore an 11th century Knights-errant allegiance:

*"I pledge my fealty to my God, my Country,
and to my righteous Sovereign.
To slay dragons anywhere.
To rescue maidens in distress and to
favor those in need
and those oppressed everywhere."*

I have served in the Merchant Marines, Air Force, Army, Paratroops, Cavalry, and Special Forces and commanded a Parachute Brigade at twenty-one years of age. Among my Military Citations are ones for *"Service Above and Beyond the Call of Duty"* and *"Heroism and Courage Without Hesitation"*.

I have volunteered for service in World War II, Africa, China, Israel and Iraq.

This is the engaging true story of a young boy who sought to become a knight and volunteered in six wars and revolutions over a sixty-nine year period. You now hold in your hands, my second last dragon, the fascinating history of a 21st century knights-errant.





Introduction

The following narrative did not issue for the balm of vanity nor the search for the literary grail. It was undertaken solely as a response to the encouragement of others to have me set forth an aggregation of the overpowering wonders of my numerous true, strange and astonishing experiences.

Accept that my primary purpose in relating the following memoir is not to introduce you to my extraordinary life, but to the virtues of chivalry, and to herald the coming of the new Age of Chivalry authored by the men and women of the modern American Military. The veracity of this claim will be tested in the following chapters of this text and in the decades to come.

You, dear reader, feel not restrained to draw whatever conclusion you wish.

In this, the story of my life, (as of this point in the twenty-first century), you will find all the wise attributes esteemed by Miguel Cervantes, an author who began his writing over four hundred years ago. I too promise in all modesty, reader, that when you read this manuscript you will marvel at the action, be amused by the comic portions, instructed by the serious, enlightened by the arguments, angered by the vice, made wiser by the examples and enamored by its virtues. This is a pledge I make to you.

Know, first of all, that I am an ordained knight-errant, who has sworn since I was the age of ten:

**“I pledge my fealty to my God, my County
and to my righteous Sovereign. To slay dragons
anywhere; to rescue maidens in distress; and
to favor those in need and those oppressed
everywhere.”**

A weighty obligation for so young a boy? Not so!

I have begun this journal in a tented American Army encampment in northeast Iraq. My mission is the same as it has always been, to help the world prevail in a time of peril, and to help those in need and those oppressed everywhere.

By very special arrangement, and undoubtedly with the assistance of an unseen source, I was able to participate in missions which included patrolling through the most remote areas searching and arresting terrorists. Often in the pitch black of night I joined patrols walking for miles through the marshes of the Masan Province bordering Iran and the treacherous embankments of the Diyala River. Our missions were to find IED's (Improvised Explosive Devices), rocket launchers, rockets, caches of explosives and weapons,

as well as terrorists (sometimes in a most unfortunate way).

For me it was a small imposition and a great privilege that permitted me to contribute to my country's mission and the world's well being at this advanced age. This was, after all, the sixth armed conflict I had volunteered for in the past sixty eight years and I had come to the conclusion that stereotyping interprets age as a criteria for ability, and the causes for which I existed would be denied others due to unrealistic criteria.

I had, in fact, only recently celebrated my eighty-second birthday in a Blackhawk Helicopter, shuttling between Camp Stryker and a remote forward operating base known as Baquba, located on the northern border of Iraq and Iran. It was a cool and pitch black night and we flew a circuitous route to avoid any prepared predisposed greetings from adversaries on the ground who objected to our presence. It was standard operating procedure to never drive or fly the same route twice. Areas of possible hostile action were avoided with this precaution. The incorporation of computers and global positioning devices in almost every combat vehicle made this possible.

Before proceeding, it is necessary, no, essential because of its relevance, that you know something of knighthood and the main characters in Cervantes' book "*Don Quixote*". The reason for this will be revealed shortly should you be so fortunate to consent to continue.

Following the demise of the Age of Chivalry, about two hundred years earlier, Miguel De Cervantes composed a book titled *Don Quixote*. It was the story of an old man who was overwhelmed by an irrepressible urge to bring back the Age of Chivalry.

This old man, Don Quixote, was a very ordinary peasant who resided in the town of Tobaso, in Spain. His esteemed possessions consisted of an old farm horse named Rocinante, a rusted suit of armor left to him by a long dead progenitor, and a vast collection of books which recounted the wondrous exploits of famous knights who are said to have existed a few hundred years earlier.

These books were more than wondrous; they were unbelievable (especially to any person of letters who maintained a semblance of reason and sanity). Their exploits were all based on their own revelations of illusionary trials and battles with dragons and evil armies and were the prodigious products of men who sought the public acclaim of Knighthood.

Imagine, if you can, the wonder and admiration enjoyed by a gullible and uneducated populace when confronted by these harbingers of wondrous noble exploits. The public fascination with these tales resulted in their unchallenged reproduction in thousands of books of that time. Don Quixote's library alone boasted over 500 different books which must have contained thousands of these acclaims and Don Quixote had read every single book at least twice.

It is no wonder that his fascination with chivalry was unrivaled, or that he should cross the threshold of reason into the abyss of dementia and set out to protect his sovereign, slay his share of dragons, rescue maidens he thought were in distress, and help those he believed were in need or oppressed.

He was obsessed with bringing back the Age of Chivalry, and for this he needed to become a Knight. But, before he could become a Knight, he had to serve an apprenticeship as a Knights-errant. Only as a Knights-errant, who had slain dragons and performed

numerous other courageous and compassionate acts of chivalry, could he earn full Knighthood.

To summarize his ambitious pursuits, you have only to know that his first attempted conquest was a disastrous encounter with a windmill. In his mind, Don Quixote saw a dragon, not an ordinary windmill.

Despite the protestations of his squire, Sancho Panza, Don Quixote prepared his shield, leveled his lance, and urged poor Rocinante to a challenging gallop directly at the unyielding windmill. Regrettably, Quixote's lance became entangled in one of the turning blades of the windmill. He found himself thrown off his poor horse landing on the hard ground with a dislocated shoulder and a shattered lance. This did not discourage our noble knight-errant. He recovered to continue a series of encounters that may be recounted and enjoyed by acquiring your own copy of Cervante's book, *Don Quixote*.

Another character you must vicariously encounter is the virtuous princess Dulcinea de Tobaso. This woman was really a common, homely, peasant woman who enjoyed no more affluence than laboring in the fields, doing laundry, and serving at the grinding mill.

Don Quixote's demented mind morphed her image into the most beautiful, the most chaste, the most virtuous princess in the world. Since every knight-errant was expected to dedicate his life to the woman he would marry after acquiring knighthood, Don Quixote chose Dulcinea as the bridal quest of his life. As a princess, there was the assumption that the king, her father, would bestow upon him not only his daughter's hand in marriage, but vast wealth and the governorship of a domain with vassals and servants to serve him.

So strong was his conviction, that he would challenge an encounter-to-death with anyone who even intimated that his Dulcinea de Tobaso was less than the most beautiful, virtuous and chaste princess in the world! In fact this challenge did occur but I leave the reader to find the conclusion.

A third character of that book, and the one to whom I am most literally indebted, is a poor married farmer of Don Quixote's village, who agreed to accompany him as his squire (a servant who would ultimately achieve wealth and position when the Knights-errant he served achieved Knighthood.)

His name was Sancho Panza. His vital contribution to this work is a multitude of proverbs, interpretations, and conclusions he so generously and wisely provided.

I wish to state beforehand that this text borrows from the proverbs supporting this four hundred year old story of Cervantes. It is a story I have treasured since I first read it as a youth. I am not unaware that it is fiction. But in difference to many far more erudite than me, I find the text, rather than amusing, a cryptic metaphor. In my opinion it is a collection of proverbs and wise sayings that are as relevant today as at the time they were written. To witness this interpretation, I ask the reader to only read on to where many of Cervantes' sayings and proverbs take new life.

Having read the latest translation by Edith Grossman, I am not certain what infringements I may have made on her contribution to the original story. In all honesty, I have not the wit to have paraphrased all that will be revealed to you. Therefore, I would want to express my appreciation for Ms. Grossman's effort and certainly encourage the reader to acquire a copy of her translation which should be available at most

bookstores or at least from the publisher, HarperCollins books.

The story of Don Quixote is a treasure worthy of possession and I commend it to you for your entertainment as well as your edification. At the same time I would enjoin the reader not to depart from this present text in pursuit of something with more purpose. In all modesty you are unlikely to succeed.

If there is a confusion of time or place in my telling, it is not deliberate. Time is corrosive and devours what was once the most precious of memories as well as what was once an unforgettable consideration. Here I would invoke a word of wisdom. If your mind thirsts for amazing action, amusement by numerous humorous portions, instruction by the serious, anger by the vice, wisdom by examples and fascination with life's virtues, then drink from the well that is set before you. After all, what does a thirsty man benefit by declining to drink from a refreshing well that would slake his thirst?

I admit to being an addict of virtue and honor. I hold in high esteem all the attributes of Knighthood and the shadowed Age of Chivalry. I confess that is easier to believe when you have ridden out in the name of your own "Dulcinea" and returned victorious. It is easier to believe when you have ridden forth and slain a seven headed dragon and with victory, embraced your own real life princess within your arms. This would be my own good fortune. This is only one of the treasures that is woven into this literary garment.

In my lifetime I have ventured to the four corners of the earth searching for unknown mysteries and to champion the virtues of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are treasures my country has provided me and I would take and share them with all mankind.

Where there was strident opposition, I did not hesitate to don my invisible suit of armor and do battle.

In truth I did not always fare well, but also in truth, I came away with my honor intact. In my lifetime I may not have done all that I should have done, but I did do all that I could do.

Challenge is a suspicion of credibility. Perhaps it will be the element of the time or a date, or the timely absence of a name or title. Please accept that my intent was honorable.

If, as proclaimed, this tale is as worthy as it appears to be, do not hesitate to accept the intent and read on. If I should have a lapse of memory that permits me to mistake the exactness of the moment, let me assure you that it is near enough to the truth and the nearer you are to the truth, the nearer you are to a worthy story.

I write with the hope that my style is not so fatiguing and the content so incredible that you, the reader, prejudge the authenticity of its content. I have been encouraged by some to include and even embellish sufficient amorous encounters to engage the minds of those who have less than a salubrious interest. In all honesty, I have not dwelt nor even scarcely mentioned such accounts. Above all else, this is a love story. Not one of a lascivious nature but of a love not fashioned here on earth, but scripted in heaven, such that it would cause the angels to smile and weep with joy and God to rejoice.

One might erroneously assume that, having traversed this world and having been exposed to ladies of every persuasion, I might have wavered in my pursuit of virtue. I assure you without any doubt that of my numerous encounters, none could boast that I ever urgently or unfairly pursued any course that put a

pretty young maiden at a disadvantage. However you can also correctly assume that this was not the case with some of the maidens who persuasively sought out my attention and schemed to take advantage of my youth.

Perhaps it was a reflection of the lack of affection I experienced growing up, but I prefer to attribute it to the natural instinct that afflicts the finest of Knights. Nonetheless, this will be revealed to you in subsequent dialogue and with the greatest degree of decorum. I will not fail to include some, but not all, of these associations. However, accept now that the code of chivalry would never countenance revealing all that precludes an intimate relationship. Decency, virtue, and honor are greater treasures when they are unseen except by God.

Of the most consideration, reader, note that from the time I accepted the responsibility of Knight-errantry, if it took a lifetime of travail, I accepted that I would seek out only the single, most beautiful, virtuous, and chaste princess in the world. For her I would suffer any abiding harms of maturation or adolescent discomforts. This I pledged and this defines my life with my wife Peggy.

I have not undertaken this effort without a great deal of self scrutiny and have articulated this history supported by faded notes and admittedly an old man's withered memory. Still, I have not willingly pursued embellishments which might cast a shadow of doubt on its authenticity or issue a cause for concern.

In setting your life to paper you are confronted by another dragon, the blurred and shifting frontiers of what you believe happened and what happened in fact.

What part of your memory has been infected? What part of all your memories is fiction, imagination,

or perception, and what part is actual history? You cannot answer for what you cannot truly remember.

What history I dismiss is without malice but due to the intrusions of time, injury, or conscience. For time is a monster that devours both good and evil, the sweet and the bitter.

What may pique the reader's reason is not the fallibility of my narrative but in truth, the unseen hand of fate. Find fault with the malignity of age that consumes or clouds the past. If I remember only certain actions or they are reduced to my favor, it is without intention of my person, but the desire of the heavens. So let it be. If your mind thirsts for the marvel of action, amusement, humor, wisdom, enlightenment, anger, vice and virtue, indulge the printed pages set before you. What will it avail you by not drinking from the well in your hands?

An advanced age brings with it pertinacious moments of frustration, sometimes referred to as short term memory loss. I submit I have not been spared that affliction. War is not always kind and part of my memory was stolen in a crescendo of fire and wind while serving my God, my Country and my righteous Sovereign in Iraq. Consider its likeness to searching for the eye glasses you are wearing on your forehead. It is neither desired nor deliberate.

Not every story ends with the author's death. I have been told that in some cases this is even a greater tragedy. If and when you have completed this undertaking, I hope you will not find this has been one of those occasions.

Being an author is like being a doctor, except your manuscript is your patient. (The beneficence of both is that you can murder your patient and still get paid for it.)

With domain of reputation at peril, is it not the righteous biographer's obligation to be exact, truthful,

and absolutely free of passions? For neither interest, fear, rancor, nor affection should make a biographer deviate from the path of truth.

Recorded history is the rival of time. It is the authentic repository of the deeds of all that has ever been, unaffected by those whose artful interpretations would deliberately prejudice the reader to his own benefit. Read this chronicle as it is and do not presume to question its authenticity. My mind encourages no satisfaction in a display of proofs, for what would we profit and what satisfaction would we gain by your acknowledgment of such obvious truths? Within these pages our reward lies in readily confessing, affirming, ratifying, endorsing, and defending the transcript you now hold in your hands.

Accept that I do not attempt to persuade anyone that I possess some innate quality that permitted me to escape the reality of ignorance or claim the advantage of a superior grace that offered me shelter in times of great peril.

Friends and critics all have their opinions. Many attribute my continued presence and favors to a particular religious precept, while others in modesty, just say it is heavenly intervention. Still others claim it is providence, the luck of the Irish, or that I have a feline's nine lives. I do not affirm or deny any of these possibilities. I am not attempting to be cunning or humble when I presume one or all of the above possibilities. At my advanced age, I simply do not wish to accidentally prejudice my next birthday by erroneously showing favor to a mendacious source for my existence.

Of all the manifestations of literature, plays, and screen; if an honest effort, the autobiography is the only true mirror that reflects a vivid image of factual history.

When life ceases or a great personal event captures the imagination of the public, the imagination of the literary confessor too often distorts history to his or her own benefit. It is only the honest merchants of history that bare their souls. With time, an autobiographer's true life will be exposed for all to apprise. Although some claim that writers, noble statesmen, politicians and evil tyrants seem able to survive.

Actually, this manuscript is modest in that I've chosen to reveal only the significant substance of my life, leaving many digressions to the reader's imagination and appetite for trivia. If it appears lengthy, it is only as I have been accused. My tales are like grains of sand in the desert.

My tribulations were nurtured by an excessive imagination and a youthful disdain for reality. But, certainly so was my good fortune and honored deeds.

My mind encourages no satisfaction in a display of proofs, for what would I profit and what satisfaction would I gain by your acknowledgment of such obvious truths? Within these pages our reward lies in readily confessing, affirming, ratifying, and endorsing what I have set before you.

I have written without fear of reprimand for the injudicious damage to anyone else's reputation or honor by this effort, for those who have earned such measure of censure surely deserve it. My pen is the very tongue of my soul and it speaks out with a voice that reaches out to both Heaven and Hell. Let the person who I have ever unjustly wronged come forward and issue a just complaint and I will allow them to nail it to my forehead!

After more than eight decades, in this, the concluding dimension of my life, accepting that death shall be the inevitable dragon to deny my conquest with

finality, I have chosen to set forth this tale as my second last Dragon. One that, with the grace of God, I shall vanquish. For this literary confrontation I remove all my armor, use paper as my mount, and wield my pen as my sword. It is my confession, and in all modesty, a praise to the virtues of the noble knight-errant and the dawning of the new age of chivalry I solicit.

I would not infer that this journal is without rancor or passion, for these are human traits and I am nothing more than human. If I would forgive a reader for anything, it would be for an action against those who trespass against their God, their country, their righteous Sovereign and their fellow human beings.

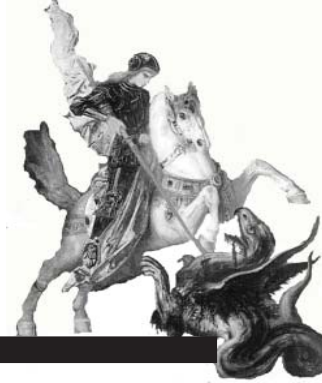
In closing, I pledge there is no fraud or deceit stirred within the broth of my history, for I would be the first to acknowledge that like a new dawn, a literary subterfuge cannot long be concealed.

If anything, I may be suspect of one fault that is widely attributed to authors. It is that authors, like fishermen, often have more hooks than they do fish.

This said, I encourage you to join me and let us go fishing.



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CHAPTER I

The Early Years

Sometime before the beginning of the 20th century, a family in Dublin, Ireland, bundled up their three young children, three brothers ages five, six and seven, and shipped them to a relative living somewhere in America. This was not a good time in Ireland where, under English rule, the Irish Catholics of Southern Ireland were deliberately being starved to death by the thousands. It was a period of enduring trials for those not favored by the Church of England.

Under the circumstances, Ireland was an inhospitable land. Its history was not one of progress with successive submissions to its more sophisticated conquerors. For the most part, its citizens remained passive, as if content to watch invaders come and go, but taking little notice of what behaviors might have improved their own lives.

Almost one eighth of the land is unfit for farming, consisting of miles of rumpled masses and towering slopes whose surfaces are whipped by the bitter winter gales. Much of the remaining land consists of huge areas known as drumlins which serve better to abuse the traveler than any agricultural pursuit. To make matters worse, these lands are interspersed by thousands of acres of peat bogs that, outside of providing a cheap fuel, were totally useless. When the English came to Ireland they realized that a transition into a community of villages, towns and cities could never be achieved without imposing some semblance of order modeled after their "English Civility".

Unfortunately, this also meant the establishment of property rights and to this end they began deeding tracts of land with the most valuable land going to the upper class English who rented it out to Irish farmers. Although some Irish citizens also became landlords, they were in no way reluctant to take advantage of their renters than were the English.

Since most of the land was unsuitable for growing grain, the Irish found the potato a very accommodating vegetable. It adapted well to the rocky soil and hardy weather. It was nourishing and marketable and did not require additional watering or fertilizer. In a short time the potato became the staple diet of the small farmers. This dependency on a single produce would ultimately spell disaster for the entire southern half of the country.

In the mid 1800's blight caused potato crops to spoil in the ground. No area of Ireland was spared and within a six year period more than one million people in Ireland starved to death. With few exceptions, the English and Irish alike did little to assist the starving masses. To the contrary, when the tenants could not

afford their rent payments, entire villages were burned to the ground to ensure the tenants would leave the area.

In many areas, the townspeople were warned that if they helped their neighbors, they too would have their dwellings burned to the ground. About 1.5 million people emigrated from Ireland to Great Britain, Australia or North America to escape the harsh conditions Ireland offered.

In America, New York was only one of several seaports that processed new immigrants.

The immigration port was regulated by the State of New York. Unprepared for the influx of refugees at that time, the system became bogged down and ridden with graft and corruption. From 1845 to 1890 approximately eight million immigrants were processed through that facility. Finally, conditions got so bad that the Federal Government intervened and built the structure we now know as Ellis Island. Unfortunately, on the evening of June 14, 1897, the immigration station burnt to the ground and all the immigration records going back to 1855 were destroyed. Although I tried, I would never learn at what port my father and his brothers were processed.

Some time during that period, a despairing Irish family sold everything they owned to raise the forty five dollars necessary to send their three young children to relatives in America.

The family packaged up their three young boys and provided each of them a bag of potatoes, some bread and water. They paid a ship's captain the equivalent of forty-five dollars and kissed their children goodbye, never to see them again. My father, aged three, was the youngest. His brothers, aged five and six, were his guardians.

Upon arriving at a port in America with a large contingent of Irish immigrants, my father and his two brothers stepped ashore (or more aptly were swept ashore) in a tide of human flesh so great and disorganized that my father was forced to let go of his brother's hand never to clasp it again. Alone and frightened, he moved in the direction he was shoved. When it came time to register his arrival, he could offer no credentials other than his birthplace, Dublin, Ireland.

As was appropriate for that time, a registrar wrote down the name of a town in England on a piece of paper and appended the tag to my father's worn coat. His name was now Harry Leeds, more an English identity than an Irish one. These names proved adequate for they lasted him for another seventy-five years.

Shuffled this way and that, he ultimately ended up indentured to a family in Toledo, Ohio, named Levy. Somehow they changed his last name to their name, Levy, and enrolled him in a public school when he attained the proper age. I do not recall my father ever dwelling on the years he spent with them. I do know that they owned a tavern and my father shared a back room together with a large black furry dog whose name he could not remember.

He probably completed at least elementary school, since he was very good in math. To earn his keep, he was expected to assist in cleaning the premises after school and to run errands. These errands consisted of delivering buckets of beer to area shop keepers and neighbors unable to approach the tavern at the time. My father never mentioned any objection to the conduct of his indenture nor did he (except with rare occasion) reveal any of his life while growing up. But, he did acknowledge his appreciation for the penny or two some of the tavern's patrons proffered upon him for his service.

Another business was conducted in rooms located up a set of stairs on a second floor. These rooms were occupied by ladies who entertained their numerous guests from eight o'clock in the morning to whatever time the tavern closed. My father was never permitted to approach the stairwell let alone proceed to the second floor. But, without considering their virtue, he thought the ladies to be very nice because on occasion, they too would press one or two pennies into the palm of his hand.

My father did not fit the typical stereotype of an Irishman. He neither consumed alcoholic beverages nor did he tell jokes; two notorious attributes of an Irishman. It was not that he was devoid of humor, because I can recall three occasions when he did utter something very funny. One of these I will divulge now. The other two will be revealed at the appropriate times.

His first display of humor was at a dinner with several guests when he mentioned the upstairs business of the tavern. He related how each morning the women would line up on the stairs and exchange their one and two dollar bills with the tavern owner for bills of a larger denomination. On one occasion a woman was counting out her bills when the tavern owner held one of her two dollar bills to the light and declared it counterfeit. The young lady looked off in space and declared, "Sweet mother of God. I've been raped!"

Judging by an old photograph of my mother and father, I would judge that they were married sometime in their early twenties. How, why or when they were married, or any of the details of their early marriage, were not made known to me. You will understand why if you avail yourself of the following history.

My mother's maiden name was Beatrice Brunette. I believe she was born in Ohio about the same time as my father's birth in Ireland. She had never attended college, but apparently was well brought up and excelled in whatever education she was afforded. To my knowledge, the two of them shared no common interest except to keep alive and to put food on the table. I do not mean to imply that they didn't love each other, they did. But there was never a public display of affection. Not with each other and not with any of their children except my brother Henry who was two years older than me. For some reason my mother's actions seemed to always favor him.

Shortly after their marriage they had moved to Detroit, Michigan, and over a period of fifteen years sired five children; two girls and three boys. The first born was Esther who was born in about 1912 and their second daughter, Dorothea, was born in about 1915. My brother Lyle was born in 1918 and Henry followed five years later in 1923.

I was born in 1927, four years after Henry. I was their last child and the one that my mother frequently cursed my father for having caused. I think we all might have been given middle initials or names but I cannot find them in my notes or in my memory, and since none aspired to greatness, we would aspire to nothing by further inquiry.

In all of their lifetime I don't think my parents did anything except work and worry. I cannot remember any time that they went to a movie or had dinner in a restaurant. I have always excused their attitude toward me by remembering the efforts and sacrifices most families had to make during the depression.

My birth in February of 1927 was at the tail end of the “roaring twenties.” It was not a particularly auspicious year. Milk was selling for fourteen cents a quart. Bread, a major ingredient in most American diets, was only nine cents for a twenty four ounce loaf. A new car could be purchased for only four hundred and seventy five dollars and it used gasoline that sold for ten cents a gallon. But, this was all about to change.

Two years later, on “black Thursday,” October 24, 1929, the bottom fell out of the stock market. My parents were not among the speculators or investors who had borrowed beyond their means to speculate in the stock market, but that did not spare them from sharing in the tragic results. Within two years one out of every four Americans was unemployed. Fifteen million people were jobless. My father, having his own small painting business, only postponed my family’s descent into insolvency.

At some time in his life my father took up the occupation of a painter. Not one who daubed on portraits and landscapes, but one who painted homes and commercial buildings. A few years into the depression, a general contractor who owed my father for several painting jobs he had done, offered my father a large two story eight room frame home in suburban Northwest Detroit in exchange for cancelling his debt.

It was a bargain considering we were a family of seven. As a last resort when the depression hit, my father secured a mortgage in the amount of five hundred dollars which he thought would tide us over until the economy improved. He, along with millions of others, was wrong.

That big, old, two story wooden house was always more than just a home. It was an unassailable fortress that buttressed our lives from the outside

incursions of improvidence. It still remains the one place I think of when I think of home. The encroachment of time would show a man's castle was no more than sand in the onslaught of a tidal wave of financial depression. Within a few years we would become one of the millions to succumb to the depression.

If we were to eat, we would eat at our own table at my mother's choice of time. Although our diet never included any "expensive" foods, the least inexpensive cuts of meat had always been an occasional staple in our diet. Now, all that changed. Like many of our neighbors, our backyard was sectioned off and vegetables were grown in one section while chickens were raised in the other. Beef or pork were no longer options. Unlike today, no political branch reached out to threaten us for violating some clause in our zoning,

Without enough money, bread, potatoes and watery soup became our road kill on the highway of survival. You never wanted to miss a Sunday dinner because that was always special. Always special and always the same. Each Sunday my father would kill one of our chickens and we would have fresh chicken soup with boiled chicken. A healthy serving of potatoes and bread was always encouraged.

The following day we would have chicken fricassee. The day after that we would have chicken dumplings or some individual chicken pot pies. By some strange miracle, the soup lasted an entire week. I don't want to accuse my mother of adding water, but there always seemed to be enough soup until the next Saturday even if it did seem to lose some of its flavor.

Although a twenty-four ounce loaf of bread cost only nine cents, my mother found that she could bake an equivalent loaf of bread for almost half the cost. If there is an aroma I shall never forget, it was the smell of

her freshly baked bread. I was not the only one enticed by the aroma. Soon some neighbors asked if they could buy her bread and their requests spawned orders from people throughout the entire area.

Unable to bake and deliver bread at the same time, it became my task to deliver her bread and collect the ten cents after school each day. I am unsure of the economics of her business, but it appeared that she made enough profit to continue her baking business until we had to move again.

Life was hard for my mother, and her constant complaining only made it harder on everyone else. She was an habitual complainer in good times and bad. Although she probably loved our home, she used almost any occasion to vocally censure my father for acquiring an outrageous mortgage of five hundred dollars and buying such a large home that she had to clean.

The house sufficed to enforce the old proverb that the less something cost, the less it is valued. Actually, she only had to clean the house until I had matured to the point where I could sweep, vacuum, dust and carry out the spent ashes from the coal fired furnace. From that time until I left home, I did the house chores. For my mother's own reasons, these obligations never fell to my brother Henry.

There was one particular day to which I always looked forward. Until we lost our home, every Sunday morning, rain or shine, my father would rise at six in the morning and walk over one mile to a Jewish bakery on Linwood Avenue. There he would buy a baker's dozen of Kaiser rolls with poppy seeds sprinkled over the tops.

The rolls were a generous size and cost all of two cents each. Arriving home he would turn on the gas flame beneath the old percolator and warm up

any leftover coffee to savor with his roll. A fresh pot of coffee was only made when the preceding batch was completely gone. Waste not. Want not.

He would always set a plate and empty cup for me next to his place. When I entered the kitchen I could always count on there being a Kaiser roll on my dish and a full cup of black coffee. Usually he and I and our black Belgium police dog were the only ones up that early and each of us occupied the same special place every Sunday morning. Our dog Blackie would always situate himself between my father and me as a ready recipient of our offerings.

Just like my father, I would butter my roll and then tear off a piece to dunk into my coffee and eat it.

If my mother wasn't present, my father would always tear off little pieces and throw it to our dog. Although I might have been starving, my appetite was satisfied when I took my turn to throw the dog bits of my roll. If observed, my mother would scold us severely, but we noticed her doing the same thing on occasions when she thought we weren't observing her. Neither my father nor I ever mentioned it.

This one time each week was one of my cherished times to be close to my father. There was never any overt sign or conversation to endorse it, but inside I felt it and it felt so good.

Another one of my most vivid, albeit less cherished, childhood memories were the times my mother would take me with her when she went shopping. We would inevitably run into someone she knew and they would always look at me and ask my mother, "Is this your littlest one?" My mother would always reply in a dejected tone, "Yes, I wanted to kill my husband when I found out I was pregnant again."

I needed these constant incriminations as a lifelong burden. Strangely, those words didn't hurt me as much then as they did when I recalled them years later and even now. A child can recover from the wound of a steel blade but a wound made by a thoughtless word is much more serious and may never heal. I don't think parents realize how deep a child's heart is wounded by a thoughtless and callous incrimination.

Another childhood memory was my fascination with building blueprints my father used to bring home. He had an old used wooden roll top desk in the basement over which a single light bulb hung from a cord and illuminated his desk as he poured over the blueprints. They were like hieroglyphics to me, but the fact that my father could apply a ruler, mark numbers on a pad of lined paper and achieve some worthwhile result left me spellbound.

After being scolded several times, I was always careful not to stand too close. But most times he would work as though he wasn't even aware of my presence.

In those days, and even today, a painter or other tradesman sought to be invited to submit a bid to a general contractor, containing what his charges would be to perform his specialized task. When all of the trades have submitted their bids, an honest general contractor will select the lowest reputable bidders to perform the work of his trade if his own bid was accepted.

In fact there are many occasions when a general contractor would play one sub-contractor against another in order to get one to lower their bid. Many times a sub-contractor walked away with little or no profit after paying the supplies and his employee's wages.

At one point, this subterfuge became so common that most general contractors were required to open all their sub-contractor's bids in a public forum. Unfortunately this improvement was not available during my father's tenure and more than one job was taken away and peddled to a competitor.

Late one evening I stood in the basement watching my father reading his mail. On this occasion it wasn't blueprints that he was studying, but various papers and notices. Among them was a demand notice from the mortgage company. In a matter of days we were to move out of the only house I had ever known. The cycle had been completed and the bank now owned our home.

On this occasion my father acknowledged my presence. He turned to me and just stared into my eyes. After studying me for a few minutes, he finally spoke to me.

"Just think," he said quietly. "Someday all this will all be yours." (This was the second humorous remark of his that I promised to relate to you.)

I was too young to appreciate the sardonic humor. Instead, I was euphoric. Someday I would sit in the basement of this great old house at his roll top desk and have pencils and paper and blueprints to study. Life was about to teach me that the dreams of youth have as much substance as the promises of the wind.

Shortly thereafter, I would realize the tragic circumstances of what was occurring. I watched as my parents loaded our modest possessions into the rear of our old Chevrolet truck and moved them to a rental home a few miles away.

In those days a landlord would offer a month's free rent and a partially filled coal bin if you would rent his home. The offer was made in the hopes that

you would find a way to continue living there and pay rent. This arrangement worked for a while, but when work became scarce, as it did in the construction trade, it became time to move again, and again, I don't recall how many times we moved, but I cannot forget one occasion .

On a bitter cold winter day I returned home from the McCullough Elementary School and found my home entirely deserted. No warning. No note or forwarding address. Nothing. I assure you such an occasion encourages a feeling in the young mind that defies description. However, having read this far, I will undertake to do so as an expression of my gratitude for your continued interest.

I was still in elementary school, so I must have been between six and nine years old, and at that moment I suddenly felt all alone in a cold and uncaring world. I stood on the bare raised concrete porch pressing my back against the front door to try and get even a small measure of heat and shelter from the bitter cold wind. Regrettably, youth, with all its wonderful advantages, does not readily offer solutions to many of the dilemmas of the young.

It was a stroke of good fortune that a few hours later the next door neighbors returned home from shopping and saw me standing alone on the porch. The lady called over to me asking if something was wrong. When I explained the problem, she told me that my mother had mentioned to her that they were moving to a home on Grand Street near Dexter Avenue, a distance of about three miles. Unfortunately, she did not have the address.

With my hands buried in my pockets and my head braced against the bitter cold wind, I walked the distance only to find myself looking at a hundred

options from which to choose. For a reason I still cannot explain, I presumed that a house with a “For Sale” sign in the ground must be the correct address. I entered the house through a side door that led up several stairs to a kitchen filled with the aroma of freshly cooked food and to a strange elderly lady who was more surprised than I was.

In an alarmed voice she demanded to know who I was and what I wanted. Without wanting to delay my departure, I related my dilemma in as brief a manner as breath permitted. Once reassured, the lady suggested I try a particular home located just a few houses away where a new family had just moved in. I can understand her concern because in those days there were thousands of homeless men wandering the streets and it was not uncommon for one to just enter a home and ask for money or food.

In many cases it was not a request, but a demand, and misfortune often visited the homeowner who refused.

I made a hasty retreat to the home I was referred to and there I found my mother who was not at all surprised to see me. I never mentioned the incident nor did my parents.

I do not attribute the absence of notice to any malice on their part, but rather to the circumstances and exigencies of the time. It is said that the priorities of a drowning man’s mind are few. Indeed, my family was barely treading water, but that was the situation for millions of Americans.

Unlike families that found some measure of comfort and hope by attending church, religion had never been a welcome guest in our home. The neighborhoods I was raised in were a potpourri of religions. Sundays, being a very quiet day, I would frequently accept an

invitation from one of my friends to attend a church or synagogue with him and his family. It was just an innocuous way of passing time. Usually, his family consisted of his mother and whatever other brothers and sisters he had. More often than not, the father of the clan failed to include himself in this activity.

I think I attended every kind of religious service available and I never got over the feeling that when the priest or rabbi started talking in Latin or Hebrew, he was doing so because he was talking about me and he didn't want me to know what he said. There is no blindness like a child's ignorance.

The one and only benefit I would accrue from these visits was that my friends always knew where the sacramental wines were kept. At least once a week, but never on Sunday, we would sneak into the church and have a couple of small glasses of wine. In all that time, I never associated religion with being an ineluctable component of life. Still, it held some latent fascination for me.

One day I was walking home from school and my attention was drawn to a new large billboard and a huge tent that had been erected in the vacant lot at Dexter and Davison. The entire billboard displayed only six huge words. *"JESUS CHRIST WILL BE HERE SUNDAY."* I was really impressed and immediately committed.

Sunday morning I walked into the tent looking forward to speaking with Jesus. Two hours later the event terminated and they passed the collection plates without the appearance of Jesus Christ. I felt a little betrayed. Search the surroundings as I might, encouraged by my agnostic adolescence, I could not find anyone who even resembled Jesus.

I thought of going up to the evangelist and inquiring why Jesus didn't show up. However, in the

end I figured it is sometimes better not to walk on unknown waters.

My oldest sister, Esther, did eventually convert to Catholicism which my mother dismissed by calling her crazy. The rest of us, except for my mother and father, eventually became Unitarians, a non-religious religion that offered a social address for agnostics.

Because of the financial pressures of the time, everyone in the family was encouraged to find some source of income and this would be given to my mother so she could pay our bills and provide us with the bare necessities of life.

With much reluctance, my sister, Esther gave up her desire to attend the local college and found a job working for the Waltham Accounting Company. Her entire wages were forfeited for the subsistence of the family. Dorothea was the true scholar of the family and won a full scholarship to the University of Michigan. She became the first female to acquire a degree in actuarial sciences. I do not recall seeing her again until she graduated and came home to announce her engagement to a scientist working for the government in Virginia.

My older brother Lyle, after protesting violently, had to quit college to assist my father in his painting business. He and my father were usually the only company employees that did not draw a full wage. However, if they could cover their costs and have a something left over to pay the rent and buy food and coal, we deemed it a blessing. However, Lyle harbored his resentment to the day he died.

Henry was absolved from any responsibilities. On rare occasions he was pressed into work by assisting my father. When he did so, he demanded he be paid as much as the other painters and rather than argue, my

father did so. I do not recall my mother ever asking him to forfeit any of his wages nor did she ever accuse him of being selfish. It was obvious to everyone that he occupied a special place in my mother's order of feelings.

It became more readily apparent when my brother and I (we shared the same bed) engaged in a wild pillow fight one evening. Unfortunately, the noise we were making resounded on the first floor where my mother was trying to relax.

Her appearance was noted when she burst into our bedroom with the thick cord from her iron in her hand. Without noting Henry's presence in the same bed, she began to strike me again and again with the cord while shrieking over and over that she was going to kill me. I have few doubts that she would have succeeded had not my sister, Dorothea, wrestled the cord away from her and made her leave the room. From that day on, Dorothea never received another kind word from my mother.

My father, who remained on the first floor, did not intercede in any way. I do not recall my father ever scolding or punishing me or anyone else. It is also a fact that, like my mother, he never embraced me nor did he ever kiss me. I was just there and I had no idea why. If you, dear reader, are in a similar quandary, I would endeavor to persuade you not to abandon hope. Providence, or what unseen hand guides your way, may have a plan for you much greater than all your passing travails. If disappointment was a fever, every youth would be ill. Justice may be lame, but she will come.

I did not abide my own advice. Within days of my beating, I decided to run away from home. One late afternoon I told some friends what I was going to do and I did it. It was a mistake to confide in my small

friends, for when my mother sought me out to run an errand, one of my young friends immediately told her of my plans.

Aware that I could easily be found in broad daylight, I planned on staying in a friend's backyard tent until dark and then accomplish some distance. It was easy for my brother Henry to find me and, being much larger than me, he placed me in an arm lock and paraded me through the streets while yelling to any neighbor he saw, "I got him. I found him!" With each shout he would twist my arm as a punishment. When we arrived home my mother took me by the arm and threw me into a corner of the room. In a shrieking voice she screamed at me, "How would you like it if I called the police and they took you away and locked you up for the rest of your life!"

She waited, but I dared not tell her what I would really like. Instead I could only think of a silent reply. "Dear God, please let them come and take me away from here."

These are the memories that define my childhood and perhaps my adulthood. Experience has taught me that youth provides few alternatives or opportunities to conquer or even escape its many dragons.

There was one more event that would forever prejudice my feelings. My brother Henry hung out with a close friend named Herbert, who lived in a huge apartment building on our street. Although I always wanted to go with them, they participated in activities to which they denied me access. Frequently I would run after them but Herbert would lock me out of his apartment, and I would just return home with my tarnished feelings.

One day the manager of the apartment building called on my father and told him that his entire ring of

passkeys for all the apartments had disappeared, and that Henry and his friend Herbert had acknowledged seeing me hanging around the apartment corridors. Deductions are like directions for those lacking a mental compass. They will only take you to where you want to go and in this case the manager demanded Twenty-Five Dollars to replace all his missing keys.

Twenty-Five Dollars was much more than my father earned most months. But fortified by the testimony of my brother and his boyfriend, my father agreed to reimburse the apartment manager for the lost keys that everyone assumed I had taken. By working longer hours and doing without, my father raised the money and paid the apartment manager his charge.

The result of this unfair and undeserved incrimination was one of scorn and ridicule by my entire family. I don't think any of my brothers or sisters felt as sorry for my father's long hours of toil than me and I was helpless to make any amends for the crime I did not commit. I felt totally responsible for having placed an additional burden upon my father's shoulders and I was unable to share its weight.

A short time later I was looking for a deck of playing cards and I knew Henry kept some in his dresser drawer which he always kept locked. Looking everywhere for a key, I lifted up a small wooden box in which he kept certain small items and underneath the box I found my prize. I opened his top drawer, being very careful not to disturb the myriad of contents. My eyes were drawn to a large ring on which numerous door keys were arranged. I knew instantly whose they were.

Elated that I could now prove my innocence, I ran downstairs and showed my mother what I had found. She called my brother Henry into the kitchen and

confronted him with the ring of keys, silently begging an explanation. Henry didn't hesitate a moment. He told my mother that he had found the keys while rummaging in one of my drawers and had secluded them in order to keep me from being punished.

Without any further discussion, my mother struck out and hit me across the mouth calling me a liar and a "little thief." I was struck in another way. I was so shocked that I scarcely felt the physical blow. Her words caused a wound that would never heal or diminish with time. In such youthful confrontations a child has few choices. You can respond to such an injury and encourage further punishment or you can ward it off with the shield of patience. In a child's case, this shield is not so large.

Childhood experiences such as this have had an enduring effect that I acknowledge without dispute. It is my inability to openly display affection to people. I can hug and kiss an animal, but not another human being. No one loves their wife and children more than I do. Yet, this display of affection has rarely been apparent. It is to me a curse that I cannot bring myself to even hug someone I dearly love. Even on social occasions, when introduced to women or when saying goodbye, I demure from embracing or kissing them by any maneuver available. It is a fault my wife constantly calls to my attention.

Am I the product of a dysfunctional family life? Let me conclude this chapter of my life with one last indictment.

When my father died, sometime in his eighties, only my sister Dorothea, who lived nearby, attended his funeral. When my mother passed away, only Dorothea attended her funeral. All of my sisters and brothers have

passed away without any of them attending another's funeral.

When I was notified of my brother Henry's pending death due to cancer, I did not choose to visit him or to attend his funeral. So much for settling all scores at death. In this chronicle the matter was concluded.

Let me terminate this fragment of history with the promise to alter the mood of this tale and encourage you to smile and embrace the remainder of my life's story for the humor and fascination awaiting you.





CHAPTER III

A Knight-Errant Arrives

My childhood was not all misery and despair, for in those early days of the 20th century there were also gangs which afforded youths all sorts of juvenile enterprise.

My affiliation was with the Montville gang, a group of about ten youngsters of various nationalities (and morals), but with poverty as a common status. The leaders of the gang were two brothers, Raymond and Erwin Musgee. By some strange quirk of fate they had the unusually good fortune to frequently find boxes of brand-new products that had mysteriously fallen off the backs of passing railway express delivery trucks.

I recall that on several of my visits to their tiny three-bedroom frame home that they possessed more electrical appliances than they had electrical receptacles capable of accommodating them.

This coincidence was never discussed in the presence of Raymond or Irwin. I remember the occasion on which one of the brothers found a box containing a gasoline motor for a model airplane. At the time this motor sold for almost twenty dollars. Since he had no use for this, he offered it to me and I accepted it.

When I took the motor home and showed it to my father, he became infuriated. In his finest Irish brogue, he persuaded me it was a stolen item and I had to return it at once!

My father convinced me that dishonest behavior would not be tolerated in our household. While he did not lay a hand on me, the tone of his voice was sufficiently convincing. I returned the item to Raymond.

Despite elementary school taking up a disproportionate amount of our time, we did add to our available time by disregarding our homework. This was a minor consideration except to our teachers and parents. Instead, we engaged in a whole variety of time consuming activities. There was Hide and Seek, Kick the Can, Blind Man's Bluff, Hopscotch, Jump Rope, Cops and Robbers and Cowboys and Indians, just to mention a few.

But, of all our pursuits, none was anticipated more than the next Saturday's matinee movie at the nearby Avalon movie theater.

For ten cents the matinee offered us two full-length movies, a newsreel of current events, several cartoons, and as a special attraction to the younger clientele, one of 20 chapters of an amazing fictional futuristic, Buck Rogers, or Flash Gordon adventure that predicted the advent of today's space travel.

The one common element in every serial was that each week the serial ended with the hero or heroine in a predicament that foretold their unalterable demise.

On the following Saturday, when the next chapter of the serial was showing, there was always an inexplicable change in the situation by which some act of providence provided the hero or heroine with an escape from their inescapable terminable predicament until the end of that chapter. Then a new inescapable death defying challenge would end that chapter.

There was always one problem. When Saturday came around we usually didn't have ten cents between the ten of us. I don't know who came up with the answer, but employing some youthful ingenuity, some enterprising member of our gang did come up with the solution. At that time soda pop came in bottles and there was a deposit on every bottle. If you returned a small bottle to the grocer, you received a two penny refund. A large soda bottle brought a five cent refund.

At the intersection of Glendale and Montville streets in Detroit was a small grocery store called Sam's, named after its Lebanese owner. The store was so small that Sam didn't have space to store his empty pop bottles inside the store. Instead, he chose to store the bottles in cases outside his back door which, unfortunately for him, made them readily accessible to us. We decided we would take turns taking possession of five or ten pop bottles from Sam's storage. Then we would go around and into his store where we would present them and collect the deposit. In fact, all we needed was a single dime to get all ten of us into the theater (a feat that will subsequently be explained).

This subterfuge worked exceedingly well for the first two Saturdays. It would end when it came my time to take a turn. Just as the others had done, I took five bottles from Sam's storage area and took them into his store and requested payment. Sam placed an elbow on the counter and leaned his weathered face forward in the palm of his hand and looked me straight in the eye.

“Vy would I pay you for mine own bottles?” he asked in his broken English.

I didn’t have an answer. In fact, I couldn’t even speak. A sculpture of embarrassment and guilt, I was frozen in my tracks. Finally, I grasped my cap with both hands and slowly started backing away. Reaching the doorway, I turned around very slowly and left the store expecting at any moment to be seized from behind and rendered over to the police. When I related my near-death experience to the others, it was apparent we had to find another way to raise money for the movies. Providence does not always provide remedies along with your problems but youthful determination is a versatile tool in the arsenal of desire.

We did find another source. There were several large apartment buildings in our area and each had a basement where each apartment had a storage compartment. We found these sufficient to supply us with empty soda bottles for months to come.

(Following is the promised explanation of how ten children gained access to the Avalon theater with a single ten cent ticket.)

In those days, on either side of the front row seats nearest the movie screen, was an emergency fire exit door hidden behind a heavy black drape. A large space had been provided between the drape and the doors so that if anyone opened the door, the light would not detract from the film being shown.

We would have one member of the gang purchase a ticket for ten cents, enter the theater and take a seat in the front row which was usually unoccupied. When the theater was darkened and the previews began, our accomplice would bend low and enter the fire exit area.

Once inside, he would simply open the fire exit door and we would all enter the secreted exit area. Once inside

we would wait for a dark movie scene and then bending low, with our hands on the waist of the boy in front, we would sneak into the front row seats. Once safely in, it was an easy matter to change our seating arrangements without being detected. I submit that the misdeeds of the young may often be attributable more to youthful exuberance than to a consideration that we were committing an illegal act. A wise man once promulgated that opportunity was the advantage of youth. In our case it certainly was.

While I and everyone else enjoyed all the films, I was fascinated by one specific bit of content.

Many of the movies portrayed a particular elegance. I was always impressed by the scenes in which Claudette Colbert, Ronald Coleman, Tyrone Power, William Powell and others were always dressed. Whether dining at the fabulous Brown Derby, standing at the dock waiting for a luxury liner to take them to London or Paris or dancing and dining aboard some luxurious yacht, the women were always dressed in beautiful sequin laden gowns and had diamond tiaras in their hair, while the men were meticulously groomed and always attired in immaculate black tuxedos and spotless white shirts.

I saw a vision of life that no one I knew aspired to. Everyone I knew seemed to accept as in an alterable condition of faith, the circumstances of poverty. What I saw in the scenes were the things I wanted to someday possess. Recalling these fantasies, I now realize that the movies never revealed how these people acquired their immense wealth. Neither did I bother thinking of how I might approach their status.

There was one thing in particular that energized my desire. On the cuffs of the men's white shirts were embroidered a design composed of three initials. I had only to see these monograms to know that I was fated to one day own a white shirt with my initials embroidered on a cuff.

At that young age I was inspired to live like those movie stars; I wanted to be rich. Not just “rich”, but rich, rich, rich! I wanted to drink champagne with a beautiful princess of my own, and above all, to have a monogrammed shirt! I also realized I had to be different from the people I knew. The men in the movies that I admired were gentlemen. I would be a gentleman! I would hold open doors for women and older people. I couldn't buy the fancy clothes yet but I could be neat and never use profanity again.

Indeed, youthful dreams are the relief of life's ordinary demands. Throughout my life I have always ministered that great aspirations are better than miserable possessions!

Next door to the movie theater was a candy store that we always visited after the movie. Most often I had not a penny to spend on such a frivolous luxury as candy and I would never entertain the thought of asking one of my friends to share his precious candy. The owner of the store stood behind a long counter on which boxes of assorted candies were stacked.

Most of the small unwrapped candy was sold by the piece, while the more expensively wrapped five cent candy bars were displayed in the lower glass showcase. The back wall was a low row of cabinets and above the cabinets were open shelves filled with huge, even more expensive candy bars. At the time I would have been satisfied with anything, I realize now that the desires of youth are the seeds of achievement. This seed, though dormant for years, would one day blossom and I would one day afford that one pound Hershey's milk chocolate candy bar with almonds and I would eat the entire bar all by myself.

Now, if you countenance these digressions, I will reveal in a future chapter a terrible result of fulfilling a youthful wish.

However, let me endow you with the wisdom that comes with aging. Never lower your aspirations so you willingly accept less in life than you desire! You are not going to get out of this life alive so it is the wise man who starts living now!

I have described to you the apprenticeship for my life and now I must turn your attention to matters more serious and enduring. Prepare yourself, for this is not the trivia you have experienced.

When I was about 10 years old I suddenly found myself unable to stand or to walk. I'd complain about the growing pains in my legs from attempting to walk and now the pains devoured my youthful stride completely.

Unable to find an over-the-counter medicine that would alleviate the condition, my mother took me to a shoe store where the salesman had me place my feet into a fluoroscopic machine that showed the outline of the bones in my feet. He nodded his head up and down indicating he had found the solution to my problem. My mother bought the new pair shoes we could ill afford and we returned home.

Although my mother was certain that the new shoes were the solution, the pain of trying to walk finally persuaded her to consult a doctor. Dr. Parker, the doctor who issued me into this world, listened to the symptoms and then put his stethoscope to my chest and back. His prognosis was not the same as the shoe salesman. I was suffering from rheumatic fever, a heart disease, for which no medication or care was then available. In those days heart surgery was unheard of. On his strong recommendation I was to immediately be placed in a bed and kept there until I outgrew the heart defect or took leave of this worldly domain.

Without adequate funds, there was no way to have me hospitalized, so I was taken home and put to bed in a

small alcove where I would eventually recover or ultimately adjourn this life.

The one thing the doctor insisted upon was total quiet, rest and the absence of irritation. Under no circumstances was I to be allowed to get out of bed nor to undertake any strenuous movement. Having my mother care for me was a sheer agony in itself, and there were many times I was not sure the right choice had been made.

Except for complaining about the additional work she had to do, my mother didn't appear to mind servicing my few needs. This was just another complaint she added to a litany of ills she claimed to be suffering from. She had only to read about a new disease to conclude the symptoms matched her own. When we drove through the streets of Detroit my father would always point out the hospitals and claim that my mother had paid for its bricks. Later in life I would originate a greeting card just for hypochondriacs; "Heard you were well. Get sick soon."

In all those months, except for my brother Henry, who stopped in occasionally to give me bad news, tease me and aggravate me, I do not recall my father or my older brother and sisters ever visiting me .

With only meager resources, there was no money with which to buy a pencil and paper for me to draw on or even a simple toy or puzzle to help pass the time of day. You cannot imagine what it was like to live there immobilized listening to your playmates play and laugh outside your window while you are imprisoned in the web of fate. If boredom was fatal I would have died a thousand deaths. Not succumbing to boredom, after some months a solution would come from an unexpected source.

While making his rounds one day, our milkman learned of my situation. On his own volition, he stopped at each of his customer's homes and asked them if they had any used books they could contribute for me. He even went

so far as to ask them to solicit books from their friends. In a short time he drew his horse-drawn milk wagon up to our house and asked my mother if he could deliver some gifts to me. When he entered my bedroom his face was beaming like a Santa Claus as he emptied an entire carton of assorted books onto my lap. It was a veritable treasure chest of gifts.

It was the first time I had ever read a novel or autobiography and it was at that time that I began imagining my vicarious world travels. Among those travels was a trip to the North Pole with Admiral Byrd and a trip to Alaska with Jack London. I flew across the Atlantic Ocean with Charles Lindbergh and I went exploring in Africa with Osa and Martin Johnson. (Martin Johnson was killed in an airplane accident in 1937, but I would actually meet Osa Johnson in 1946 when I sought her assistance in entering South Africa).

I was introduced to the poetry of Rudyard Kipling, Robert Service, Whitman, Burns, Byron and other poets whose remarkable expressions in writing made an indelible impression on my future. I also entered the terrible meat rendering business with Upton Sinclair, and examined the lives of great men like Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and Marco Polo. I even entered politics with books about Karl Marx and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Many of the books would affect my life in one manner or another. But two books would have the most impact on my life. One of the books was a story about King Arthur and the knights of the round table, Queen Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot. Another book was a four hundred year old story about a man called Don Quixote, written by Miguel De Cervantes. This book would have the greatest impact.

To prepare you for what you are about to undertake, let me explain what a knight errant stood for during the Age of Chivalry. A knight errant was a man who aspired to become a knight. A knight was a man who had passed a number of heroic tests and thereby was proffered a number of

honors and financial benefits by the public and the nobility. By his own fiction, he alone cut off the heads of numerous dragons. Single-handedly he took on an army of thousands and prevailed. His rescue of maidens was legendary (and I do mean literally legendary.)

His wildest claims were recorded and printed, and the books were distributed throughout the world to an eager, albeit gullible, audience who accepted these prevarications without dispute. In return for their acclaim, these Knights were often awarded a monarch's daughter together with large states and vassals who contributed to his wealth and well-being.

In truth, the majority of the most successful knights won their reputation by entering jousting and sword fighting tournaments without ever encountering a real dragon.

The Golden Age of Chivalry and knighthood existed in various forms from the 11th century through the 14th century. During its golden age, Chivalry stood for everything that was noble and virtuous. It was the embodiment of decency, courage, compassion, loyalty, faith and virtue. It was the pursuit of justice and righteousness everywhere. Before you could become a knight, you had to prove your qualification by serving an apprenticeship as a knight-errant. His rite of passage demanded that he accomplish the sufficient demands of knighthood. Above all else, to become a knight-errant one must agree to live by the knights pledge:

**I swear my fealty to my God, my country
and to my righteous Sovereign.
To slay dragons anywhere.
To rescue maidens in distress
and to favor those in need
and those oppressed everywhere."**

A knight must not be reluctant in resolve or hesitant in relief, but courageous, compassionate, loyal, faithful and

virtuous. He must be well mannered, polite, liberal, generous, astute, and ever alert to evil; ever the hand of God. These are the threads that constitute the warp and weave from which the cloth of knighthood was cut.

While I lay paralyzed in my bed I read and reread Don Quixote. I dreamed of becoming a knight. Everything that knighthood stood for was proper and appropriate to me. All I needed was the opportunity.

Heavenly intervention, an act of God, Providence, or whatever you wish to call it, would provide me more than a fair share of opportunities.

From the time I picked up the first book, reading consumed the hours of the day. After more than a dozen of his monthly visits, Dr. Parker withdrew his stethoscope, looked at my mother in surprise, and announced that all the previous symptoms of the serious heart problem had disappeared. I was well, and could resume a normal child's life. (In truth, to this day some of my friends would testify that I never resumed a normal life.)

Within weeks I learned to walk again. Free of the invisible chains that restrained me, I was welcomed back into my youthful pursuits. With my old friends around me, I announced that I wasn't going to play cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers anymore. I was going to play a new game, nights and dragons.

I explained the virtues of knighthood and then we all set out to acquire the wooden boxes whose boards would furnish the material to make the required swords. I thought it was extremely nice of Sam to supply me with a prime wooden orange crate. I carefully laid out the design of my sword, and with one of my father's saws, I cut off the handle and blade of my sword. From another piece, I fashioned a cross piece which formed the hilt and nailed it below the handle.

Next, I went into the house and took my old black raincoat and drew it around my neck fastening only the top button so it resembled a cape. With my playmates around me, I ordered each one to place their sword's point into the ground, kneel on one knee, place their forehead against the hilt of their sword and to repeat after me the Knights-Errant creed:

*I swear my fealty to my God, my country
and to my righteous Sovereign.
To slay dragons anywhere.
To rescue maidens in distress
and to favor those in need
and those oppressed everywhere.*

I might just as well have been standing in Sherwood Forest as I led them in their Pledge of Allegiance. This is the oath I took as a young idealistic youth. I would take a new path in life. I would become a night errant and I would wage the battle to renew the Age of Chivalry. For more than 70 years this is the oath I have lived by. This is the oath that I will die with. I had slain the dragons of youth. Now it was time to proceed to greater conquests.

Never in my lifetime did I seek a conquest that would inscribe my name in some temple of honor. I became a night-errant so that my life and chivalrous behavior would be a visible example to others.

I would learn that there are people who would be offended by the appearance of civility and even angered by the effort to favor those in need and those oppressed everywhere. While others have at times appeared to support the knights' code, no group has earned the right to become knights more than the American military.

No nation has sacrificed more of their treasure of life and wealth for the universal cause of life, liberty and the

pursuit of happiness, without consideration of a bounty, than America has.

The harsh lessons of abiding tyrants are indelibly inscribed on paper and film for all to see but the lesson of blissful ignorance is a play in the ordinary costume of modern life. Failure to challenge these dragons today is to sow the winds that give rise to the whirlwinds that we will one day be forced to encounter if we wish to preserve the remnants of our Constitution and our Bill of Rights and I will have more to say on this before I conclude this journal.

Herein are the dragons I have had to deal with in my past. The ones that future generations will have to deal with lurk in the shadows, but I am an optimist, I believe other night-errants do also!





CHAPTER III

The Dragons of Youth

In my youth chewing gum was packaged in a flat package about three inches wide and four inches long. Together with each piece of gum was a picture card portraying the faces of popular athletes, Indian chiefs and other famous people or scenes that might be of interest to children. There were probably thirty or forty cards to each set and the children kept buying the gum hoping to be able to complete a full set. Almost all of the children I knew collected these cards and we would trade with each other in an attempt to make a complete set.

I suspect the company's marketing genius made available only one particular picture card in each set. Needless to say such an arrangement encouraged chil-

dren, as well as adults, to keep buying the gum in the futile hopes of completing the entire set of cards.

I was about six years old when I purchased and opened a particular package of gum. The first thing I did was extract the picture card to discover my treasure. Instead of the usual type of picture, this card had a picture of a smiling Japanese soldier holding his rifle upright in the air. On the end of his bayonet was impaled the body of a small Chinese baby.

I stared at the card with a measure of disbelief and asked myself how anyone could do such a thing. I showed the card to my playmates and they weren't imnoressed. Perhaps they were too young to weigh the significance of the horror portrayed on the card. They didn't care. I took the card home and showed it to my mother. She told me it wasn't nice and to get rid of it. She didn't care. The next day I couldn't wait to show the card to my favorite teacher, Ms. Johnson. She simply shook her head back and forth and went on with her work. She didn't seem to care either.

America didn't seem to care. Europe didn't care. No one seemed to care except me and I couldn't understand why.

I cared so much that I resolved to one day challenge those who would perform such a horrible atrocity.

The first World war was called "The war to end all wars." At the conclusion of the war the nations of the nations of the world did form an international organization called the League of Nations. It was formed for the express purpose of preventing acts of aggression by any nation. Almost every nation agreed. There must never be another World War. Unfortunately America had become a bastion of pacifism and refused to join the League of Nations..

When Japan began their conquest of China in 1937, with their usual political aplomb the League of Nations sent several impressive communications to the Japanese government requesting them to withdraw their armies from Manchuria. Whether they really believed their words would stop the Japanese, they were reluctant to threaten armed intervention. A naive world stood by without any threat of military action or even sanction.

Within two years over two-hundred-thousand Chinese men, women and children were slaughtered. Not wanting to waste their precious lead bullets, the simple, unarmed peasants were hacked to death with swords, bayoneted, or were impaled on crude bamboo poles.

Still, the rest of the world seemed not to care. More than twenty-five thousand young children and women were raped and/or pressed into brothels to satisfy their carnal desires of their soldiers. The Japanese army allotted one girl to each fifteen soldiers and when the girls became useless they were butchered and their bodies violated in the most grotesque fashions.

Even at the young age of six I knew it was wrong and I could not understand how these horrible actions could not assault the world's sense of justice.

History would teach me that appeasement is the adversary of peace. It is a bridge of iniquity, only half built and never completed, to the detriment of the appeaser and the victim. Every Knight-Errant is disposed, no obligated, to favor those in need and those oppressed everywhere.

The shadow of Chivalry rebelled at such treason of virtue but it remained only a shadow. Here was the appearance of the most evil "dragon" and no sense of chivalry presented a challenger.

History does not record a single event when only words overwhelmed a tyrant's desires. To be intimidated or otherwise lured into submission is to measure freedom's neck. The world would soon learn, and soon forget, that delay and procrastination are the Devil's own handmaidens, but this proof must await the end of this tale.

I have neither the notes nor the memory to serve me for the next few years, not until the ominous day of December 7, 1941. Be assured that it is the continuous progression of events, each one greater than the last that seemingly confuses or dismisses the consequences of time. But, if a tale is as worthy as I proclaim mine to be, do not hesitate to accept the intent and read on.

On a crisp December day I was helping a friend build a puppet stage for his church's coming Christmas pageant when the news came over the radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese..

My first emotion was one of delight, thinking only that now the mighty American military would don its armor and respond to this treachery.

My elation was short lived as the news of our losses began flooding the airwaves and newspapers. Estimates of thousands of Americans killed and injured challenged our aura of invincibility and painted a very bleak picture of the future.

Although the threat of oncoming conflict was apparent to most people, the world preferred to continue waiting for some peaceful resolution. I cannot forget the theater newsreel that showed the Prime Minister of England Neville Chamberlain returning from Germany and in his upraised hand he waived a piece of paper. It was a signed agreement in which Hitler promised not to pursue any further military conquests in return for England, France and Italy giving Germa-

ny sovereignty over the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia.

Although there were many Germans living in the territory, it had been part of Czechoslovakia for over one hundred years and none of these nations had the legal right to give away a part of another country's territory.

Despite Hitler's "iron clad" compact, in March, 1939, Germany invaded Czechoslovakia and took what was left of the country. On September 1, 1939, he shredded what was left of his cloak of honor when he invaded Poland. Hitler's program for conquering the world had already been openly proclaimed in his book *Mein Kampf* and the world ignored it.

It was only a short time later, on December 7, 1941, that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, a cowardly act that killed 2,345 American soldiers, sailors, airmen and sixty civilians in a single day. The following day Germany declared war on America. This catastrophic conflict would cost the nations of this world almost sixty-five million lives.

Those who had tutored us to remain unconcerned would learn that America was like a huge open field. The protestations of the pacifists had been the manure that fell on the barren soil of the timid and the cowardly. The voice of the peace loving idealist was vanquished by the deeds of tyranny and millions of lives would perish in an inevitable battle. Over sixty-five million lives would be lost in a war that could have been prevented had the democratic nations of the world unsheathed their swords instead of their sophistic voices.

Tragically, it took another horrendous war to teach the democratic nations of the world that the arts

of treachery could only prevail if they remained reluctant to act.

The shadow of Chivalry rebelled at such treason of virtue but it remained only a shadow. Here was the appearance of the most evil “dragon” and no sense of chivalry presented a challenger.

History does not record a single event when only words overwhelmed a tyrant’s desires. To be intimidated or otherwise lured into submissiveness is to measure freedom’s neck. Even today there are growing doubts that the power of the pen can impose a peaceful resolution when opposed by the unsheathed tongue of a tyrant. The world had learned but soon forgot, that delay and procrastination are the Devil’s own handmaidens, but this proof must await the end of this tale.

The true cost of the next war is seldom raised. Actual written records reveal that the Nazis murdered six million Jews. But in addition their records show that they starved, gassed and cremated nineteen hundred German Catholic Priests who dared by word or deed to oppose Hitler. Scholars still haven’t been able to account for thousands of Catholic nuns who also died in Hitler’s death camps. If the Germans took pride in their macabre slaughter of six million Jews, how much pride can they now enjoy knowing that the war also took the lives of seven million German Christians who also died during Hitler’s reign of terror?

Bewilderment and frustration were the dragons when my age deprived me of serving my country at the time. If I could not serve in the armed forces, the least I could do was serve in other ways.

I went to the closest Red Cross blood donor’s station only to be told that I had to be eighteen years of age to donate.

Not to be deterred, I skillfully altered my birthdate on my birth certificate and met the Red Cross requirements.

In my zeal to contribute more, I registered at two different donor stations and, before the age of computers, there was very little chance of being discovered. The merit was not only in the quantity of blood I was donating, but in the quality, for I had the rare O-Negative type. I only had to be careful of which card I presented each time I donated and I never missed an appointment.

Do not forget this good deed, for certainly Heaven did not and I shall soon reveal to you the significance of this action. Following is a confirmation of the truth that every good deed is a debt due from Heaven.

Fifteen was also the age at which I found school and homework consuming too much of my time, so, without telling my parents, I quit going to school.

Instead, I decided I would go to sea. The fact that there wasn't really any sea around Detroit didn't deter me. There was the Detroit River which supported numerous freighters and excursion boats. For seven cents I was able to take a streetcar to the end of Woodward Avenue from where I could walk to the offices of the Ashley and Dustin Steamship Company and apply for a job on their excursion steamer, the Put-In-Bay. To my delight they told me that if the Coast Guard would issue me a Seaman's Passport and a Rating Certificate, they would employ me at the impressive wage of ninety dollars a month.

I immediately went down to the office of the United States Coast Guard and applied for the required papers.

Without any hesitation the documents were typed which authorized me to sail on any United States vessel as a Wiper, Oiler or Coal Passer.

I returned to the offices of the Ashley and Dustin Steamship Company and was hired on as a coal passer. I had not the slightest idea what the job entailed, but the promise of an enormous stipend of ninety dollars a month was enough to overwhelm any fifteen year old. My work schedule seemed simple enough. I was to work four hours on and eight hours off six days a week. Reader, I have just skimmed the cream off this broth.

Since this was a coal fed, steam driven, paddle wheeler, my newly acquired position entailed taking a large shovel full of coal from an enormous bin several feet from the furnace, and throwing it across the floor to where a person engaged as a Fireman would pick the coal up with his shovel and throw it into an open door which spewed fire and dust back at him. This was the fire that boiled the water that turned into steam that made the engine function.

This monster was a real dragon. It had an insatiable appetite and consumed every morsel of coal fed to it. As if it were real, it belched smoke and flame from its mouth and each mouthful was a scream for more. Twice a day, for four straight hours, I heard it calling, "Feed me!" "Feed me!" To make matters worse, the more coal I shoveled, the farther into the coal bin I had to go and that required me to deliver each shovel full of coal a further distance. It was by any measure a self defeating effort.

Monday was my only day of rest. On Mondays there was no sailing due to the midnight excursions to an island amusement park at Cedar Point on the previous Sunday night. By the end of my first day I

inquired of myself, "What have I done?" The question went unanswered every day until payday at the end of the month.

I was surprised and disappointed when I learned that my room was anyplace on the open deck that wasn't occupied by customers. Board was also a surprise. Although dinners were available for passengers, the crew was offered only what remained or what was being thrown out because it was too old to serve paying passengers.

My first dinner included a modest amount of potatoes covered with a very thick gravy. It must have been an awfully tired gravy because it failed to run. It just lay on top of the cold potatoes in whatever form it took when placed there. A fair quantity of vegetables and a tiny sliver of some kind of meat made up the main course.

A huge piece of apple pie, almost a quarter of a pie, promised to compensate for the other meager portions. I could almost savor the taste as I ate the last of the cold potatoes and gravy.

I was just ready to put a large piece of the apple pie in my mouth when another seaman yelled to me to look under the crust. Slowly, I lifted the crust with my fork not knowing what to expect. As I studied the filling, I realized that it was covered with a furry white green glaze. Mold! In my adolescent state of mind I returned to the Galley and presented the pie to the chef.

"This pie is GREEN!" I exclaimed.

"SO?" He asked. "What color would you like?"

I got the impression that the situation wasn't going to improve so I set the plate down and left.

At the conclusion of each day, to get a good shower and to get a good meal, I would frequently take

a street car for the hour ride to my home. It all seemed bearable when I looked forward to the end of the first month to receive my enormous sum of ninety dollars in wages.

On the last day of the month, I stood in line as each crew member entered the purser's office and left with a fist full of bills. When my turn finally arrived, I stood with my hand outstretched as he carefully counted out 60 American dollars. Only sixty! There had to be a mistake. I was hired at 90 dollars a month. It was at this time that I learned the purser deducted 30 dollars a month for "room and board." After complaining, I was given two choices. I accepted the 60 dollars.

I couldn't wait to go home and show my parents my new found wealth. That night I took a street car home and made the mistake of displaying the money to my mother. Before I could retract my hands she relieved me of the entire amount. When I mentioned I might need some money for carfare and other necessities, she counted out five one dollar bills and handed them to me. That was the end of the conversation. Again I must defer to the difficult times my family was enduring. I harbor no remorse at having to work for an entire month for five dollars that I could spend "selfishly" as I wished.

After only a few more weeks, I learned of a job opening in the Rathskeller, an area at the stern of the ship that was an entertainment center with slot machines. If you chose to, you could walk down a flight of stairs into a tavern that sold only beer and wine. However, before I could get the job I would have to go back to the Coast Guard office and obtain a rating of Bar Keeper.

To my surprise there was no age limit required for this rating and I walked out minutes later with my new Coast Guard certificate certifying me to hold the

position of Bar Keeper on board any American merchant ship at the age of fifteen. I still retain that document.

I was immediately disappointed when I learned that I was not hired to tend bar. Instead, my new position was that of a “nickel nurser”, a person who made change for the slot machine players. Since no slot machines accepted anything larger than a nickel, there was always a demand for change. But, carrying the sack of nickels to make change wasn’t the hard part of this job.

Because of their age and heavy usage, the machines were constantly sticking and had to be opened and cleared. Paul, the manager, was not a particularly mean boss, but he was not so energetic that he would walk to where the broken machine was located.

Instead, I would have to pick up this heavy machine and carry it down a flight of stairs and across the tavern floor to where Paul sat with his feet propped up on a beer keg. What helped favor this work was that occasionally Paul would trip a pay-off lever and let me keep the nickels that came out. Rarely, when a person did hit the jackpot, the most they could win was twenty nickels. I suspect the Rathskeller made more money from the slot machines than they did from selling beer.

If not provoked, Paul was tolerable. However if he felt some customer was a nuisance, he would turn into an awesome fire breathing dragon who would verbally consume his antagonist.

There was one feature that actually made the job enjoyable. Paul was married to a young girl named Virginia. Paul had to be in his thirties, but his wife, Virginia, could only have been eighteen or nineteen years old. In addition to being beautiful, she dressed in outfits that emphasized her feminine attributes. Her

two unfortunate dispositions were smoking and alcohol. She and Paul both were usually under the influence of both addictions.

Virginia was always exceptionally nice to me. Many times on those hot, sultry trips, when Paul wasn't looking, she would seek me out and give me a nice free cold bottle of soda pop and we would talk. Something Paul would never think of doing.

One late evening, after a moonlight trip to Cedar Point, Virginia and I were cleaning up the barroom without Paul's attendance. Virginia was unusually talkative that evening and in a spirited mood. She walked over to me and held up a plaster sailor doll that one of the passengers had won on the island and given to her. Holding it up with one hand, she asked me if I had seen her new baby. I just smiled. Then, with the other hand she jerked the shoulder of her blouse down exposing one of her bare finer attributes. Holding the doll up to her exposed bosom she said, "It's time to feed my baby."

I was a knights-errant, not a full knight. I had the utmost regard for virtue, but understandably, I lacked experience to deal with this kind of confrontation. In fact, all I could do was stare at her exposed breast until I envisioned what altercation might arise if the Dragon Paul walked in on us. To conclude the matter expeditiously, I surrendered only a smile to Virginia, and made a hasty return to my floor sweeping.

The sailing season ended on Labor Day. It was almost midnight when we finished cleaning up and I had to walk through a heavily wooded area in the pitch black darkness to access the street. I had gone about half way when I was startled by a figure stepping out of the shadows. It was Virginia.

To you, readers, who encourage an occasion that favors an odious appetite, and for those who demure the apparent, feel free to interpret the conclusion. If you smile and continue, I shall have succeeded.

There would be no next season. That year the Navy acquired the ship and tore off the superstructure to make a simulated aircraft carrier on which to train Navy pilots from the nearby Grosse Ile Naval Airbase.

By 1943, America's participation in World War II was showing the desired results and the aspiration of victory seemed assured. However, this didn't diminish my enthusiasm to actively serve my country. What less than participation in a noble campaign would satisfy a Knights-errant's commitment? I had a growing fear that this would end without my direct intervention.

Providence would again intercede when I learned about a new civilian auxiliary service called the Civil Air Patrol. It wasn't an official branch of the military and you received no allowance or wage. You even had to purchase your own uniforms and furnish your food and medical care. The only requirements seemed to be that you had to be sixteen years old and in good health.

Almost every squadron of the Civil Air Patrol was a flying squadron that taught young people to fly and participate in searches for lost aircraft. Squadrons located along the coastal regions also patrolled the waters in search of enemy submarines.

Apparently Providence had something else in mind for me. The only Civil Air Patrol squadron in the Detroit area was Squadron 632-5, a paratroop squadron (the only paratroop squadron in the Civil Air Patrol).

This squadron was located at Wings Airport, a small privately owned airport on Mound Road just North of Detroit. Within a few months I had the

distinction of having gone up in dozens of airplanes while never landing in one. Except for the officers, most of us were sixteen or seventeen years old. On turning eighteen, almost everyone chose to enlist. It was an ingenious recruiting instrument for the air force.

Before being allowed to make a parachute jump we were required to spend several weeks learning the basics of military drill. Then we had to learn how a parachute was constructed and how to pack it and repair it. At that time, the military was using a 28 foot diameter circular backpack parachute and a 22 foot diameter chest pack parachute just in case the main chute failed to inflate properly. Unfortunately, neither of these parachutes was maneuverable after opening. Once they were opened you were at the mercy of the prevailing winds and you could end up miles from your intended drop zone.

Another version of a parachute was being manufactured by the Triangle Parachute Company. As their name indicated, this parachute had a triangular shape instead of being round. One of the panels had a small opening so that the wind captured in the canopy would flow out of the opening and propel the jumper in the opposite direction. By twisting your harness, you could turn your parachute so you were propelled in the direction you wished to go. Still, they lacked the sophistication of the parachutes in use today.

My education was mainly obtained by observation and, like the others, I had to wait for several weeks before I was chosen to jump.

This new adventure provided me with the opportunity to feel like I was at least doing something for the war effort. While we met every Saturday and Sunday for lessons on packing parachutes and jumping exercises, every couple of months we traveled to some large Army Airfield where they were conducting a

recruiting drive or a bond rally to raise funds and recruit young men for pilots for the war effort.

There we would put on a “spectacular” display of different types of parachute jumps. Actually, they were not all that spectacular, but most people had never seen a live parachute jump and they were awed by the spectacle of people falling freely through space, daring to pull their rip cord only at a height sufficient to allow them to open their parachute fully before hitting the ground. These were called “free fall” parachute jumps as opposed to the Army’s “static line” jumps. When doing a “free fall” jump, you pulled your own rip cord to open your parachute. When making a “static line” jump, your rip cord was attached to a long line that was anchored in the airplane. When you dropped a certain distance from the airplane, the static line would automatically pull your rip cord for you.

My second contribution to the war effort came when our squadron was invited to participate in a huge air show recruiting drive at Selfridge Air Force Base in Mount Clemens, Michigan. There must have been several thousand spectators together with the press and photographers. The Commanding Officer and a Brigadier General were among the celebrities on the reviewing stand.

At that time I had been promoted to Warrant Officer, and for some reason, I was selected to jump along with the four top officers of our squadron. Carefully noting the direction of the wind, my commanding officer, Captain Dorr Walker, chose to be the first one out. Based on the wind blowing from the East, his plan would facilitate his landing exactly in front of the reviewing stand. The other three officers would land in their respective positions and I would land somewhere far down wind, the farthest position from the reviewing

stand. You must realize that we were using war surplus Army parachutes and they lacked the design that facilitated directing a parachute to an exact spot on the ground.

Apparently, during or after we took off, the wind reversed the direction one hundred and eighty degrees and we had no way of knowing it. Actually we did have a way. When we landed, I was directly in front of the reviewing stand and all four of my senior officers landed far away down wind. To the mortification of my officers, only I was invited up on the reviewing stand where I was congratulated by the base commander and the visiting Brigadier General while newspaper photographers took photographs.

Nothing was said about it until the next day when a photograph of the General shaking my hand appeared in the morning issue of the Detroit News, the largest newspaper in Michigan. The caption underneath the picture mentioned the general's and my name but did not mention any of my officer's names.

That morning my commanding officer, Captain Dorr Walker, called the Detroit News and demanded the article be withdrawn from the afternoon and evening editions because there "was an error in the names." The article did not appear in the later editions. This was one time when the exercise of perfidy prevailed against the virtuous deed and the flame of sudden fame was extinguished by the fleeting ill wind of jealousy.

I began thinking about the potential for such exhibitions and suggested to a few of my CAP members that a fortune could be made if a small group of us did these similar shows as a commercial enterprise. It was a feeling several of my friends endorsed because we could do these private shows and still meet the requirements of the Civil Air Patrol.

Undertaking a series of public air shows without benefit of experience or financial backing was not a small undertaking. First, we all had to go out and buy two Army surplus parachutes, the 28 foot back pack and a 22 foot chest pack. Fortunately, used parachutes were not a commodity many people sought and the Army-Navy stores were happy to get rid of the used parachutes. Under the circumstances, we were able to acquire our parachutes quite reasonably.

The next things on our agenda were a name, a logo and a distinctive uniform. The uniform was simple. Each of us purchased a pair of black coveralls. The name required more consideration. We needed a name that would garner attention and convey a degree of mystery. We couldn't afford a lot of advertising so we needed something that would attract attention. After several attempts we finally decided on the name, DEATH'S ANGELS. For our logo we adopted two open parachutes and our name printed directly below the insignia. We had the design produced on a large circle of cloth which was then sewn to the backs of our black jumpsuits.

We were all set to go. All we needed was a program and some clients.

Our team consisted of four teenagers, Elmer Kanta, George Manus, Jimmy Mall and myself. Each man was able to choose the type of jumps he would like to perform. George and Jimmy, chose to do the "delayed-openings" and "pull-off." The delayed-opening jump was when you would leave the airplane at an altitude of six or seven thousand feet and fall until you were only several hundred feet above the ground before pulling your rip cord.

Because of the airplane's altitude, people had a problem following our descent. To resolve this problem, we made some small oblong bags, the bottom of which

was tied just below your elbow and the opening was held in your fists. These bags were filled with bread flour. As you descended, you let the mouths of the bags open and a vacuum would suck the flour out leaving a trail of smoke-like material marking your descent. This was a great act and even made more of an impression when a bag would come loose and people would lose sight of the jumper and follow the trail of smoke all the way down to the ground.

The Cut-A-Way jump was a real crowd pleaser. Without warning the audience, one of us would jump from three or four thousand feet and immediately open our emergency chest pack. For this jump the parachute's harness was held on by two quick-release clamps. After a short descent, the jumper would release one side of the harness and his parachute would suddenly stream up in a straight line of silk.

The announcer would yell out, "OH! OH! IT LOOKS LIKE HIS PARACHUTE IS BROKEN!" The audience would immediately panic and start invoking all kinds of scripted incantations, calling upon God to do something. After falling a respectable distance with the apparently disabled parachute, the jumper would release the other side of the useless harness, open his main parachute and land safely.

Another stunt was to just climb out on the wing of a low flying biplane and the pilot would fly back and forth while the jumper held on with one hand and waved to the crowd with the other. On the final pass, the jumper would pull his rip cord and the wind would instantly inflate his parachute and permit him to land safely from this low altitude.

This act was refined later when army surplus glider tow ropes became available at the local Army-

Navy stores. For the new act, we fashioned a swing in which the jumper sat. Then, at a very low altitude, we would lower him from the doorway until he was only a few feet from the ground. He would just sit there and wave each time we went by, but that was all it took to please the crowd. After several passes, the pilot would take the plane up to about 100 feet and the jumper would pull his ripcord and be pulled off the swing. Part of the attraction was that we could spot his landing exactly where we wanted him to land.

For the finale, we had a really special display; the infamous Bat Wing jump. Both Elmer Kanta and I were a little more adventurous than the others, so we elected to resurrect the old Bat Wing jump, a display that had resulted in the deaths of numerous performers.

In all modesty, I must inform you that some of those who perished, attempted to do this jump without the assistance of a parachute. From the beginning we declined to be so brazen. To perform this jump, we sewed webbing between our sleeves and our pant legs and another section between the insides of our pant legs. When we raised our arms outstretched and spread our feet, we closely resembled the outline of a bat.

Apparently bats are better proportioned than anything a human has originated and had overcome the problem of assailing the pavement with their body.

A major obstacle to man's success was the use of metal inserts some jumpers sewed into their webbing. In several cases the jumpers could not reach their rip cords, while in other cases the metal inserts cut or otherwise interfered with their shroud lines. You now may understand how, in the early days of parachute jumping, the appropriate term of "shroud" was used as a synonym for a parachute canopy.

I am sure that by now you are enthused at the prospect of us making a lot of money. Let me take a few moments to explain how we operated this business.

One of us would drive to the main airport of a small city and offer the airport owner the opportunity to make a lot of money by taking up passengers who wanted to fly in an airplane. We would make this possible by conducting an air show at his airport. Mind you, in the early nineteen forties not a lot of people had ever been up in an airplane, so this was a major attraction. The airport owner wouldn't have to pay us anything. We would just pass the hat after each parachute jump while he was taking up paying passengers. He would however, have to furnish a plane to haul us. With this agreement to the time and place, we would insert a fair sized display ad in the local newspaper promising a series of death-defying aerobatics at this wondrous free air show.

Unfortunately, while the shows were great, the audience was not always motivated to reward us in a manner befitting our effort, risk and expense. The effort was finally abated in nineteen forty-four when we were putting on a show at Monroe Airport in Monroe, Michigan. It was late afternoon and I was making a one-mile delayed jump to close the show.

It was my second and the final jump of the show. I had just finished repacking my parachute on an open grassy mound. As an accomplished parachute rigger, I ran my fingers up the four inside shroud lines and had no doubts everything was correct. They were not.

It was a beautiful sunny day and our attendance was better than usual. After checking the wind direction, I had the pilot take me up to seven thousand feet and climbed out of the passenger's position from where the

door had been removed. With my one foot on the step, I leaned out holding onto the two supporting wing struts, released my grip and began my one mile free fall. I spread out my arms and feet and watched the ground glide past beneath me as I circled in a small arc.

We had a method of counting that accommodated the speed of the aircraft and then the rate of the free fall. I don't know why we never thought of using altimeters, but no one I knew of ever used one to measure his altitude while falling.

At the appropriate moment I reached to my harness pocket, grasped the rip cord and gave it a stout yank. There was no delay. I heard the chute whisk out into the air, but waiting further did not produce the expected shock when a canopy pops open. I lifted my head and to my horror I saw a narrow ribbon of silk streaming upward above me as I was continuing to descend at a very rapid rate of speed. I immediately grabbed hold of my risers and spread them apart hoping to allow some air to enter the canopy and inflate it but it would not happen.

Rather than delay with this effort, I reached to my chest pack and pulled its rip cord. I heard the canvas enclosure pop open and witnessed my folded emergency chute descending directly in front of me in its original folded condition. Lord knows how long that parachute had been packed but it offered no apparent inclination of opening.

Not realizing the importance of checking how long the parachute had been packed, I had never checked the packing record contained in a small pocket of the cover.

Seeing the ascending ground, I took the bundle of silk in my hands and threw it out into the slip stream with all my might. The wind immediately grabbed it and

took it upward in a spiral around my main canopy. I looked up in disbelief. Now I had both of my parachutes deployed and neither one was responding as it was supposed to.

I imagine it was only a few seconds, but as I glanced down at the rapidly approaching landscape I realized the inevitable. I was fully conscious and capable of controlling my reactions. In the next few moments I told myself, "If you hit the ground at this speed you will be killed or you will live the rest of your life in a bed or wheelchair." None of these choices appealed to me. Instead, I would try a different option. I sorted through the harnesses, grasped those of my chest pack and started hauling in the shroud lines. I don't know how much silk spaghetti I had in my arms, but when I reached the hem of a canopy, with all the might I could muster, I threw everything out into the passing air.

Those who witnessed the entire fall say that my reserve chute inflated at telephone pole height. Whenever it occurred, the chute threw me into a violent oscillation, swinging my body upward like a pendulum, to where my body was parallel to the ground. The canopy hit the ground first and then I fell about twentyfeet and landed on my back. People were running over to where I lay and stood in a circle around me. No one uttered a sound. People would move towards me, stare down at me and search my eyes and then move back to their former position without any gesture or sound. It was a unique situation and I felt no inclination to speak to any of them or to even try to move.

The ground on which I hit became a mold of my body. I had actually made a deep indentation into the ground. I lay there like I was paralyzed. I was, but from fright, not from any injury. Actually, I was afraid

to move because I didn't know how many or which bones might be broken.

Very slowly I began moving my fingers one by one. Then I tried my feet and legs. Finally I dared lifting my body into a sitting position and then stood up. I didn't have a single pain. Except for my comrades, the crowd quickly disappeared.

I had just fallen 7,000 feet without a functioning parachute and walked away without a scratch.

I must explain to my dubious readers that a good part of this miracle was occasioned due to the farmer who owned this property. That very morning he had gone out and plowed this section of his farm. It was all freshly turned dirt, nice and soft.

I remind you that all the expenses and profits of these aerial shows depended on collections made by the other team members after each jump. Apparently in all the excitement of expecting to retrieve a dead or injured member, my partners got so excited that they forgot to pass the hat.

After the most thrilling air circus exhibition, we netted not a single dime for my efforts.

This was just one of the episodes that some people have attributed to the intervention of God. While some ascribe it to divine intervention, others claim it was Providence and still others to the luck of the Irish.

I conclude this chapter of my life without admitting to any commitment for the reasons of my survival. I leave the attribution to those who dare. As for me, at this age, not being certain, I do not wish to offend any unseen power by crediting the wrong source.

The performance had a sobering effect and it was mutually agreed to discontinue our flying circus effort and each pursue their own goals.

I was not discouraged by this near death episode and actually encouraged when I returned home and found a letter from a talent agency waiting for me. For a fee of ten percent the agent offered to spread word of my parachute displays nationwide. I was really impressed and persuaded when I found the name of Ann Corio, a very famous burlesque striptease artist, among her famous clients. I signed the contract.

My first paid engagement was for a one mile delayed jump at a huge air show sponsored by the Kiwanis Club in Jeffersonville, Indiana. I still have an original show poster showing the date only as September 19th and the location as the New Albany and Jeffersonville Airport in Indiana.

At that early age I found myself suddenly in the company of some very famous celebrities whose names were featured along with mine on thousands of posters throughout Indiana. In addition to the name Bobby Leeds, the posters listed the names of Wilbur Shaw, Harold Johnson and the world famous pioneer aviator, Roscoe Turner.

Harold Johnson was a famous prize fighter. Although he lost three out of his four fights with Archie Moore and was knocked out by Jersey Joe Walcott, he eventually became the Light Heavyweight Champion of the World and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Wilbur Shaw was a famous race car driver who had built and established the "Indianapolis 500" race track and was its president from 1945 until his death in 1954. Although he only won the race three times, he was the first driver to ever win the Indianapolis 500 two successive times. Only Mauri Rose, Bill Vukovich, Al Unser and Helio Castroneves have ever matched Shaw's record.

It was the third name on the list of celebrities that most fascinated me, Roscoe Turner. Having always been infatuated by the spectacle of flying, I looked forward to actually seeing and possibly meeting this famous pioneer of American aviation.

Roscoe Turner was one of the earliest enthusiasts of aviation. Although he enlisted in the U.S. Army Airforce during WWI, the war ended before he ever saw combat and he was discharged as a First Lieutenant in 1919. With the money from his discharge Turner purchased an Army surplus aircraft. Until 1923, he became a "flying gypsy," performing with Jimmy Doolittle and other aviation pioneers in air shows all over the American Midwest and south.

While looking for a new plane to purchase, Turner ran into a former army pilot he had served with. His friend offered him an exceptional opportunity to purchase a late model Army Air Force plane he owned. It was such a bargain that Turner jumped at the opportunity.

A few months later Turner was approached by FBI agents. It appears that the plane he had purchased had been stolen from an active army airfield. It took some time, but Turner was able to prove his innocence and at the same time decided to abandon "Barnstorming".

Roscoe Turner was the aviator who set the East to West transcontinental airspeed record in 1930. He also won the Bendix Trophy in 1933 and the Thompson trophy in 1934, 1938 and 1939. He would have also won the race in 1936 but his engine failed and he was forced to withdraw.

In addition to setting numerous speed and distance records, when World War II broke out he set up his own flight school and graduated 3,000 pilots for the Army Air Force. In 1952 he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by a special act of Congress.

Roscoe Turner was a friend of mine.

Excusing my digression to emphasize the distinguished company I kept, now let us return to the New Albany and Jeffersonville air show.

Due to engine trouble in the plane that was to take me up for my parachute finale, Roscoe Turner came forward and volunteered to take me up in his own plane. Something just clicked and this one occasion turned into a warm friendship. I don't think he ever garnered any benefit, but his actions resulted in me receiving several more show opportunities where I performed the finale. At the conclusion of each show he would give me a ride back to his home base in Cincinnati.

I will never forget the thrill I got the first time he flew me back to Cincinnati Airport. He insisted I go into his hanger with him where he led me to a cordoned off area containing what I believe was his famous racing plane, the Laird/Turner Racer.

The airplane was cordoned off by ropes and it glistened like it had just come off the assembly line. I don't doubt that my expression on my face encouraged him to ask if I would like to sit in the cockpit. I jumped at the invitation. Being extremely careful where I stepped, with Turner's assistance, I entered and sat down in the cockpit of the famous plane owned by one of the most famous aviators in the world. What more could any sixteen year old pilot-to-be ask for?

It was at one of these air shows that someone told me about a new flying program the Army was instituting for young men who were turning seventeen. Coincidentally, my seventeenth birthday was only a few months away.

In the next portion of this text, if you so wisely choose to continue, you will learn that an ounce of luck

may be worth more than a pound of wisdom and perhaps
you would better to be born lucky than wise.





Chapter IV

The Ineptness Dragon

When I heard about an Army Air Force program that would accept you when only seventeen years old, I knew it was meant for me. My seventeenth birthday was only a few months away and at last, I would be able confront the Axis dragons directly.

When I finally received the information on the program, my heart sank. In order to qualify for the program you had to be seventeen years old and a high school graduate with a 3.5 honor point average. In addition, they preferred applicants with at least one or two years of college.

My educational life flashed before my eyes. I not only wasn't an honor student, I had dropped

out of school in the eleventh grade with a 2.5 honor point average. My quest became shadowed in doubt.

I wanted to be an Air Force pilot more than anything in the world so I did what no one else in my shoes would have done. I summoned up my courage and wrote a letter to General Hap Arnold, Commanding General of the American Air Force.

I don't recall everything I told him, but I know I related my sorry scholarship background and I gave him my solemn pledge that if he would waive the rigid requirements and let me become an Army pilot, I would be the best pilot in the United States Air Force!

Hey, nothing ventured. Nothing gained!

Two weeks later I received a letter from the Army Specialized Training Program authorizing me to take the admissions test for the program. I became a believer that fortune favors the determined heart.

Admissions Test? No one had mentioned anything about having to pass an examination!

A week later I was ushered into a huge auditorium that contained over a hundred desk chairs located on different levels and spaced far enough apart to prevent anyone from copying someone else's answers.

Apparently, there were hundreds of applicants taking the entry test and every one of them had graduated high school with at least a 3.5 honor point average, and may even have had some college education.

Every one except one. . . Me.

They handed me a thick folder of papers and told me to go to an assigned seat and read only the first page. There were about a dozen monitors spread out among the desks to make sure no one was cheating. The test period was from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

At the signal to start I opened the folder and scanned through the pages. The test included every kind of subject a person would be expected to have studied in high school, especially math and history. The first thing I did was go through the pages and answer the questions I was pretty sure I knew. Then I went back to the first sheet and went through the questions again working out the math problems and the multiple choice I thought I might be able to answer correctly. At 4:00 p.m. they announced to the few remaining candidates that we only had 30 minutes remaining. I still had almost fifty percent of the questions unanswered.

Again I returned to the first page and decided to guess at the remaining problems and questions. By this time most of the applicants had completed the test and had left the auditorium. As the end of the testing period approached, I was the only contestant remaining in the auditorium and all of the monitors were in the front of the room laughing and probably joking about me.

When the final bell rang I made my last entries, turned in my documents and with a heavy heart left the auditorium. I had squandered my dreams in the pursuit of youthful aspirations. Knowing that I had just guessed at almost fifty percent of the answers, I was certain I had failed.

About two weeks later I received an envelope with an orange border around it from the Army. I read the letter with total amazement. I had passed the qualification tests in the top 30% of the applicants. Who ever said the braying of an ass does not reach heaven? Surely, reader, is this not a confirmation of the old adage that sometimes it is better to be born lucky than to be born rational and that it is a wise drowning man that clutches at straws?

On March 29, 1944, I was processed into the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program at Fort Sheridan in Chicago, and sent by train to Galesburg College in Galesburg, Illinois.

The college had been the site of the famous Lincoln-Douglas debate in which Lincoln clearly spoke out for the banning of slavery.

The college had an almost total female student population due to most of the potential male students having enlisted or being drafted into the military. The college moved the few residing civilian male students into fraternity houses and most of our battalion was quartered in a large college dormitory called Seymour Hall. Four men were assigned to a room, based on the first initial of their last names. I only remember the name of one clown, Joe Levar, a Polish American with a weird flair for bizarre humor.

Reveille was at 6:00 a.m. and breakfast was served at 7:00 a.m.. Lunch was served at noon. Classes were held from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., interrupted only by lunch and some brief lavatory breaks. From 4:00 p.m. to lights out at 10:30 was an enforced study period, and monitors checked every room to be sure we were studying.

On Saturday morning, the entire Squadron formed and to the accompaniment of our student band, we marched past a reviewing stand. Attendance at every function was mandatory. This was the schedule followed Monday through Saturday afternoon.

The formal review was well attended by the local population and at the end of the review we were dismissed and free to do whatever we wanted until reveille on Monday morning.

In my case it was not a matter of what I wanted to do, it was a matter of what I had to do to maintain

a passing grade level. From the very beginning, I encountered the handicap of lacking a sufficient education to compete with the rest of my battalion. As a result, I found myself using every spare minute studying. At night after a bed check was made, I stuffed my pillows under the blankets so it appeared that there was a body there and then I took my books and a flashlight into the closet and closed the door. A towel along the bottom of the door kept any light from being seen. My entire Saturday afternoons and Sundays were spent studying.

I was competing with cadets who had 94.5 grade point averages in high school and some who had two years of college. Cadets whose grade point average fell below 80 were automatically terminated from the program. College algebra and most of my other courses did not present a problem. However, when we began studying analytical geometry, I just could not manage it. In desperation, I went to the dean of the math department and told him of my dilemma. If I didn't maintain at least a "B" average, I was likely to be washed out of the program.

The Dean explained that he didn't have the time to tutor me, but possibly his secretary, who was a female college student, might be willing to do it if I could make some arrangement with her.

Ellen turned out to be a gorgeous, nineteen-year old coed who lived with her parents near the college. After explaining my situation, Ellen said she would be happy to help me if I would come to her house each Saturday afternoon for tutoring. I readily agreed.

At our first session we sat next to each other on the couch and I noticed that she was wearing a sweater that buttoned down the front. The top couple

of buttons were not buttoned, encouraging my eyes to wander. Apparently her eyes also noticed my visual digressions and she came up with the novel incentive to encourage my studying. Out of the clear blue she suggested an arrangement where she would give me certain assignments and if I completed them correctly by our next meeting, she would unbutton another button of her sweater. Now, who among my male readers would have refused such a magnanimous offer?

Right up to the time of our mid-semester exams I studied as I had never studied before and the dragon of analytical geometry was vanquished. At our meeting just before the mid-semester, and at the time Ellen's last button was to be opened, Ellen took me by the hand and told me she had bad news for me. Her father, who worked for the railroad, was being transferred to another city and she would no longer be able to tutor me.

I was right back to button one and didn't know what to say. Ellen took me to the door and bid me goodbye. This was a case where the sauce was worse than the main dish.

At the mid semester math exam I breezed through the exam. When the grades were posted I had a 100% for math. I was the only person in the entire Battalion to score a perfect grade. Reader, do not embrace the thought, as many of my comrades did, that there had been some kind of collusion between Ellen and me. It was true that, as the Dean's secretary, she probably had access to all the problems and their answers. I assure you the subject was never broached or entertained.

When Christmas came around all of the college's staff were given a ten day holiday. This meant there would be no meals or other amenities available so the

Army decided to give all of us a ten day furlough assuming we could all afford the bus or train fare to and from our homes. In the case of one other soldier and myself, the money just wasn't there.

To remedy the problem, our regular Army Master sergeant volunteered to stay with us in the empty building and to take us to a restaurant for breakfast lunch and dinner. It is a vivid memory of our dinner on Christmas eve. The only restaurant open was a Chinese restaurant upstairs over a camera shop. As we sat there with our platters of chop suey in front of us, suddenly the other soldier broke down and began crying. In a town of thirty thousand people, not one family offered to host even one of us for a Christmas Dinner.

This event was addressed later in my married life. When the holidays of Christmas and Thanksgiving came around, we always contacted the nearest military bases and invited a group of soldiers and sailors to join us for dinner. For Christmas, Peggy and I purchased some modest gifts, wrapped them up in Christmas paper and gave one to each of our guests along with our best wishes.

In December of 1944, our unit was transferred to the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois.

Although the war was still going on and the Axis dragons had yet to be slain, the Air Force had more pilots than they had a need for. By closing many of their pilot training programs, my chances of ever flying was minimal. Desperately wanting to participate in the crusade to slay the Japanese dragon, a search of the various military branches revealed none that would accept an enlistee under eighteen years of age. Yet, there was one option for me, the United States Merchant Marines.

On or about February 14, 1945, I went to my commanding officer and told him I needed a three month furlough so I could go home and help my parents. I told him that both of my older brothers were serving overseas in the military and my elderly parents needed assistance at home. My commander took notes and told me he would contact the Red Cross and they would check my story. This was something I hadn't counted on, so I left his office thinking that the next visit to his office would be for a reprimand.

About 8:00 p.m., I was summoned to my commander's office certain that I was about to be reprimanded for lying. Instead, he told me that the Red Cross had confirmed my story and he was issuing me a three months leave of absence. I came to believe that fortune does favor the determined heart.

(Apparently this leave-of-absence was never recorded in my Army records and does not show up anywhere on my discharge papers which has caused a good deal of curiosity on how I served in the South Pacific and was in the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program in Champaign, Illinois at the same time.)

Reader, in my lifetime I have learned that sometimes truth is stranger than fiction.





Chapter V

Vanquishing the Axis Dragons

I readily packed all my gear in my duffel bag and hitchhiked to New Orleans where the War Shipping Administration had a hiring office for Merchant Marine sailors. I bid for several positions on different ships and finally was accepted as a “wiper” on a brand new ship built and being outfitted in Panama City, Florida.

As a wiper, it was my duty to keep the engine room clean and take care of any menial tasks. I was also assigned to be a loader of a 20 mm Orlikon Cannon on the forward starboard bow just 25 feet away from the three inch cannon. Hearing protection was

only provided only to the Coast Guard members but not to the crew members who manned the 20 mm Orlikon Cannons.

After firing these weapons, we usually suffered a temporary loss of hearing but it always sufficiently returned to not notice any difference. It wasn't until after the war that I learned that I had lost about twenty percent of my hearing. It seemed so slight that I never complained about it. As with other injuries, treatment or benefits were not accorded to members of the Merchant Marines.

The first part of our trip took us down through the German U-boat infested waters between Florida and the Panama Canal. Although we encountered no threats, we did have several practice drills and these served to make me very proficient in my performance.

The S. S. Dudley H. Thomas was a specially constructed liberty ship. It had a very wide beam and stern so the ship could accommodate aircraft in its holds as well as on its main deck.

The engine room was between twenty and thirty feet below the first deck. The entire top of the engine room was lined with huge tanks that contained super heated fuel oil for the furnaces. In the event of a torpedo impact, these tanks usually ruptured, pouring tons of boiling oil down on the engine crew. This knowledge encouraged me to gain the ability to clear out of the engine room and reach my gun station faster than anyone else when an alarm was sounded.

We sailed from the Atlantic Ocean through the Panama Canal and anchored overnight in Lake Gatun. The following day we completed the trip through the canal to the Pacific Ocean and from there we sailed to the Oakland Army Base in California. There the ship was loaded with Lockheed P-38 interceptors in its

holds and several of the larger Northrup P-61 Black Widow fighters on our deck. After taking on additional provisions, we sailed to Honolulu for more provisions and our sailing instructions.

From Honolulu we sailed to Eniwetok Atoll where we rendezvoused with a huge armada of American warships preparing for the invasion of Japan. I think it contained every type of warship in addition to hundreds of freighters loaded with supplies. To the right of the island were floating gasoline barges for as far as you could see.

We were only there for a few days before we received new orders. We were to break away from the fleet and sail unescorted to Biak, New Guinea.

On this mission we received several alerts. Some were to look for survivors of a ship that was sunk or for pilots of an airplane that had crashed in our area.

One incident involved an unmarked aircraft that came at us on a torpedo run directly over my gun station. Apparently I was the only one who got to his gun station in time to load their gun for the plane's approach. Unfortunately, to load a 20 mm Orlikon, the gunner has to force the loading end of the weapon all the way down to cock the gun and get a shell into the chamber. Since I was the only one at the station I inserted a magazine into the gun and tried to cock it so I could fire at the approaching plane. I jumped up and down bearing all my weight on the shoulder arms and finally managed to get a shell into the chamber. By that time the plane had already flown over us without dropping a torpedo or firing any of his machine guns at us.

The pilot then banked and was coming directly over us from the stern to the bow and was making a perfect pass to strafe us. Without firing a shot the pi-

lot banked sharply to the right taking him right over my gun position. I swung my gun around and pressed the trigger. I could see the tracer bullets following the plane, but could not catch up as it passed out of sight.

I am remiss at not having introduced you to our nemesis, our three hundred pound Chief Engineer. Mr. Campbell was an elderly Dutchman who had come out of retirement to serve as the Chief Engineer on our ship. From the time we left New Orleans until we reached Oakland Army base he ruled the engine room like a tyrant. As if working in a 100 degree engine room wasn't bad enough, he would not tolerate anyone sitting down during their four hour shifts.

He would get up at all hours of the night and day and peer down into the engine room to see if he could find anyone sitting down or relaxing. If he did see someone sitting down he would scream down at the top of his lungs, "Get your finger out of your A##- and get to work." I don't believe he ever completed a sentence with out some profanity. No one on board, except possibly the Captain, escaped his hostility. When we arrived at the Oakland Army base, the entire crew asked to sign off the ship. This would have seriously delayed the ship and the Captain begged us to wait until he made some other arrangement.

A short time later, the Captain gathered the crew together and told us that he had spoken with the Chief Engineer and the Chief Engineer had apologized and said he would revise his demeanor and promised to be nice in the future. Considering the consequences of all of us abandoning the ship, we all reluctantly agreed to give the Chief Engineer another chance.

We weren't an hour out before we heard his booming voice screaming down into the engine room,

“Get your finger out of your A-- and get to work!” Expecting a man like Campbell to change his demeanor was like building a bridge in the desert.

While he was disrespectful to everyone, he saved his utmost contempt for me. When he first met me he asked me my name and where my family came from. When I told him Ireland, he screamed at me, “You’re not Irish, you’re a “F-----G Englishman!” Then he told the Engineer that he wanted me to climb up on top of the settling tanks and move the stored material from one tank to the next. These tanks held the superheated fuel oil and the temperature up there was at least a hundred and fifty degrees. When I was doing this, I could only work there for a few minutes at a time because the soles of my shoes got boiling hot. When I finished one rearrangement he ordered the engineer to have me move the material back to its original place on the other settling tank.

About halfway to New Guinea, we developed a knocking coming from one of the engine’s connecting rods. We had “thrown” a bearing. This meant that one of the engineers would have to crawl down into a small pit, take off the two huge nuts that were holding the crank shaft together and scrape the lead bearing insert until there was again space for the lubricating oil to circulate.

When the chief engineer was apprised of the situation, he made one of his rare descents into the engine room. His body was so huge he could only manage the stairwell by descending it sideways, one step at a time. When he finally reached the bottom, he began a verbal tirade against the oiler, yelling that it was all his fault and calling him everything under the sun.

When the second engineer prepared to climb down into the tiny engine compartment, the chief en-

gineer insisted that he had to scrape the bearing. Because he was so overweight, in order to do that, we would have to remove the hundred pound steel forging from the pit and place it up on the deck where he could sit down and scrape the lead bearing.

Mind you that we were sitting right in the midst of one of the worst Japanese submarine territories in the world. Every minute of delay exposed us to the threat of being torpedoed. We could not voice our exasperation but after scraping the bearing we had to lower the bearing into the pit and the second engineer would have to take the bearing up and check to see if there was enough space for oil to circulate. Finally, three or four hours later, after several efforts, the Chief Engineer finally agreed the repair was adequate.

What might have encouraged him to change his demeanor was something that happened when he was preparing to repair the bearing. In order to separate the lower half of the crankshaft required removal of two very large nuts. He yelled at me to go topside and secure a giant adjustable steel wrench from a room at the top of the stairs. I climbed up the two flights of stairs and found the wrench. It must have weighed at least 25 pounds. I lifted this massive piece of steel and looked down over the railing at the chief engineer sitting right next to the opening. It was not my intention to kill him, but I did intend to impress him with my ability to do so.

I held the wrench over the railing and waited for the chief engineer to move his foot out of the way and then I let go. There was a resounding crash when the wrench hit the steel deck plates and then silence. I then descended the stairs and the chief engineer just stared at me not saying a single word about what had

just happened. I said I was sorry that the wrench had slipped out of my hands and nothing more was said.

That was the last day I had to move anything on top of the settling tanks and the last time the chief engineer interfered with our shift.

We finally arrived safely at Biak, New Guinea, and they began unloading the aircraft. At that time American forces held the entire lower half of the island and its airport but there were still a number of Japanese soldiers still on the upper half of the island. We were put on eight hour shifts and there was relatively little for us to do in our free time except mingle with the soldiers and go hunting for Japanese trophies. My good fortune was to find a Japanese battle flag and a Japanese bayonet. My bad fortune was to reach into a cluster of bushes and find a nest of hornets.

I must have received almost a hundred stings and was rushed to a first aid station where they administered a shot of adrenaline. Miraculously, I suffered no after effects. A few days later a liberty ship docked and unloaded cases of supplies among which were about a hundred cases of beer. Since there was a lack of supervision, a few of my shipmates and the soldiers in whose tent we were staying, decided we would avail ourselves of a few cases of beer. The temperature was in the hundreds so we didn't mind that the beer was also hot. We had each drunk several cans when someone came up to our tent and yelled out that they were having a boxing contest on the deck of the supply ship. He also said that it was a fleet wide contest and the winner would enjoy a number of benefits.

We joined the crowd watching as one man after another fell to the superior contestant. Then, out of the blue, one of my shipmates yelled, "Leeds, you can take that guy." I didn't say anything. Then, my entire

group of friends started yelling that I could take him; that I could beat the standing champion, and urged me to go up and challenge him. Reader, trust me, never accept advice unasked for. You are better off alone than in the company of drunks.

The boxing ring was on top of one of the hatches and was roped off to approximate a regular boxing platform. The referee gathered my opponent and me in the center of the ring and explained the rules. To this day I couldn't tell you what he said. When the bell rang I stumbled out of my corner to meet my adversary who turned out not to be the normal man I'd entered the ring with. As soon as we met in the center of the ring, my opponent had grown two or three feet taller and had several arms which were pummeling me without mercy. I continued backing up trying to escape this meeting until I found myself in a corner unable to retreat any further. In desperation I swung my head sideways to try and avoid another blow and instead drove my forehead into the edge of the steel winch and cut a three inch gash in my forehead.

With blood streaming down my face, the fight ended and my friends rushed me to the nearest first aid station to get the cut sutured closed. I probably won one record; the shortest fight in the fleet's history.

To while away the time, I heard that the base commander flew to headquarters at Finchhaven, New Guinea each night. With nothing better to do, I requested permission to accompany him one night and was granted permission. Our flight was in a C - 47 and as it was my luck, a violent storm broke out. This had to be the worst flight I have ever experienced. We were tossed around in the sky like a ping pong ball in an ocean. I didn't get sick, but I never requested another airplane flight in that storm ridden environment.

After several weeks, we departed and headed home to the states. Our route took us to Manila where the harbor was strewn with vessels sunk by the Japanese navy and airforce. A large clock on the face of one of the destroyed buildings showed the exact time the first bombs fell at 12:05. Then we went on to Honolulu, and finally to San Francisco where I was discharged on May 31, 1945. Every member of the crew was awarded the American Theater Ribbon and the Pacific Theater Ribbon by the War Shipping Administration. (Although I was allowed to wear these awards until I was discharged from the Air Force, they were taken away while being processed "because the Merchant Marines were not an official branch of the United States Military.")

The only things awaiting me when I disembarked were three letters with orange borders around them, from the Army. Apparently, I had overstayed my leave of absence by almost two weeks and I was now A.W.O.L. Absent Without Leave! Although the letters clearly stated that they were not to be forwarded, the letters bore markings that showed they had been sent all over the Pacific before being returned to San Francisco.

I immediately went to the nearest Military recruiting office and explained that I had been in the South Pacific which took longer than I had planned. The officer in charge made a telephone call and then told me to go directly home and new orders would be awaiting me. This I did. When the new orders came they had two dates in them. One date was to report to a processing station in Chicago and the second date was to report to my old squadron at Keesler airbase in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Somehow, I missed the first date and only saw the second date. When I arrived home one night my mother told me that several of my old comrades had called and said that their orders required them to immediately report to Fort Sheridan in Chicago and they were leaving immediately. I dug out my orders and sure enough, I found out that I was already supposed to be at Fort Sheridan in Chicago.

I immediately went downtown to the main recruiting office and told them what happened. While they were impressed with my service in the South Pacific, they said they would make sure I didn't make any more mistakes. They told me they were going to have two M.P.s take me to my home to get my belongings and to say goodbye to my family. Then they would escort me to a train that would take me to Chicago.

When the military Jeep pulled up in front of my house I could see neighbors coming out to see what was happening. To avoid this attention I asked the M.P.s if they would mind driving down to the store at the end of the block and wait for me there. I assured them I would just say goodbye to my family and would meet them at the store. I went into the house, packed a small bag of my personal belongings, said goodbye to everyone and walked down to the store where the military Jeep was parked. By this time about a dozen neighbors had already walked into the store to find out what was going on. I told the M.P.s I was ready to go and as we were departing I heard one of my neighbors tell the rest, "It's the Leeds' boy. I always knew he'd come to a bad ending."

The M.P.s took me directly to the railroad station and made sure I got on the correct train to Chicago. Once on the train, I took my seat for the trip. At that time every train had military police on them who

walked down the aisles and checked all men to see their military status. One of the M.P.s stopped beside my seat and gave me a stern look and asked me where I thought I was going. I replied that I was going to Fort Sheridan. He suddenly broke into a grin and said, "It's all right, we know all about you". Apparently my story had made the rounds and a lot of people seemed to enjoy it.

At Fort Sheridan I received a thorough physical examination and received all the vaccinations the military felt were necessary. After that I was given train and meal tickets to Keesler Air Force base in Biloxi, Mississippi, where I re-joined most of the men I had served with in the Army Specialized Reserve Training Program. Our new designation was Squadron U. We underwent several weeks of basic training which included marching, weapons training and on Saturday every squadron participated in a mass formation where every squadron formed and passed by the reviewing stand while a military band played. It was an inspiring site and many people in the city were allowed to come onto the base to watch the review.

One of the miserable attributes of Biloxi Mississippi was that it was always extremely hot, humid and raining. On one occasion our unit was formed between the barracks and it was pouring rain. The route to the formation led through a huge deep puddle of water. Not wanting to get my feet soaked, I urged our part of the column to divide and four men go to the left and four men go to the right of the puddle and we would merge together at the end of the puddle which was still secluded from the people on the reviewing stand.

Everything was perfect except for our cadet major, who was just another enlistee, but who had been appointed to be the cadet major of our company. At

the conclusion of the parade, the cadet major called us all together and told us that he was going to teach us a lesson. To punish us, he took away our free time and made us regroup outside in the pouring rain. Then he marched us back and forth through the puddle of water until we were thoroughly saturated.

That evening a small group of us decided it was time for us to teach cadet major a lesson.

This cadet major had already pulled his rank so many times that everybody in the platoon had a dislike for him. He was fortunate in that his bunk was in a private room within the barracks. For his protection, he had installed several hook eyes to secure his door. That night several of us busted his door open and while some of the group held him, one of our members shaved a cross on his head. With his crew cut the shaped cross could not be concealed. The next morning our cadet major reported the incident to our battalion commander and I found myself being escorted by M.P.s to the commander's office. There he accused me of destroying government property and told me he was going to have me court-martialed, imprisoned and given a dishonorable discharge.

The company commander wrote up the incident and submitted it to the Provost Marshal who refused to file the charges against me, saying he would settle for no more than sentencing me to a few weeks of kitchen police duty. Although the company commander tried to go around the Provost Marshal, the Provost Marshal prevailed and I ended up being ordered to three weeks of kitchen police.

Now if anyone thinks K. P. is a punishment, I have news for them. When you work in the kitchen the butchers and the chefs cut out the best cuts of meat, the filets and the prime ribs, and they go only to the

kitchen help and officers (in that order). The rest of the soldiers dine on what ever is left. Not only that, but we could eat as much as we wanted, anytime we wanted.

By this time everyone in the kitchen and probably everyone in the battalion had heard about the incident and the favor fell to the ones who settled the score with the cadet major. When breakfast was served the first day I was in the kitchen, our cadet major came through the food line. When he got to the first station the server took a teaspoon of potatoes and put it on his dish. He looked at it in dismay and told the server he wanted more potatoes to which the server ordered him to move along. He moved to the meat station and when he held up his tray the server put on a piece of meat that was about 2 inches square. Every food station including dessert was handled in the same manner

I swear that I had no part in this arrangement. I imagine he reported the treatment to the company commander but we never heard anything from him. However, while the cadet major did receive permission to eat with a different company, he never came back to us for his meals.

For the duration of my time at Keesler Air Force Base I continued to volunteer serving on K. P. I found it to be the best way to standby.

After several weeks, the Army Air Force was renamed the United States Air Force and became a separate military service. Unfortunately, the Air Cadet training program was discontinued and pilot training was stopped. Everyone in the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program was reclassified and shipped to different bases. I was reclassified from Air Cadet to Parachute Rigger and sent to Chanute Airforce Base in

Champaign, Illinois, attached to the 3502nd Army Air Force Base Unit.

When I arrived at Chanute Air Force Base I was assigned to a barracks and told in which kitchen I was to eat. That was it. The war was all but over and all preparation and training just stopped. We were free to just walk around the base until the weekend and then we were issued two or three day passes. When we returned, the same routine was repeated.

Bored with nothing to do, I started going over to the flight line to watch the planes take off and land. Most of these flights were being made by returning pilots who had to put in a certain number of hours of flight time each month in order to qualify for special flight pay. With nothing to lose, I asked one of the pilots if I could go up with him and he agreed. It turned out that he had flown numerous missions with General Claire Lee Chennault in China and welcomed the opportunity to relate some of his stories to a willing listener.

The plane we were flying in was an early version of the BT-13 trainer. Instead of an automatic starter, on this plane the pilot had to get out on the wing, insert a crank into the engine and wind up a spring. Then the pilot would get into the plane and pull a handle that released this spring and the spring would turn the engine over and over until it started. To earn my ride, I was the one that had to get out on the wing and crank that inertia starter, but it was worth it. Once we took off, the pilot would light up a cigarette and tell me the controls were mine. There was a sign above the dashboard that read "NO SMOKING" which he ignored completely.

When he told me to take the controls, I told him that I had never flown a plane before and he proceeded

to teach me what each of the instruments meant and how to move the stick and rudder pedals to assume any direction and altitude. After he had achieved his required flight time necessary to qualify him for flight pay he would have me turn the plane in the direction of the airfield where he took over and landed the plane.

On one of our flights we received a radio message from the tower stating that a heavy storm was moving into the area and all planes were to return to base immediately. My pilot started flicking the radio on and off rapidly while speaking some mumbo-jumbo. Then he switched the radio off completely and told me he had flown in worse storms and we continued to fly until he had achieved his required time. After landing I presume he told the tower that his radio wasn't working and he couldn't understand their message.

Shortly after this incident the Japanese surrendered and World War II ended. Everyone on the base seemed to go wild. The soldiers tore down parts of the chain link fence around the field and just took off. When order was finally restored, most of us received a notice that we were going to be honorably discharged on a certain date.

The process of discharge was held in an airplane hangar filled with rows of desks, secretaries and an Air Force officer at each desk to process us. I was processed by an Air Force second lieutenant. As soon as I sat down he demanded to know why I was wearing four combat ribbons awarded to me by the War Shipping Administration and by the Air Force. In a stern voice he lectured me that the Merchant Marines was not a branch of the military and the Air Force erred in crediting me with overseas service while I was in the reserves. At the time, I was completely subdued and wasn't about to argue with him.

He made out of pencil copy of my discharge and handed it to the typist to type the finished copy. When it was completed he handed it to me and told me I was finished. If I had read my discharge paper at that time I would have noticed how finished I was. In addition to my combat ribbons he also stripped me of my marksman medal and even my good conduct ribbon.

Forty-three years later, on January 19, 1988, America finally awarded veteran's status to only some Merchant Mariners. At the same time all the women who failed or dropped out of the WASPS (Women's Airforce Service Pilots) training program were accorded veteran's status.

If a merchant mariner was assigned to a ship sailing to England and then found out this ship was sailing to a North Atlantic destination or to Murmansk, Russia, they were given the opportunity to sign off the ship due to the terrible odds of surviving. Being torpedoed by German submarines or being sunk by German aircraft in the North Atlantic or on the trip to Murmansk, Russia, was almost a sure death sentence. The frigid waters of the North Sea climaxed the lives of those who were thrown into the waters in only a matter of minutes.

One in every twenty-six merchant mariners died in the line of duty. Eighty-three hundred were killed at sea and another 12,000 were wounded, of which eleven hundred later died. Time and again the Air Force fought against giving merchant mariners veteran's status. Finally in 1987, forty-two years after the end of the war, federal judge Lewis Oberdoffer ordered that American merchant seamen who rendered service to the United States Armed Forces while in the ocean going service from December 7th, 1941 to December 31st, 1946 be granted veteran's status.

For most of us this recognition came too late. When one of us had been injured and had to be hospitalized, it was at our own expense. In fact, while we were hospitalized, our pay was cut off. It is a fact that Mariners suffered the greatest casualty rate of any United States military service during World War II.

When the merchant Marine service was credited to service in the Coast Guard, we finally received an official United States Coast Guard discharge certificate, but that was all.

At the time of my discharge at Chanute Airfield, I was given two options: I could take a discharge and then be subject to the draft and probably be called up for four or six years of duty in Europe or I could re-enlist for four years and get a chance at choosing the type of work I'd like to do in the Army, maybe even a chance to receive pilot training.

I had enough experience with the military's promises. I chose an immediate discharge and trust to luck. As far as I know every single one of my friends chose to sign up for a four-year term and not one of them ever got to fly. They all ended up in Europe doing what the Army wanted them to do while I was free to pursue dragons.

Failure to say "yes" is sometimes the answer of a wise man!





CHAPTER VI

Slaying the Seafaring Dragons

By the time I arrived home there was a letter waiting for me from the War Shipping Administration. Inside was a picture of a seaman at the helm of a ship with a bold slogan, "*LET'S FINISH THE JOB!*" The notice went on to say "URGENT-EXPERIENCED SEAMEN NEEDED!" The notice closed with the instruction to wire the Merchant Marine in Washington D.C. collect.

I was aware of the need not only to take food and medicine to Europe and the Far East, but also to bring back our soldiers. Although there was no men-

tion of reimbursement for traveling to New York, I volunteered. It was another dragon to vanquish.

Ordinarily, in order to get an advanced rating from the Coast Guard, you had to have several months experience plus pass a multiple choice test. Due to the need for more advanced sailors, the Coast Guard did away with the time element and it was only necessary to pass the multiple-choice test. Once again opportunity favored the determined heart.

Immediately I went to a bookstore and got a copy of an Audle's Blue Book which explained every maritime position and how to perform the requirements for that classification. I studied the section on Oiler, Fireman and Water Tender and took the exam. I was surprised, but not disappointed, at how close the test questions were to the samples given in the Audle Blue Book.

On January twenty-second with my new rating as Oiler, I sailed for Bremmerhaven, Germany, on the S. S. Carillo, carrying food and medical supplies. We were only out one day when we got caught in a violent storm off Cape Hatteras. For three days we could not make any headway and were just buffeted to and fro, and for three days no cooked meals were served. Under the conditions, I don't think anyone missed the food.

Working down in the engine was a frightening experience. High up on a bulkhead hung a large pendulum and when the ship rolled sideways the arrow would swing and show you the number of degrees the ship was leaning. There were also red marks at the point at which the ship would capsize. It was a frightening experience to watch the pendulum approach a red mark, knowing that you would never be able to get out alive if the ship turned upside down.

Also, as the ship rolled from side to side, the crankshaft would splash oil out onto the steel deck plates making them slippery as ice. As oiler, it was my job to approach the engine and to pump oil into the cup on each crankshaft. From these cups the oil dripped slowly down to the bearings and kept them lubricated.

We had a large supply of shredded rags which were available for cleaning messes like this. However, the chief engineer was concerned that we might run out of rags and so he cut off the supply. Needless to say, the steel deck plates became as slippery as ice and it was inevitable that on one occasion, when the ship lurched, I slid to the railing of the engine and started to fall backwards into the crank pit.

As I did, the crankshaft came around and struck me on the back of the head knocking me away from the crank pit some ten feet across the floor.

I awoke in the Purser's office on a cot. Although the Purser had some first aid training, my injury was far beyond his experience. He was able to place a stitch at the beginning of the cut in my scalp and another stitch at the far end. But my skull had swollen so much he could not close that part of my scalp.

I remained in the purser's's office for the remainder of the trip to Bremmerhaven. On arrival he was kind enough to walk me to a first aid station that also did not know what to do. They did bandage my head and recommended that I see a doctor when we returned to America. They also recommended that I not do any strenuous work until then.

Apparently the chief engineer did not think my job as an oiler was strenuous, so I was put back to work as an oiler on the return trip to America. During this time, I began suffering from terrible headaches and

the aspirin tablets they gave me did not seem to help. When I arrived back in New York the maritime union insisted that the shipping company have me admitted to the Marine Hospital on Ellis Island.

Because the hospital was overloaded with patients from all branches of the military, I was just shuttled from one room to another until I was finally scheduled for my head x-rays. At that time, the only way they could x-ray the brain was to first put a syringe in the base of your spine and draw out all the fluid from your spinal column. No sedative was given. I felt them push the needle in and then a horrible pain and all went black.

I don't know how long I was unconscious, but when I awoke, my entire body felt like it was going to burst. I was in a ward with many other men and my moaning finally attracted a nurse. She gave me two aspirins in my hand and a glass of water which I eagerly accepted. After another half hour of agony, my moaning caused the nurse to return. In addition to two more aspirins she offered me a warning to shut up. Later, I noticed that she had placed the bottle of aspirin on the table beside my bed. If I could only have reached it, I would have swallowed the entire contents. Fortunately for me I was in such pain that I could not even turn and reach for the bottle.

After another week I was able to sit up and shortly thereafter able to walk to the cafeteria for my meals. Much of my back pain had subsided but not the headaches. My first time in the cafeteria, I took my tray of food and sat at one of the front tables. I was about to start eating when all of a sudden something hit me in the back of the head. I turned around and saw a patient staring at me.

Suddenly three or four other patients started picking things up off the plates and started throwing them at me and others around me. It was then I found out that I was not placed in a regular medical ward, but because of the shortage of space, they had put me in a vacant bed in the psychiatric ward.

After strenuously complaining, I was transferred to a rehabilitation ward where I spent several weeks weaving rugs until the cut in my scalp healed. Finally, they gave me a large bottle of phenobarbital and discharged me. I don't know who paid for my hospitalization but like other mariners, I received no pay for the time I was hospitalized.

When I returned home, I enrolled at Wayne State University in Detroit using my G.I. Bill to pay my tuition. Despite being tranquilized by the phenobarbital, I had almost no difficulty with any of my courses. The one problem I did have was that when the bell rang it sounded exactly like the alarm bell on the S. S. Dudley H. Thomas when I was in the South Pacific. Even though I would try to be ready for the bell that announced the beginning and ending of classes, I just could not get used to it. To me that bell was an alarm that we were about to be attacked by submarines or enemy aircraft. The instant that bell rang, I threw all my books up in the air and ran for the door.

After three or four occasions I was called to the Dean's office and told that my behavior was disrupting several classes and he said I'd have to make other arrangements.

I decided to take only a few courses in night school, but by now my headaches had grown worse and I increased my dosage. One evening I went to school and sat down on a bench and fell asleep without

ever going to my class. I awoke early in the morning and realized what was happening to me. I was existing but I really wasn't living. From that day on I never took another phenobarbital pill. My headaches continued for years, but diminished with time

From April 9, 1946 to July twenty-third, I made two trips to Africa working on the S. S. South Africa Dawn.

When I was a child, one of my sisters took me on a visit to Mississippi. I will always remember standing outside of a chain-link enclosed playground where many white children were playing all kinds of games. Outside, next to where I stood, a number of little black children clung to the chain-link fencing watching the white children play. Next to where I was standing were two drinking fountains: One had a sign, "Whites Only." Several feet beyond was another drinking fountain and over it was a sign that read "Blacks Only." Even though I was a young child, I didn't think it was very nice.

After spending almost a month in South Africa I had seen the worst of Africa's Apartheid Policy. You were sternly reprimanded if you even referred to a black person as a native of South Africa. According to the revisionist white rulers of South Africa all the natives of South Africa were killed during the Zulu Uprising of 2006. Although the British did kill over 10,000 natives, many survived and they and their descendants still lived in South Africa.

An interesting side note to this history was that Mahatma Gandhi, a most distinguished twentieth century advocate of peace, actually was a warmonger in 1906 and encouraged the British to wipe out the black natives. In fact he actually urged the British to arm his

fellow Indians and let them fight against the African natives.

Early in the uprising, Mahatma Gandhi was given the rank of Sergeant Major in the British Army. The British did let Gandhi form a Stretcher-bearer Corp., but they would not trust the Indians with guns. Many times Gandhi publicly lamented the fact that the British would not train the Indians, arm them and let them fight against the black natives of Africa.

Although Gandhi was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times. It was declined all five times.





CHAPTER VII

Challenging the Apartheid Dragon

Between April 9 and July 23, 1946, I made two trips to Africa and fell in love with the country, however, this love did not extend to many of the white inhabitants and especially the government and their police force.

I had seen segregation in America but it was unlike what I found in Africa. In South Africa you were not even allowed to call a black person a native. They were referred to as Kaffirs which implied a black stateless immigrant. The State insisted that all the black natives living in South Africa at the time of the Zulu uprising were killed. Although thousands of black Africans were slain during the Zulu uprisings, thousands

of others remained alive and continued to live in South Africa and its surrounding territories as their ancestors had for thousands of years..

Of course every amenity was separated, one kind for blacks and another for whites. You rarely saw a black man walk by a policeman without bowing his head as if expecting a blow. As I traveled past the city limits of Cape Town, it was not unusual to see naked black women bathing or washing clothes in road side pools of rainwater. If they had done that within the city limits, they would have been arrested and maybe held in a prison for months without any regard for any family who had no knowledge of her disappearance. On one occasion, a native woman was arrested for walking along a road with only a skirt. She didn't speak any English and was screaming and waiving her hands in the air trying to explain that she was made that way. She probably was from some distant tribe and did not understand the city's dress code. The policeman put an arm lock on the old woman and forced her to a point where a police van took her away.

While home, I was engaged in a conversation about Africa and mentioned that I might return there to live for a while. When the conversation ended, a man who had been standing nearby invited me to a meeting of people who were opposed to segregation and Apartheid.

Being interested, I attended the meeting and found the people actively engaged with funding causes sympathetic to my own. My sponsor said that if I was returning to South Africa and wanted to help, he would give me the name of a person who would tell me how I could help end Apartheid in South Africa. I took the man's name and telephone number.

Shortly afterward I secured a Visa for South Africa and being low on funds, contacted the America

South Africa Steamship Company to see if I could arrange a work-away passage which would allow me to work on a ship to Africa and then leave the ship in Africa. That might have been possible at one time but no longer. It seemed that some of the ships would fire a seaman in a foreign port leaving him there without any means of support or of returning to America. Finally the Federal Government passed a law requiring shipping companies to sign a mutual agreement with every seaman they employed, stating that a seaman could only be discharged in an American port.

The Company also warned me that if I attempted to leave the ship in Africa, I would be charged with a Federal crime and face a long prison sentence.

Despite the warning, I went to the union hiring hall and bid on the S. S African Victory going to South Africa. I won the bid and found myself once more employed by the America-South Africa Steamship Company as a Junior Engineer. We sailed for Africa on June 6th.

The trip was uneventful until we arrived at Port Elizabeth, the city where I planned to jump ship. Low on funds, I applied to the purser for a draw upon the wages I had earned up to that date. This was pretty standard among seamen. I don't recall what the limits were but I think you could get about forty percent of your earned wage as of that date.

Shortly after receiving my draw, I was summoned to the captain's office where he threatened me about jumping ship. He warned me that no man had ever jumped one of his ships and gotten away with it. I told him I understood and went back to my cabin to plan my departure. We arrived at Cape Town on December 25th.

According to my American source, I was to contact a fellow conspirator in Uitenhaig, a small town about twenty miles inland from Port Elizabeth.

Fortunately, an Argentinian ship carrying a load of champagne docked right in front of us and the sailors on board were selling bottles of champagne for only fifty cents a bottle. At that price, almost everyone on board was availing themselves of this bargain. I had another role for it. I purchased several bottles and each night I would get off the boat and have to pass by a guardhouse. The first time I went past the guardhouse he searched me and found a bottle of champagne I was carrying. I was fined seventeen dollars and lost my bottle of champagne. The following night I took two bottles of champagne with me. When I got to the guardhouse I just placed one bottle in his window and he waived me through. That became the procedure each night.

As soon as it got dark on Christmas Eve, I carried my duffel bag with all my personal belongings out to the guardhouse. Ordinarily they would have searched any luggage I was carrying, but this time I reached into my duffel bag and offered the guard my last two bottles of champagne. He thanked me several times and waived me right through. I was on my way. I went straight to the train station and caught the eleven-fifteen p.m. train for Uitenhaig.

I arrived in the small town of Uitenhaig sometime before midnight and found myself in a dark and deserted town. There wasn't an automobile or person on the streets. I located a small hotel but it had closed at 10 p.m. Next door was a police station with only a single light burning outside its entrance. Its front doors were also locked. Across the street was a large park with a statue at its entrance. I placed my duffel bag

against the base of the statue and settled in for the night.

The following morning I woke up and made a phone call to the number that had been given me. A man on the other end of the line identified himself and I told him I was from America and was instructed to call him. He told me wait where I was and he would come and get me.

A short time later he picked me up and took me to his large one story home and introduced me to his wife, his son and two daughters.

Apparently, my friend in America had notified him about me and my willingness to help fight against Apartheid. He told me that arrangements had been made for someone to pick me up and take me to Johannesburg where I would receive additional instructions.

In the meantime, I was treated like a long lost relative. Each morning we had a breakfast of pancakes, sausage or bacon, fruit and excellent coffee. About ten o'clock we all piled into his car and drove twenty miles to the ocean where we all went swimming. At noon, we got dressed and drove to one of their choice restaurants for lunch. Following lunch, we would return home. On every occasion I offered to pay but they refused to let me.

About ten days passed when my host found what he was looking for in the want-ad section of the local newspaper. The ad was for a person to share expenses on a drive to Johannesburg. After calling the number I was told I would be picked up tomorrow, January 15, 1947, and driven to Johannesburg where I would receive new instructions.

The following day, I was picked up by a man named Daniels, driving the newest model Ford sedan,

and we began the seven-hundred mile drive to Johannesburg. When he arrived, I opened the rear door to place my duffle bag on the seat and found myself facing a grinning black child of about twelve to fourteen years of age. He was shabbily dressed and his head was covered by a well worn, wide brimmed hat held up by his ears. Daniels explained the circumstances.

He was a courier for a group that raises money to finance Apartheid protests. His employers were two attorneys who, in addition to their legal duties, purchased raw diamonds from natives who found or stole them from De Beers property in Botswana or Namibia. These attorneys shipped the raw diamonds to another law firm in Cape Town who in turn shipped the diamonds to illegal diamond cutters in other countries.

The De Beers Company has been called the most corrupt monopoly to ever exist. Their wealth, skill and determination bought influence in many countries of the world, but especially in Africa. By buying influence, anyone caught with uncut diamonds or even finished diamonds without proof of being purchased through a De Beers agent, faced long prison terms and possibly even death.

My job as a "courier" was to deliver the illegal uncut diamonds from the lawyers in Johannesburg to a law firm in Cape Town. The young black boy who would ride with me was an integral part of the plan. While traveling back and forth, when having to go through a large city, I was to let the boy out and he would disappear into the jungle and walk all night. In the morning I was to drive about two miles out of the city and wait until the boy reappeared. Of course the diamond bag was always in his possession. At the time I was unaware of the consequences if caught by the police.

At first I enjoyed driving back and forth and especially when I received payment for each trip. I would make one or two trips each week and given the option of taking my payment in cash or taking my payment partially in cash and partially in uncut diamonds. I was assured that the diamonds were worth much more than the cash I would have received. I chose to take a major part of my wages in the uncut diamonds.

In Cape Town and in Johannesburg I found that I could get a private room at a youth hostel for only a few dollars a day. Not wanting to be caught with the diamonds, I cut open the seam in the bottom of the lining inside my small leather toiletry bag and stuffed the diamonds underneath the lining.

Although it was possible to drive a one way trip in two days, like my predecessor, I always took three days each way. My first stop heading to Cape Town was a small town on the Vaal river called Parys. Going to or coming from Johannesburg, my host told me he always made Parys an overnight stop. I learned why on this trip.

Parys was a very small town and had only one small one-story hotel that operated on the "Modified American Plan". In those days, your room charge also included shining your shoes and three main meals.

On our ride to Johannesburg, Daniels had let our black courier out before we stopped at the Parys Hotel for the night. My room was small but comfortable and included a toilet, closet and single bed. When I met Daniels in the dining room we were shown to a table and handed menus which were printed in Afrikaans.

Not being able to read Afrikaans, I figured the safe thing to do was to just order the same thing as he did. Our first course was a large bowl of some

kind of vegetable soup. The second course was individual platters each offering a huge boneless fish that was absolutely delicious. After managing the fish they brought us a platter of assorted vegetables, medlar and two kinds of potatoes. I ate some of each dish to be nice, settled back and was prepared to leave. Apparently, my friend was a bottomless pit and the waiter reappeared with a platter of delicious looking meat. Just to be polite, I indulged and thought the taste a little strange, but delicious.

When I could eat no more, Daniels asked me how I liked monkey. He was serious and I didn't for a moment doubt that I had just indulged myself in a monkey fest. To climax the meal we were brought a huge bowl of every kind of fruit grown in Africa and believe me, few Americans could identify most of them.

I slept soundly until about 6:00 am when I was awakened by a knocking on my door. When I answered it, a young black boy offered me a steaming cup of black coffee and a shiny pair of shoes resembling my own. Apparently it was the custom to set your shoes outside your door and they polished them for you.

For breakfast I enjoyed a bowl of Wheaties swimming in milk, three large lamb chops, baked potatoes and a bowl of fresh fruit.

When we checked out my total bill for my room and meals was one pound and two shillings, the equivalent of five dollars and forty cents in American money.

After a few weeks of driving I became alarmed when I stopped for a meal or to get gasoline and was subjected to being searched and questioned about my back and forth trips between Cape Town and Johannesburg. Although they never found any incriminat-

ing evidence, I sensed that I was deliberately being targeted.

Also, during the time I was driving, I learned some very disturbing facts. The anti-Apartheid movement had become so wide-spread that the government had passed dozens of new laws that allowed them to charge anyone who was even a remote friend of someone suspected of being an “agitator”, with treason and executed. More and more frequently, groups of armed insurgents were challenging the African police and politicians. Until Apartheid ended, over 4,000 men and women “agitators” were hanged. Their sudden interest in my movements caused me to re-evaluate my participation.

What alarmed me most was that on my last stop, I was questioned by a CID plainclothesman (Criminal Investigation Department) and the police. The man had the exact date of my last visit. Although they searched my belongings and the car thoroughly, they could find no evidence of my smuggling activity. One thing that further alarmed me was that they took my passport and made a phone call to confirm my visa.

Apparently, while they did confirm that I had a legal visa, they did not at this time note that I did not have an arrival date stamped on the visa. As an illegal immigrant, I could have been immediately arrested and imprisoned. Foresight is the mother of success. I determined to terminate my term as a courier.

I explained why I could no longer continue as a courier. They understood my concerns and as long as I did not reveal any of this effort to anyone, seemed to appreciate my past efforts and we separated most amicably. When settling my account, they were most generous and the award of uncut diamonds seemed an assurance that if I was ever detained or arrested, I

would not betray them. It was an assurance I had no problem in giving.

Returning to the hostel where I had been staying, I gathered up my possessions, checked out and made my way back to Parys. In order to conserve my cash, I chose to sleep in a small encampment with a young Englishman, Stanley Rafferty and a French Canadian, Ralph LaVoie, who were also illegal immigrants and pretty much in the same straights as I was.

Camping outside wasn't bad as long as you didn't ever leave any possession out that a monkey or baboon could steal. The entire metropolitan area was enclosed within a wire fence to keep out the larger four legged animals, but didn't keep monkeys or baboons out.

We solved our meal problem by making a deal with the hotel owner to repaint all his screens and anything else he wished painted or repaired, in exchange for meals and a generous supply of beer. Of course we couldn't eat or drink in the dining room, but he furnished us excellent portions of palatable food and beer that we could take back to our campsite. Any remaining food was always placed in a remote area of the jungle so animals would not get used to visiting our campsite.

Although the Vaal river did have crocodiles in it, the water was rather shallow by the city and they usually stayed about a mile down stream in deeper water.

With little to do on Sunday evening Rafferty proposed we cross the Vaal River and visit a nearby native village and buy some of their home brewed Kaffer beer which was a potent alcoholic drink.

It had begun to lightly rain when we started out but we had little trouble descending the four foot river

bank and crossing to the other side. A trek of about a mile brought us to the native village where we were welcomed by a group of half clad male and female natives. I don't know what their relationships were, if any, but after exchanging a modest amount of shillings for four quart bottles of Kaffer brew, Rafferty bartered some cigarettes for a young girl's favors.

I went into the straw hut with him and watched while Rafferty selected a handsome young girl who appeared to be fifteen or sixteen years old. I declined to join him and just watched with everyone else while he concluded the arrangement.

By the time we returned to the river it'd been pouring for several hours. Instead of finding a shallow stream, we found a raging torrent of water up to the edge of the four foot banks. There was no way we could swim across the river holding a quart of beer in each hand.

Rafferty had a solution. He cut four long strands of sturdy vines and tied each end to a bottle's neck. Then we wrapped the cord around our necks and tied it in a slip knot. This way the bottles would not come loose and our hands would be free for swimming to the opposite shore which was now almost twenty feet away.

Calling across to LaVoie to stand by to help us out when we reached the opposite shore, we entered the fast flowing waters and began swimming. The swift waters immediately grabbed us and began to carry us downstream toward the area that was teeming with crocodiles. To make matters worse, the swiftly moving waters started twisting the bottles around each other, tightening the cord around my neck to the point I could no longer breathe. At some time I finally passed out.

Later I awoke on the opposite shore with Rafferty and Lavoie giving me artificial respiration. We returned to camp where I concluded there was no future in remaining in South Africa, but that I might be able to help the Portuguese natives in their struggle to overthrow their Colonial rulers.

With little preparation, I decided to walk and hitchhike the two thousand miles to Portuguese East Africa. In addition to my food and water, I fashioned an assegai, a short native spear fashioned from a sturdy branch from a dead tree. I knew exactly what I would do if I ran into a hostile animal. The procedure would be to jam the dull end of the spear into the ground and point the sharpened end forward so when the animal leaped at me it would be impaled on the end of the spear.

Bidding my friends goodbye, I set off into the jungle heading in a North East direct action figuring I would run across a roadway and then get a lift from some driver. I walked for almost a half day when I came across a small dry river bed that seemed to be running in the direction I wished to go. Following the dried riverbed for some distance I came to a small area filled with water. It also bore the footprints of animals that came there to refresh themselves.

On each side were paths obviously made by the various animals. Rather than go on, I decided to take the path that led in the direction I wish to go. I had only gone a short distance when I came to a clearing in which there was a huge pile of rocks. I was about to enter the area when a huge scrawny male lion walked out of the brush carrying the entire rear quarter of some animal in its mouth.

I froze in my tracks as did the lion. Slowly I tightened my grip on my assegai, lifted it up, and plunged

the blunt end into the ground. To my horror, I heard a distinct cracking sound and looked down to find my spear had broken in the middle and I was holding only a two foot spear unsupported except only by my own strength. I looked up at the lion who was just standing there looking at me. After a few minutes the lion turned his head away and carried his trophy into the opposite bushes. I swear he had a disgusted look on his face.

Now, I knew that where there was a male lion there would be one or more female lions around and they were the hunters and killers. With fear as my companion I turned around and beat a hasty retreat back to my friends in Parys.

When I told them of my harrowing adventure, Rafferty spoke up and told me that as long as I carried a stick in one hand a lion would never harm me. Incredulously I looked at Rafferty and asked him if that was true. "Absolutely," Rafferty replied. "Of course you've got to carry that stick faster than the lion can run !" Rafferty's field of advice was like a garden full of weeds.

The next morning I bid them goodbye and boarded the train to the east coast of South Africa. From there I took another train to Dar es Salaam and then to Mombasa, a small primitive settlement that used to be the starting point for safaris into the unknown African jungles.

Dar es Salaam was more like a regular city, except that like South Africa, the black citizens had no rights and were treated abysmally. I did not find much anti-Apartheid sentiment among the white population so I decided to give up my quest and try to find the ship that I could work on to find my way back to America.

One day I went down to the docks and sat down on a bench to watch for ship that might be heading towards America. Shortly after, a white Portuguese man sat down on the bench beside me. He spoke a little English and after a few minutes he asked me if I was an American. During our discussion, it became evident that he was very much opposed to the Portuguese colonial government's rule of his country.

During our discussion, I told him that I was a licensed Marine engineer in seeking the ship to take me back to America. Almost immediately he asked me to help some friends take a coastal ship that was docked in front of us, on a short trip to Madagascar and back. He said the ship was carrying some very badly needed materiel for the revolutionaries in Madagascar.

When I declined his request, he begged me to reconsider. "It's only a short trip and you'll be back in the morning. There is no danger to you. All the materiel is concealed beneath the deck plates and they will be covered by tons of coal packed in large canvas sacks. They have a complete crew, but they do not have an engineer to take care of the engines."

After listening to his persistent talking, I finally relented and decided to do this one good deed. The man took me on board and introduced me to the captain who spoke less English than he did. As soon as my new friend finished speaking, the captain gave the command to cast off the mooring lines and started the engines. Then he pointed toward the door to the engine room and motioned me to descend to the engine room.

When I reached the engine room deck plates I stared in abject terror. There were no steam engines. This ship was driven by two diesel engines and I had never worked on a diesel engine in my life. I didn't

know what I was supposed to do if something went wrong. All of the gauges had red lines on them, but except for them and a knocking sound I didn't know how I would know if something was going wrong. Of course there was one other way to tell. If the engines suddenly stopped, something was wrong.

After several hours we finally docked. I went up on deck and saw that we had gone up an inlet and a few dozen men came on board and unloaded the sacks of coal as well as the merchandise secluded beneath the floor plates.

While the unloading was in progress, the Capt. invited me to join him and the rest of the crew for supper. The meal consisted of one huge pot which contained a thick meat and vegetables stew. Each man was given us several flat pancakes-like breads but no silverware. I watched as each man dipped one of his hands into the pot and loaded a handful of contents onto a bread, wrapped the bread around it, and ate it. Faced with no alternative other than to go hungry, I followed suit.

When the ship was completely unloaded and everything put back in place, the engines were started and we began our trip back to Dar es Salaam.

I was thinking how lucky I was when all of a sudden the engines were idled. Not knowing what was wrong, I ascended to the deck and froze as I saw a Portuguese warship on each side of us. Apparently the captain was given orders to accompany them to a harbor in Portuguese East Africa. It was a military installation and I and the entire crew were taken off the ship and held under guard while another group of soldiers thoroughly searched the ship.

Each crew member was searched and questioned. One of the officers spoke very good English

and kept asking me what I was doing on board the ship. When I produced my passport he noted that I did not have a visa for Portuguese East Africa and asked me several times how I entered the country. Stretching the truth a little, I told him that I just walked across the border and was visiting the country. I didn't know I needed a visa.

Despite not finding any sign of contraband, every member the crew was arrested and charged with some crime. I was singled out. Noting I had a legal visa for South Africa they decided to deport me to South Africa. I was placed in an English Land Rover and a driver and two Army guards drove me to the South African border and turned me over to the South African police.

The South African police took my passport and then locked me in a cell until the next day when I was released and I returned to Johannesburg. Once again I rented a room at the YMCA hostel. My stay was cut short. Apparently when they checked my passport with Pretoria, they found that I had never entered South Africa legally. The day after renting my room two police officers came and arrested me, took me to the train station and stayed with me on the train trip down to Cape Town.

There I was taken to the main police station and told that I was going to be held in a detention barracks. When I protested that I had a legal visa to be in South Africa, the police captain took my passport and turned to the page with the visa. Then he placed a ruler diagonally across the stamped visa and with a red pen drew a thick red line. Then with he printed in large letters "CANCELLED".

"You no longer have a valid visa for South Africa!" He said. After that I was turned over to two CID

(Criminal Investigation Department) men and taken by taxi to an Immigration Detention facility to await deportation back to America when the S. S. South African Dawn returned to Cape Town. Apparently the captain of the African Dawn had insisted that he would be the one to return me to America where I would be tried for breaking articles and serve a prison sentence.

Reader, do not despair. Where there is a will, there may be a way.





CHAPTER VIII

The Dragon of Incarceration

When we arrived at the detention barracks I was turned over to two elderly guards who registered me. This office and the guards living quarters, plus a high ten foot wide solid wood gate formed the north wall of the detention facility. After registering me, I was taken to the right prisoners' barracks. This frame building formed the east wall of the compound. There were two rows of beds and at the far end was a bathroom complete with sinks and flushing toilets.

The far end wall was built against the toilet area of the black prisoners' toilet facility that ran at a right angle to our building and formed the

south wall of the enclosure. The west wall was a twelve foot high concrete wall with nine rows of barbed wire running along the top.

The two guards who were always on duty were single, elderly Army veterans and one or both of them were always on duty.

There were only about a half dozen inmates so I was allowed to choose any empty bed. I was given two sheets, apparel, a thin woven rope mattress and a blanket, all of which looked and smelled like they had never been washed.

We were allowed to roam the grounds until eight p.m. when we were locked indoors. The barracks had sufficient lighting but at ten o'clock all the lights except one were turned off. Most of the inhabitants had either missed their ship or had jumped ship and were being held until another of their country's ships came into port that would accept them. Other prisoners were foreigners who'd completed prison sentences and awaited repatriation.

Guards were referred to as screws and both of ours were considered poor examples. One of the guards was blind in one eye and we referred to him as Winkle Oogle. The other guard was even older and he was always referred to as Prune Face. Of course we never used those names in their presence.

Our food was most often purchased from an Indian restaurant and frequently consisted of curry and rice. On many occasions the rice was rancid, crawling with tiny worms. On these occasions the guards took the food back and got us fresh food. The one time when we really had a

major conflict was when we ran out of toilet paper and Winkle Oogle tore some newspapers into strips and gave them to us. We knew that these two cowards were given allowances to buy our meals and necessities and they were cutting all of the corners to save money that they were pocketing. I did not endear myself to Winkle Oogle when I threatened to complain to the American Council if we were not furnished proper toilet tissue immediately. About twenty minutes later Winkle Oogle reentered our barracks and threw a bunch of newspapers at me. I picked them up and threw them back at him yelling that I wanted to call the American Embassy. A short time later he reappeared and threw a new roll of toilet paper into the room. Apparently my threat was effective for we were never without toilet tissue during my remaining time.

By bribing the guards, I was finally able to telephone the American Consulate and I requested a meeting with the Consul, Mr. Anderson. I also called an immigration lawyer at Sturocks law firm and asked him to intercede on my behalf to obtain a visa for neighboring Rhodesia. Finally I was informed that there was going to be a meeting between the Consul, a representative of the shipping company and a representative of the Immigration Department. At last something was going in my favor.

This meeting was postponed several times until one day I was advised that my old ship, the African Dawn, would be in port at four p.m. and the captain had ordered me to be brought on board to be returned to America. It seemed there was little chance that I could avoid being extradited.

Just prior to four p.m., two CID men came to the detention barracks and I was told that the ship had been delayed and wouldn't arrive until six p.m. and I should be ready to be taken to the ship then. This allowed me two hours to prepare. I did.

A few months before, four of the inmates went into the bathroom one night, broke out a ceiling tile and escaped. They made the mistake of stealing a car with the intention of driving to Port Elizabeth and obtaining passage on a vessel leaving South Africa. Half-way there they changed their minds and returned to the detention barracks. Each of the men were threatened with a six month's jail sentence if they broke any more rules. Apparently the threat was sufficient to make them comply. Recalling this event, I reasoned that the only way to avoid being returned to America on the African dawn was to escape from the barracks.

While the guards and the CID men were talking, I went into the toilet area of the colored's toilet and found the ceiling panels were also made up of two by four plastic panels. With the assistance of a water pipe, I lifted myself up and tried to dislodge a ceiling panel. It only rose about two inches so I made a fist and drove it through the center of the panel. I broke out the remaining pieces of panel board revealing a clear entrance to the attic area. Once up in the attic area I carefully stepped from one cross beam to another until I reached the west end of the barracks where freedom was promised.

When I tried to remove a clay roof panel I found they were held together by four strands of

wire. Working feverishly, I unwound the wires to remove enough panels to allow me to climb up on the roof. Once on the roof, I slid to the edge and dropped about twelve feet to the ground and casually walked away. It was broad daylight and a large number of passersbys stopped and witnessed the entire escape yet no one yelled out or made any attempt to summon the guards or police.

Realizing that the police would soon be out searching for me, I made my way to Signal Hill where I hid in a bunch of bushes with a clear site of the harbor. I could clearly see the S. S. South Africa Dawn docked right behind another ship within the breakwater of the harbor. I anxiously waited, but six o'clock passed without it leaving. Finally, at six-thirty I heard two angry blasts of the ship's signal horn and watched as a pilot craft guided the vessel out of the breakwater into the open sea. Once again the captain would not be returning me to America.

It was the middle of January, 1946, and I had little protection against the bitter cold African nights. I remained in hiding another day and then made my way down into the city in broad daylight. I realized that it was virtually impossible to remain undetected, so I decided to take a chance and called the American Consul and tell him what I had done.

He was not pleased. He advised me to turn myself in and he would prevail upon the Immigration Department to let me return to the detention compound until he could arrange my departure. Misplacing my trust in him, I did as he suggested.

I was re-arrested and returned to the detention compound.

The two guards must have been chastised for having let me escape and they openly displayed their hostility by refusing to let me use the telephone and constantly checked my presence. While several of my old roommates were still there, dozens of new ones had arrived. Among the new arrivals were two young Swedish sailors who had missed their ship.

As a way of mocking me, Winkle Oogle told them of how I tried to escape but was recaptured. That evening the two sailors went into the bathroom and decided to duplicate my effort. Having gone through the experience I didn't see how these inexperienced kids could succeed. I didn't have long to wait to find out. In the silence of the night there was suddenly a loud crashing noise. After succeeding in climbing into the attic area, one of them stepped off a rafter onto a ceiling tile and fell through, landing in the toilet below.

Within minutes both boys were back in their beds but not in time to have the lights turned on by our guards.

Surveying the damage in the bathroom, the guards immediately called the police and several police officers soon appeared. After pointing out the two Swedish sailors, Winkle Oogle walked over to my bed and falsely accused me of being an accomplice in the escape attempt.

Despite my denials, I was also arrested and the three of us were taken to a police station where we spent the night. The next morning they told us that we were going to be returned to the detention barracks. We were placed in a vehicle with three

guards for the trip. We drove only a few miles when the vehicle slowed down to make a right turn. I glanced out the window and saw a road sign that read Roland Strat. I knew something was wrong. The name Roland Strat was infamous as a location of South Africa's worst condemned prison. I instinctively reached out in front of my guard and tried to grasp the door handle and escape but his two arms restrained me and I was then unable to move until we had passed through the two huge gates into the reception area of Roland Strat Prison.

All of our personal items were taken and placed in bags. After receiving a stern warning against breaking any of the prison's rules, we were led to a cell block that contained about ten cells. The two Swedes kept telling them that I was innocent but the warden just ignored them. After being thoroughly searched we were led to a courtyard where I could see several prisoner cell blocks.

Each cell block was about one hundred feet long and contained a row of cells about ten feet wide and twelve feet deep. At the end of the cells were three exposed showers. Three flushing toilets, mounted on a raised platform, were centered at the far end of the courtyard. Any form of privacy was non-existent. The courtyard was about twenty feet wide and ran to the rear wall of the next row of cell blocks.

The individual cells were about eight feet wide, twelve foot deep and ten feet high. A small ventilation opening was located at the very top of the rear wall near the ceiling. It was too small to permit a prisoner from entering it, but it did

not prevent one prisoner from boosting another prisoner up to hide some contraband in it. Knowing this, irregular searches by the guards always included a ladder that permitted a search of the ventilation shaft.

The guards led me to the first cell block, opened the gate and pushed me in, locking the gate behind me. There was a painted yellow line running on the floor about two feet in front of the row of steel bars that formed the front of the cell block. Not knowing what it was for, I went up to the bars and grabbed a hold of them with both hands.

The guard casually walked to where I was standing and without any notice struck out at my fingers with his hard wood baton. I instinctively retracted my fingers and only felt a mild stinging in the end of one hand. If I had not withdrawn my fingers in time he would have crushed most or all of my fingers. Pointing his baton at me and the yellow line, the guard informed me that prisoners were not allowed to approach this wall of bars by crossing the painted yellow line.

The door to my cell was a very solid wooden door with only a single smaller opening covered by a sliding cover of steel that could only be operated from the outside. There was no heating, air conditioning or other means of ventilation.

At three thirty p.m. the door was opened and supper was brought in. It consisted of a soup made of onions with some carrots and red beans. It also had chunks of stale bread in it to thicken it. After turning in our spoons and empty dishes we were allowed into the courtyard and to use the flushing toilets.

Our rigid schedule was the same every day. At five-thirty a.m. the lights were turned on. At six o'clock we had to be dressed and at six thirty the cell doors were opened and everyone had to line up outside their cells to be counted in the presence of the Chief Warden. When everyone was accounted for, a doctor came in to the cell block to see if anyone required medical attention and afterward breakfast was served. After that any court cases were taken out to court. There was always a waiting line to use one of the three toilets at the end of the courtyard.

Every breakfast was identical. It consisted of oatmeal, a small loaf of brown bread and a metal cup of very hot water. If you wanted coffee or cocoa you had to purchase it in cans of a powder from the cell block's storekeeper using money that you had deposited when you entered the prison.

Shortly after breakfast, buckets of boiling water were brought into the courtyard and each inmate was given a two foot square piece of cloth. The entire courtyard and each cell block was flooded with the boiling water and every inmate had to get down on their hands and knees and draw the cloth across the concrete until the cell-block and courtyard floors were completely dry.

At ten o'clock we were again given a cup of boiling water with which to make coffee or cocoa and at eleven a. m. lunch was served. Lunches varied on a regular basis.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday lunch consisted of the same old soup but on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday it was a stew. The stew was mostly potatoes and ground

up vegetables in gravy. Occasionally two or three chunks of some kind of meat was included. The meat usually had a white stomach lining attached to it and you could chew it forever without being able to swallow it.

At three-thirty supper was served and every day it was the same stew and bread as was served for lunches.

We were allowed to remain in the courtyard until four-thirty p. m. when we were locked in our cells until the following morning. This confinement was unusually punishing. Despite the extremely cold weather you were issued only two blankets and a woven rope mat on which to sleep. This cellblock held several very senior men who could not control their bladders. In the morning all the blankets were collected, folded and stored on top of each other. If you were unfortunate enough to receive one of these mats or blankets your only alternative was to use them or sit up all night and freeze.

Reader, these dragons were small in comparison to one of our inmates named Johnny Skulse. He had to be the closest thing to Neanderthal man in the last forty thousand years. He was a little over five feet tall with a long face and a jaw that jutted outward. He walked slumped over with his large long arms almost touching the ground like an ape.

Skulse had spent most of his life in jails and prisons and was now awaiting trial for crippling a prison guard. It occurred after he had been judged to be an habitual criminal and sentenced to life in prison. He was on a chain gang chopping lumber when a guard turned his back to him

and Skulse struck him in the back with his axe. Although the guard survived he was totally paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

With his appearance and his past record, he literally ruled the entire cell block's population and frequently took advantage of the younger men in the cell block without the guards or anyone else intervening. In fact, it seemed the guards even enjoyed his sadistic, perverted behavior.

Having some money in my account, I purchased cans of cocoa powder. Like other inmates, when the first cocoa can was empty it became a prized possession because I could use it to mix their boiling water and my powdered cocoa in proper proportions.

One day I went to the cellblock's storekeeper to get my cocoa can and was told that he didn't have it anymore. Despite my protests there was nothing I could do. Later that morning I saw the storekeeper and Johnny Skulse walking in the courtyard and Skulse was carrying a cocoa can I had never seen him with before.

Friend, when you are confined with very limited possessions, the value of the few things you do have become magnified.

Without any hesitation I approached Skulse and demanded the cocoa can. He just stared at me and uttered some guttural sound. When I reached for the can he handed it to the storekeeper and started swinging at me. Fortunately he didn't know anything about boxing and I was able to avoid most of the swings and to land some punishing blows to his face and body. Finally, he tried to cover face and back away from me. I sus-

pect I was the first person to ever stand up to him.

The following day Skulse got into another fight with another inmate smaller than me and again was beaten up. From that day on he only imposed upon new smaller young inmates but never when I was around.

The prison cells were quite adequate for six men, but hardly adequate to handle the crowd that came in on weekends. Every weekend they arrested so many drunks and petty criminals that they had to house them in our cells. It was not unusual to have ten or more men in our cell and no one could lie down or sleep. To make matters worse, these men had to use the porcelain chamber pot continuously and the smell was so bad you could barely survive it.

After several weeks of this I decided I was going to make a protest that would bring things to a head.

After breakfast one day, a guard handed me the towel to dry the courtyard and I just threw it down and went back into my cell. The guard came after me and demanded me to pick up the towel and start drying the courtyard like everyone else. I refused. Then I blurted out, "I didn't do anything to get in here and I'm not going to do anything until I get out!"

The guard looked at me in disbelief. He turned abruptly and left the cell block. A short time later he returned with the assistant warden. It was a Saturday and the warden was not on the premises. The assistant warden yelled at me and told me to start drying the floor or he would fix

me. Again I refused and he ordered two guards to seize me and take me to solitary confinement.

In some respects, solitary confinement was better than a regular cell. Although it was totally black I didn't have to put up with the crowding and stench of drunks. Every meal consisted of oatmeal, the small loaf of dark bread and the tin of hot water.

On the following Monday, my cell door was opened and two guards took me to the warden's office. The warden called me a typical uppity American and kept threatening me with longer confinement for not obeying the African laws. The more I said I didn't belong there, the more he threatened me. Finally, he had me taken back to my regular cell and I never cleaned the courtyard or cell floor again.

A few days later a guard came to my cell door and asked me if I was interested in getting out. Naturally I replied, "Yes!" He closed the opening and disappeared. Shortly after, two guards came and escorted me to the warden's office. In addition to the warden there was a man from the American Consulate and another short man in a Seaman's coat.

The man from the consulate asked me if I was ready to return to America. I didn't hesitate. I would've gone anywhere to get out of that prison. The consulate representative told me that the other man was captain of an American ship carrying a load of lumber from Brazil.

He explained that a galley man had gotten sick and had to be hospitalized and if I agreed to take his place for the remainder of the trip the ship's captain would let me fill the position.

I readily agreed and then I was taken back to my cell to await preparations for them to take me to the ship.





CHAPTER IX

Vanquished by The Chinese Dragon

At four-thirty p.m., on March fifteenth, a prison guard came and took me to a large room with several large wood tables. He led me to one of the tables and told me to pick out my personal belongings.

I recognized everything on the table and began to pack them into my duffle bag. Then I spotted my tan toiletry container in which I had hidden my uncut diamonds. I also noticed two six foot men standing at the end of the room. There was something that screamed they were plain clothes policemen and I also noticed they were looking out the corners of their eyes

to observe me. I realized that if I picked up the toiletry container, and they knew there were illegal diamonds in the container, it was as good as a confession and I could do ten or twenty years of hard labor in an African prison.

I was torn between all that wealth I had earned and walking away, but I had enough of African prisons. I turned and began to walk away. I had only taken a few steps when one of the plain clothes policemen started walking towards me and called out for me to not to forget my toiletry bag. I shook my head and yelled out "That's not mine!"

There was an awkward silence and then the two plain clothes policemen approached me and told me they were to escort me to the S. S. Luckenbach in the Cape Town Harbor and not to try to escape. Their warning was superfluous, for I was more than anxious to get out of South Africa.

Arriving at the ship, the two men led me on board and turned me over to the First Mate. Then they went down the gang plank and stood there not taking their eyes off me.

About fifteen minutes later, a pilot boat guided us out of the breakwater and into the Indian Ocean. I was free at last, and on my way to America.

Apparently someone had spread the word that a murderer was released from a condemned prison and was coming to work on the ship. No one, but no one, on the ship approached me.

At last I saw a crewman looking out over the port rail and I approached him. "How long before we get to America," I asked. At first he appeared kind of surprised and frightened.

There was a pause and then he replied, "We ain't going to America."

It was my turn to be surprised. "What do you mean we're not going to America?" I asked.

"We're going to China. This boat's been sold to the Chinese government. When we get to China the company is flying the crew back to America."

I felt like I had been hit by a brickbat. I tried to think of my meeting with the consul and the ship's captain. China was never mentioned and I began to wonder if I had signed articles which would have guaranteed returning me to an American port.

The trip to Shanghai took us through the Indian Ocean and through the Straits of Malacca. Working in the galley was an easy job preparing potatoes and vegetables for the first and second Chinese chefs to cook. Bored with my tasks, I asked the first chef if I could brew some beer and he consented.

Being imprisoned provides you with a wealth of information, much of which an honest man would never use. However, the brewing of beer was a very simple recipe and although I didn't think I would ever use it, I did not forget it.

I took one of the largest pots we had and filled it half full of water. Then I emptied a five pound bag of sugar into the water followed by four or five pounds of broken up yeast. I stirred the mixture well, put a lid on the pot and placed it on the back burner of the stove where people were unlikely to look. After a few days there was a perceptible odor in the kitchen and I figured the melange of ingredients was ready.

To check my mixture, I filled an empty quart bottle with a ladle and then tightly sealed the bottle with a cork. I hid the bottle in a dry stores room where

the temperature must have been a hundred degrees. Then I turned and walked to the door. When I reached the door I heard a large pop like a gunshot and I turned to see the cork rolling on the floor and a foaming liquid coming out of my bottle. Eureka!

I poured my huge pot of ingredients into a ten gallon milk pail and stored it away in a cold storage room. Then I took my open bottle of brew up to the kitchen and shared a sample with the cooks and the first mate who was in on the secret. I wasn't really a drinker but it had been months since I had a drink and my concoction was a welcome relief. Unfortunately some of my coconspirators indulged a little too much and other crew members knew that someone had a supply of alcohol and the kitchen was suspected.

Soon a series of random searches began but none of the searches turned up the culprit or the source of supplies.

My enterprise certainly stood me in well with the cooks and the first mate. I think they were still getting high by the time we reached Shanghai.

When we finally docked, I was shocked at the appearance of the dock area. The few cranes were in disrepair or missing completely which meant that the entire ship would have to be unloaded manually.

The ship's holds were filled with lumber as were the decks and after one day it became apparent that it would take weeks to unload all the lumber.

To make matters worse, the entire city was in turmoil. Trucks of cotton being transported through the city had to have several armed guards running alongside them to keep citizens from running up to the side of the truck and pulling out handfuls of cotton.

The first day I saw a man wielding a cart full of paper currency through downtown Shanghai. The next day I saw the same man wheeling another cart full of money through the street. Chinese currency had been devalued to almost nothing. A single pack of American cigarettes could be bartered for items that previously sold for hundreds of dollars. Merchants were trying to dispose of all their inventory for products that could be bartered.

The Communist Army was winning the war and had advanced to the outskirts of Shanghai. It appeared that it was only a matter of time before the Communists would invade the Shanghai area and that bode ill for the politicians and merchants. Food and necessities were almost unobtainable for the average person and fear and uncertainty permeated the masses.

In an effort to obtain some relaxation, I decided to rent a rickshaw and go to the Bund area which was an enclave settled by English, German, and American businessmen and one which offered many taverns. I got into the two wheeled rickshaw and the boy started pulling me toward the Bund area.

When we got out of the downtown area he suddenly turned sharply into an alley and before I knew it, he threw his handlebars up in the air letting the rickshaw topple backwards leaving me on my back. By the time I could get up I found myself surrounded by ten or fifteen young Chinese peasants. As they began closing in on me, I reached into my pocket and withdrew my six inch switchblade knife from my pocket.

Holding the knife out in front of me, the group stopped and began backing off. Moving my arm back and forth in a menacing gesture I made my way through the entire group and returned to the ship.

Seeing myself in this hopeless situation, I decided to invoke my Knights-Errant's pledge and volunteer to fight against the Communist menace.

I found what was supposed to be a recruiting office and told them I wanted to join the Army and fight the Communists. I'm not sure any of the people I talked to understood exactly what I wanted to do but I finally found one officer who spoke some English and he said he would arrange it. Without giving me any papers he assigned a young boy to me and told me he would take me to an army unit near the front.

The next day at six o'clock in the morning, without any tickets, we boarded a crowded train that was overflowing with peasants. Most of the people were carrying belongings including live chickens and pigs. In addition many people clung to the outside roofs and sides of the train. We took off in a north west direction and I began a series of short naps. Eighteen hours later, with only the two of us remaining, the train finally stopped.

It was bitter cold and raining and we could see the Army encampment off to our right. For miles you could see nothing but the outline of dark tents. In the midst of the area were several very large lighted tents which I presumed to be medical facilities. My guide, whom we had decided to call Kim, and I walked to the border of the military camp and there Kim had me wait while he found someone to process me into the unit. He returned with a soldier, who, because of the time and weather, took us to a nearby farmhouse to spend the night.

This one story, brick farmhouse had only two rooms and was occupied by a farmer, his wife and two young daughters. The front room served as the kitchen and in the rear of the room was a trench leading to

the outside. A bucket of water stood beside the trench. This was the lavatory. No running water. No screens.

The farmer took me to the second room which was smaller and contained three bunk beds. Once in the room, he closed the door leaving me alone. I was dead tired and took off all my clothes and climbed under the covers of the largest bunk bed. I had just gotten into bed when the door opened and the farmer's two young daughters came into the room. As I lay there awake, the two girls went to the other beds and began removing their clothing while facing me. I would guess that the oldest one was no more than sixteen or seventeen years old and the younger one was about fourteen or fifteen years old. Not pursuing any alternative, I turned my back so I was facing the wall and closed my eyes.

Suddenly I felt the blankets lift up and a body moved in against me. Apparently the eldest girl was adept to this kind of situation and her hands pursued a course which left me helpless. Reader, believe me when I tell you that female wiles are the quicksand of a man's virtue.

When finished, the young girl left the room and returned with a large basin full of steaming water. She returned to my bunk and applied the steaming washcloth to my body. I still am not sure whether it was an attempt at sanitation or a demonic punishment. When completed, the girl left the room and I turned back to the wall to go to sleep.

Only minutes later I felt the same sensation, but this time it was her younger sister. By her actions it was apparent that she also was well schooled in this trait, and once again I was devoured by the quicksands of lust. I guess some people can resist anything except temptation.

Just as her sister had done, I had to again suffer the pain of a steaming sterilization.

Sleep still avoided me. Shortly after, I did fall asleep and someone started pounding on the door. I opened it to find myself facing the girls' father. Although he didn't speak English he held out his hands in a demand for compensation. I offered him a pack of Camel cigarettes and he continued motioning for more. I then offered him a second pack of cigarettes and he accepted it and disappeared. I concluded that this was not a unique arrangement. Suddenly, realizing that this house was on the border of a military camp with thousands of lonely soldiers, I shuddered at the thought of what I might have just fallen prey to.

It could only have been an hour or two later when I was awakened by a crashing noise followed by several pointed things jabbing my body. I awoke and turned to see a soldier holding a kerosene lantern and several other soldiers jabbing at me with their bayonets.

There was an officer standing by my head screaming at me in Chinese. I looked around and saw that the door to the bedroom had been broken off its hinges. The officer had my wallet in his hands and was going through all my documents. Finally he ordered his soldiers to grab me by the arms and drag me outside in the cold pouring rain to the wall of a nearby concrete building where they stood me against the wall and held me there.

The wall was covered with holes made by spent bullets. While I stood there in the cold pouring rain, the officer was yelling out commands and pretty soon several soldiers appeared and formed a line facing me. I was about to be executed as a spy.

On the officer's command, the line of soldiers

raised their rifles and aimed them at me. I was resigned to the fact that I was about to be executed and all I thought of to do was to scream at the officer to let me put on a pair of pants. I don't know why at this moment, modesty overwhelmed my sense of fear.

Just before he gave the command to fire, the entire area was lit up like a search light had been turned on us. I turned to see the source of the light and it was an ancient staff car and an officer had left the car and approached the camp commander. Apparently the officer inquired of the camp commander what the execution was about and the camp commander told him I was being executed because I was a spy.

The officer took my wallet from the camp commander and started going through it. As he went from one document to another he finally pulled out my Red Cross donors card. The card had a large red cross in the center of it. After staring at it for several seconds, he ordered the camp commander to bring me up to him. The officer pointed to my Red Cross blood donor's card, looked at me, and asked "Red Cross?" I immediately pointed to myself and repeated the words, "Red Cross! Yes, Red Cross!".

The officer looked at the camp commander and started yelling at him. I think he told him that I was a member of the American Red Cross, the only allies Chiang Kai-shek had, and accused him of making a gross error. The officer then went back to his automobile and another officer in the car handed him a cloth sack. The officer rummaged through the sack and finally withdrew a gold bracelet and offered it to me.

The bracelet was made up of several links and each link was a wish for something good such as a good life, prosperity and many children. I thanked the officer several times and he returned to the staff car

and drove into the camp. Reluctantly, the camp commander ordered his men to return me to the farmhouse where I returned to bed to spend the balance of the night. About four a. m. I was awakened by my guide. He told me that the camp commander was very angry and when the General and his party left the camp in the morning he was going to take me out and have me executed. The guide insisted that we had to escape and hide in one of the empty rail cars of the returning train or we'd both be executed.

Without awaking anyone, we snuck out of the house and went to the train which had been turned around and was heading back to Shanghai. The freight cars were being filled with wounded soldiers and we entered a partially filled car and took the seats at the farthest end. Fortunately we were not discovered and were relieved when the train finally took off on its return to Shanghai.

When we arrived in Shanghai, they were still unloading lumber from my ship and I was told that the Chinese government had decided not to buy the vessel. I settled with my guide by giving him two five pound bags of sugar for which he was truly grateful.

The following morning my guide reappeared at the ship. Returning to his home, his sampan was stopped by the Harbor police who found the two bags of sugar and accused him of black market activity. As a result they arrested his wife and put her in jail demanding ten thousand American dollars for her release.

There was no way I could give him ten thousand American dollars, so I asked him if there wasn't some other way to pay the police. I offered several suggestions and he said a gallon of red paint might do it. I gave him a gallon of red paint from our stores and wished him luck. Since he never reappeared, I trust the

can of red paint sufficed and his wife was released.

After another week, all of the lumber had been removed from the ship and we were told the ship was returning to America.

At the same time we learned that there was a dock worker's strike in America and if the ship went back to an American port it would be tied up. So, instead of going back to America it was going to return to Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada where it would be loaded with grain and delivered to England.

Now, I had always admired England for the role it played in World War II. However, I had been away from my home for several months and I did not wish to visit England. When we arrived in Vancouver I asked the captain to permit me to leave the ship and he refused. Knowing that I had jumped my last ship, the captain made me accompany him to the American consulate's office in Vancouver. There he told the Consul about my past and insisted the Consul warn me of the legal consequences if I jumped ship, including a prison sentence.

I then told the Consul of my time in the African prison and my desire to just return home. Being ignorant of maritime law, I also told him that I wasn't twenty-one years old and wasn't old enough to sign any contract. (This was not true of American maritime law.) The Consul listened and then asked me to step out of the room while he discussed the matter with the captain.

Shortly after, he had me come back into the room and told me that the captain had agreed to let me sign off the ship. However, the Canadian government would give me only twenty-four hours to get out of the country.

It didn't take me that long. I immediately hitch-

hiked across the border into Washington and from there I hitchhiked to the Tonopah Air Force base in Nevada where my brother Henry was serving. Fortunately, Henry had just received a three week furlough to return to Detroit so we decided to hitchhike together to Detroit. The Tonopah airbase was located up in the mountains and we selected the northern highway for our return trip.

A farmer gave us our first ride and it ended at an intersection on top of a mountain. We must have stayed there for three or four hours without a single car traveling in the direction we were going. It was so cold up there that after a few hours we decided to accept a ride in either direction in order to escape the cold.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, a car picked us up that was heading back towards Tonopah. We pooled our money and purchased bus tickets to a major city beyond the mountains. There our luck changed and we were able to expeditiously hitchhike the rest of the way to Detroit.

Driving down Telegraph Road that night, a car with a soldier in it pulled up alongside us at a stop light. The soldier rolled down the windows of his car and solicited my brother to join him and go out looking for girls. Although we were still at least fifteen miles from home, Henry told me to get out of the car and he proceeded on with his new accomplice. It was dark and very cold but I found the drivers in Detroit more amenable and I concluded my trip without further inconvenience.

Now good reader prepare yourself for my encounter where I was out numbered seven hundred to

one and was victorious. It is an account that will engage all your senses and endorse your wisdom in pursuing the contents yet to be revealed to you.





CHAPTER X

Challenging the Middle East Dragons

Arriving home, one of my first actions was to contact my old Civil Air Patrol buddies and arrange to go out to Wings Airport and make some parachute jumps.

There were six or seven of us in a group when a stranger approached us and asked if we were pilots. He introduced himself and told us the new country of Israel was going to build an Air Force and they were looking for trained pilots. He then told us that they were offering \$500 a month and a \$10,000 insurance policy to any pilot who agreed to fly for them.

Elmer Kanta had a pilot's license and Jim Fitzhenry had flown in the American Air Force, but never in combat. While most of us had handled a small plane in the air, we had never taken off or landed an airplane and lacked experience in navigation.

Fitzhenry immediately expressed his interest and then the man turned to me and asked what I did. I told him that my experience was all in packing and repairing parachutes. He said that might be something the Israeli's might be interested in and he took my name, address, and phone number.

On October 28, 1947, I received a letter from an attorney, Morris Lieberman, advising me that my name had been given to Mrs. Feldstein of the Zionist Organization of America relative to Palestine employment. He wrote that he would appreciate seeing me at his office in order for him to secure some necessary details.

I visited him and he told me that the Israelis were very interested in my going there and setting up a school for parachute packers. He made me the same offer of five hundred dollars a month and a ten thousand dollar insurance policy. The money would be paid by check to my parents each month.

While the money was impressive, I could not refuse my obligation to help the Jewish people after what happened to them during World War II. It was a Knight's obligation to help the poor and oppressed.

Shortly afterwards I received instructions to see the manager of a small retail store on Five Mile Road in Detroit for more details. There I received an airline ticket to New York and directions to an Army Navy store that carried surplus United States Military equipment.

In New York I was outfitted with two American Army uniforms, a pair of paratroop boots and given a ticket for the next day's flight to Rome, Italy.

As instructed, I went directly to the Mediterraneo Hotel and secured a room. The Israeli I was supposed to meet turned out to be a young Miss Hassea Agranski, daughter of the owner of the Palestine Post newspaper in Tel Aviv. Although it was mid morning, Miss Agranski was still reclining in bed, dressed in a loose and revealing negligee.

Miss Agranski gave me a generous sum of Italian money and told me I would be notified when it was time for me to be smuggled into British controlled Palestine.

The Mediteraneo Hotel also hosted a number of ex-Nazi pilots, some of whom were released from prisons in Europe by the British if they agreed to fly for one of the Arab nations fighting Israel.

One morning I was having breakfast when a group of thirteen young people came into the dining room and sat at a table close to mine. They were laughing and speaking in a dialect I had never heard before. As I observed them, one face in particular captured my attention. It was the most beautiful face I had ever seen and I knew she was my Dulcinea, the princess I was seeking.

Casually I caught the eye of one of the other girls in the group whose name was Mary, and asked her what language they were speaking. She replied that all thirteen of them were Finnish students and were vacationing in Italy. To make conversation, I told her I hoped they weren't staying in the Mediterranno Hotel, because the boiler had broken down and there was no hot water available with which to wash.

As we talked, after each exchange Mary would pause and translate our conversation into Finnish for the group. After our latest exchange, Mary turned to me and said, "Peggy said you would be welcome to take a douche in her room."

Reader, perish the thought. In Swedish and many other European languages, a douche is a shower. Although you may be more apt to believe what you most desire, I assure you a warm shower was all I received.

However, being a brash American, I told Mary that I would like to take Peggy out for lunch and she would be welcome to join us and act as a translator.

At noon, all thirteen of the Finns appeared at my hotel for our date and after coffee and cake at some restaurant I had to pick up the check. I suggested to Mary that I would like to have a dinner date with just Peggy, her and I. While the ten male Finns were against it, Peggy insisted. That evening Mary, Peggy and ten male Finns showed up for our dinner date. Apparently the Finns strongly believed in the rumor that Americans "love 'em and leave em" and that my intentions were anything but honorable. To make matters worse, several of the boys had already asked Peggy to marry them and had been declined.

Over the next few days without any other companions, Peggy and I spent most of our time together and I knew in my heart that she was the "Princess" I wanted to spend my life with. Although she could not speak any English and I could not speak any Finnish we pursued our courtship using our own sign language and imitations.

Everything was great until the evening of May 28. That evening I had dinner with two pilots, Leonard Cohen and Buzz Buerling, who were already flying for Israel.

Buzz Buerling had earned fame as a Canadian who served in the English Air Force in World War II. Assigned to protect the Island of Malta he shot down a record thirty one and a half enemy aircraft over Malta earning the Distinguished Service Order, Distinguished Flying Cross and two Distinguished Flying Medals.

On one occasion he survived being shot down and survived the crash landing. Brought up in a strict Catholic family, it was a family that had a profound appreciation for the Jewish bible and its people. This appreciation was manifested when Buerling volunteered to fly for the Jewish Air Force in 1947.

The other pilot, Leonard Cohen, had acquired fame as the "King of Lampedusa." Already distinguished as a flying ace in the English Air Force, he was also assigned to protect the Island of Malta.

On one of his missions during the siege of Malta, his plane was hit and he had to make a forced landing on the small island of Lampedusa about 93 miles from Malta. As he stepped out of the damaged aircraft brandishing his service revolver, the entire Italian garrison surrendered to him.

On the evening of Thursday, May 20, 1948, I was having a late dinner with Buerling and Cohen and they told me they were ferrying a Norseman airplane to Israel later that night. When I asked if I could go along, they told me the plane was already overloaded with "supplies" for the Israeli Air Force and there just wasn't room.

Later that night, Cohen and Buerling took off from Urbe Airfield near Rome for Israel. After getting about fifty feet off the ground, the plane burst into flames and crashed. Both men were killed. Sabotage was suspected but never made public.

Late that evening, I was awakened and told about the crash and warned that the English Daily Mail newspaper was preparing articles about the Jewish underground operation in Rome and were going to print the names of volunteers awaiting transport to Israel in violation of an embargo. This could mean the arrest of all of us.

I was ordered to immediately take my belongings to Urbe airport where I would be hidden in a small South African Cargo plane that would take me to Israel. Under the circumstances there was no way I could notify Peggy and I saw my dream vanquished forever.

At the airport a Canadian and I were secreted among the cargo and after several hours the plane landed at the British controlled airport in Haifa, Israel.

A man met us at the plane and guided us around the British immigration lines without any problem. From the airport we took a taxi to Tel Aviv. On the way the man started explaining what our tasks might be.

Sensing that the driver could be listening I poked the man and motioned at the driver. "Don't worry," he said, "We're all Jewish." Continuing, he said he would take us to be registered and then to the hotels where we would be staying, but he had to ask us for a favor. He then described the meager air force the Jews had and stated that they desperately need bombardiers for tonight's raids against the invading Arab armies.

I assumed that they would train us on how to use the sophisticated bomb sights that we had used during WWII. The Canadian volunteer declined to do it because the Canadian volunteers were having a party that night.

We were taken to an office where we had to fill out a number of forms and were given identification cards. Our passports were checked but were not stamped

because our governments threatened to revoke the citizenship of any citizen who fought in a foreign army. My I. D. shows an arrival date of May fifteen, nineteen forty-eight, the day after Israel declared its statehood.

When I asked how I was to get to the Sde Dov Airport at ten o'clock, I was told to just stand in the road and ask anyone for a ride to their secret Sde Dov airbase. I trusted his advice and he was correct. I held out my thumb and the first car stopped and drove me to the base. When I arrived it was pitch dark and I was dropped off in front of the only building on the airfield. Inside were several rows of wooden chairs, many of them filled with young men in varied flying suits. Not one of them had any identification patches on their jackets nor did they display any insignia of rank. I just sat down and waited for someone to say something to me.

Finally a young uniformed man came in and began calling out the name of each pilot and told him what his target would be that night. At the conclusion of his assignments he walked over to me and asked if I was a bomb chucker. I replied "yes," and he pointed out a pilot and said, "You'll go with him," and then just walked away.

The pilot walked over to me and told me to follow him. We walked over to the flight line where I focused my eyes on a dozen or so small civilian aircraft. I finally asked the pilot where the bombers were and he just looked at me. "You're looking at them," he said. "Tonight they're bombers. They're also our fighter planes and our transport planes." He led me to a "V" tailed Beechcraft Bonanza from which the luggage door and passenger seat had been removed. I was instructed to get in and sit with my back facing the instrument panel.

I climbed in and soon a small tractor and trailer pulled up by the baggage door. Two men handed me three Israeli made twenty-five pound concussion bombs which I was to store on their noses against the far side of the luggage compartment. Then the two of them slid in a huge one hundred pound Czechoslovakian made bomb.

When the bombs were accommodated, one of the men handed me a bundle of twelve incendiary bombs that were three sided and about a foot long. The incendiary "bombs" weighed about a pound and a half each and were tied together by a rope around their middle.

On your first pass, remove a couple of the incendiaries from the bundle and throw all of them out. They will separate while falling. On your second pass, when the pilot gives you the signal, start throwing out the twenty five pounders. Be very careful not to bump the noses because the bombs would likely explode on impact.

On your third pass, remove the pins from the nose cone and from the propeller in the rear fins. Then slide the hundred pound bomb halfway out, holding it by wrapping your arms around the tail fins. When the pilot says go, open your arms and the bomb will fall out by itself."

I had just received the full training course on how to be an Israeli bombardier.

Our target that night was an encampment of about ten thousand Egyptian soldiers and about 800 tanks just outside Lydda Airbase which was still being operated by the British. The Egyptian Army was poised to capture Tel Aviv only six miles away.

Although the days were hot, it turned very cold at night, especially at higher altitudes. The pilot asked me if I had a jacket and I replied "No." He then handed

me a knit sweater and told me to be careful of it because his fiancée had just knitted it and sent it to him. I gladly accepted it and immediately felt warmer.

Because of our limited vision, we started our first pass at about a thousand feet. We had to be absolutely sure none of our bombs struck the British airfield. Apparently we took them by complete surprise and the incendiaries did illuminate large areas of the encampment. On our second pass we were below a thousand feet and started receiving flak from the troops on the ground. On the pilot's signal I dispatched the three concussion bombs.

We circled one more time and I removed the pins from the nose cone and the rear propeller. I pushed the bomb half way out of the baggage area and held onto it by wrapping both my arms around the bomb's tail fins until the pilot yelled, "Go," and I released it. I watched in horror as my right sleeve unraveled and disappeared.

The pilot pushed the throttle in as far as it would go and made a climbing turn in the direction of home. Even at a distance we could still hear the Egyptian troops firing blindly into the air.

When we landed I asked the pilot how he was lucky enough to get the fastest plane in the Airforce. He just smiled and replied. "I own the plane. I flew it up here from South Africa."

That morning I had been taken to a gymnasium just around the corner from the Hadassah Hospital, and told it would be the location of the new parachute packing school. The room had already been outfitted with two parachute packing tables and about a hundred packed parachutes were piled against the back wall. The operation was made a part of the Air Force and I was given Air Force documentation and a payroll book.

Twelve teenage girls and four older men were enrolled in my first class. Two of the men were tailors who had never mended a parachute in their lives but at least they could understand and speak a little English.

With the girls it was a different story. While most of them could speak some German or Hebrew, the others only spoke Russian or some other European language. This required me to give my lectures first in English and then have several interpreters repeat what I said in other languages. Sometimes it would take fifteen minutes to explain a single paragraph of what I was saying. At the end of the school session I would go back to my room and catch a few hours sleep until it was time to go to the airport.

On the second night I was back with my Beechcraft pilot and the same target. It was the same routine except this time they were prepared for us. As soon as the incendiaries hit the ground, an estimated ten thousand guns were shooting at us. The entire sky was filled with fifty caliber and twenty millimeter tracer bullets. I remembered my magazines during World War II. In between the tracer bullets were three other bullets you didn't see; a regular bullet, a steel penetrating bullet and an explosive bullet.

I remember staring out into the sky. It was almost a surrealistic picture. The ribbons of light were so numerous that I felt like you could walk across the sky on them. At the time of our third pass the inside of the plane suddenly lit up. I turned my head and I could actually read the numbers on the instrument panel.

For a moment I thought our plane was on fire and then I heard the pilot yell out, "It's the British. They've turned their searchlights on us!" I released the hundred pounder and suddenly there was a tremendous explosion that lifted our plane up and out of control.

The pilot finally brought the plane back under control and we fought to gain altitude and distance.

When we landed at Sde Dov, I got out of the plane and walked around it. It was too dark to see the bullet holes so I ran my hands over almost every inch of the wings and fuselage to count them. There weren't any.

That night I went back to my room and thought about this war I was in. We were out numbered seven hundred to one. In all of Tel Aviv we had some captured WWII rifles and one fifty caliber machine gun. Our Air Force consisted of a few civilian Austers, one Norseman, a couple of two place Taylorcrafts, Piper Cubs and one Beechcraft Bonanza. It also included one World War One Tiger Moth which no one would fly.

In contrast, when the war started the Arabs had a total of 131 late model aircraft which included Britain's top of the line Supermarine Spitfires, Hawker Hurricane Fighters and formidable Fiat and Macchi fighters. In addition they also had twenty-nine bombers and twenty-nine large transport planes. Golda Meir expressed my thoughts: "If you don't believe in miracles, you are not a realist!"

While the British were supplying the Arabs with modern Spitfires and other modern heavy weapons, America and most of the western world formed a boycott of military supplies to Israel.

It is true that a knight-errant must be courageous, but it is also true that he may refrain from an encounter where the odds are so overwhelmingly against his climaxing the battle alive. I considered this over and over. In the end, knowing the odds, I decided some causes are worth risking your life for. I would stay in Israel. I would favor the poor and oppressed.

I packed up my personal belongings and gave them to a friend to mail to my parents for me. The second thing I did was give fifty dollars to another friend who was flying back and forth between Czechoslovakia and Israel and asked him to purchase a hand gun for me.

My friend did acquire a gun for me, a twenty-five millimeter Beretta that couldn't hit the broadside of a barn at thirty feet. The gun would suffice for the purpose it was intended. I knew that if my plane was shot down and I was going to be captured alive, experience had shown the Arabs would torture me until I died a very painful death. I did not want to be captured alive.

The following night I went out to the airport and was re-assigned to the Beechcraft and the Arab concentration. Without letting my pilot know, I borrowed a 30 caliber machine gun and stowed it away behind his seat. When we had completed the bombing, I took the machine gun and aimed it at the British searchlights that were lighting us up for the Arab gunners.

When I pulled the trigger, I think the pilot lifted a foot off his seat and he started yelling at me to stop. He even yelled that I was going to shoot our wing off. This wasn't so, because I was very careful not to let the muzzle of the gun point near the wing or the tail. In retrospect, I can understand the pilot's reaction to the unexpected loud machine gun noise suddenly emanating from within the plane. It would prove to be my last flight in his Beechcraft.

On June third, nineteen forty-eight, I went out to the airport just to see if anything was going on. Daytime air raids were quite common and a deep zig-zag slit trench had been dug in front of the administration building.

The Arab bombers usually came over every day and Sde Dov airport was usually one of their targets. Other than Sde Dov, the planes just flew back and forth

over Tel Aviv and their bomb chuckers threw the bombs out aimlessly just to cause civilian casualties. Working around the corner from Hadassah Hospital, I often saw the remains of their victims.

On this particular day an Arab bomber did drop some bombs over Sde Dov. Hearing them coming, all of us jumped into the slit trench. One of the bombs hit at one end of the trench and another bomb hit at the other end. Because the trench had several zig-zag legs in it, none of us were wounded.

We climbed out of the trench and watched the bomber flying off toward the city.

Suddenly we saw a fighter plane dive at it and the bomber caught fire and crashed. A short time later we saw a second bomber turn into a cloud of smoke and disappear over the city. The pilots of the third bomber also saw it, turned tail and scrambled back to its base. It spelled the end of the daily bombings by unescorted C-46 and C-47 cargo planes.

The pilot of the fighter plane was a native born Israeli named Modi Allon who was flying one of the newly received Czechoslovakian S-199 fighter planes. The air war was about to change.

A few weeks later, I was conducting a parachute packing class when I heard the familiar buzz of an Arab Spitfire. I went up on the roof to watch just as a Spitfire flew past me with all six machine guns firing. It had no particular target except the homes of innocent civilians.

I couldn't resist the urge to fight back. I ran down to the parachute loft and grabbed away an Israeli made Sten Gun a guard was carrying. I rushed back to the roof just in time to see the same Spitfire coming past our building again. I aimed the gun at the plane's canopy and held the trigger back.

Three times the gun fired and then jammed. I opened the breech of the gun and worked to extract the jammed shell. I loaded a new shell into the chamber and waited. Suddenly I saw the Spitfire coming, but instead of flying next to our building, the pilot was coming directly at me with all six of his machine guns blazing. After passing me I looked around and the roof on both sides of me was shredded. Had he used his cannon, I would have also been shredded.

Again I had managed to get off a few shots and again the gun jammed. I could actually see the pilot's face as he banked sharply to the left. I knew he'd come back so I desperately tried to replace the jammed shell. This time I couldn't dislodge the shell and I was totally defenseless. I looked up and saw the plane coming back. But, instead of flying directly at me, it was flying level with the roof top and at a very slow speed. As it approached me, I grasped my gun by the barrel and when he was almost opposite me I threw it at him with all my might. He never returned.

I came to the conclusion that the homemade Israeli Sten Guns were of better use when you threw them at the enemy piece by piece!

By June fifteenth I had graduated two classes of parachute packers and a third group of young girls were brought to me. I was ready to address them when I looked at them and saw a familiar face. It was Peggy.

Apparently, Peggy had insisted that she would follow me to Israel and the entire group of Finns would not let her go alone, so they all decided they would go with her. After contacting an underground Zionist organization, the thirteen Finns were sent to a large farm on the outskirts of Rome for training.

There they were given military training which included marching, target practice and the ability to disassemble and reassemble weapons.

Shortly thereafter, the group was shipped to Israel where some of the boys were given a speed boat with a thirty caliber machine gun as part of the fledgling Israeli Navy. The other boys were put in the army. Mary and Bertha were put in the Army medical detachment and served as nurses aides. Peggy insisted on being a parachute packer. By the end of the 1948 war, Finnish volunteers accounted for the largest percentage of foreign volunteers at two percent of its population.

I immediately began courting her again and after ten days I asked her to marry me. She said, "yes," and on American Independence day, July Fourth, nineteen forty eight, although neither of us were Jewish, we were given a very orthodox Jewish wedding in what was widely acclaimed as the first international event of the Jewish state.

When I announced that Peggy and I were going to be married, one of my tailors asked me if he could make her wedding dress. Since we didn't have much money we hadn't planned on a formal wedding. We would just wear our khaki uniforms. The Tailor must have read my mind and said he wanted to do it as a gift. He said we had discarded dozens of unusable silk and nylon parachutes and he could find enough material in them to make a beautiful wedding dress.

Then he suggested that we not tell Peggy what we were going to do, but rather surprise her with it. "The top of the dress would not be a problem," he said. "However, for the lower part of the dress I would have to take some measurements." Scheming together we decided that the tailor would tell Peggy he was making a dress as a surprise for a friend's daughter and since

Peggy had the same shape, he would like to take some of her measurements. Peggy politely agreed.

I cannot tell you how surprised Peggy was when she was presented with the dress. I don't know who was happier; Peggy, me or the tailor. Peggy's girl friend Lea had recently been married and she loaned Peggy her beautiful veil. Lea had just married a young sabra who could not serve in the military because his eyesight was so bad. Instead, the government made him a taxi driver! The logic for some decisions often begs a rationale.

The wedding ceremony was held under a canopy called a chuppah and when the Rabbi asked me if I took Peggy to be my wife, I didn't know how to say yes in Hebrew. The only word I could think of was "toda raba" which meant thank you very much. Despite her short time in Israel and being literate in about ten languages, Peggy was able to pick up enough Hebrew to answer the desired questions correctly in Hebrew. As traditional, we were marched around the chuppah three times and then we each sipped wine from the same glass. The glass was wrapped in a napkin and I had to crush the wine glass with my foot. This symbolized an eternal life together. If you crushed the glass with one blow it was considered a very good omen. I succeeded.

The wedding drew wide attention in newspapers all over the world. Although only a few countries had consulates in Israel, the consuls from those countries attended our wedding as did many Israeli officials. A grand reception followed. It was a very expensive affair and to this day I am not sure whether the Israeli government or someone else paid for all of it.

Following our wedding, the Air Force moved us into a vacant bedroom in an apartment owned by a family named Levy.

Peggy could not speak any English and I could not speak Finnish and we lived that way until she learned English in America more than a year later.

Five days after our wedding I was summoned to appear before a group of high ranking Israeli officers. Apparently, the heads of State and the Israeli military constituted the committee. The first question they asked me was if I thought paratroops would be of any use to Israel.

It was a question I was ready to answer. I was very emphatic when I answered in the affirmative. I told them that a small but well trained unit could wreak havoc behind the lines of the poorly trained Arab soldiers. I went on to outline a plan for capturing the nearby Lydda Airbase that was now being used as a base for bombing Israel. I explained that by paratroopers coming to the base under cover of night and first subduing the perimeter guards, we could attack the barracks and command center, land a plane load of Israeli pilots and make off with all the serviceable late model Spitfires and other aircraft after destroying any remaining equipment.

The group listened intently and when I finished there was a brief silence while each of the attendees just looked at each other. I was thanked and all the members shook my hand, after which I was taken back to the parachute loft.

A few days later I received a message that I was being sent to Czechoslovakia for training to command a paratroop organization and to be trained in sabotage, espionage, counter espionage and gorilla warfare.

On July fourteenth, nineteen forty-eight, I was one of several people who boarded the Israeli L-049 Constellation bound for Czechoslovakia. On board were

four other men who were assigned to paratroop training, the wife of an Israeli politician and a variety of other passengers. One of the paratroopers was an American named Ben Foreman. Ben had served aboard the British blockade runner Exodus and we would soon become very close friends.

Because we had to fly at night and sometimes over hostile countries on part of our trip ,we were supposed to be accompanied over the Adriatic Sea by a Yugoslav Air Force Yak fighter escort in close formation.

I am unaware if this escort plane ever met with us, but apparently we did violate Albanian air space. It was late in the evening and I awakened when the plane started bouncing around. I just assumed it was a storm, but later events leads me to believe it was Albanian anti-aircraft fire.

Shortly after this incident, the copilot came out of the cockpit and told us our main hydraulic system had lost its hydraulic fluid and we had no hydraulic control assistance. To restore the fluid it would be necessary to manually pump hydraulic fluid from our reserve system into our main system.

The inside of the airplane was divided into two areas. All the passengers were seated along the left side of the plane in canvas bucket seats while the right side of the plane was lined with large heavy wooden boxes designed especially to carry disassembled aircraft.

In order to get to the hydraulic bypass valve it would be necessary to untie the ropes that were holding the aircraft storage box closest to the cockpit and move the huge crate off of the cover of the bypass valve.

This we did and the copilot began cranking a handle around and around. When he tired, the rest of the men on board took a turn. Shortly after, the copilot returned and told us to stop cranking. There was dam--

age to the hydraulic valve and we had just pumped the balance of our hydraulic fluid overboard.

This meant the pilot would have to control all the functions of the plane manually, a tremendous task. Amazingly, we finally reached a friendly airbase in Czechoslovakia. As we made an approach for landing, a Czech fighter plane warned us off signaling that our right landing gear was only half way down. Our pilot took our plane up again and tried everything to either lower the right landing gear or retract the left landing gear for a belly landing. None of the controls responded.

With no safe alternative, the pilot ordered us to secure ourselves and to expect a hard landing. We continued to fly around until we had gotten rid of most of our remaining fuel. Being an experienced parachutist, I had always vowed that I would never ride a crippled plane down.

Both Foreman and I volunteered to each take one of the lady's two children and fasten them to our parachute harnesses and jump with them, but she absolutely refused.

In the remaining time, I opened the plane's passenger door and found the plane had already descended to about fifty feet. In a mad rush, Ben and I grabbed hold of the bench ribbing and held on for dear life.

Miraculously, the pilot held the plane level until it lost its airspeed and the right wing tip dug into the ground sending us spiralling to the right. We all just sat there until the pilot, fearing the plane may catch fire, ordered us to get out of the plane as fast as possible.

Looking around I appreciated just how fortunate we were. If the problem had been reversed, and we ground looped to the left, there was the likelihood that we would have collided with a row of three bombed up

B-17s that were awaiting take off for Israel. While we just stood there staring at our plane, the pilot, Martin Ribakoff, stood crying uncontrollably.

Apparently five of us were assigned for the paratroop command training and the other men were to be trained in infantry and tank tactics. I believe we stayed that first night at the Stalingrad Hotel in Zatec. There I ran into my old friend Jim Fitzhenry who was flying military equipment from Czechoslovakia to Israel.

He surprised me by telling me he was going back to America because none of the things they had promised him were done. He claimed that they had promised to bring his wife to Israel and in addition they never sent her the ten thousand dollar life insurance policy nor one of his five hundred dollar pay checks.

The following morning, our paratroop group was transported a few hundred miles into the Sudetenland forest to a secret military base to train with the Number 71 Czechoslovakia Paratroop Infantry Battalion.

We were quartered in wooden barracks that were not heated nor air-conditioned. The days were cold and the nights were freezing. There was no provision of hot water so you shaved and bathed in a nearby frigid stream. Our uniforms were warm, but for stockings we were issued two large square wool cloths which you folded a certain way to form a stocking.

Classes began immediately and consisted of lectures and actual practice. Because none of us understood Czech, we were offered to choose between German and Russian. The group voted for German. Ben told me that he would carefully take notes and would translate the German into English for me. A solution I had to abide with.

Taking long marches were part of the course. The weapons training was deficient because most of the weapons, with the exception of the German Panzer Faust grenade launcher were antiquated models from previous wars.

In fact, the 50 Caliber machine guns were water cooled WWI American models no longer in production. One other aspect of our training was unique. We were not allowed to “sight” our weapons.

All shooting on the firing range had to be done from the hip, which assumes you will be able to kill your enemy before your enemy can kill you. The taught technique was to quick fire three successive times at the enemy. The first shot was to the left of the chest area to try and hit his heart. The second shot was directed at the enemy’s head to totally disable him and the third shot was to the man’s crotch. I never asked the reason for the third shot but surmised that in case you didn’t kill him, at least you’d make him miserable for the rest of his life.

The espionage, sabotage and gorilla warfare lessons were excellent. The first thing we were taught was to never trust anyone or any thing! As part of our training, the Czechs continually “booby-trapped” our facilities and our possessions.

To instill the serious consequence of “booby-traps” we learned about almost every type of “booby-trap” by experience. We learned never to enter a building through a normal entrance. Not to open a strange book or other attractive item, but to always practice caution. The “booby-traps” were usually armed with dynamite caps that, while not too destructive, made a loud noise when activated. Still, you never put your shoes on without carefully shaking them upside down.

In addition, we were tutored in Airborne command tactics while they joined us in training a company of young Jewish boys, who were rescued from various concentration camps, into paratroopers. We called ourselves the 1st Israeli Airborne Brigade.

On August 7, 1948, the 1st Israeli Paratroop Brigade made its first paratroop jump from a Czech Douglas C-47 Skytrain plane at Kúmr airfield in Czechoslovakia.

According to records provided by Czech Researchers, our paratroop officer's group was comprised of Daniel Avni, Benjamin Foreman, Peter Neuman, Guri Gurfinkle, Karl Kahane, Arthur Landman and myself. My photograph of the group shows the seven of us at the camp. I can only identify Ben Foreman and myself. I cannot identify the other five men but learned Arthur Landman left the group because, although his record showed he had made several jumps behind German lines in Yugoslavia during WWII, he just could not get up the nerve to jump again.

Among the seven of us, I was the only one showing a rank on his shoulders. My rank was denoted by two gold stars on each shoulder.

Upon completion of our training program we were given a test. It was nicknamed "Assassinate Winston Churchill" (This was the Communist version of humor). We were to meet an actual train several miles away and place a "booby-trap" to explode when the seventh coach passed over it.

This was a very practical exercise. We had been taught to know every kind of fuse and how long it took to burn. We had a course in map reading and we had been taught to avoid inhabited areas. All we required was a competent leader and the materials.

To our surprise our instructor announced that Guri Gurfinkle would command the exercise. Ben and I immediately raised some concerns. Gurfinkle had never served in any military and was totally unfit for this mission. This agitated the Czech officer and he was adamant that Guri Gurfinkle would be the leader. I began to smell a political influence. Time would confirm my suspicion.

To begin with, we were assigned as a unit should be. The lead man (or “point” man) would go first. The second man would be the squad’s commander who had the compass and maps. The third man would be the one who carried all the explosive devices in a backpack. The next three men would carry rifles in case we ran into enemy sources. The last man carried a machine gun and was supposed to protect our rear.

Our mission began at night and we were to meet the train at midnight. Guri studied the map as if he knew what he was doing and Ben and I just looked at each other and smiled. We were making good time and Guri would stop every once in a while, look at the map and correct the direction in which we were going.

After a couple of hours we came to a stream that Guri claimed was in the wrong place. The stream didn’t appear too deep, but Guri didn’t want to take a chance. To prove his leadership ability, he ordered the munitions carrier to climb up on his shoulders and he would carry him across the stream to make sure the explosives didn’t get wet. While arranging this, Ben and I decided to scout along the river bank for a bridge. Ben found one on the left and I found another on the right. Both were within twenty-five feet of where our squad was going to cross.

Our exemplary leader took three steps into the stream and suddenly disappeared from sight as did our munitions carrier and all our fuses and explosives. By the time they were extricated, Ben and I greeted them, perfectly dry and eating a couple of apples. The only thing Guri could do was to demand to know why we weren't wet. When we told him, he accused both of us of not obeying orders and threatened to have us court martialed.

To make matters worse, we found ourselves in an apple orchard with several dogs barking to announce our presence. Soon floodlights illuminated the entire area and an elderly man came out of a cabin brandishing a shotgun and challenged us. Our Czech instructor answered the man and apparently satisfied his concerns.

We were about to continue the mission when we heard a train whistle announcing the passing of our objective. I didn't say a word but just smiled at our instructor and shook my head. He fully understood and later said he didn't have any choice in the matter. It was a political decision and he had to do what he was told. "Lo que sea sonara." What will be, will be.

Calling off the mission, our instructor ordered us to turn around and march double-time all the way back to our base. The results of the exercise was never revealed.

Shortly afterward, Guri and four more of our original group departed for other army assignments and only Ben Foreman and I remained in the paratroop classification.

Before returning to Israel, we held a full parachute exhibition for a group of Czech officials and visiting Israeli politicians. The jump came off without a hitch. Following the jump.

Ben and I were invited to Prague and attend a dinner for the Czechoslovakian High Command and a group of Israeli politicians. It was a grand event and both the Czechs and the Israelis expressed delight with our performance.

Our next move would be to return to Israel and initiate our program to enlarge our paratroop brigade to a company size and engage our enemy.

Apparently, political considerations were being pursued in Israel that would dramatically affect my continued command of the Israeli Paratroops.

It is not unusual for existing social leaders and politicians to push for their own children or friends to fill top military positions in newly sanctioned units. In some cases these candidates prove to be exemplary, such as the Netanyahu brothers. But in other cases the decisions do not prove meritable and cast a shadow over the ethics of such arrangements.

Neither Ben Foreman nor I ever anticipated such considerations when we returned to Israel.





CHAPTER XI

The Dragon of Duplicity

We arrived back in Israel in late October or early November and found a completely finished paratroop training base on top of Mount Caramel. In addition to a one floor administration building, they had set up a fuselage from an old C 47 so we could teach our students how to jump from the aircraft and the importance of being able to land on your feet and roll so as not to break any bones.

As commander, I appointed Ben Foreman as my adjutant and together we began seeking more recruits as paratroopers. In addition to local units, Ben and I traveled on the secret "Burma Road" the Jews were building to bypass the massive and well fortified Arab blockade of Jerusalem.

Among the men we solicited were a black Christian American and a full blooded American Navajo Indian. Both declined in order to stay in Jerusalem and fight to protect the holy city from the overwhelming Arab army besieging the city.

Fortunately, we ran into Bernard Marks who had sailed with Foreman on the Exodus. The two men had been friends for many years and he readily agreed to join us. We returned to Mt. Carmel with our new recruits. Marks had served in the American military and was well suited to hold the rank of Warrant Officer and assist in the training of our recruits.

I should explain that at this time, except for the American dominated Israeli Air Force, the Israeli military had not defined the ranks of officers and did not have any badges or other signs of units or ranks. They did find many insignias left by the British and various units adopted some of them. We found some paratroop insignias and adopted the cloth British Airborne chest patches to identify our unit. The Air Force also adopted several of the British insignias until Israeli insignias were available.

Unlike most other units, we did not wear any insignia of rank nor did we require saluting. We were small enough that everyone knew who their superiors were and we were able to maintain a very high esprit de corp. Bernard Marks was the drill master and took his orders from Ben Foreman and Ben took his orders from me. Everyone knew who their squad leader was and we functioned as a well trained outfit.

We were not unusual. The most successful military unit in the Israeli Army was the "Democratic" Fourth Troop, 1st Anti-Tank Regiment which was founded by twelve former artillery officers. Without any modern anti-tank weapons the unit resorted to a

homemade 3" mortar. Although the driving shell fit into the three inch mortar barrel, the Israelis added a sixty pound bomb filled with explosives, small pieces of metal, and even rocks. When fired, it made all kinds of weird noises as it sailed indiscriminately through the air and when it landed it sounded like an atomic bomb.

While the weapon was totally inaccurate, the effects were sufficient to throw any enemy encampment into turmoil resulting in the overwhelming of the enemy by conventional troops. Through their campaigns, the "Democratic" regiment became so famous for their lack of discipline that they had more than enough new applicants and grew to be one of the most, if not the most, effective units in the Israeli Army.

Our brigade included twenty-two young seventeen and eighteen year old survivors of German concentration camps. Our biggest problem was their morale. As an example, I remember in a hand to hand combat class telling a listless recruit that if he performed the way he did, he was going to be killed. His response was, "So what?" The common experience of helplessly dealing with the dead and dying had sapped them of a reason for living. This caused us to initiate a daily class to imbue them with reasons to want to live and a responsibility for the future lives of those who had made it to Israel or wanted to come to Israel.

We were only functioning for about a month when I received three messages. The first was that the Paratroops would henceforth be a separate unit of the military and not a part of the Air Force. As a result, my pay was being revised because my new classification was less dangerous than flying.

The second message was more of a demand. I was to divorce myself from operational requirements

and spend all of my time writing a training manual. They stressed that it was absolutely imperative that I complete the manual as early as possible.

A third demand was that I had to sign a pledge of allegiance to the State of Israel. When I volunteered to fight for Israel there was no requirement that I had to take an oath of allegiance. There was no way that I would jeopardize my American citizenship and I handed the form back to the officer and said so.

I turned over all my daily duties to Ben and sat down to write a training manual. Fortunately, I had taken a lot of notes and had made diagrams from my lessons in Czechoslovakia. Still it would take weeks to complete.

When payday came around, neither Peggy nor I received any paycheck and I could not get any satisfactory answer from our superiors. We waited almost another month just barely subsisting on our meager savings.

When we received news that Beersheba had fallen on October twenty-second and that a new truce was put into effect by the United Nations, I knew the war was over and asked for Peggy and me to be returned to America.

Their response was not what we expected. We had helped win a war but we were about to lose everything else.

The day after I submitted the completed training manual, three Israeli MP's came to my office and told me I had to surrender my sidearm, take only my personal belongings and leave the base. When I asked for my pay they completely ignored it. I told Peggy what was happening and we were whisked outside the camp. I don't know who took over but learned lat-

er that Ben Foreman had also been abruptly removed from the base. Fortunately for him he was married to a Sabra and she had a family with whom they could live.

I took Peggy to a hotel thinking our paychecks would be forthcoming. They weren't and no one would help us resolve the situation. After running up a sizeable hotel tab, we waited until early in the morning and left the hotel through a window.

Fortunately, Peggy remembered the name of a friendly politician and she called him and explained our situation. Later that day we were picked up by a couple of soldiers and told that arrangements had been made for our return to America. They drove us to a distant camp and deposited us. It turned out to be a prisoner of war camp filled with captured male Arab prisoners. I was told that when we arrived in New York we would be met by people who would "settle things" with us.

We were given a tent at the end of the camp where the guard's quarters were. However, we had no running water or shower. When Peggy needed to use the latrine, I had to stand guard at the door to prohibit a guard or Arab prisoner from entering.

Finally the day came when we were taken to an ancient Israeli ship that had been used for carrying refugees from Europe to Israel. The women passengers were quartered in one of the front holds and the men were quartered in a rear hold. Each hold contained hundreds of bunk beds stacked three high so there was plenty of space for the dozen or so of us passengers.

It was nighttime when we finally arrived in New York and our contacts were not present to meet us. The dock soon was vacant and three hours later still no one appeared. Giving up, we walked to a main street and

took stock of our finances. Between us we had less than six American dollars.

I bought Peggy her first hotdog and a Coke which she first spit out saying it tasted horrible. Then I called my sister who lived in Red Bank, New Jersey, and she arranged bus tickets to take us to her home. The following day she called a Zionist organization and they arranged bus tickets for us to go to my home in Detroit.

I would learn later that when the Israeli war ended, hundreds of men and women who had gone to Palestine and risked their lives to establish a Jewish homeland suffered similar situations. When their units were disbanded, they were just turned out. No money. No shelter. No return to their homeland. Nothing.

I learned of several cases where some of them snuck into a military camp to secure some food and a warm bed, only to be arrested and jailed. Their passage to Israel was paid by the Zionist organization, but a return trip was never promised. Reader beware. Within every bait there lies a hook.

There probably was no deliberate ethical violation. The creation of a new country encourages a great many changes and sometimes it is not always the cream that rises to the top.

Several years after returning to America, the American Veterans of Israel held a convention in Chicago at which an Israeli Vice Consul spoke. Everything was going well until he remarked his appreciation for the Russian who trained and commanded the first Israeli paratroops. I only flinched but Peggy could not be restrained.

Out loud she corrected the Consul and told him that her husband was the man that trained and com-

manded the first Israeli Paratroop Brigade. There was a pause when Peggy offered our wedding album and some documents to verify her claim. After concluding his talk, the Consul asked Peggy to see her documents. After looking at them, he asked if he could borrow some of the wedding photographs and other documents and he would return them to us as soon as he showed them to some other people. We never received our wedding pictures and the other material back nor did we ever hear from the Vice Consul again. Sometimes trust is stupidity in the costume of ordinary life!

Following that incident, the American Veterans of Israel Organization began publishing a series of spurious claims challenging my integrity and even some that claimed I had never served in Israel. These people completely ignored my Israeli citations for *"SERVICE ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY"* and another for *"HEROISM AND COURAGE WITHOUT HESITATION."*

Apparently they even solicited information from several of my former paratroopers about my service. They never published the results of their survey but another issue of the journal contained an interview with Bernard Marks, my former adjutant at the Mt. Carmel Paratroop Base, who stated that as far as he knew, "Robert Leeds was the man who started the Israeli Paratroops and he was its first commander."

In a masterful piece of slander, the commander of the Israeli Airforce, Ed Kaplanski, said that he and his adjutant had researched the Israeli Air Force records and no Robert Leeds ever served in the Israeli Air Force.

What he didn't say was that I was serving under the name of Bob Levy and that I had original Israeli documents verifying my parachute packing op-

eration began as part of the Israeli Air Force. Again, without any semblance of proof, he challenged the number of parachute jumps I had made and claimed that I had made fictitious claims in my resume. As one of his proofs he stated, "Contrary to Leeds' claim, the Air Force records show that the Israeli Airforce never bombed the Lydda Airbase."

If he had read all of my statements he would have found that I never once said we bombed Lydda Airbase. I said we bombed the massive 10,000 man Arab army deployed NEXT to Lydda Airbase! We had specific orders not to let any bombs fall on the British occupied airport and give them an excuse for entering the war against us!

Mr. Kaplanski's statements came as a surprise. He was the very pilot that flew the two missions on which I was his bomb chucker! Now, it is true that we were never formally introduced, but his twisting of words raises questions about his motives.

I am sure he had access to the true events that would eliminate any question of who trained and commanded the First Israeli Paratroops.

Reader, you may wonder why I have pursued this subject. Let me explain. When I stand in the light of God, I do not fear a crooked shadow.

I do not believe a man has any possession more valuable than his name and his reputation. They are the true dimensions of his being. They define his past and predict his future. By his name you will know who he really was and who he really is. I protect my name and reputation for they are a knight's life's garment.





CHAPTER XII

Surviving the Every Day Dragons

Like many other newly married young couples, we found refuge with my parents. Although we were welcome, after a short time we knew that we had to get our own apartment.

One day I was walking down Linwood Avenue in Detroit, which was a busy street near our house. The west side of the street was lined by a row of small stores, most of which had a plain metal sign or a metal sign with neon lighting hanging out over the sidewalk. Perhaps because my father was a painter, I noticed that most of the metal signs had large areas where the paint had peeled off. I got an idea.

I went out and bought 100 penny postcards. I then sat down and wrote a short message on the backs of the cards and addressed them to the stores where signs were in disrepair. My message was very brief: "Sir: Please take a look at your sign!" I signed them "The Sign Copy Company" and mailed them.

I waited three or four days and then went up to the first store and asked the owner if he had looked at his sign lately. Then I introduced myself and told him I would repaint both sides of his sign with the finest outdoor metal paint for only fifteen dollars.

Now if you're thinking in today's dollars, you have to remember that in 1949, the average wage for an unskilled worker was as low as forty cents an hour.

Since my father had a garage full of various sized ladders, paint thinners and paint brushes that I could use, all I needed to spend was two and a half dollars for a quart can of paint. What I didn't consider was my absence of artistry. I figured all I had to do was trace the old lettering. What could have been simpler. My figuring was!

My lack of other considerations sadly diminished the net proceeds of my enterprise. First of all, in order to trace the lettering, I had to remove all the neon letters and on occasion I would break a set of letters and have to purchase new ones. Secondly, what I envisioned as an easy task did not turn out that way. My lack of artistic skill required me to spend much more time tracing the lettering than I had envisioned. In many cases I could not see the outlines of parts of the lettering and I had to rely on my own skill for the task.

Another consideration was that due to my lack of skill, I was only able to complete two or three signs a day. Fortunately, the signs were up high enough so

that even though some of my outlines didn't match the original, the differences could not easily be distinguished from the ground.

In thinking back, I was probably only averaging forty cents an hour. Still, I continued and eventually acquired enough money to be able to afford to buy a used 1937 four-door Chevrolet which cost us only one hundred dollars. Of course there were a few problems with the car. In addition to using more oil than gasoline, the car would not turn to the left. In order to make a left-hand turn I had to go one block further, turn right, go to the end of that block, make another right turn and then go to the end of that block and turn right again.

We could live with the oil problem but the turning problem demanded we spend the funds necessary to correct it. Another problem was that Peggy kept complaining about the faded color of the car. I finally repainted the car in her choice of color, green.

When our first child was born, we decided to make a trip to my sister in New Jersey, a matter of over of thousand miles. We were doing fine until we got to the Appalachian Mountains. Within a short time we learned that even though we filled the crankcase with oil at the bottom of a mountain, when we got to the top of the mountain all our oil was gone.

We hadn't gone over too many mountains when we burned out a bearing and our engine seized. By an act of Providence we were able to coast to the small local Chevrolet dealer in that town. The manager of the dealership was the owner and he came out and surveyed the problem.

As I expected, the estimated cost of repairs far exceeded the money we had available. When the manager offered to get us a room at the local hotel, that also

was beyond our budget. When I explained our situation to the manager, he said he knew of a nearby lady who might be willing to let us stay with her the night and then we could decide what we wanted to do the next day. He made the arrangement and said he would tow the car into his shop to get it off the street.

The lady served us an excellent dinner that evening and breakfast the next morning. When I asked her how much we owed her she said, "Nothing. It was a pleasure having the company of you and your family." I insisted that we pay her something but she absolutely refused.

When we went over to the dealership, our car was parked in the driveway shining like a new car. Upon our approach, the dealer came out and greeted us.

"You're all set, he said. "One of my mechanics didn't have anything to do so he stayed late and replaced all your connecting rods and oil seals. We used some spare parts we had, so there aren't any charges. I don't think you'll have any problems for the rest of your trip. You've got a full tank of oil and he filled your gas tank. You and your family have a nice trip!"

I insisted that I pay something but he absolutely refused to take any money. We did complete our trip without any untoward incidents. In this case, some very nice people slew our dragons.

It also taught me a lesson and enforced my pursuit of my Knight-Errant's code; "To favor the poor and oppressed."

Upon completion of the trip I realized that I had never written down the names and addresses of the lady who boarded us nor the dealer who so generously helped us on our first vacation so I could send them a thank you letter. It did affect me in another way. This

incident happened almost sixty-five years ago and in that time I've probably purchased at least thirty new automobiles and every one has been a Chevrolet. My present Chevrolet was purchased in nineteen eighty-five and has over eighty-five thousand miles on it. A Chevrolet will always be this knight's first steed.

Earning a livelihood is a dragon that everyone must confront. My first attempt was as a timekeeper for an auto parts manufacturer. There were two of us employed in this office and our job required us to take all the employee's time cards out into the shop after starting time and physically check that the employee was on the premises.

Occasionally, someone would have a friend punch their card in but not be present to work and still get paid for the day. My partner, Oscar, was a middle aged man who had never worked in any other position in his life. One day I mentioned to him that I was going to enroll in college so I could get a better job. Oscar picked up my metal lunch bucket and shook it vigorously back and forth making a clanging noise.

"Do you hear that noise?", Oscar yelled. "That's the noise you're going to hear every day for the rest of your life!"

He was wrong. That night I went home and I told Peggy to throw my metal lunch bucket away and just pack my lunches in a brown paper bag with a Thermos bottle. From that day on I carried my lunches in brown paper bags.

I must have had a dozen jobs after that one but something always happened that resulted in a layoff. Finally, I landed a job with the Ford Motor Company. Starting out as a timekeeper, I was transferred from Detroit to their plant in Ypsilanti, Michigan, as a Time Study Engineer. After a year I was promoted to Meth-

ods Engineer and transferred to a new factory in Missouri where they were setting up to manufacture the wings for the U. S. Airforce's B-47 bomber. I was promoted to Methods Engineer.

Short of qualified engineers, one other Methods Engineer and I were each to split a three shift work schedule. I worked from four p.m. to four a.m. five days a week and the other engineer worked from four a.m. to four p.m. five days a week. To me it was heaven. With all twenty hours of overtime pay each week, I was earning more than I ever dreamed of earning.

At first we rented a small home, but because of all the money I was making, Peggy and I decided to purchase a small two room lake shore home in Lake Lotawana and remodel it into a four room house that included a living room with a four-foot high by six-foot wide fireplace

. In order to do this I took out a hundred thousand dollar short term mortgage. When the house was completed we had an open-house and I invited everyone in the Methods Engineering department to a barbecue and to go swimming. This gave rise to an unexpected dragon.

My department head enjoyed it so much that he asked if he could come over each Sunday with his wife to swim. I consented. While Fred really enjoyed swimming, his wife did not like to swim and constantly complained about having to "waste" her Sundays at our house. Fred just tolerated her complaints and kept coming over with her.

On December twenty third, the Personnel office distributed a notice to everyone that the factory would be closed at noon on December twenty-fourth for the Christmas holiday and would re-open at eight o'clock on December twenty-sixth. My department head made

it a point to tell me that I would be expected to come in and work the half day, December twenty-fourth from eight a.m. to twelve noon.

I tried to reason with him that I lived twenty-five miles from the plant. When I finished my twelve hour shift at four am, it would take me two and a half hours to go home and come back. His reply was that If I wanted to live in a fancy lake home, that was my problem!

Instead of letting the matter drop, I went to the personnel director and asked him how the letter should be interpreted. He said that my interpretation was correct and that I would not have to work the morning of December-twenty fourth. He told me to forget about it and he would straighten it out with Fred.

Just before four p.m., Fred, accompanied by two security guards, confronted me and told me that he understood I had gone over his head to get out of working on the morning of the twenty-fourth and he had some more good news. "You can have the rest of the year off too. You're fired!" The two guards took me to my locker where I secured my belongings and took me to the gate and closed it behind me.

Peggy and I were too shocked to realize the dimensions of Fred's action. The next day I drove back to the plant and was denied to see the personnel director.

Without ever contemplating I would lose my job, I had spent all of our savings and incurred a heavy mortgage payment to rebuild the cottage we had bought. We could not possibly sustain this debt load and to try to keep from filing for bankruptcy. We sold the home for the amount of the mortgage and moved back to my folk's home in Detroit. I recalled the old proverb that abundance, like want, ruins many. I was now among the many. Dragons like Fred are the per-

petrators of misery. Still, you cannot live and just wait for a storm to pass. You must go on living and learn to dance in the rain. It was difficult, but we danced.

It took weeks and hundreds of applications until I finally was accepted as a Time Study clerk at a local General Motors factory. Unlike some of the other automotive factories, General Motors did not shut down and layoff most of the employees temporarily until the new model start up. This was an important consideration to working for General Motors.

Most people are unfamiliar with how the executive hierarchy functioned. It was a nepotistic organization and had a series of levels that decided your benefits. For example, some positions could not be attained unless you were a graduate of the General Motors Institute of Technology and to get into the Institute your father had to also be a graduate. Each level of work had a grade number. As a male clerk I was a grade four. I had a desk but my chair had no arms and my wastebasket was very plain. It wasn't until I reached the sixth level that I finally got a chair with arms.

To perpetuate the nepotistic system, the company preferred exempt-class employees to bring their sons into the company. As might be expected when a father employed his son, his son was promoted rapidly to a six level status. In order to seemingly control nepotism, the Corporation prohibited a plant manager from promoting their sons beyond the seventh level. However, to get around that restriction, different plant managers exchanged sons so the unrelated executive could promote them.

It was a system that challenged my desire to progress to the top. I sat down and planned my way to become a tenth level plant manager. I went down to the personnel director and asked if I might improve

my chances for advancement if I got a college degree. I knew the answer before I asked the question. I also knew that he would mention this to the plant manager and any kind of notice would be a step in the right direction.

Since General Motors had a very generous college tuition refund program, together with the credits I received from my military service, I was able to complete the requirements to graduate with honors in less than three years. They were impressed and I was promoted from a fourth class clerk to a fifth class Time Study Engineer.

My next opportunity arrived when the union decided to call a strike. Because we were coming into a model change we had to submit our cost for all the parts we produced to the central office. It was decided that we would move all of our documents to a hotel where we could work on them during the strike. Needless to say we had numerous heavy boxes of material that we had to move from the second floor to a waiting vehicle at the entrance of the first floor. Some of the boxes were much larger and heavier than the others and my associates would stand there and argue over who was going to carry which box. While the department head was looking on I simply walked over and grabbed the heaviest box and carried it down to the waiting vehicle. My associates thought I was pretty stupid and stood idly by while I carried all the heavy boxes. It did not go unnoticed by the department head.

A short time after the strike was settled, to the consternation of time study men who had been there much longer, I was promoted to a sixth level Methods Engineer grade and shortly after that to supervisor of the entire Methods Engineering section.

I confirm again that I am a great believer in Providence and let me give you some of my reasons.

Having improved our financial situation, Peggy and I decided to move to a heavily wooded area in Bingham Farms in northwest Detroit and build a dream home on one of the several vacant lots. Without knowing who lived in the few homes in the area, we purchased a secluded lot and built a beautiful two story raised ranch home. As it turned out, of the six other homes in the area, one turned out to be owned by the owner of the largest Pontiac dealer in Detroit. Another one was owned by a General Motors corporate executive and another was owned by John DeLoorean, General Manager of Pontiac Motors.

The twenty acre estate with the Olympic sized swimming pool located behind our home had a six foot high chain link fence around and belonged to Semen Knudsen, General Manager of Chevrolet Motor Division. We were in good company.

One day Semen Knudsen knocked on our door to return some belongings that one of his security guards had seized when he extricated my son and another boy from his swimming pool. At the time I didn't know who he was and as a matter of apologizing, Peggy offered him a jar of her home-made cherry jam. Of course I also assured him that I would make sure Marc didn't use his pool any more.

A short time later my department head told me that a group of central office corporate executives were coming to our plant to go over our next year's production costs. He wanted me to attend and take notes, but under no circumstance was I to speak at the meeting. In fact, I was to stay at the very back of the room. When the group came into the meeting, Semen Knudsen began conducting the meeting.

They had set up a projector that depicted a large table of numbers consisting of about fifteen long columns on a movie screen. Now, once upon a time while in high school, I was taught a shortcut for checking documents like this one. All you had to do was add the last digit of each column total together and using only the single last digit, compare it to the last digit of the grand total. In my mind I added the digits several times and came up with a three. The last digit of the grand total was a seven. There had to be a mistake.

I still don't know what possessed me but I blurted out, "There's a mistake in those totals!" A deathly calm came over the room and I realized Knudsen and everyone else was staring at me. There were several minutes of silence while some of Knudsen's men began re-adding the columns. Sure enough there was a mistake. I figured my boss was going to kill me when the meeting was concluded.

Now, probably everyone in the room thought that I had added up these thousands of numbers in my head without any mechanical assistance. It was really a very simple eighth grade trick. When the corrections were made, Knudsen looked straight at me and said "Robert, I didn't know you worked for Chevrolet." Then he explained to everyone that I was his neighbor. Reader, people tend to believe what they think. Time would endorse my brashness.

A short time later I was transferred to General Motors central office as a consultant to the Corporation with a significant increase in my wages. As a member of a Team Study group, consisting of about ten men who had been singled out for advancement, I was sent all over the country to analyze the performance of the different companies General Motors owned.

Upon the conclusion of my one year term I was transferred back to my plant as the director of the Appropriations Control, Time Study, and Methods Engineering departments. Again I was promoted one level with another impressive increase in salary. I had conquered the dragons of existence.

To prepare you for the next dragon, McDonald's, let me give you a slight introduction.

Peggy and I were, and still are, animal lovers. We have rarely been without some kind of pet including dogs, raccoons, a coatimundi and an ocelot.

It was the death of our pet ocelot that would change our lives again and confront us with the pet care dragon.

We had our pet ocelot, Socrates, for several years when in 1965 we had to board him in a kennel for three weeks while we were on a vacation. We inspected numerous kennels and could not find one at which we would ever want to board a pet. Finally we found a man who ran a small private nature kennel.

He assured us he could take care of our ocelot properly. He didn't. When we arrived home he informed us that Socrates was dead. For his first night, one of the children who worked for him locked Socrates in a secure cage and did not remove his leash and collar. During the night Socrates climbed up on a limb of a broken tree branch in the cage and jumped off. His leash had wrapped around the branch and in the morning they found him hanging in his cage.

Terribly distraught, I decided that pet care was a dragon that needed to be subdued.





CHAPTER XIII

Into the Dragon's Lair

Early in December, 1970, I sat across from my boss's desk and told him what I planned to do. I can only imagine what he must have been thinking.

I had many pets in my lifetime, but I was an engineer, not the zookeeper. I had started at General Motors 17 years before as a clerk and now occupied the position of director of industrial engineering. I had two secretaries, a private office and privileges most employees would have been eternally grateful for.

In addition to a very generous salary, I was receiving annual bonuses and shares of stock in the company. I was able to select five brand-new company cars each year, changing them as soon as the odometer reached three thousand miles. This was a luxury that

afforded me the opportunity to drive the first Corvette Stingray that Chevrolet produced.

For the first time in a lifetime of insecurity and frequent periods of unemployment, Peggy and I enjoyed a sense of security.

My manager reviewed all the advantages of working for General Motors. At forty-three years of age, there was still opportunity to garner an even larger share of the good life.

After all, he reasoned, I hadn't started with company until I was twenty-six. Over the past years, I'd not only proven my ability as an industrial engineer, but I had worked equally hard during my free time acquiring a bachelor's degree and then a master's degree from Wayne State University. I not only graduated without ever completing high school, but I graduated with honors and was awarded the Sigma Iota Epsilon scholarship key.

But it was General Motors that made it all possible. Among my perks was a college tuition program that permitted me to afford attending college night classes twelve months a year.

In addition, I had been chosen as one of only ten men in the entire Corporation to serve as a consultant with the corporation's manufacturing staff and on several occasions I was sent to General Motors Institute for advanced courses in engineering, financial, and managerial techniques. The company had invested in my education, but we had both benefited.

"Are you really going to give all of this up to run a dog kennel?" My manager asked incredulously.

"Not a dog kennel," I corrected him politely. "A motel. A Pet Motel."

He kept his eyes focused on mine as he re-folded my letter of resignation and placed it in its original envelope. He held his arm out with the envelope only inches from me.

"Why don't you take it back and think about it for a few days." Almost confidentially, he said, "I won't mention it to anybody. Think it over." His head was nodding up and down, almost as if he was giving his consent.

"No," I replied, shaking my head from side to side. My stomach was churning inside and there was a strong temptation to take the letter back, but I knew I mustn't weaken. I pushed my chair back out of reach and stood up. This newly awakened concern for animal welfare and the forces that compelled me to make a commitment were stronger than any persuasions of logic. I didn't dare procrastinate. This had to be it. It was.

The needless death of our pet ocelot induced me to reconsider my pet boarding experiences. I started thinking about all the faults I had found with the way pets were boarded in America. At first I thought it might be the result of the lack of financial means. It wasn't.

My training with General Motors gave me the skills to evaluate the merits of the pet boarding industry. Surveys revealed that by nineteen sixty-five Detroit pet owners spent about one million, six hundred thousand dollars annually on pet boarding in Detroit alone. The money was there but equitable service was not.

Although there were newspaper stories every year of kennels burning down with tragic loss of the boarded animals, I did not find a single fire resistant

kennel. My surveys showed that many more pets died from the lack of adequate care than from fires.

Most kennels were garages or other buildings that were constructed for another purpose. They lacked sufficient air-conditioning or heating. Many had none at all. Almost all of them were filled with small wood or plastic cages. Even the few that did have indoor-outdoor runs still had plenty of cages available to accommodate an overflow of boarders during the summer vacation period and on holidays.

Seeing my interest in pet boarding, my fourteen year old son Marc got a job in a local boarding kennel. Since he could only work after school hours, the boarded animals had to wait all night and most of the day to be fed and to have their cages cleaned. His stories endorsed everything that I had found and more. One very hot Saturday he returned from work and told me that the kennel owner had forgotten to open the windows of the garage and the temperature got up to over one hundred degrees. When Marc entered the kennel, several dogs were dead. The woman swore Marc to secrecy and instructed him not to tell anyone what had happened. When a deceased pet's owner called for their pet they were simply told that their pet must have died from natural causes.

This perfidy encouraged me to confront this profession. It was not only kennel operators who operated so unscrupulously, but many veterinarians also victimized pets and their owners. By boarding healthy pets amongst pets who were being treated for various diseases, many dogs and cats became ill and many veterinarians actually charged the pet owner to treat the problems. As a rule, most pet boarding facilities refused to let pet owners see where their pets were being kept.

In compiling a list of corrective measures a pet owner should strictly observe, the number one warning was to never board your pet in a boarding facility that would not allow you to take your pet to the accommodation where it was to be kept! Even this is not always adequate. When a kennel over-booked, as soon as the pet owner left they would take the pet out of its run and place it in a cage somewhere.

My first task was to determine whether or not there was such a thing as a pet-boarding industry. To garner the necessary data, I designed and mailed out an innocuous four-page questionnaire to the eighty-one dog kennels serving the greater Detroit area.

Relying on my engineering experience, the counsel of professionals in the dog food industry, and the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences, I came up with a list of requirements that I felt a good boarding facility should meet.

All of these are readily available in my award winning book, *Love is a Four Legged Word*. Unfortunately, the perverted humor "Dead Pets Never Tell" still persists in the pet care industry.

I bolstered my research with the assistance of the Ralston Purina Company, the A. J. Carlson Research Institute at the University of Chicago, the Federal Government Committee on the Guide for Laboratory Animal Facilities, the National Academy of Sciences, Natural Research Council and others.

When I summarized my findings there was overwhelming logic to support an effort to capitalize on the problem.

After interviewing several architects, I made the selection and contracted for the plans and specifications for a four hundred room pet motel that would serve as a model for the industry.

Besides kennels for dogs, we also designed separate facilities which included an aquarium, aviary, serpentarium, stable, and a small animal room, our "Bunny Club."

The major problems of pet boarding was the problem of stress. Data indicated that the stress of being in a strange limited environment led to enteritis and subsequent dehydration. With older animals, it contributed to kidney failure.

To minimize stress, each area was completely separated from the others. The cats could never hear a dog barking and a forty inch high concrete wall separated each dog run inside and outside.

Published studies indicated dogs and cats relaxed when serenaded by soothing music. This prompted us to incorporate a special communication system that would carry soft music to every pet area both inside and outside the buildings. A master control in the manager's house would allow the manager to monitor each animal area with the push of a button.

The dog kennels and cattery rooms were divided into three categories according to the size of the room, its furnishings and its amenities. The main building contained two separate catteries and the Regency and Imperial dog suites.

The Regency and Imperial dog suites had custom-made brass beds with specially made Sealy water proof mattress.

Regency and Imperial boarders had more attendants so each dog received daily brushing and attention. We even bought a Dairy Queen machine so the dogs could also enjoy an ice cream sundae each Sunday evening. Any pet could also enjoy a sundae on any day if the owners paid a dollar for the service.

Every indoor dog room had a special corrugated soft half inch thick plastic mat so no dog could ever sleep on abrasive concrete.

The concept of “mass” boarding offered numerous benefits. Having up to fifty-two employees assured us that no employee would be overworked because someone didn’t show up. As a responsible corporate citizen we were able to always pay more than the minimum wage and provide employees with overtime pay, medical insurance, paid vacations, a college tuition program, and a host of other benefits never before offered by a pet care facility.

Over and over again those in the industry and even my closest friends warned me that my dream was already someone else’s nightmare. One of my best friends offered to comfort me with the assurance that no failure is so great that it cannot be exceeded by blind faith and unreasoned effort.

The shock came when I received the estimated cost for construction of the facility. By substantially reducing the size of the facility we might possibly be able to build my pet motel for a quarter of a million dollars. This did not include the land cost!

For two years I sought to borrow the money from banks and venture capitalists. Despite all my research and projections, the only encouragement I received was to build the first Pet Motel and then come back to them.

By December 1970, I had exhausted my list of capital resources in Detroit and most of our savings. I decided that Chicago was a more fertile market for venture capital.

That December I resigned from General Motors, moved to Chicago and bought a small Leavitt-built row- home thirty miles North East of the loop.

I immediately gained employment as a consultant which covered our living expenses and the quest for venture capital. Within a short time I was able to obtain commitments for almost half the money I needed.

By an act of Providence, I was sitting in a co-worker's office while he was reading a marketing magazine. On the cover was a picture of a handsome executive. The bold headlines above the picture proclaimed, "AMA Chicago Chapter Names McDonald's Kroc as Marketing Man of 1972.

Who is Ray Kroc?" I asked

Beckerman looked at me in surprise and then told me. Here was a man who parlayed a mundane thing like a hamburger into a \$700 million chain of fast food restaurants.

I took the magazine home with me and read the entire article several times. This was a man who could tell me how to raise the money I needed.

What could I lose? I sat down at a typewriter and begin typing, "Dear Mr. Kroc. . ." On a single sheet of paper, without actually revealing what my concept was, I told Ray Kroc a little bit about my personal history and a lot about my problem of obtaining venture capital for a unique and worthwhile concept. I closed by asking for twenty minutes of his time to get his advice.

I all but forgot about the letter until I was summoned to the telephone the following week. I picked up the receiver and answered, "Leeds."

The other voice came across clear and crisp, "Bob, this is Ray. What can I do to help you?"

There was a pause and I tried to think of who I knew by the name of Ray. The voice came on again and I realized it was Ray Kroc from McDonald's."

Within minutes he had me at ease and I had an appointment to meet with him at McDonald's headquarters in Chicago.

After a brief exchange of trivia he invited me to reveal my mysterious concept to him. I began opening my charts on a nearby table, but with a wave of his hand he insisted that I place everything on his desk.

I pointed to my architect's rendering of the buildings and then reviewed my surveys and projections. When I concluded, he shook his head and said, "This is the Goddamndest thing I've ever seen since I thought of McDonald's!" Kroc asked me to leave all my material with him and he'd get back to me.

A week later I was invited to a lunch with three of Kroc's lawyers at the prestigious Chicago Athletic Club on Michigan Avenue. I explained that I had other investors who were willing to put up half of the monies, but they were quick to insist that wouldn't be possible. If Kroc invested he didn't need any banks or other investors. He would do it all by himself on certain conditions.

First, he would own the land and later sell it to the company. Secondly, his architect had to design and build the pet motel. I didn't like either provision. Letting the architect design and also build a structure was like letting the foxes build the chicken coop.

The desire to see my dream become a reality, plus the millions I was going to make and a three martini lunch was sufficient to persuade me to agree.

To this day I wonder if their martinis had any gin in them or whether the whole lunch was a set up. All they talked about was how much Ray Kroc liked me and how lucky I would be if I agreed to enter into a partnership agreement with him.

"There was this one stipulation," they said. "Because of Ray's agreements with McDonald's Hamburgers, he could not enter into any other business unless he owned fifty-one percent of the company!"

This was one thing my lawyers warned me to always avoid. "Whoever held the a majority of the stock ruled the corporation!" Despite my reluctance to agree, Kroc's lawyers continued to assure me that this was a small concession, considering he was making such a magnanimous offer and one that would make me rich beyond my dreams.

Reader, believe me. You are easily persuaded to accept bad advice when you are promised what you most desire. I agreed to their terms. Time would teach me that you can place a continent between a promise and a deed.

From the moment I saw the architect's first renderings I knew I was in trouble. The architect was designing another Taj Mahal. I had enough experience to know that the cost to build his structure would be three or four times what my budget was.

I immediately telephoned Kroc and told him of my fears. When I was finished, Kroc set me straight.

"Look", he said, "If we're going to build a pet motel, my architect is going to build it!"

Instead of letting the matter drop, I telephoned Joan Kroc at their home and explained my concerns. She sounded very sympathetic and told me not to worry about it, she would call Ray and straighten everything out.

I felt a little relieved until she returned my call. In a very pleasant tone, she told me they were not concerned about how much the pet motel cost. She said that they had millions and they loved the idea so much that the cost of buildings wasn't even a concern.

I explained that it was a concern to me since my compensation was largely based on our return on investment. If we spent over the two hundred and fifty thousand dollar budget, I might never make a penny.

Her reply was calm and sincere. "Robert, here is what we will do. Regardless of how much it costs to build and operate the pet motel, we will compute the return-on-investment on an investment of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Believe me. We have enough money that we don't care if the pet motel ever makes a dime. We love the idea and just like you, we want to see this dream come true."

She also said that Ray was a little ill and she did not want to see him get irritated. "Let him have his own way and you'll never regret it!"

Her response was my bridge over troubled waters. Although I continued to insist that the architect make a number of design corrections, I never mentioned the problems to Joan or Ray.

By June, 1972, we learned that the construction cost was going to end up at one million, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Neither Joan or Ray even raised an eyebrow.

I have to admit, the appearance of America's first Pet Motel was a sight to behold. When you approached the motel you would get the impression you were approaching a real hotel and when you entered the lobby, you entered a large room, that except for the presence of numerous types of animals, you came to a twenty-five foot long hotel reservation desk behind

which were three or four uniformed receptionists, and about five hundred key boxes.

In addition to three dog kennel facilities, the motel offered specially designed accommodations for birds, small animals, simians, reptiles, horses, and several acres for farm animals.

All three dog kennels offered special features that included private heated and air conditioned indoor rooms with an attached private outdoor run.

The dog kennels were divided into three sections; Deluxe, Imperial and Regency. All the Deluxe rooms had thick perforated wall to wall vinyl mats while the Imperial and Regency Suites had small or large brass beds with custom made Sealy mattresses and cotton sheets.

We never did establish an advertising budget. We didn't need to. Almost every newspaper in America carried pictures and stories of us. Even European and Oriental countries sent reporters and photographers to publish the story of American Pet Motels.

Despite not having all our facilities available for another six months, we ended our first year with only a twelve thousand dollar loss. With the completion of all our runs, we were booked one hundred percent from then on. For major holidays we had over one thousand pet owners on our computerized reservation program. People were making reservations a year ahead of time and some people even had their pets flown to us for boarding. We became so well known, American Airlines signed a contract with us and even printed brochures featuring both our services.

It is impossible to describe twenty-seven years of operations in a single chapter but for those who seek more of this strange enterprise I recommend you

acquire my best selling book, *Love is a 4 Legged Word*, which is still in print.

Neither Ray or Joan attended our 1974 annual Director's meeting where I laid out my plans to construct over one hundred new pet motels throughout America. I could predict annual revenue of two hundred and six million dollars annually and I had the statistics to prove it. After completing my presentation, without a single comment, Kroc's lawyers and accountants just excused themselves and went to lunch, leaving me just sitting there.

The actions, or rather the lack of actions, by the lawyers and accountants bothered me, but the anticipation of the arrival of Christmas eclipsed those concerns. The joys of Christmas were cut short when I received a phone call from Kroc's head attorney.

I answered the telephone, "Merry Christmas, American Pet Motels." There was a long pause. Then Kroc's attorney said, "Bob, I wanted to let you know that Ray has decided to close the Pet Motel on December 31st. He would like you out of there as soon as possible, but not later than that date!"

A dragon had made its first advance and I had not even a sword to vanquish him.

The following day a stranger called on me and introduced himself as the new owner of American Pet Motels.

I asked him what they were going to call the new company and he replied that they were keeping the same name and going to operate the same way.

This was the low point of my life. I couldn't believe the Krocs would do this to me. To add insult to injury, the man invited John Zevchek, my Administrative Assistant, to have lunch with him.

When they had left, I began thinking of all the problems an inexperienced new owner would encounter. Replacing the pistons in our high pressure cleaning pumps and a hundred other things that only John and I knew how to do, would cause new owners severe and costly problems. I could take some comfort in this thought but it was short lived.

When John returned from lunch he seemed jubilant.

"Guess what?" He grinned. "I'm going to be the Vice President of American Pet Motels." I was speechless. Here was my best friend whom I had hired out of a dead end job, doubled his earnings and treated him like a member of the family. I had even given him several hundred shares of stock in the company. The tongue of a traitor is not steel but it cuts as well.

That afternoon was the lowest point of my life. In anticipation of the company's future success, I had paid many of the company's expenses out of my own pocket. In addition, I had just purchased a new home, incurring large monthly mortgage payments. A new car for my wife and membership in an exclusive private country club were additional obligations.. In addition, with Christmas coming, I had bought all kinds of expensive gifts for my family and friends. There was no way I could survive financially for more than a few months.

I could hardly believe what was happening. There had to be a mistake somewhere. When I got home that evening I telephoned Ray Kroc at his penthouse apartment. When he came to the phone I asked him nicely what was wrong.

He responded in a harsh, brisk voice.

"It's my company and I'll do what ever the hell

I want with it. If I want to burn it to the ground I'll do it!" There was a slight pause and then he hung up.

I sat there with the phone in my hand and tears in my eyes. Everything had been going so well. What could have happened to make him so angry with me?





CHAPTER XIV

Vanquishing the McDonald's Dragon

I didn't know what to do, but I wasn't going down without a fight. Peggy was more distraught than I was. I refused to believe that Kroc would do what he was doing.

I don't know how long I lay awake that night but I didn't hear the tow truck take away my Cadillac in the middle of the night.

Early the next morning I received another call from Don Lubin, Kroc's personal attorney.

"Bob, this is Don Lubin. I'm just calling to ask you not to contact Mr. Kroc any more. His decision is final and he has asked me to handle the matter. I just

want you to wrap up everything as soon as possible and be off the premises not later than the thirty first or you'll be arrested for trespassing! That is when the new owner will be taking over."

"Wait a minute" I said. "I've got a five-year employment contract with Ray. This is my concept and my name. If you're going to dissolve the business, then let's dissolve it. I'm going to shut off all our telephone lines and lock the doors!"

Apparently there was more than one attorney on the line and he couldn't constrain himself. His words came screaming across the line, "It's not your concept and it's not your business. It's Krocs! It's all Krocs! Just pick up your pencils and get out of there!"

Lubin's voice quickly came back on the line. It was quiet and the tone of reason. "Bob, the company does not have enough assets to satisfy Ray's claims. He is calling his notes for One-Hundred Eighty-Thousand dollars for back rent and interest." These were items I was not even aware of.

"Ray holds over fifty percent of the stock and that's enough to dissolve the corporation. If you will look at all your agreements, they are all with American Pet Motels. When the company is dissolved all of your agreements are voided."

I couldn't remember them telling me these things in the beginning, and now was a bad time for me to receive a lesson in contract law. I suddenly realized that this whole company had probably been structured for just such an occasion.

From the very beginning I had been paying Ray and Joan sixty thousand dollars a year plus eighty-five percent of the profits. To enhance the company's image, I purchased all the company's typewriters, adding

machines and other stationery supplies out of my own funds. When I took guests and business associates out for lunch or dinner I paid the expenses from my personal checking account.

Driving home that night, I began to realize what I was up against. Except for a few thousand dollars in Mutual Funds and some General Motors stock, I had depleted our savings account. At fifty years of age finding a job that would cover our expenses wasn't going to be easy. I kept recalling our conversations with Ray and Joan.

"Don't worry about a thing," they had assured us. "We're doing this all for you. We don't care if we never make a dime. We have more money than we could ever spend. We just want to see you and Peggy become wealthy and enjoy some of the luxuries we do."

Over and over again, I kept hearing the popular McDonald's jingle, "We do it all for you."

Yes, you certainly do I thought. You'll do it to anyone.

In the depths of despair I made the decision that if my ancestors had the guts to stand up against the beef barons of yesterday, the least that I could do was to stand up against the ground beef barons of today.

Saturday morning I opened the telephone Yellow Pages and began calling almost every lawyer in the book. Being a Saturday, most of the offices were closed. Of those who were open, as soon as I mentioned Ray Kroc and McDonald's they declined becoming involved.

The following day, although it was a Sunday, I began calling again. Of course almost every office was closed. Desperation drove me to continue in my quest.

I was down to the w's when I called Walsh, Case, Cole, Brown and Burke. It was a senior partner, Robert Case, who just happened to come into the office for something on that Sunday.

Despite breaking down several times, I was finally able to explain my predicament. When I finished, Case made an appointment for us to meet on Monday.

We met at my house and I gave Case all of my agreements and contracts. I explained my financial situation and promised to pay him whatever it took to keep the Pet Motel.

The next few days were Hell until he called me to tell me that he would like to take my case. Their terms were that if we lost, I would only have to pay them their actual labor cost and out-of-pocket expenses. If we won I would pay them their regular fee which could amount to many thousands of dollars.

Without any consideration, except that this was my only chance, I signed the agreement. An eighty-five hundred dollar retainer went along with my signature. This wasn't about waiting for a storm to pass, it was about learning to dance in the rain.

After Bob Case's first contact with Kroc's attorneys I received one more call from Don Lubin.

"Robert!" He exclaimed. "If you hire an attorney we are going to look up every bar you ever got drunk in; every girl you ever slept with; we will ruin you socially, politically and economically if it takes six hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars to do it!" Then he slammed the receiver down. To me this was an empty threat. There was nothing in my past that I was ashamed of.

The following day I received a large brown envelope bearing the McDonald's return address. Inside

was a drawing of the earth with people standing shoulder to shoulder on it. From out of the clouds was coming a booming voice, *"Listen to Me, Earthlings. This is GOD! I am repossessing Earth and I want everyone off by the thirty-first!"*

Although many McDonald's employees continued to board with us, none ever mentioned the cartoon, let alone admit to sending it.

The next step was ours. Case notified Lubin that he was filing a law suit in Federal Court charging the founder and chairman of the board of McDonald's with stock fraud. Case was claiming that all of our contracts were deliberately designed to commit this fraud.

McDonald's did not take over the Pet Motel on December 31st. Instead, on that date they received notice to appear in a Federal Court where my law suit would be tried for all the world to hear.

When we arrived, several of McDonald's attorneys were gathered in a private room as we waited for our case to be called.

Shortly after our arrival, Don Lubin came into our room and asked me why I was doing this. His voice was dripping with verbal honey. Then he said that Kroc didn't want to hurt me and that he would like to settle this matter peacefully and to my satisfaction.

My answer was direct. "I wanted to own American Pet Motels. Period!"

For the first time Lubin said that would be fine with them but I would have to repay Kroc for his investment. Then he read off the financial requirements. One hundred eighty-thousand dollars for back rent and interest plus the original one million two hundred

and fifty thousand dollars that Kroc originally paid to build the Pet Motel.

Bob Case was prepared for this. He countered Lubin's claims with the fact that Lubin's figures did not take into consideration that McDonald's had received eighty-five percent of the Company's profits each year (Almost sixty-four thousand dollars), and the annual depreciation benefit of almost two-hundred-nineteen thousand dollars. In addition to that, he had collected twenty-five thousand dollars a year in rent.

Case was well prepared and he insisted those amounts would have to be considered in any settlement.

Lubin didn't make any reply. Instead, he asked to be excused so he could discuss these demands with Kroc's other attorneys.

After several minutes Lubin returned and said that "In an effort to settle this matter expeditiously, Kroc was willing to cancel all the notes and contracts and sell Leeds all his stock for an additional repayment of his original investment of one million two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

It was a steep price, but given enough time, I knew we could pay the price and get rid of the Krocs and McDonald's. I agreed, but only if we could pay the amount in monthly payments over a period of ten years.

Lubin said Kroc wouldn't go for that and then Case said, "Well, let's see what the court says."

Lubin immediately again asked for a few minutes to talk with his constituents. They agreed to our terms.

The best arrangement we could get was a ten year payout with a floating interest rate starting at six

percent. This meant no down payment, ten annual payments of sixty-one thousand five hundred dollars and a balloon payment at the end of ten years of six hundred twelve thousand and five hundred dollars.

To all my friends it seemed an overwhelming situation and even my best friends urged me to give up. But I possessed faith and I held to the knight-errant's code that all things are possible with faith and faith would be my sole weapon in this endeavor.

When all the papers were signed, Bob Case revealed his strategy. McDonald's was coming out with a multi million dollar stock issue. If we went into court and McDonald's or Ray Kroc were found guilty of stock fraud, the effect might jeopardize the success of the stock offering.

There was also a second consideration. Case said he had heard that Ray Kroc had cancer and was dying. He and Joan had given his attorneys total control for liquidating all his business interests outside of McDonald's and turning everything into cash.

Ray died on January fourteenth, 1974, and left Joan an estate worth well over five hundred million dollars. Despite his harsh rhetoric I liked Kroc and don't believe he would have allowed the destruction of the Pet Motel if he were in normal health.

Unfortunately, I would learn that fate can also be the victim of a bad economy. During the 1970's interest rates climbed to over fourteen percent. Our note with McDonald's allowed our interest to more than double. During the recession, people stopped traveling and going on vacations, which adversely affected our profitability.

As our ten year mortgage term approached, we didn't have the six hundred twelve thousand and five

hundred dollars required. I had already hit the banks for a loan with which to build an additional one hundred dog runs. I had only one resource, Joan Kroc.

Joan's voice was as soft and mild as it had always been. Unbeknownst to me, one of her friends had read my book, *Love Is A 4 Legged Word*, and had sent it to her.

She immediately told me that she and Ray never knew about what the lawyers did to us and tried to assure me that Ray would never have allowed it if he had known.

When she had finished her apology I explained that we had almost paid off our note to her but needed an extra few months to get the balance of the money.

There was a short pause and then she asked me to wait a minute. When she returned she said she had just checked with her attorney and the amount was fifty-six-thousand dollars and she had instructed her attorney to mark the note paid. Apparently she had a direct phone line to her attorney.

I was unprepared for this act of contrition. I still harbored a deep feeling of animosity for the pain and suffering Peggy and I had gone through, and I knew from my telephone call to Ray Kroc that he did know what was happening.

I told Joan that I didn't want her to cancel the debt because we were in a position to pay the entire amount in just a couple of months.

Instead of answering me I heard the telephone click and her attorney came on the line.

"Mr. Leeds, I am Mrs. Kroc's attorney and I am cancelling your note. You will receive a copy shortly.

"I don't want the note cancelled." I said. "I prefer to pay the fifty six thousand dollars. I don't want

any charity.”

“Mr. Leeds, I work for Mrs. Kroc and I take my orders from her.” With that she hung up.

A few days later the canceled note arrived in the mail. I telephoned Joan Kroc one more time to thank her for her generosity.

Joan died on October 12, 2003, of brain cancer, leaving an estate worth over five hundred million dollars. Among the recipients were a hospital that received more than eighteen million dollars, the Salvation Army who received eighty million dollars, National Public Radio received over Twenty-Two Million Dollars and other beneficiaries such as zoos and Democratic political organizations also received donations of millions of dollars.

Despite all our financial impositions, The Pet Motel recovered and became more profitable than anticipated. While the largest kennels in America boasted gross revenues as high as one hundred thousand dollars, our gross revenues reached almost one million dollars and once again I was driving a Cadillac.

I remained President of American Pet Motels for seventeen years until I retired and moved to Las Vegas in 1999. I wouldn't have sold then if a broker hadn't walked into my office and offer me six million dollars in cash for the Pet Motel. He explained that a multi-million dollar company was going to open Pet Motels all over the country and wanted to duplicate our operation.

They didn't duplicate our operation. They doubled our rates and cut their services and within a few years were out of business.





CHAPTER XX

Vanquished by the Iraqi Dragon

I have never regretted moving to Las Vegas, but I didn't really retire. I began a new career as an author and then as a publisher. Of the five books I wrote, three were nominated for best book of the year.

Someone sent the great actor Orson Welles a copy of my children's book *Christmas Tails*, and Welles telephoned me and insisted that it should be made into a movie. He said that if I would write the screen play, insisting that he play the part of Santa Claus, he wouldn't charge me a penny except for the modest recording charges. I wrote a preliminary screen play and he narrated it to send to his friends at Walt Disney Studios.

He suggested I make some changes to the script and send him the new version. This I did and then settled back to wait. Two days later, on October 10, 1985, I picked up the newspaper and read of Orson Welle's death from a heart attack.

The movie rights to both *Christmas Tails* and *Love Is a 4 Legged Word* were sold.

In 2008, I began writing a book about knight-hood and I came across the current American Army manual. I was struck by the similarity between the requirements to be an American Soldier and a knight-errant. Except for etiquette, there were many similarities.

I thought it would be appropriate to include this comparison in my book.

There was another compelling reason. A new global dragon had surfaced. In September, 1980, Iraq, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, first invaded and conquered its nearest neighboring country, Kuwait, and then using poison gas and other weapons banned by the United Nations, he invaded Iran.

Hussein's avowed purpose was to become the dominant Arabic power in the world. Like Bonaparte, Hitler and Stalin, Hussein had grand illusions of becoming the leader of an empire. His empire would include all the present and former countries of the Ottoman Empire.

His consistent violations of treaties with Iran and other countries plus his use of poison gas on civilians and soldiers brought unanimous condemnation from the United Nations.

Believing that Iraq also possessed atomic weapons of mass destruction, America and the United Nations declared war on Iraq and invaded the country on July 10th, 2002.

Despite my age of eighty-one years, I felt physically fit and desired to confront this new dragon.

As I had done in similar situations I sat down and wrote a letter. I addressed the letter to the Commanding General of the United Nations Multi National Force Iraq. I included information about the book I was writing as well as my military history.

I also related my experience in five wars and revolutions and asked to be embedded with some active front-line Divisions in Iraq for an indeterminate time. I emphasized that I was eighty-one years old but with a fifty year old's physique.

The Commanding General of the U.N. Multi National Force Iraq sent my letter out to most branches of the military and numerous responses were immediately received requesting my services. Among my suitors were the Cavalry, the 10th Mountain Division and the Marines.

To expedite my embedding, I accepted the first offer and found myself assigned to the 1/4 Cavalry in Iraq for three months and then I was to transfer to a Marine Division in Afghanistan.

On December 31, 2008, I boarded a plane for Kuwait and arrangements were made for me to be driven to the main American base in Baghdad.

Within the next three months, I completed over forty-five front-line missions. Some of the differences between the military of World War II and today's soldiers were very evident.

One of the main differences was the robot like performance of today's soldiers. No one, except your platoon leader and possibly his master sergeant, knows the destination of your patrol. Not until your platoon is ready to move out, is the mission revealed. This is a

precaution against a terrorist ambush or the terrorists planting improvised explosive devices on your route. I would learn the hard way it doesn't always work.

Some of the outposts were less than one half the size of a city block. Security was not a problem because there were no Iraqi employees. Other American camps varied in size with some being over a mile square and the home of over ten thousand soldiers from all branches of the military.

One of the major differences was that depending on what your patrol was going to do, your platoon might include a Navy medical soldier, an Airforce computer specialist or a soldier with some other unique ability.

One outstanding difference was the presence of female soldiers. I assure you that assignments were made without regard to the soldier's race, sex, creed or color. When our platoon leader learned of our assignment, he gathered us around him in a circle, and explained our mission. While gathered in the circle with our arms around each other's necks I always looked at the backs of the heads on both sides of me. If there was a tied-up bob of hair, my partner was a female. Other than the bobbed hair, there was little else to discern whether your companion was a male or female. Shortly before taking off, a minister (usually Catholic) came out and led us in a prayer.

Having women in your patrol didn't seem to cause anyone concern. On forced marches, despite the roughness of the terrain, women and men performed alike.

When an armored patrol leaves the base, everyone who carries a gun has to shoot several rounds into a huge sand hill next to the road to make sure that every gun was loaded and in working condition. When you returned to the base, you went through a similar

procedure only this time every gun had to be stripped of any magazine and there could not be any shells in the chamber. Safety ruled!

In the brief time I was with the First Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, I would serve at a dozen different bases and on patrols to forty-four Iraqi towns and small villages. In many cases we were visiting Iraqi police stations or training bases, but many of our patrols ranged from Kurdistan in the north to Basra in the south. The entire border with Iran was used to smuggle weapons to the terrorists.

When you visited a police station or village you could immediately tell whether the people were friendly or not. If they were friendly, they always insisted on serving you chai, a particular type of tea. It didn't matter if there was only one soldier or a hundred, you were obligated to sit down with your host and sip tea. Rarely would you ever see the women of the house. You would be served by the host or his sons.

Our patrols varied. Sometimes we raided local entertainment centers that offered computer services. A computer expert would spend hours searching for any indication that the computer was being used to aid our enemies.

Most of our patrols were involved in searching suspected areas which included the entire Iraqi banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. One of our patrols showed me a serious flaw in our practice. On this occasion we had solid information that a terrorist was living at an address in a city near Baghdad. We raided the house but did not enter it. His wife answered the door and told us her husband had gone to Baghdad on business. I still believe it was a mistake not to enter the house and search it.

One of our soldiers noticed a red dress lying on top of a mound against the house. Upon checking it he

found several new rifles. He then asked one of the terrorist's sons where his daddy kept his other stuff and the little boy pointed to a huge trash mound behind the house.

When our soldiers started probing they found eighty-four hand grenades, dozens of rockets, rocket launchers and thousands of rounds of ammunition. That was when I learned of what I thought was a huge mistake.

Apparently our government had an agreement with the Iraqis that in situations like this we would just notify the Iraqis and they would handle it. In my book we should have arrested the woman, burned down the house, put the children in an orphanage and hunted down the terrorist.

There were so many corrupt Iraqis, that those arms probably found their way back to the terrorists. This was the time that I came up with an idea that would enable us to destroy most of the enemy depots and their leaders.

I crafted my idea into a letter directed to the commanding officer of my division. As a matter of protocol I gave the letter to my commander to forward to the proper person in division headquarters. The reply stunned me.

In his letter the writer stated that these armaments are often assembled and distributed in the terrorist's home with the assistance of his wife and children. If we destroyed the house we might injure or kill a woman and children. Apparently, the United Nations armed forces had more consideration for the terrorists than for their soldiers.

Another factor seemed obvious. It seemed this cleanup operation was more concerned with the American body count than outright winning the war.

Time and again we received small arms fire while traveling in our armored vehicles. Not once did we ever stop and pursue the source of shooting.

Three times I was in a location when mortar shells or rockets landed within a few hundred feet of me. In none of these cases did I observe our troops go out after the source or at least return the fire. At one of our largest bases that adjoined an airfield, someone decided to install a tall floodlight to aid pilots when landing or taking off at night. It worked great the first night. On the second night it proved to be more of a target than an aid. During the night we received several rockets that landed around the beacon. The beacon was removed the next day.

On two occasions as soon as a rocket landed near us, we were ordered to return to our Stryker vehicles and return directly to our base. Not on one single patrol were we allowed to leave our vehicles and pursue whomever was shooting at us.

On March 9, 2009, we were assigned to visit an Iraqi police station in Baquba, right on the border of Kirkirk. The patrol procedure was carried out as usual and none of us knew our mission until a few minutes before we departed. Another defect soon became apparent. Every patrol included an Iraqi interpreter who was serving primarily because he was promised free immigration to America. Although the Iraqi interpreters were supposed to be very loyal, it was evident that they harbored more loyalty to Sharia Law than to the American Constitution.

On one occasion two interpreters joined several of us at a dinner table. Immediately they began asking if we were aware that Jews kidnapped Muslim and Christian children to use their blood to make a Jewish bread called Matzos. We were so stunned we just

glared at them. To further justify their story they even said they personally knew of several actual cases. Following that statement they claimed the Holocaust was a Jewish myth and made up by wealthy Jews to get sympathy.

They had barely finished when one of our soldiers stood up and shouted, "That's a God Damned lie! My father served with General Patton who freed thousands of prisoners from Buchenwald Concentration Camp. Don't give us that bull *#%!".

The two interpreters didn't say another word. I believe they didn't want to jeopardize their free trip to America.

The fallacy of security was that so many of the bases were huge and surrounded by eight foot high chain-link fences. At night there were security patrols but it would be very simple for a terrorist to place a cellphone under the fence so an interpreter could call and reveal where a patrol was going. This could be done in minutes.

Our patrol, on March Ninth, consisted of five Stryker vehicles with five or six men in each vehicle. We were just about to park our vehicles in front of a field of grass that was about four feet high, when my vehicle was hit by an RKPG (a Russian designed rocket propelled grenade). Fortunately, my vehicle had been modified with an extra layer of loose steel plates.

When an RKPG hits a vehicle without the extra layer of protection there is a primary explosion which opens a hole in the vehicle and the main shell explodes inside the vehicle's interior. The force of the explosion compresses the soldiers' bodies and often they are killed by their own bones piercing their internal organs.

I didn't even hear the explosion. I guess that you never hear anything or know when you are knocked out. I don't know how long I was unconscious. All I remember is that I opened my eyes and the vehicle's interior was filled with smoke.

Someone yelled that there was phosphorus burning and that was alarming because we had about twenty canisters of shells stacked right next to where I was sitting. Try as they might, they could not open the rear door. Fortunately there was a small emergency escape hatch in the door that they finally got open.

It appeared obvious that whomever launched the rocket was hiding somewhere in the field. Some members of the patrol started fanning out into the field when they were ordered to return. Instead, we concentrated on getting our turret gunner out of the vehicle and radioing our base for emergency medical treatment.

It seemed it was just minutes before an emergency vehicle arrived and our top gunner was put on a stretcher and placed in the rear of the emergency vehicle. He had obvious shrapnel wounds to his neck, arm and thigh. He was taken to a Class 1 Field Hospital and then flown to our Landstuhl Region Medical Center in Germany. After being treated there, he was flown to Walter Reed Medical Center in Maryland from where he received a medical discharge.

pital. I wasn't familiar with compression injuries and I declined to go. I really didn't think I sustained any injury.

That night my legs started bothering me and when I undressed for bed I found the inside of my right leg covered with dried blood. I checked my trousers for holes, but there were none. I just took a shower and went to bed.

The next day the pain in my legs was stronger, so I went to a Class 1 First Aid Station. The only people there were two first aid workers. One of them felt my right leg with his hand and confirmed that I did not have a broken leg.

With each succeeding day, I could feel my body atrophying. I could no longer do push-ups nor chin myself. Although almost every fair sized base had a small gymnasium with all kinds of equipment, I could no longer entertain any kind of calisthenics.

That night I climbed up onto my top bunk. I suddenly got dizzy and felt like I was going to fall off the bunk. With another soldier's help I was lowered to the floor and I climbed into a vacant berth and passed out. I don't know how many days I lay there, until one day, I thought my condition was being caused by dehydration and not having eaten anything for several days.

Although very dizzy, I got up and started staggering toward the defac (mess hall). I was staggering so badly, that someone reported me and a nurse came and guided me to the kitchen. From there, she took me to a Class three First Aid Station where a doctor examined me.

His examination included a series of questions from his computer. When he completed the program and his examination, he told me that I had lost some of my memory and had developed horizontal vertigo. I had shown him my teeth that had turned brown and were bent out of shape. His response was that they would turn white again and would regain their original position with time.

Then he seemed exasperated. "I don't have any protocol for someone your age! When you get back to America get an MRI!"

The doctor typed out the results of his examination, and without showing it to me, sealed it in an envelope.

That concluded the examination and treatment.

Over the next several weeks, instead of my teeth turning white and returning to their normal positions, my teeth turned brittle and started to disintegrate until there were only small jagged pieces showing.

Another problem was my throat. I became aware of it when I felt some foreign object in my mouth. I reached in and found that the skin on the top of my mouth had been burned and a new skin had grown. I was able to remove a large shard of the old skin in one piece. What I couldn't do was repair the damaged portions of my throat so I could ever swallow normally.

My legs remained swollen and painful, but every doctor I saw just said it was a normal result of the explosion and would improve with time.

Despite my injuries, I continued going on patrols up until April-nineteenth. I was going on a morning patrol and found myself unable to lift my foot high enough to reach the entrance step of the vehicle. I knew it was time to quit.

It took about five days before I could arrange a flight back to Las Vegas. On the day I was to depart for Kuwait, the patrol was interrupted when a courier stopped our patrol and told me the commanding officer wanted to see me.

In his office, he told me that he had recommended all the crew of our damaged Stryker vehicle for Purple Hearts. I hadn't even thought about it and thanked him for his consideration.

All four of my comrades did receive their Purple Hearts and I believe they were all given medical

discharges. Although I met the criteria, I was the only one of the squad that did not receive a Purple Heart.

After returning to the states I would learn the reason.

Someone sent me a copy of the Army doctor's letter that he had given me to present when I returned to America. I will quote his letter word for word:

"Disposition Written by rancher, ronald
@24 Apr 2009 0939 AST Released Without Limitations
Followup as needed with PCM. -
Comments; *I do Not believe symptoms are related to his injuries in early March* but because of limited data available for his age group for blast injuries would recommend a MRI, pt is scheduled to fly back to US this evening. I believe it is appropriate for him to have this upon return vs delay his return trip. Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms worse.

Discussed: Diagnosis, Medication(s)/Treatment(s), Alternatives, Potential Side Effects with patient who indicated understanding Injury & illness: *Not Work Related; Not Battle Related, Category: All Other, Medical/Surgical Cause: Non-Battle Illness*
Appointment Class: Outpatient
E&M Code: 99213 (OFFICE/OUTPATIENT VISIT, EST)"

(Underlining and Italics added.)

While everyone else in the vehicle had battle related injuries, mine were not (?). Based on Dr. Rancher, having not been injured when our Stryker vehicle was blown up, my nomination for a Purple Heart was declined, and I also would not be eligible for medical treatment when returned to America.

When I finally managed to get an MRI, they confirmed that I had two traumatic brain injuries. One wiped out my short term memory and the other affected my balance.

The Army doctors insisted that I only travel in a wheelchair. I refused that option. Next they offered a variety of four wheel pushcarts that resembled shopping carts. Despite their insistence that experience had shown that people with my injuries, and who repeatedly refused to confine themselves to a wheelchair, invariably showed up again with broken hips and other serious injuries. I refused because I'd rather take my chances, than spend the rest of my life in a wheelchair. In the end I said I would settle for a cane. They just shook their heads and I departed with a cane.

Over the next year, I did have some bad falls. I suffered a few cuts and bruises, but I believe my paratroop training had taught me how to fall and roll off the impact. The bad thing about falling was that I could not stand up again. On one occasion I lay on the garage floor for four hours before being found and helped.

Whatever the consequences, I was determined to try and walk like any normal person. Over the next few years, I swam every warm day and concentrated on improving my balance. Today, I may wobble a bit, but I walk without any assistance. I do take a cane with me just in case.

I would not be so fortunate with some of my other "non battle related" problems.

Over the next few years I required three cornea transplants to restore my vision. After the first transplants, my body rejected one of the corneas requiring another transplant. I also required hearing aids to restore eighty percent of the hearing in my right ear and sixty percent of the hearing in my left ear.

None of my lower teeth returned to their original white color nor did they return to their original position. Instead, they rapidly disintegrated to the point where only small shards of dark brown enamel were visible. In addition, my upper teeth also became brittle and began breaking if I accidentally bit into a bone or a piece of hard gristle.

Without the means, nor money, to correct the problems with my teeth so I could eat solid foods again, I went to the local school of dentistry who had programs for helping people whose income fell below a certain level. I met all the criteria. However, they had a special program for veterans, and I was assigned to that department.

Three senior dentists examined my teeth and X-rays were taken of my jaw. Showing me the X-rays, the doctors confirmed that my jaw had several hundred tiny pieces of shrapnel in it; far too many to even attempt to remove them. Apparently, this kind of injury wasn't included on Doctor Rancher's computer program even though it was not an uncommon result when an armored vehicle was struck by an RKPG.

Their conclusion was that because of the cost, they would only be able to remove all my lower teeth and fit me with a lower denture. Only my two canines remained and both of them were damaged.

When the denture was finished, I was thankful to be able to eat solid foods again. Unfortunately, my canines continued to disintegrate and my denture began shifting in my mouth. Finally, I bit down on something and I heard a snapping sound. I recovered two pieces of my broken denture.

Returning to the dental college, I was informed there were no available funds in the veterans department. It was back to a liquid diet for years.

Finally, my wife and I took out a reverse-mortgage, and I spent about twenty thousand dollars on a set of snap-in implants. I reveled at the idea of being able to eat lobster and corn on the cob again.

About this time, a tiny black speck of shrapnel underneath one of my fingernails started bothering me. This tiny speck turned into an infection that ultimately became cancerous. Three amputations later left me without the entire first section of my left hand's first finger. You would have to operate a typewriter or computer keyboard to appreciate this kind of handicap.

A short time later I was diagnosed with cancer of the jaw. No one can say whether it was caused by the minute shrapnel or not, but after the most painful surgery I had ever experienced, I was minus half my tongue and still had no taste buds nor ability to smell.

After eight years I still cannot eat solid foods and despair at the regurgitation of liquefied spaghetti and meatballs issued forth by the family's blender. Morning, noon and night, this routine is my diet.

My doctor has told me it will take another six months before I will be able to speak and be understood. (Perhaps this is a blessing to some.)

In one recent month, this knight-errant's medical bills exceeded one hundred and twenty-eight thousand dollars.

For brevity, I don't dare let my wife tell you of my other problems. One would be, that in spite of all kinds of sleeping medications, I only sleep for three or four hours a night. I admit I am not the same per-

son who went to Iraq eight years ago. I am no longer a “friendly” person. I am aloof and quick to display my anger both vocally and physically.

Without the benefit of experienced military doctors, I can only rely on the expertise of medical personnel who are unfamiliar with ‘contained’ explosions.

My embedding agreement specifically stated in paragraph 2.C “. . . Commanders will provide billeting, rations **and medical attention**, if needed, to the embedded media commensurate with that provided to members of the unit. . .” (Italics and underlining added.)

Lord help my four comrades if they received medical treatment commensurate with mine!

The only apparent reason I was not afforded proper medical attention and the medal was Dr. Rancher’s emphasis that my ‘injuries’ (not wounds) were due only to my age and not battle related.

Lord help my four comrades if they received medical treatment commensurate with mine.

This was in contrast to what one commander stated in an open letter: “**Robert embedded with my Brigade while we were in Kirkuk in 2009. He came to me on his third or fourth embeds with the 25th ID and was properly vetted by CENTCOM. Before he came to me, he was injured by an IED while on a patrol in the east. At his request, I sent him out on at least four operations. Furthermore, even at his advanced age, he insisted on carrying all of his own equipment, which was quite heavy. Mr. Leeds was well-regarded by the units he embedded with, and I’ve seen people one third his age with far less stamina.**”

(Signed Lt. Col. James S. Rawlinson)

Do I ever regret volunteering to serve in Iraq?
Certainly I regret being wounded, but as a knight-errant, when each battle is over, his reward is to know that he was courageous enough to try!

That is the reward knights cherish most!





CHAPTER XVI

The Origins of Knighthood

The origin of the first knight is unknown except that the word 'knight' was derived from the old English word 'servant'. It first appeared in the 700's when Charlemagne, King of the Franks, began to use soldiers on horseback. These knights became a very important element of his army.

It wasn't long before the sovereigns of other nations copied the title and originated their own requirements for the award of knighthood.

In addition to distinguishing the recipient, it also bound him (or her) to the will of the annointer. There were varying requirements and wages. Charlemagne began by awarding his best knights with large areas of land called "benefices." The peasants who lived on these lands were taxed and ruled by the knights and

the knights awarded a generous portion of the taxes back to the King. This system had so much merit that it spread throughout Europe.

The greatest benefit to the king was that every military knight was a well trained loyal citizen who could be summoned to fight without any payment for the king if needed.

These knights often fought in exchange for the right to pillage any conquered city or village. Additional rewards included the right to rape any female and to slay any non-Christian. Some knights became so rich that they soon paid financial tribute to the king, who would hire peasants to train as soldiers that would fight (and often die) in the rulers' many wars.

In addition to the military advantages, a major benefit was the prestige the title "knight" brought. To assure exclusivity, many of the older knights' orders limited membership. Of course the King, his wife and children as well as his nobles and best friends were included in the list of eligible candidates.

There have been many variations of knighthood. The oldest, titled The Most Noble Order of the Garter, was founded by England's King Edward III, and its membership is still limited by its statutes to the English Sovereign, the Prince of Wales and twenty-four members.

Members of the Royal Family and foreigners can be admitted, but only as supernumerary members and do not count towards the twenty-four. Membership to the order is at the Sovereign's personal discretion. Those admitted to the order attend their induction at Windsor Castle on Garter Day in June. The new knights and ladies are invested personally by the

Queen and each new knight receives full robes worth an estimated five thousand pounds sterling.

While most of the ancient orders of knighthood required proof of a warrior's courage, compassion, virtue and loyalty were not always prerequisites.

It wasn't until the time of the collapsing Western European nations, caused by the breakup of large territories and the rise of feuds by nobles, knights and warlords who battled and plundered the peasantry and the Church, that the Church saw an opportunity to begin the Christianizing of the knightly profession.

For hundreds of years the Church preached a doctrine of "Peace and God" which even went so far as to forbid warring on Sundays and certain other "holy" days as well. That is when the Church began to fashion knights as a weapon for the Church to wield against non-Christians.

There was one singular motive that drove this pursuit; the recapture of Jerusalem from the Muslims.

At the end of the eleventh century, Pope Urban led the cry for the First Holy Crusade. It was, after all, the means to take the Holyland, Jerusalem, away from the its Muslim rulers.

The conquest of Antioch was heralded as proof of the Christian knight's values, tactics, standards, modes and operations which were driven by their faith. After Antioch the knights established the First Christian Crusader state, Edessa. The First Crusader State and the first to be conquered by the Muslims.

The fall of the First Christian state in 1144, resulted in Pope Eugene III calling for a Second Crusade. This Crusade was led by King Louis VII of France and King Conrad III of Germany and was comprised of a

number of European nobles, hundreds of knights and thousands of religious peasants.

The armies of the two kings marched separately across Europe, but after crossing Byzantine territory, both armies, despite their ample supply of knights, were defeated in separate battles with Turkish armies.

Kings Louis and Conrad and the remnants of their armies finally reached Jerusalem and participated in an ill-advised attack on Damascus. The Second Crusade was an outstanding failure for the crusaders and an outstanding victory for the Muslims that would ultimately have a key influence on the fall of Jerusalem and give rise to the Third Crusade at the end of the twelfth century.

In 1189, a Third Crusade was spurred by the religious zeal of King Henry II of England and King Philip II of France. Upon King Henry's untimely death, command of his army was assumed by King Richard I of England (known as Richard the Lionheart). The elderly Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, also responded to the call for troops to free Jerusalem.

A unique feature of the Third Crusade was the claim by young French and German youngsters that Christ appeared before them and ordered them to raise armies of young people to help conquer the holy land.

According to a thirteenth century source the Children's Crusade consisted of religious fanatics as young as six years old. The French king told the boys to go home, but approximately thirty-thousand of them continued on to Marseilles where they were to embark for the Holy Land.

Another army of about 50,000 children traveled from Germany across the Alps to Italy where they intended to sail to the Holy land.

It is believed that most, if not all, of the children, perished before ever reaching the Holy Land. They have just disappeared from the history books.

The history of knighthood includes more than nine major religious crusades and while all of them were instigated by various Catholic Popes, not all of them were against Muslims. In fact at least one was conducted against the Eastern Orthodox Church. Other sects that did not embrace the Roman Catholic church also felt the wrath of religious knighthood.

Religious crusades soon became a vehicle for murdering non-Christians and especially non-Catholics. One of the most notorious crusades was led by the notorious Count Emicho who carried out a series of massacres of Jews in various towns in 1096. His actions drew widespread outrage and caused a major crisis in Jewish-Christian relations.

From the twelfth century on, knights and knighthood played important roles in most religious conflicts, but over time it lost its parochial distinction.

In 1229, in what became known as the Sixth Crusade, Emperor Frederick II achieved the peaceful transfer of Jerusalem to Crusader control through negotiation with the Muslim al-Kamil.

A decade later, Muslims easily regained control of Jerusalem. A Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Crusade failed to retake Jerusalem and accomplished very little.

Many argue that the Crusades successfully extended the reach of Christianity and Western civilization. In the Muslim world, however, the Crusaders with their knights, are regarded as having been immoral, bloody savages. Their widespread massacre of Muslims, Jews and other non-Christians resulted in a bitter resentment that persists to this day.

In the course of my research, I found the names of the ten most famous medieval knights. First among them was a King Arthur. Yes, historical data does record a King Arthur. However there is no mention of a Round Table, Excaliber, Sir Lancelot nor a Queen Guinevere. They are all fictional characters of Hollywood's script writers.

Over thirty percent of these famous knights would eventually die from battle wounds.

Kighthood probably got its start in the eighth century. Regents were always looking for ways to distinguish themselves, their family, their loyal friends and their fiercest warriors from the "common" peasant. (This is as true in some parts of the world today as it was in the Middle Ages.)

Becoming a knight soon became a license to fight and the right to ransack any city or town they conquered. This included killing all the men, raping all the women and carting off any thing of value.

In numerous cases, these knights became immensely wealthy and paid the king so the King could hire several peasants to fight for him. The term was "shield" money.

In the wake of the collapsing Carolingian Empire, while the rulers and knightly class battled and plundered, it was the peasantry and the church who, being unarmed and easy targets, suffered the most.

By the end of the eleventh century Western Europe had become a significant power but threatened by the invading Seljuk Turks.

In an effort to stop the Turks, Emperor Alexius I asked Pope Urban II for mercenary troops to help stop the Turks. Pope Urban saw a unique opportunity

for the Catholic Church. In November 1095, the Pope called on all Western Christians to take up arms.

Cleverly, the Pope did not mention the Turks, but instead, emphasized the obligation of all Christians to recapture the Holy City of Jerusalem. All the Pope's knights were required to take an oath that he would defend the weak, the poor, widows, orphans and the oppressed.

The response was overwhelming. In addition to thousands of knights, thousands of ordinary citizens joined in a series of religious crusades. Every warrior wore a cross and thus began a series of more than nine "holy" crusades.

Despite all the crusades, Jerusalem ended up under Muslim control and after more than several centuries, ownership of the Holy City is still a major area of concern.

The crusades did accomplish several things. They extended the reach of Christianity and Western civilization. Certainly the Roman Catholic Church experienced a major increase in wealth and the power of the Pope. Trade and transportation improved vastly, as did ship building and the manufacture of various supplies.

At its peak, Knighthood was enjoyed by thousands of sovereigns, their family members and their most loyal friends and famous warriors and although there were other worthy tributes, the one that has endured to this day is establishment of class distinction.

Regrettably, courage, which had always been a requirement of knighthood, was ignored when certain monarchs decided to award knighthood to theatrical celebrities and others. **Courage is not a requirement. Celebrity status is.**

For obvious reason, England has reached out to further diminish the original status of knighthood by granting knighthood to people who have not met the real requirements of traditional knighthood such as the following American celebrities:

1. **Angelina Jolie** for her work with Preventing Sexual Violence.
2. **Steven Spielberg** for his impact on the cinema.
3. **Bob Hope** for his contribution to the entertainment industry.
4. & 5. **Bill and Melinda Gates** for their business skills and philanthropic work.
6. **Ronald Reagan** who only served with the AAF film unit, making army military films during WW2
9. **Rudolph Giuliani** was awarded knighthood for “his leadership” (?)
10. **Walter Annenberg** was awarded knighthood for his contribution to British-American friendship.
11. **Billy Graham** is one of only five knights recognized for their religious work.
12. **James Watson** who discovered the structure of DNA.
13. **Henry Winkler** in recognition for his services to children with dyslexia.

I do not deny any of these people and others who have been recognized for their success in certain fields. However, the quality of courage, and putting their lives at risk is absent.

In reviewing the centuries during which requirements for knighthood varied, true knight-

hood required a non-sectarian oath such as follows:

***“I swear my fealty to my God,
my country and to my righteous Sovereign.
To slay dragons anywhere.
To rescue maidens in distress
and to favor those in need
and oppressed everywhere.”***

It is important to understand these requirements in today’s vernacular.

First, can an atheist or a person of any race, creed, color or religion become a knight?

The answer is yes. Every religion has tried to impose its religious orientation upon its requirement for knighthood. It is felt that even a person who does not acknowledge a religious persuasion if he meets all the other requisites, should still be qualified for knighthood.

There is a reason for the prefix “righteous” before the term sovereign. No knight should follow the dictates of a ruler who has evil intentions!

Despite the actions of many knights, almost every knight’s list of requirements includes one that calls for respecting and aiding women in distress.

The “slaying of dragons” took on a more realistic meaning with the publication of the book ‘Don Quixote’ by the famed author Miguel de Cervantes, over four hundred years ago.

To Don Quixote, ‘dragons’ were the evil things, real and imagined, that existed in his world. Today that meaning still exists, but in a

broader interpretation. Dragons are the everyday problems that confront all of us. Don Quixote, although inept, teaches us to confront not only the world's evils but also our "minor" every day problems! When you have the courage to conquer a problem, you slay another 'dragon'.

Favoring those in need and those oppressed are also vital requisites of knighthood and covered in the requisite of compassion.

Herein you have the true requirements of knighthood: Courage. Compassion. Loyalty. Faith and Virtue.

Reader, you may pursue knighthood even though you have been lax in one or two areas. But courage is a constant requirement and you must be determined to correct any other deficiencies from the date you swear your oath!





CHAPTER XXII

The Wages of Knighthood

Returning to the States from Iraq, the first thing I did was to go to a military hospital for an MRI. When I went to the single available counter, the woman asked to see my military discharge Form DD214.

Even though I had all kinds of documents, she would not even look at them. She insisted I had to produce the Form DD214!

I had been discharged in 1945 and had filed all my papers in a carton somewhere. I had moved several times and I had no idea where my discharge papers were.

Three times I wrote to the military for a copy of my military records and each time I received a reply that my military records had been destroyed in a fire at the National Personnel Records Center in Overland,

Missouri. Eighty percent of the records of U.S. Army personnel discharged between November 1, 1912, to January 1, 1960 and seventy-five percent of the records of U.S. Air Force personnel discharged between September 25, 1947, and January 1, 1964, were lost.

Since I had been transferred back and forth between the Army and the Air Force several times I was doubly cursed. In addition, I had served in the Merchant Marines in the American, South Pacific and in the European theaters, and this service wasn't transferred to the Coast Guard until Merchant Marine service was credited to the Coast Guard in about 1988. This was after my service records were lost in the fire.

When trying to get accreditation for my Merchant Marine service, they never were able to find any record of my fractured skull and internment in the Marine Hospital on Ellis Island. They also did not reinstate my American and Pacific theater ribbons. However, I did receive an additional plain Honorable Discharge from the Coast Guard. It was a Form DD256CG dated May 21, 1945.

After years of looking, I finally found my original U.S. Army Discharge document and it was an AGO Form 53-55 dated November 1, 1945. It was then I also learned that there was no Form DD214 for WWII veterans! Every honorable discharge was a Form 53-55!

Ironically, the Veterans Administration still does not honor WWII Discharge Form 53-55 as proof of military service. Thousands of WWII veterans, like me, are probably still not able to get military medical assistance or purchase needs at a military Post Exchange because they cannot produce a Form DD214!

You would assume that in this day and age such a gross error as this would have been recognized and corrected. Apparently we assume too much.

In my personal case, in a single month, I had medical bills in excess of \$128,000.00 and the military paid not one cent of it.

Honorably discharged WWII veterans deserve as much consideration as those who served honorably in later wars. Hopefully, someone with influence will address this disparity.





CONCLUSION

I have written much about the requisites of true knighthood. But there are many qualities which define a candidate for knighthood. Inherent with the qualities mentioned is the manifestation of respect. These are things called manners.

Emily Post was born in 1872 and wrote several novels. Persuaded by the crude behavior of people in those days, she published and edited an etiquette book titled *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home*.

It became a best seller. By 1932, in addition to her radio programs, her columns on good social taste appeared in about 200 newspapers. In 1946 she founded the Emily Post Institute, which continues her work.

I write of this because many of her admonitions changed the behavior of both men and women in the

western world. Some of the outstanding reflections that assists the recognition of a knightly virtue in this age occur when you see a man who always opens the car door and then carefully closes it when the lady he is with enters or departs the vehicle.

You see it when a person always looks behind himself when he is entering or leaving a building. If there is someone following, he holds the door open for them. Rarely does such a person not smile and vocally thank him or her. Try it yourself and you will find a simple way to make this a better world. Every man should always hold a lady's chair to accommodate her before sitting down himself. Slovenly behavior is just another dragon that can be slain to your credit.

But without any American sovereign to initiate the program of knighthood, where will the next knight-errants come from?

Allay your concerns. There are thousands who have walked among you.

Every single man and woman who ever volunteered or otherwise served in our military has already passed the most important quality of knighthood, *courage*! Certainly those who have died in battle should be considered for knighthood and those who have been awarded citations for bravery have at least earned the mantle of knight-errant.

There is a major difference in a single act of courage. When a person runs into traffic to rescue a child or even an animal, people call him a hero. He was. But a knight-errant would always be alert to such occasions and would commit him/herself to continually seek courageous acts, even at their own peril.

There are readers of this document who will set it down without any real benefit. If you are such a one,

so be it. But, it is my hope that others may see the intrinsic value of knighthood. It is so simple for one possessed of values.

Simply get down on one knee and repeat the following oath of allegiance:

**I swear my fealty to my God, my country
and to my righteous Sovereign.
To slay dragons anywhere.
To rescue maidens in distress
and to favor those in need
and oppressed everywhere.**

You have already begun the journey to make this a better world.



ROBERT X. LEEDS



THE
LAST
KNIGHTS-
ERRANT

(Alternate Cover Choice #2)

Pg 240

ROBERT X. LEEDS



WINDMILLS

at

12 O'CLOCK