

THE HUNT FOR
THE LIFE OF
RILEY

1911

SYMBOLS
DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LC = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

LIAMS
ENT

at of origi: The oncept of STUARD RDIENT of Washington

1 232A

HE NEVER KNEW



KENNETH JAMES
MOORE

That's him. That's my uncle captioned above, the once enigmatic man with an enduring legacy, Lieutenant William G. Weber, U.S. Army Air Corp. Bottom right is his very, down-to-earth, assistant ground crew chief, Staff Sergeant Phil Bennett. One man survived the war. The other did not.

On March 25th, 1945, while piloting one of the most advanced, aerial killing platform the world had ever seen, my mom's youngest brother, my Uncle Billy, went "Missing In Action" somewhere over the Pacific in the waning months of World War Two. With him was his flight crew and their boss, Squadron Commander, Lt. Colonel Jack Riley.

"Navigator, what's our heading? Where the hell are we? Give me a reading."

As dawn broke the next day, search teams from the 4th Marine Division began their ascent up the mountainous terrain of the 500 mile long Mariana archipelago in search of any trace of the now missing aircraft. Retracing on foot, the designated course that all military aircraft were ordered to fly on their return to U.S. bases on the isles of Tinian and Saipan, countless grid searches were executed. Nothing was found.

In the air, fellow B-29 'search and rescue' crews had been airborne throughout the night locked into the hunt. Relentless in their quest, flying dangerously low, water-skimming crisscross patterns throughout the night, seeking any sign of the missing aircraft and its crew.

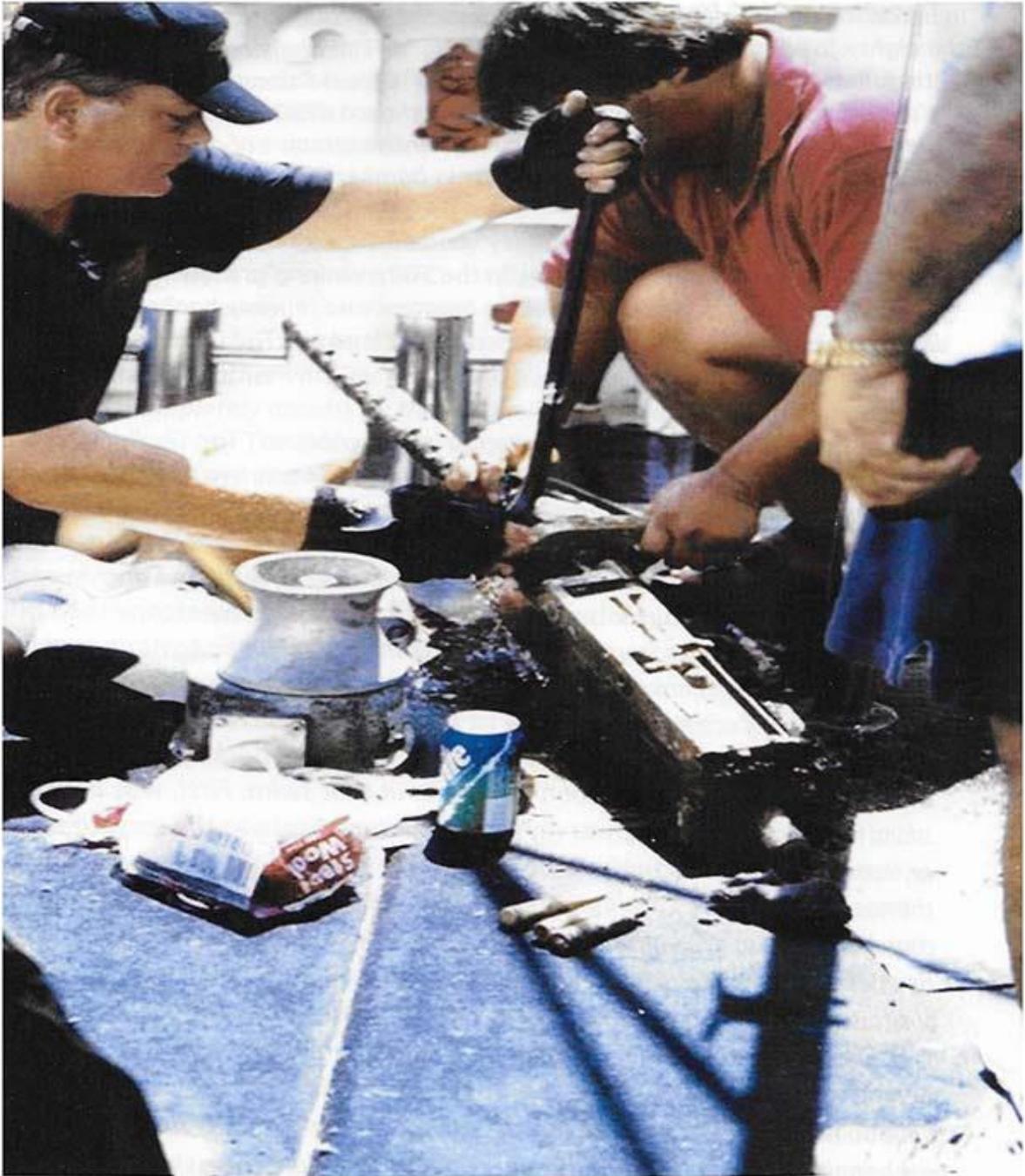
"Find that damn airplane. Find "The Life of Riley" ordered Army General, Curtis Le May, the cigar-chomping officer in overall command.

In the water, already deep in the hunt were the Navy's, famed, "lifeguard league" replete with subs and surface vessels. These were the men who eight months earlier, had snatched the then twenty-year-old future president of the United States George H.W. Bush out of the enemy-infested waters of the Pacific. "I'll personally drive my sub up Mt. Fuji general, if that's what it takes," replied head "life guard," Vice Admiral, Charles A. *Sink them all* Lockwood.

Thirty days later and some ten thousand miles away, there was a knock on a door. Standing on the front porch of the home in which my uncle was raised, stood a local courier. In his hand was the deeply dreaded, universally recognized, Western Union telegram. This one would inform my grandparents, George and Stephanie, that their youngest, Billy, was now officially: "MIA, missing in action."

From March of 1945 through February of 1949, no less than five, air, sea and ground-based searches by the U.S. Military to find B-29 #42-65241, were conducted. No smoke, no debris, no oil slick or remnant of the giant state-of-the-art warbird that a young man from the wheat-waving town of Walla Walla, Washington, had once piloted nor any trace of its crew had ever been found.

That is, until I took up the hunt.



Me and crew members aboard the "Challenger," cleaning one of the "Life of Riley's" 50 caliber machine guns recovered from 80ft depths. The chrome breach and tip on this half century old weapon were near pristine. The breach was jammed but not due to coral infestation. A round was lodged inside, securing the breach mechanism in the forward position

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The true life, action-adventure on which you are about to embark through these pages began as an academically structured, investigatory research project in the early 1970s. In October of 2000, it became a speech presented at the reunion of former members of the 20th Air Force, in Washington, D.C.

I didn't start out to write a book or in any way set forth a public account of what turned out to be a near, thirty-two-year undertaking. Rather, the goal was to remove the ambiguity surrounding the disappearance of my uncle, Lt. Billy Weber, his commanding officer Lt. Colonel Jack Riley, and their crew during World War Two. At its onset, this endeavor was strictly intended as a gift for Billy's sister, my mother Pauline, on her 65th birthday. At the time as a college student, it was the only present I could afford to give to the woman who had given so much to me.

Looking back over the thousands of pages of documents, interviews, and hand-scratched theorems, many ringed with coffee stains and aged with time compiled while raising a family and developing a business, the following account - as best as such a retrospect can provide without compromising those who lent a hand along the way - is a true and accurate portrayal of my journey to unravel the mystery surrounding my deeply beloved, uncle's disappearance...

FORWARD:

On June 16th, 1992, Boris Yeltsin, then President of the newly formed Russian Federation, declared in a public statement while standing next to George Herbert Walker Bush, President of the United States, that the Soviet Secret Police, the KGB, has retained U.S. military personnel,

captured during the Vietnam War inside Russia's borders. Yeltsin, perhaps thinking that this was the kind of news the American people wanted to hear in the age of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* went on to say before hurried away from a battery of microphones and news cameras...

" And we have them from Korea and World War Two, as well."

This is the true, life story of two of those Americans from World War Two who would never again set foot on U.S. soil. And how, with the help of a countless number of selfless individuals, I unraveled the mystery surrounding their disappearance. Then, how together, the lives of these two Americans with loving families back home, came to a startling end. One man, certified by the US military with a 172 IQ was Squadron Commander Lt. Colonel, Jack Riley. The other was one to whom Jack referred in a letter home to his wife Hazel as being, "The best friend any man could ever have," my uncle Lt. William Weber.

Just after sunset on March 24th, 1945, with Billy manning the pilot's yoke and Jack, acting as the Aircraft's Commander, these men along with crew #33 of the 20th Air Force's 398th Bomb Group, took to the air from Runway Alpha, North Field, Tinian; a top-secret, Pacific island base on a ten-hour, 3,200 mile round trip mission. The target: the Mitsubishi aircraft engine, manufacturing plant in Nagoya, Japan.

Their assignment: "fly pathfinder" – be that spearheading aircraft flying ahead of no fewer than four hundred and twenty-three, fully loaded, American bombers to light the way to the target. Weber and Riley had flown pathfinder no fewer than seven times before. To all around it seemed only natural that they would volunteer to do so again. But before the clock clicked two a.m. on the morning of the next day Jack, Billy, and crew #33 were gone, they'd disappeared, never to be

seen again. On February 1st, 1949, my birthday, Billy and crew were officially declared to have “vanished without a trace.” The nickname of the aircraft they flew, THE LIFE OF RILEY.

Don't get me wrong. As far as history books go, there was nothing special about my uncle. Billy Weber *was just another Joe*, a cabinetmaker's son, a brother, a friend, a husband, a memory taking its first steps toward fading as I took mine coming into this world. A first-generation American, Billy was no different than the hundreds of thousands of other young men who had voluntarily heeded our nation's call to arms in the aftermath of the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. There was, however, one slight distinction. With the winds of war being pervasive, Billy was already in uniform two months, before. Imbued with the deep-seated principals of human compassion by parents who had fled Russia at the onset of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Weber home in Walla Walla, Washington, built solely by Billy's father, exuded from every beam, the ideals of freedom and service to others. Freedom meant everything to Billy. It was a freedom not just to choose or to fly but to soar, to not just dream but to engage fully and passionately in every measure of life his heart and mind so desperately sought. Stripping away his humble, small-town beginning, there, remaining deep within him, was a hunger. Having sat beside his aging father, once a young lieutenant in the Czar's Army – wounded defending his adopted land against the Japanese - young Billy got a first-hand lesson in what life is like living in perpetual fear amidst a whirlwind of tyranny. On October 3rd, 1941 Billy set out to enlist. He'd be a foot soldier in the regular army with the dream to one day apply to flight school. His goal, to help rid the evil that had overtaken his father's ancestral land, Germany. Before my grandfather passed in January of '63, he sat with me in similar fashion. I asked questions about his son. The aging warrior who still walked with a Charlie Chaplin-like limp, was guarded. My Grandpa Weber who spoke Russian, German and a flawless version of

the King's English, had one tale however, he was near bursting with pride to tell. He recounted how he'd watched his youngest through the parlor window that brisk, October morn, stop for a brief moment, turn back, taking the door handle to his family's home in hand, twisting it, making certain it was secure and closed tight. Catching his father's gaze, Billy provided a reassuring smile silently pledged to the man who raised him - and perhaps, far more importantly to himself - that he would do all he could to protect those he loved. That was it, nothing more. That is, as far as history books go.

CHAPTER ONE:

Seemingly from the time I could walk my sister, born a full decade before me, loved to posture my ever-in-need, nurturing soul into an emotionally harrowing corner whenever anything in my parent's household broke, was damaged, went missing, or simply drew our mom and dad's attention. No matter what the circumstance, I became the scapegoat. She would point her finger at me and say in front of our parents ...

"Tell the truth now, Kenny."

The problem is, I never knew the truth, nor did my mom and dad, aunts, uncles, the U.S. military, its civilian authorities, and certainly not my big sister or older brother. And regarding how our mother's favorite chafing dish spilled out onto the kitchen floor in pieces well, I never snitched.

Still, whenever I acted out during my developmental years or even *did something right for a change*, my measure was taken by mom and dad by way of an on-the-spot, comparative analysis

to a man whose face in a photograph sat ever-present atop our living room mantel, William G. Weber, my Uncle Billy, our “family’s face.”

I am the family face; flesh perishes, I live on, projecting trait and trace through time to times anon, and leaping from place to place over oblivion.

19th Century poet, Thomas Hardy

Whether I was a ‘good kid,’ said something funny or did something completely outrageous, there he would be, my mysterious uncle, ostensibly taken down from the mantel and placed next to me, my measure inescapably taken by way of his.

As far back as I can recall, all I wanted was the truth. Of course, I had no way of knowing at the time, just how costly finding it would be.

When I was a kid growing up in the 1950s, short stories or “cliffhangers” were all the rage in movie theaters across the country. Each week those “to be continued” sagas kept youngsters like my friends and me eagerly cutting lawns, washing cars, doing our chores....anything and everything necessary to have enough money to buy that theater ticket for next Saturday’s matinee. I guess you could say I was born into a family with its very own “cliffhanger.” At the center of it was a handsome man with a generous smile who was forever unwilling – as legend had it - to be the one seen standing around with his hands in his pockets.

When Billy was in junior high, local newspapers reported he saved a neighborhood kid from drowning. The third-grader had been playing “pirate” floating a toy boat in the catch of a water pumping windmill. Wedged beneath one of its sails, the child was pinned face down unable to

move. Seeing a child's arm-waving frantically in the air on his way home from school, Billy jumped into the icy flow. According to a neighbor who witnessed the event, Billy removed his jacket and wrapped it around the seized sail. Pulling back on both sleeves as hard as he could, he freed the windmill blade and the young "pirate," dragging the grateful, water-belching mariner to dry land.

Years later, bearing some semblance of my uncle, neighbors throughout the "two river" town of Walla Walla, in which my grandparents remained, would - as I happened by during frequent family visits- motion for me to step over to them, wanting to share their remembrances of their favorite, "Hometown Son," my Uncle Billy, a "cool and shifty guard with a good one-handed shot" on the Wa-Hi, 1939, State basketball team. In one such family outing, my parents Herb and Pauline, Brother Bob, Sister JoAnne and I traveled from our home in Vancouver, Canada to celebrate the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday with my mom's parents, George and Stephanie.

It was an unusually warm and bright late-November day. Relatives - some I dearly adored and some my life could have done well having never known - were gathering from near and far at my grandparent's home. As the crowd grew, I was tasked with fetching a few last-minute additions from the corner grocery store. Old man Stevens and his wife Bonnie who lived across the street whistled and waved, insisting that I cross the sidewalk over to them. Standing by their fence, the Stevens made certain I clearly understood one thing:

"You know, young man if you keep to the straight and narrow, you're going to grow up to be one of the good ones, you know, just like that uncle of yours. You got it, son. I see it in you. You got the same full measure of upright stuff Billy Weber, had."

Later that same afternoon, before the congregation sat for dinner, another neighbor down the block, a Mr. Bennett, a tall, slightly bent, African-American who worked with one of my favorite uncles Dick Trousdale, at the nearby Continental Can Company, stopped by to see if my dad, a consummate car buff, was home. I remember watching as the two grieved over a blown head gasket on Mr. Bennett's '39 Ford, pick-up. Soon I heard...

"Too bad that brother-in-law of yours, Weber, isn't here. He'd have this old jalopy fixed and up and running in a jiffy. Where is he anyhow? Has anyone figured out what happened to good ol' Billy boy?"

As I grew, family tales of my uncle also grew. One relative was convinced that Billy Weber was a tank commander during the Battle of the Bulge, the recipient of the Silver Star for heroism. Oddly enough, that was true except for one thing. As I was later to find out, that was Bill Moore of Everett, Washington, its three-time mayor, an elder cousin of mine on my dad's side of the family.

I remember another who, one afternoon, came bursting through Grandma Weber's kitchen door professing with arms waving as if he were Spartacus leading a slave revolt, that...

"I saw him! I'm telling you I saw him. He was right there in front of my eyes. Right out front, he was. It was Billy alright. No mistaken those broad shoulders of his. He was in Italy, a Buck Private carrying a bazooka up a hill. I'd seen him fall. Shot dead right through the head he was."

Periodic lapses in decorum from the far side of the family were common faire throughout my early years. Some more memorable than others.

When another uncle, the self-proclaimed intellectual of the clan, having two years at a community college under his belt, thought I was out of earshot, he'd whisper to the adults that he knew for a fact Billy had been on loan to British Intelligence and was still alive, a victim of amnesia.

One summer afternoon the following year, I was dragged down into the sweltering recesses of my grandparent's basement by my Cousin Greg, a tall, lanky kid three years my senior. There Greg told me he knew more about Uncle Billy than all the grown-ups combined. He made me pinky-swear and threatened to turn me into mincemeat if I shared with anyone the inside "skinny" he was about to impart. According to my fair-haired *cous*, Uncle Billy left this earth in a ball of flames over Guadalcanal early in the war, flying right seat to *Terry of Terry and the Pirates* fame. Until I was about ten, I liked that one the best. That is, until one afternoon, hand-in-hand with my father, we visited Shep's Smoke Shop on East Main in downtown Walla Walla. There Dad got his carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes and I got my favorite thing on the planet at the time, a root beer Popsicle. As Dad and I went to leave, walking past the newsstand, just like that, there it was. That's when I found out that a swashbuckling band of World War Two aerial aces known as "Terry and the Pirates" were nothing more than the wistful imaginings of an aging comic-book writer.

Resulting from each of these 'heroes of their own narratives,' I learned early on that in the absence of hard data – to which I would later be taught how to find - human beings will do all they can to fill in the blanks. Some do so with nothing but the best intentions. Others...

But none of this in any way dismisses the fact that my Uncle William G. Weber, was a genuine, real-life, flesh and blood, living, breathing human being. As far back as I can recall I found it

deeply disturbing that so many people could share intricate details of how my Uncle Billy lived but no one could tell me where he was or exactly how he died or if he was indeed, still alive.

Why the mystery?

When I asked my parents, aunts and uncles they would say, “You’ll find out one day when you grow up, young man.” Looking back now it’s funny to think they were right. Virtually nothing of what I’ve shared with you thus far or what I am about to impart was known to my family until a decade and a half later when I took-up the task for the first time of digging for the truth to find out what really happened to my uncle?

In the early years, I often asked myself. “So, who was this guy Billy Weber, anyway?” Far later in life the haunting question became, “Why would someone like Jack Riley consider my uncle his best friend? What was the connection?”

Time would reveal that connection. Both Weber and Riley were exceptionally talented, mechanical engineers. Jack had been academically trained. My uncle fixed lawnmowers and neighborhood jalopies before becoming an Army aircraft mechanic stationed at Illinois’s Chanute Field in 1942. Then, nine months later, the dream he had while walking down the front porch of his parent’s home came true. Billy Weber, the cadet class of 43-1A - chosen by his classmates to be their platoon leader - graduated flight school at George Field, Lawrenceville, Illinois. That same day, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Army. Clearly, someone higher-up had ‘taken a shine’ to my uncle and his talents. Later, young Weber would be brought under the wing of Jack Riley’s watchdog, Colonel Glen Martin but who was it so early on in his military career?

At the time of their disappearance, both Riley and Weber were officers in the Army Air Corps, both were twenty-seven years old but far more importantly, both men were pilots, pilots hand-picked by General Haywood Hansel, to fly the most advanced, aerial weapon system of its era, the “*Superfortress*,” the B-29 bomber, the aircraft that brought an end to the war. This propeller-driven, 90-foot long aluminum fuselage with its 141-foot wingspan, could fly at 384 miles an hour at 32,000 feet carrying a 20,000-pound payload along its 4,200-mile range. It could outpace Mitsubishi Zeros’ top speed of 351 and when necessary, its 12, computerized, 50 caliber machine guns operated by one man, a “central firing control” officer was capable of fending off - as it had in one instance- more than 70 attacking enemy aircraft at one time to land unscathed. With bunk beds for the crew in the only pressurized cabin of any aircraft of its day, its cost of development alone exceeded that of the Manhattan Project’s, atom bomb. For a nation’s leader like Soviet Premiere Joseph Stalin and his top aircraft designer Andrei Topolov who couldn’t duplicate one, the absence of a B-29 left a gaping hole in Russia’s military arsenal. The U.S. wouldn’t even allow its *Fair weather* ally to lay eyes on one, so...

And oh yeah, there that one other thing, the one left off of Lt. William Weber’s military service record, his “201” file as well as his pre-induction, FBI background evaluation. Billy spoke fluent Russian but not like a well-versed academician but rather with the flair of quiet confidence like that of a former nanny to the children of a Saratov, Russian Oligarch, Billy’s mom - my grandmother - Stephanie.

There are two reasons why Jack and Billy never came home. The first is easy. They perished. The second regarding when, how and the extraordinary circumstances under which together, the two men met their fate well, that’s going to take a little bit longer to explain.

1981, July 10th, 7:15 pm, the telephone rings:

“Hey, I need a favor.”

I recognized the voice immediately.

“Let’s see. Let me guess. You were caught rolling a drunk for a swig of his gin, lingering too long outside the men’s airport bathroom ... international terrorism, espionage? Which one this time?”

“You know me too well.”

“I do. You’re me with boobs.”

“That’s why we were only good for one another in the sack.”

“Funny, I thought we did our best work together as research analysts.”

“I’m out of the country for the next few weeks. I would like for you to sit in on an interview for me. You’re still living in Manassas, right?”

“You know I walked away from the life you chose to lead. I’m neither qualified nor authorized to...”

“There is this guy. He’s seeking asylum in the U.S. His case is being heard the day after tomorrow. He’s clean, no strings, nothing messy. I simply want someone with no vested interest, to give him the once over before I pass him and his paperwork up the chain of command. Do you know where New Market, Virginia, is?”

Some say that World War Two is no longer relevant. I say it is that point from whence freemen even today, take their measure.

“Of course.”

With eighty-five million people dead as a result of mankind’s most epic episode in history, not all battles were fought in the open, on beachheads or in forests along the Rhine. Many of the battles that shaped our lives then and still today took place in broad daylight on main street America in your hometown and mine...in card rooms, backdoor brothels and, darkened alleyways between enemies and allies, alike. These were the battles waged by the world’s intelligence agencies, the OSS, the forerunner of America’s CIA, Britain’s MI-6, Germany’s Gestapo, Japan’s Kemptai, Russia’s KGB and GRU, each plying their trade to reshape the American landscape. Long after cannon fire ceased, these wars wage on under various guises, to this day.

1981, eighty-three miles from Washington, D.C., in the basement of the Fellowship Church, in New Market, Virginia. July 12th, 6:14 a.m.

“Da.”

“What? Wait! It’s over? I just got here.”

Yes, just like that, it was over. The meeting I was asked to attend had lasted less than a handful of minutes. Though reticent to say it aloud, I was thinking...

“I crawled out of bed at the crack of dawn to drive an hour and a half for this? I was here on time! What’s going on?”

The voice with its fake Southern drawl came from behind me originating from the tall, red-haired man with the boyish grin who'd been clearly heading the proceedings long before I arrived. I was told by the young woman who encouraged my attendance - a collegiate friend of mine - to call this guy, "Buck" if I needed to address him at all. Buck was wearing the light-tan, tropical worsteds of a U.S. Army Infantry officer, a Captain with the appropriate number of ribbons on his chest for the medals he's received but one thing was clear. That was neither his MOS (military occupation specialty) nor it seemed, his actual employer. The telltale clue was the Vietnam Service ribbon. It was placed out of sequence on his uniform above 'his' Distinguished Service ribbon. A blatant no-no. You hang around military folks long enough you pick up these kind of 'order of precedence' nuances. The colonel whose rank it actually was, had been ordered by Buck to leave the moment I entered the room. As he did, I distinctly remember the look on his face. Inadvertently brushing my shoulder, he apologized as he passed by.

"Excuse me, sir." He offered with stern conviction in his voice. That was followed by a parade-grade salute and a steadfast nod of respect.

I don't know who this spit and polish colonel thought I might be but I can guarantee one thing I wasn't even close...not even in the ballpark. I was just a guy in jeans, sports coat, pullover shirt with, of course, no tie doing my friend, Candace, a favor...or so I thought. As directed, I took the seat the colonel vacated at the table behind which a man seeking asylum, sat with a badly burnt and cropped right ear. As it turned out, he was a Russian intelligence officer, a career GRU operative.

Not knowing who this man was or even the slightest clue what I was to gather from him by attending this meeting, I thought to coach a few extra minutes out of the scene and start out on a

friendly note. Reaching over, I offered the gaunt-faced stranger with thick-wavy hair and billowing eyebrows, my hand. He hesitated. Rubbing his right hand across the stubble on his face, his eyes opened wide wondering no doubt, if I was friend or foe. Finally, he took my hand in his. It was big, much larger than mine and dripping with that kind of odorous sweat a man suppressing deep-seated fear, generates. We shook. With that, in a fashion of a highly trained soldier schooled in an authoritative regime, he shot to his feet saying, “Perhaps we’ll meet again, sir. Your friend speaks very highly of you.” As the lines on his face widen then narrowed with each breath, my new-found nameless friend, strode past “Buck” through the basement doorway and out into the adjacent hallway. He was wrong. We would never lay eyes on one another again.

Now with only a quickly thrown together “Army Captain” and I remaining in the church basement, Buck turned and asked, “Well, Mr. Moore. Are you satisfied?” Did you get what you came for?”

Opting to set aside the litany of flippant replies running through my mind, I simply offered, “Yes, thank you” and got up and left the room. I wasn’t willing to call him “Buck,” I saw no need to carry on the charade and I was certainly not going to address him as, “sir.”

Now as it became my turn to pass through the basement door, as I did, I felt a firm grasp on my arm pulling me slightly off stride. I turned into the shadow of an adjacent darkened hallway seeing the half-shaded face of a woman I’d known since campus life a decade before and barked, “Holy shit, Candy. You scared the living hell out of me. You said you’d be gone for a couple of weeks? What are you doing here?”

“So, tell me.” She insisted. “What did you think?”

“About what?”

“That was him!”

“Who, him?”

Yes, I recall actually saying “who him” and immediately feeling remarkably stupid for having done so especially in front of a woman as drop-dead brilliant as “Candy.” God how she hated to be called that. ”

Following a divorce after one year from Sandy, my first wife, and chancing upon Candace in an Eastern Bloc econ class I audited, I had the good fortune while struggling to attend grad school, of finding a 19th Century house in above-average repair in Manassas, Virginia. There in what became my home, was the first and only time Candace and I gazed upon one another in our respective birthday suits. Admittedly, hers was better than mine. Rolling out of the sack, the subject of my childhood quest to determine what happened to my uncle during World War Two, captivated my former classmate’s heart. A few months would pass before she shared the reason why her commitment to my cause ran so deep. A routine of swapping favors instead of spit then began.

“That’s the guy, Phil’s guy, the guy Phil Bennett, your uncle’s, Assistant Ground Crew Chief, wrote about to you.”

“The nosey guy on Tinian who kept pestering Phil while working on my uncle’s plane? The one he suspected was a Russian?”

“Yes. That’s him and yes he was or rather is, Russian.”

“How can you be so sure it’s the same guy?”

“After fourteen straight hours of interrogation, not only do I know what kind of Pablum his mother fed him but what street corner she worked in Kiev before...”

Candace was and frankly is, like no other female I’ve known. A quick-witted, brilliant academician with unparalleled street-savvy, she’s 5’7”, blonde, busty, and when necessary, remarkably intimidating, ably backing down angry men twice her size. Eye-catching but no runway model, the way she walks and then decidedly stands is reminiscent of a cross between a farm girl stepping over cow paddies and a scholar’s, “lost in thought,” meanderings. Upon receiving her Masters from Georgetown, she slipped into a U.S. Navy Ensign’s uniform and then within months into Naval Intelligence. Picking the best off the vine and putting it to good use is an American Naval tradition. As “study buddies” Candace and I hung out together for two years. Prior, as an undergrad at Arizona State University, I was taught by my mentor Dr. Douglas Dagleish, how to dig for the truth, how to be the consummate researcher. I loved playing Dick Tracey, albeit if only on paper. At Georgetown however, Candace rammed her “hardball” form of “first-generation only” research down my throat. She was good, very good and I, because of her, became far better at locating those oft-obscure, nuggets of truth. When we both put campus life behind us, we’d hear from each other, now and again. But then of course, there were always her “out of the blue, telephone calls asking me to again be her sounding board and me, asking her for the occasional “nudge in the right direction.” It was and remains a relationship like no other.

“He was twenty-two, thrilled to be in a non-combat unit of the GRU during the war,” offered Candace while standing in the church basement hallway.

“The Soviet Army’s intelligence directive during World War Two, that GRU, right?” I asked just to make certain that whatever game had been afoot was over and we were now talking seriously.

“Yes.” In his case, he along with a team of nine others decked in US Navy enlisted uniforms, slipped into Guam, Saipan and Tinian in early November of ’44, to gather data on our B-29’s and their crews.”

“Sure. Okay. That fits. The first B-29, the *Joltin’ Josie*, arrived on Saipan the month before, on 12 October, as I recall. From an intelligence operative’s perspective, Vladivostok is what, approximately 1,900 miles from Saipan? At worst, a two week’s journey by steamer, half that by sub.”

“Viktor...”

“So that’s his name?”

“That’s what we’re calling him. Viktor was the only member of his team to return to the Soviet Union, alive. He has spent the last four decades being wrongfully persecuted but never prosecuted for the deaths of his comrades. He was about to be brought before a military tribunal when...”

“So what’s that got to do with...?”

“Look, I got raked over the coals by my superiors for going off script with him. I did it for you. I pressed Viktor hard, really hard regarding his time on Tinian. He grew impatient with me. That’s what I hoped would happen. He spilled his guts. He was spared years of imprisonment in Lubyanka, having finally ratted out his fellow spies. His comrades had chosen greed over country. The eight had set up a black market opium smuggling ring with the Japs, ultimately perishing in the process. The bottom line is he failed in his primary assignment to obtain Intel on the B-29.”

“So the GRU had nothing to do with the disappearance of my uncle and his crew?”

“Yes, that’s a box we can definitely check off. Not the GRU but that doesn’t let the rest of the Soviet military or its civilian political apparatus off the hook.”

“And Viktor?”

“When he returned to the Soviet Union, this degreed engineer was relegated to the role of a common clerk. Frankly, he’s lucky to be alive. As it turned out, he’d been a good student during his academic years. From the back corner of every station to which he was posted, he kept copious notes on a wide range of Soviet activity. We were squeezing him and boxes full of his notebooks through the basement window of his Moscow flat while the KGB was breaking down his front door.”

“We?”

“Yes. My team and I.”

CHAPTER TWO

I was a miserable kid in high school.

Born in the United States, I grew up in Vancouver, Canada. In 1964 the summer of my sophomore year I transferred to one of America's leading public high schools, an architectural wonder, Arcadia High in Phoenix, Arizona. My parents and siblings were anxious to return home. I was not. My developmental years were spent forming friendships with people of a different mindset, less driven, living in the present, taking life a day at a time. I was a fish out of water unable to adequately hide my ambitions. Still, as I grew and comparisons to my uncle subsided, I adapted to the pace of my Canadian friends.

Being an American living in Canada in the 1950's was like being a stain on a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman's red tunic. That sentiment changed quite literally overnight on January 20th, 1961, the day John Fitzgerald Kennedy took his seat in the White House's, Oval Office.

Canadians latched onto that guy as if a combination of Elvis, Mickey Mantle, Winston Churchill, Robert Frost, and all the things you wished your parents were but were not, rolled into one. And JFK was that and more. If there had been a chance since the American Revolution for the United States to annex Canada without a single drop of blood being spilled, it was missed in the early 1960's. Every Canadian kid would have forced his/her parents to vote for Statehood with a large percentage of the adults doing so without prompting. Nothing illustrates this point better than the Vancouver Sun newspaper. On November 23rd, 1963, the day after President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. No advertisements, no want ads and no other stories appeared in that Canadian newspaper. Every line was in one way or another, a tribute to America's fallen President. It was spellbinding. Something I'll never forget.

Yet back in 1961 as an 11-year-old on New Year's Day, I was still a marginalized kid with few friends save for those equally marginalized. Then, nineteen days later, being an American living in Canada – at least on a kid level – was as close to perfection as one could get. Older girls, thirteen and fourteen began walking up to me, saying:

“Oh hi. Gosh, you're him. You're that American boy everyone is talking about.”

Amongst my Canadian peers, I could do no wrong. After all, I was indeed an American, a standout in the crowd, someone unique and special like JFK. Going from outcast to “the cool kid” so quickly by the sheer nature of my nationality, made Dr. Jekyll's speedy transformation to “Mr. Hyde” pale by comparison. I owed my unearned, new-found, fame to a man I'd never meet, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the newly seated, President of the United States. So, because he was involved in politics, I started following politics. He was involved in world affairs so I began immersing my preadolescent mind to its available depths, in world affairs, reading newspapers both Canadian and American – cover to cover - and watching “The Most Trusted Man in America,” Walter Cronkite every night with my dad on CBS Evening News.

Ask now what your country can do for you...” President Kennedy had more to say to future generations than just that. He could quote the words of the great truth-seekers of both the modern and classic era, off the top of his head. He mobilized the English language with inspirational tidbits from Camus, Disraeli, and most notably Winston Churchill while fielding questions during news conferences from both the “Left” and the “Right” So I set out to learn all I could about those who were idealized by the man I idolized. I read then reread magazine articles and paperbacks found in the neighborhood Bookmobile's, “one for a nickel, three for a

dime” *Last Chance* basket in which the thoughts of these great political philosophers between tattered bindings, appeared.

Then one day it hit me. I couldn’t believe it. I’d almost overlooked it. John Kennedy was a Navy lieutenant during World War Two, commanding a PT boat in combat against the Japanese. I had an uncle named Billy who - according to the Western Union telegram I found hidden away at the bottom of my mother’s Hope Chest, the one declaring her brother MIA - also fought against the Japanese in World War Two.

“Where was that patch with its military insignia, the one my uncle sent home for my brother Bob who discarded it, the one mom stitched to my t-shirt sleeve when I was five or six? What the heck did I do with it?” My eleven-year-old brain was scrambling.

Like I said, no one in my family knew anything for certain about Uncle Billy and that included the whereabouts of that bright blue and white military patch.

“Found it!”

Oh wow, how cool is this? So now with my first great “Uncle Billy” discovery under my belt, I lead my Canadian peers in military, “ground assaults,” with empty BB guns and cap pistols charging up and over backyard swings, across our neighborhood’s alleyways, dodging make-believe bullets behind garbage cans proudly wearing the patch bearing the insignia of the U.S. Army Air Corps, 20th Air Force.

Between the ages of eleven and fourteen – before being dragged kicking and screaming back to the States - I was able to bolster my newfound fame to dizzying heights by having a member of

my own family who – at least according to me – was an American war hero, just like JFK.

When pressed for details, my social status shot through the roof – especially with my third-grade classmate Stephanie Yuchin, who brazenly wore fishnet stockings to class - when all I could say to her was,

“It’s a secret.”

Little did I know at the time just how close to the truth I was?