Effects of the Magnetic North Pole
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Ralph McDonald
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Dedication

Thanks to Ed Leonard of the 6912th Radio Squadron Mobile, Berlin, Germany. His humor was (and is) contagious. Extra special thanks goes to Margaret Ganter, aka Wonder Woman, of the 6921st Security Group, Misawa, Japan. Her help was invaluable and deeply appreciated.

Special thanks also to Tom Pugh of the 6901st SG, Zweibrucken, Germany. Tom Caron of the 6921st SG was immensely helpful. My very good friends, Arlen Trapp, Leo Walls and Rich Kozik of the 6913th RSM regaled me with marvelous stories of Bremerhaven. Thanks to each of you.

In its entirety, this work is dedicated to all of the members of the 6913th RSM, Bremerhaven, Germany, and to the men and women who served in silence during the Cold War following World War II in outposts throughout the world. They collected and analyzed signals intelligence to insure our continued freedom through vigilance. In God we trust, all others we monitor.
Introduction

Effects of the Magnetic North Pole is a fictitious account of one Airman's journey to a destiny that would long remain secret. A teenager, Mark Nobel, joins the U.S. Air Force in the late 1950's during the height of the Cold War following World War II. The Soviet Union launched Sputnik which caught the U.S. off guard. Mark and his best friend, Robert "Snoopy" Richards, survive Basic Training and the Russian Language school at Monterey Bay, California, before beginning their assignment in Bremerhaven, Germany. The young Airman meets and falls in love with a German girl who complicates his life. In Bremerhaven, they are introduced to the strange world of signals intelligence, spies, espionage, agents and counter-agents.

The USAF Security Service command emblem and patch (seen on the cover) symbolizes the mission of the Security Service. It consists of a shield divided equally into quarters by a vertical and horizontal line and identifying scroll. Significant of the command's worldwide influence, the first quarter is blue with a green globe with yellow land markings. Pertinent to electronic transmission, the second quarter is red with a yellow lightning streak. Symbolizing the Air Force, the third quarter is yellow with a blue half wing. The fourth quarter is symbolic of protection and security and is blue with a white shield with yellow flame over a sword.
1. R. A. Grunt

As far as the eye could see, the Pacific Ocean undulated in an easy motion. An ocean breeze pushed white-capped waves toward the shore as they moved relentlessly into a beautiful, protected bay. There the waves disappeared into a serene and graceful harbor that lay about 120 miles south of San Francisco. A palm leaf bobbed its way seemingly without a destination in mind. Morning penetrated the night and a new day dawned. Early morning sunlight reflected from the water. Waves in the bay turned from blue to black to silver to blue again, as the sun pulled itself over the coastal mountain separating California from the sea and penetrated the early morning fog.

I awoke to the strains of "That'll be The Day" by Buddy Holly and his Crickets as the Greyhound bus came to rest. The muffled sound drifted softly from a radio at the front of the coach. Rock and roll was the stimulant that helped the driver stay alert. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes, gathered myself and pulled my tired body from the bus seat. In the distance I could hear the surf lapping against the beach, although I couldn’t see it from the front gate where we had stopped. Next to me, Airman Second Class Robert "Snoopy" Richards was still asleep, or at least pretending to be, in his now wrinkled blue Air Force Ike Jacket. This short, waist length jacket was designed by General Eisenhower for the Army during World War II, but was being phased out of the Air Force inventory.

I grabbed Snoopy’s arm and mumbled, “Come on, man, wake up. Shake a leg, we’re here!”

“Where’s here, Mark?” Snoopy asked without opening his eyes.

"Here" overlooking the bay, perched on the side of a hill that offered a breathtaking view of the Pacific Ocean, was the United States Army Language School at the Presidio of Monterey Bay, California. Here was
USALS where we would spend the next nine months of our lives attempting to learn the Russian language. The United States Air Force had determined that I had an aptitude as a linguist and that they, and the top secret National Security Agency, had an urgent need for such people. Why they picked me was strange, as I had been a C student in high school German.

That grade of C may have called their judgment into question in some quarters. I didn't feel I was the potential linguist they expected, or at least hoped for. But, another look at the beauty of this coastal community convinced me that I should accept the government's estimation and not worry about it further. After all, considering the 1956 war between Egypt and Israel and the United Nations forces stationed in the Sinai Peninsula, I could end up shoveling sand somewhere near the Gaza Strip.

It was Monday, 7 October 1957, when Snoopy and I arrived by bus from the airport in San Francisco, where we had met for the first time the previous night. We didn't know at that time that we would become friends and roommates for our entire Air Force career. The bus to Monterey covered the distance in about five hours, arriving at the Presidio at 6:30 AM. We were bone tired. We were a long way from home, Snoopy from a small town in Alabama and me from Lincoln, Nebraska. Me straight from Basic Military Training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas, with a brand new Airman Third Class stripe and Snoopy from Radio Intercept School at Keesler AFB, Biloxi, Mississippi, where he had earned his second stripe upon graduation. Until joining the Air Force, neither of us had been away from home for more than the better part of a month.

The bus was nearly empty now. Only a few civilians who were continuing south remained. As I pulled my heavy B4 garment bag from the overhead rack and put it down in the aisle, I looked again at the front page of the San Francisco Examiner I had picked up at SFO. I picked it up. A bold headline declared that the Soviet Union had launched a satellite called Sputnik into orbit around the Earth a few days earlier. It
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was up there beeping at us. Beep, beep, beep mocking us! I just couldn’t believe it. How could they do that? Weren’t we far ahead of the Russians in science and technology? What happened? And Sputnik was a dumb name for a satellite. It sounded like they had launched a potato into space. However, the newspaper made it sound threatening and more than a little ominous as the Examiner reported speeds of 18,000 miles per hour while circling the Earth every 96 minutes. Nobody truly understood what Sputnik was capable of, or what it meant and that was a troubling thought. Mumbling under my breath, I dropped the paper on the bench seat as I moved toward the front door.

The bus stopped near the stone-faced entrance to the Presidio, where a barrel-chested Army Corporal in fatigues motioned for us to approach. As we exited the bus and staggered toward the Corporal, it was a balancing act trying to maintain control of our heavy bags and regain our land legs. Snoopy's duffle bag crashed to the pavement as he struggled to light a dangling Pall Mall cigarette. In our disarray, we presented our orders to the ramrod straight Corporal.

“What the hell are you doing, you blue boy scumbags? Who the hell said you could smoke? Does this look like your Mama’s house to you?” The Corporal screamed at us, but at Snoopy in particular, “You look like you were sleeping in those clothes! What the hell is your excuse?”

Somewhat startled, Snoopy answered, "Sir, no excuse, sir!"

"I work for a living in this man's Army, so don't call me sir again, you worthless asshole," the Corporal snarled as his face reddened.

"Yes sir, ah, I mean yes Corporal," Snoopy replied as he attempted to regain his composure.

This was our introduction to "R. A. Grunt". For the rest of our time at Monterey, "Regular Army Grunt" was to become our code-name for all non-draftee or regular Army soldiers who tried to make our lives miserable. Probably because their own lives were so miserable. R. A.
Grunt never seemed to realize that there were no draftees in the Air Force. All Airmen were volunteers, even if they may have "volunteered" simply to avoid the Army, much as I did. A fact that didn't help matters as far as R. A. Grunt was concerned.

“Field strip that cigarette, fly boy!” the Corporal insisted.

Snoopy complied, but was visually upset by the Corporal's attitude as he asked, "What are you tryin' to prove, Corporal? SIR! Ain't it a little bit early to be havin' such a tizzy fit?"

The Corporal took off his cap and threw it to the ground. He was displeased with Snoopy's challenge. After a great deal of yelling and stomping his cap, he cried, "Tizzy fit? Tizzy fit, I'll show you a God damned tizzy fit. How would you like to spend your first six weeks here on Kitchen Police scrubbing pots and pans?"

I was amused up until the part about spending six weeks on KP, because I thought the argument between the two was pretty funny, in a military kind of way. Lackland had taught me all about KP, where you scrubbed greasy implements from before sunup until well after sunset. No, I certainly didn't want to spend six weeks in an Army kitchen. I finally had to do something so, in my most pathetic voice I whimpered, "Corporal, we've spent all night on this Greyhound and we're dead tired. We apologize for how we may look this morning. Now, can we find our quarters, sign-in, shower, shave and comb our hair?"

Eventually, R.A. Grunt calmed down and marched the two of us to our new home away from home. We passed through the stone gateposts and on the left, I saw a sign that read, "We are learning Russian so you won't have to." I sighed a deep sigh, because my orders said that I had to. The three of us marched up a gracefully arching street called Artillery Avenue to some pre-World War II buildings with white painted rocks as borders around neatly manicured lawns. Frame buildings were painted in a faded yellow that one usually associates with weathered boxcars. Everything was military orderly.
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We signed-in at the Charge of Quarters office. The Army Corporal left and returned to his regular duties, which probably involved biting the heads off of dung beetles. The CQ was expecting us, gave us a form to be signed by each of the various divisions such as supply, laundry, library, chapel and the administrative and personnel office. It was much harder to get into this post than it would be to get out. Fall behind in your classes and you would be kicked out in short order.

The CQ pointed out our barracks, Building Number 17 about a block away. As we made our way to Building Number 17, I looked at Snoopy and he was smiling a big toothy grin as he tried to take in the Pacific Ocean, Monterey Bay, the early morning fog, the Presidio and our new barracks, all at the same time. We soon discovered why they called this barracks Stalag 17, as we settled into a highly regimented daily routine.

Stalag 17 was our home, but the daily routine was strictly Army. Student hierarchy at the United States Army Language School was a little unusual. Yes, we were all students, but from different branches of service and of differing ranks, so they employed the “Rope System” of organization. A rope was a braided cloth that hung from your left shoulder and draped over and under your arm. By its color, it indicated a hierarchical status transcending your actual rank. Most often, the highest-ranking students were assigned positions of authority in this system, but it was possible that an Army Private could be acting Barracks Chief or Student Platoon Leader.

We had four levels of ropes, starting at the bottom with “Green Rope” as Squad Leader, “Red Rope” as Barracks Chief, “Yellow Rope” as Student Platoon Leader, and a single “Blue Rope” as Student Company Commander. Blue Ropes were usually shave-tail Second Lieutenants fresh from Officer Candidate School. Personally, I had no intention of getting roped into anything.

Being an integral part of the military/industrial complex, many Air Force bases use bugles in a limited way to raise and lower the flag and to tuck
you into bed at night. But, the Presidio was an Army Post. And unlike the Air Force, the Army takes the bugle very, very seriously. They have a bugle call for every function imaginable and some not imaginable. Every movement of this troop was governed by a brass bugle call. Except one. The Army had no Latrine Call. They had not yet figured out how to regulate bladder and bowel movements, although they came close and many of us suspected that our food was not always as advertised.

I can still hear the bugle calls of a typical Presidio day:

**First Call** came at what was technically, still the middle of the night. First Call was intended to wake the post, allow a short time to shower, shave and dress for the first formation, Reveille. Snoopy said that First Call was really to wake the buglers, but then who sounded first call? Troopers from the Army, Navy and the one Marine in our barracks generally fulfilled the military’s expectation for military dress and conduct. Snoopy and I were exceptions. Green Ropes were as rushed as the rest of us and paid little attention to their individual squads, a fact we took advantage of at every opportunity.

**Reveille** came while it was still dark and usually so foggy you couldn't see across the street. In other words, you couldn’t distinguish individuals with any degree of certainty. Reveille formation was a formal roll call where the platoon lined up on the Company street in front of the barracks and a Red Rope yelled, “Platoon whatever, all present or accounted for, Sir!” to some unseen presence who apparently kept track of such trivial matters. It didn’t take long however, for Snoopy and me to realize that we could get a full 15 minutes more sleep if we shortcut the dress code. After the first week of this routine, Snoopy and I lined up unshaven, in trousers, shoes, overcoat and cap and enjoyed our additional 40 winks.

**Call to Colors** was sounded to announce the raising of the flag that officially marked the beginning of the duty day. Most of us avoided being outside at daybreak because we were required to snap to attention, face in the direction of the unseen flag and salute the fog until the Call to
Colors ended. It was during this time, we found it far more productive to make our beds, clean the barracks, straighten up our cubicles and memorize the day’s assignments of vocabulary and dialog, time permitting.

**Mess Call** was the next order of business. The call to chow was sounded three times a day, but breakfast was the most popular meal because it was thought to be impossible to screw-up eggs. We soon learned however, that the Presidio chefs were professional and capable of screwing-up anything. Watery eggs, burned toast and chipped beef on toast, or as we called it, “shit-on-a-shingle,” were staples, but sometimes we were treated to rubberized pancakes for a change of pace. The coffee had an odd aroma and taste, that made me think it was chicory from down South somewhere. But that was only one theory. The Army didn’t name it "Mess" without good reason.

**Assembly** was the bugle call that summoned us to resume our scholastic obligations. Each class lined up in squads under the direction of Green Ropes and the squads into platoons under the Yellow Ropes. Assembly gave R.A. Grunt an opportunity to inspect each trooper to insure we were suitable to represent the military establishment. R.A. Grunt marched up and down the rows of students pausing at each one to offer advice on how to shave or shine his shoes. After the usual harassment, each class marched off to their respective classroom or auditorium to continue their education in linguistics, and to catnap whenever possible. Morning classes usually ended at 11:30.

**Assembly** sounded once again just before noon. We gathered at the noon formation to hear the Blue Rope, the big boss, discuss the remainder of the day's activities, special events, announce important items of interest such as upcoming inspections, and to inform us of vital issues such as the dress code for tomorrow. Would we be in class A uniforms or fatigues? We awaited the noon Mess Call fortified with the knowledge that, unless the cleaners lost some item, we would be properly attired come the morrow.
Mess Call sounded again for the noon meal and students were dismissed from the noon assembly, company by company. Students usually nourished themselves, but sometimes spent the time more productively studying the day’s lessons. It came down to a choice between "beanie weenies" or falling behind in the classroom. Given the pace of extremely difficult classes, this was not a terribly difficult choice to make considering the nature of beanie weenies. Prisoners in the real Stalag 17 at least had potato soup once each day.

Mail Call was heard during the lunch break. It was a favorite brass melody that almost everybody looked forward to hearing. Fortunate troopers received mail from girlfriends, wives, mothers, friends, and even sometimes from comrades in arms stationed at other military bases around the world. Getting a letter was always a special time and I was lucky enough to sometimes find a five or ten-dollar bill from my Dad folded between the pages. Dad understood the poverty of young students, even those in the Air Force. I hope he knew how much I appreciated his thoughtfulness and generosity. Following Mail Call, we returned to the abbreviated afternoon schedule.

Mess Call again sounded for the evening meal. Conversations were taking place in several different languages and the mess hall sounded like the biblical Tower of Babel. Because the class day was over, the evening meal afforded the opportunity for the students to relax, talk with each other and generally socialize. Sometimes, the topic would be related to what was covered during the day's classes. More often, what some of the female teachers were wearing if especially low cut or revealing and formulating plans to seduce one or more of them. Obviously, students were healthy young service men.

Retreat marked the end of the duty day and the lowering of the post flag. Following Retreat we found time to visit the Post Exchange, the snack bar or other important venues such as the Enlisted Men's Club where a bottle of beer cost ten cents. Ten cents seemed cheap enough, but every Friday they had Happy Hour where each bottle was only a nickel. You
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could get pretty happy during Happy Hour while spending twenty-five to fifty cents.

**Taps** meant lights out and time for bed. However, because we were students, we were allowed to keep small desk lamps lighted in our plywood cubicles so that we could continue our studies and do the homework assigned. Classes were run at a quick pace, double time because we were expected to become near experts in a ridiculously short period of time. I had a clock radio that was tuned to the local rhythm and blues station where I listened to The Platters, Jerry Lee Lewis, Sam Cooke and other rock and rollers as I studied.

This sequence was repeated day after day after day. I could name that bugle call within the first three notes.
2. Mark Nobel

My journey began unremarkably enough, at least for a high school graduate in the 1950's. Mark Noble is my name and like most high school seniors, I reluctantly registered for the draft on my 18th birthday. Registration was at the main, downtown Post Office in my hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska. The P.O. was a three-story building with a classic Roman architecture, sort of smoky gray stone with tall columns and wide steps leading to the enormous front door.

I parked my green (with one white door which was the result of an accident at a drive-in movie) '49 Ford coupe on the street, but left the motor running until Fats Domino finished up "Blueberry Hill" on the car's radio. I knew all of the words, so even with the static, I easily kept up with the fat man. I snapped my fingers and slapped the quilt that covered the tattered upholstery of the front seat. As the record ended, I turned off the engine and climbed the steps to the front door.

It was busy on the first floor where the Post Office was housed, but the second floor was quiet with several government offices, including the draft registration office. Not wanting to get into trouble with the draft board, I registered as required, but I certainly didn’t relish the idea of being drafted. When I was much younger, and with a lot of help from John Wayne movies such as "Iwo Jima," I thought that I would join the Marine Corps and become a hero on some far-flung Pacific island. Gung ho, Semper Fi, do or die! But that idea passed as I realized the likelihood of getting maimed or killed on that same Pacific island was extremely high. Being a hero lost much of its appeal to me as I recognized just how dangerous it could be.

In late May of 1957, I graduated from high school with pretty good grades. All A’s and B’s except for that C in German. School was far too easy for me and I never really worked at it as most classes were a snap and I coasted through much of high school. I played both football and
The reality of the situation was that very few jobs were available, I had the draft hanging over me like the Sword of Damocles and I was not ready to go back to school right away. It occurred to me that perhaps I should talk it over with the military recruiters in town, because after all, I would probably get my draft notice in a few months anyway. Might as well get it over with.

Over the next two weeks, I revisited the Post Office where on the third floor I talked to each of the four recruiters: Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy. Each had a compelling story to tell; much of which was obviously bullshit, but the Air Force made a certain amount of sense to me. If I waited to be drafted, I would likely go into the Army for two years. Two years is much too short a time for them to invest the time and energy to educate me. At least beyond learning to march, dig holes, wash dishes and clean an M-1 rifle. I didn't see much future in that. The Army seemed to be a terrible waste of talent. No, I wanted more than two years of ground pounding and KP duty.

The Navy offered a much better chance of actually learning something, some skill that I could use later in life. Although the Navy seemed to be
a good choice, I didn't want to spend time in the middle of the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean. I suffered terrible motion sickness at the lake when fishing with my Uncle Bill, so I passed on the Navy too out of respect for my stomach.

Marines were always my childhood ideal, but now older and wiser, I put them in the same general category as the Army. The USMC did not offer a great opportunity for education, beyond learning how to operate and field strip a 30-caliber machine gun. Also, they spent as much time on boats as did the Navy. If something like the police action in Korea came up again, the Marines would be the first to go. Gung ho, but no real future there either. That left the Air Force almost by default.

After I told him that I wanted to learn how to fly a jet and shoot down Russian MiGs, what Staff Sergeant John Anderson, the Air Force recruiting Sergeant, said was, “You’re not going anywhere today, Mark. At best, some dead-end job unless you get a college degree or learn a good trade. You can’t get a real job with the draft hanging over you. Nobody will invest the time to train you. Are you ready for college right now? Continue your education?”

My honest reply was, “I don’t think so. I need some time off from …”

The recruiter cut in, “You need to settle down a little and get your feet on the ground. Get a good technical foundation. In the Air Force, you'll almost certainly be trained in electronics, aeronautics, or missiles and weapons systems. All very high tech fields. All valuable in civilian life as well. In addition to on-the-job training, there's college correspondence classes and we'll help pay some of your college tuition after your enlistment.”

I said, "Electronics sounds great. I've always been interested in electronics," without actually knowing what 'electronics' meant.

S/Sgt Anderson looked me squarely in the eye and asked, "Are you good in math?"
"I think so. Pretty good anyway. I got A's and B's."

"I can practically guarantee an electronics tech school in that case. The Air Force is always looking for electronics whizzes," the Sergeant exaggerated.

All recruiters must be cut from the same cloth. And I was an 18-year-old innocent who believed much of what he said, so I enlisted for four years in the Air Force. What the hell, a few weeks of basic training and I would spend the rest of my time in Honolulu, Hawaii, or Paris, France or some equally exotic place according to the colorful posters on the walls. It seemed like all duty stations were located in swell places. I might also look good in the uniform. Blue was my color after all. At the end of the four year enlistment, I would be discharged, enroll in college, meet a girl, get my degree and have a wonderful life based on the technical skills, on-the-job training and college tuition provided by our Uncle Sam. Sounded like a great deal.

I wasn't ready for Basic. Oh my God, it caught me totally by surprise. Basic Military Training was conducted at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas. If you tried to go AWOL, Absent With Out Leave, from Lackland, you couldn't get away with it. The surrounding countryside was so flat they could see you for thirty miles across the desert and you would be picked-up right away.

BMT is where the military attempts to turn regular, normal young men and women into fanatics. Break down civilian habits and instill a uniform look, attitude and behavior. It was also filled with dichotomies. Survival training was cancelled because it rained. We packed our backpacks, donned our steel helmets, strapped on our pistol belts, marched to the bivouac area, and pitched our pup tents as the downpour began. With Technical Instructors screaming, we then hurriedly packed everything up and marched back to our barracks in the pouring rain. Survival training was cancelled because it rained; evidently, we couldn't survive the rain, or more likely the TI's didn't want to get wet.
In the mid 1950's, the Air Force consolidated all BMT facilities at Lackland which was adjacent to Kelley AFB, in San Antonio. Lackland was designed with military precision, streets lined with barracks in a monotonous, uniform layout and painted entirely eggshell white with military green trim. Buildings and grounds were spotless, maintained by a never-ending stream of young men and women recruits. Each barracks was a two-story building with great open bays where approximately 60 recruits were housed, 30 on each floor. Bunks were stacked two high and lined both walls in a straight line with footlockers at the foot of each bunk.

But once again, on Billy Mitchell Drive, there was a hamburger stand just like those in downtown Lincoln. A home-sick Airman Basic could buy a hamburger, fries and a strawberry shake for thirty-five cents and listen to the jukebox for a nickel, given the rare opportunity to visit the hamburger stand. I listened to the jukebox hammer out "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and the Comets as I pigged out on my favorite foods. A touch of home in a strange land.

Our time was spent learning to be soldiers; marching, making beds, learning to dress, shine shoes, plus a hundred different ways to mop and polish a floor, which included the use of a toothbrush in those hard to reach places. Much time was also spent in classrooms learning the history and lore of the Air Force. Their goal was obvious, to produce the few, the proud and the unquestioning.

An epidemic of Asian influenza struck particularly hard that summer in San Antonio. At one point, about half the basic recruits in my barracks were in the hospital unable to fulfill their military obligations, or at least the marching and drilling portion. In the hospital, at six AM, they were asked to get out of their sick bed, make the bed, complete with hospital corners, and then get back into it to recuperate. Sounded like a medical example of military logic.
The other half of us, those who avoided the flu didn't fare much better. We were forced to work added duty shifts because of the personnel shortage caused by the epidemic. I pulled two tours of guard duty one night; from 7 until 10 PM, and again from 1 until 4 AM. My duty station was a patio between two barracks that housed a picnic table, coke and snack machines. There would be hell to pay if the enemy infiltrated our patio and tried to sabotage our coke machine. The first tour went without incident, with me dressed in standard night attire of fatigues, a reflective armband and armed with a flashlight fitted with a red plastic cone. If a car came by, I would light up like a traffic signal.

A little before 6 AM, I anxiously awaited the recruit who was scheduled to relieve me from my guard duty, who was now almost two hours late. I was tired, sleepy and more than a little irritated. Out of the gloom, I recognized the soft red glow of an approaching flashlight about a block away and headed my way. A rush of relief mixed with joy washed over me as the light drew closer and I anticipated being relieved by the delinquent Airman Basic. I walked out of the patio and onto the street to greet my replacement.

"Snap to attention, Airman Basic," roared Staff Sergeant Reno Sartari as he shined his flashlight directly into my face. He was not my relief, but a T.I. on his way to awaken his charges to start a new day. "What the hell are you doing out here in the middle of the street?"

I snapped to a full brace attention and began, "Sir, my guard duty was over at 4:00 AM and my relief is …"

Sergeant Sartari interrupted, "No excuses Airman Basic, what is your First General Order?"

Oh brother, now I'm in trouble, "Sir, my First General Order is: I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved, sir!"

"Is this street your post, you worthless piece of buffalo shit?"
"Sir, no sir," my voice wavered as my nerves failed due to the lack of sleep and terror of the situation.

"What the hell is your name?" he demanded.

"Sir, my name is Airman Basic Mark Noble."

"What should I do with you, Airman Basic Noble?"

"Gig me, Sir!" I shouted. Gig was our shorthand for being formally put on report by our superiors during Basic Military Training. It went on our permanent record. Accumulate enough gigs and you would washout of your unit, be forced to restart with an entirely new barracks, and redo weeks of training. A fate too horrendous to contemplate.

"Gig you, gig you? I am going to drag you up against that wall over there and shoot you right in the gut, you son-of-a-bitch! You'll die bleeding and calling for your mama, but you'll never leave your post again."

I gasped as the Sergeant looked at his watch, directed me back into the patio, smartly turned and disappeared into the early morning darkness like the taillight of a slow moving automobile. Five minutes later, my relief finally did show up and I hurried back to my barracks just in time to start a new day of military training and harassment.

Midway through the 8 weeks, I encountered the career guidance center, or "Green Monster" as it was called. The Green Monster was a very ugly building, painted a faded military green and configured with large classrooms containing long rows of tables. It was there that I was subjected to two long days of aptitude and intelligence testing. These tests were designed to show if I could tell the difference between a square and a circle, do simple arithmetic, copy three letters of Morse code and distinguish which was the business end of a mop. A great deal of stress was associated with these tests however, as their results helped
determine if you were to be an electronics or missile technician, a clerk
typist, material supply, or in the motor pool.

Near the end of BMT, I returned to the Green Monster to meet with a
Master Sergeant named Ben Candelaria, identified by his nametag, who
was a career guidance Sergeant. He explained that I had placed in the
top two percent in each of the seven test categories. I was what he called
a "flat liner." There were no highs or lows in my test scores; they were
all in a high, narrow range. I could go to any tech school that I wanted to
attend, according to the Sergeant.

My immediate question was, "I'm ready. When does the next school
start and when does the bus leave?"

Ignoring me, M/Sgt Candelaria seemed bored as he looked through a
binder that contained a long list of technical schools and then said to me,
"You know that the needs of the Air Force always come first. There is a
high priority right now for people with language skills and I think you fit
that description. How would you like to go to Monterey Bay in sunny
California and learn a foreign language?"

"Yes sir," I quickly replied, never thinking to ask anything about the
school, especially which language and somehow assuming in the
recesses of my mind that it was German.

And to make it even better, the M/Sgt added, "You can go home for two
weeks while the Air Force begins a Top Secret security clearance on you.
That usually takes about three months. You ain't now, or ever been a
communist, have you? Good!"

The only part I heard was, “…go home for two weeks!”

Fourteen days at home went by all too quickly. I visited all of my high
school buddies to say good-bye. I also visited the girls I either counted
as friends or dated at one time or another. "Good-bye, I may never see
you again" sex is very special. Promises to write every day were lightly made with little intention of fulfilling them.

Notification that I was accepted by the tech school at Monterey Bay and scheduled to report there arrived at my home just a couple of days before my much too short leave was over. A chit for an airline ticket was also included with my orders. Mom and Dad drove me to the airport in Dad's almost new Ford Edsel and it seemed appropriate that the Everly Brothers sang, “Bye, Bye, Love” on the car radio as I hummed along with Don and Phil. Mom and Dad waved good-bye as I climbed the ramp to board the TWA Transcontinental and took off for Monterey Bay via San Francisco, California. I thought to myself, "Great adventure lies straight ahead."
3. Snoopy

My roommate and very best friend, Robert "Snoopy" Richards was born in Holly Pond, Alabama, which is a small village, located about half way between Huntsville and Birmingham. Holly Pond was less than ten miles from Guntersville Lake where Snoopy spent many happy hours fishing with his friends and neighbors during youthful summers. He had a very happy childhood until one July day in 1949 when Snoopy was 11 years old.

Snoopy's pa served in the Army during World War II. He was decorated for valor and earned a Purple Heart in Belgium as a member of the 101st Airborne Division. Staff Sergeant Elmo Richards was a survivor of what became known as the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes during December 1944. When Elmo was discharged and returned home, he brought a souvenir home with him. The souvenir was a fully functional, military M-1 Garand rifle.

This of course, was illegal and it is unknown how Elmo managed to ship the rifle home. But, there it was. Elmo used the rifle for hunting in the nearby forests which were plentiful as the hills around Holly Pond were heavily wooded. With good reason, he had a great attachment to the weapon that he believed saved his life several times in France, Belgium, and Germany. Snoopy's mother, Ruth detested it as a reminder of World War II because it represented a stressful and unhappy time in her life when she was alone, worried about the war, the well-being of her husband and trying to raise a small child all alone.

Snoopy, however, was extremely proud of his pa and was drawn to the rifle like the proverbial moth to the flame. He loved to take the rifle down from the wall and play Army, protecting his family from Indians, Nazis and sometimes Californians. He and his friend, John Joseph "Jay Jay" Jones was playing Army on a hot 10 July 1949. Tragically, Elmo had accidentally left a round in the rifle following his last hunting excursion. During the children’s play, the rifle went off striking Jay Jay
Ralph McDonald

in the face. The bullet entered Jay Jay’s cheek and exited at the back of his head, killing him instantly. Small bits of bone, blood and brain matter covered the wall behind where Jay Jay stood.

Snoopy was devastated by what he saw. It was a horrifying scene. The accident had a permanent affect on Snoopy because he was responsible for his friend's death. Mental scars from the image of the accident caused a noticeable change in Snoopy's attitude and his behavior. He was exceptionally bright, a quick learner, but took on a defiant swagger and challenged authority figures whenever, wherever and however possible.

At home on the family’s 30-acre farm, he helped his pa with the daily chores. He looked at a mule’s butt so often and long while plowing that he began to think that butt was a normal part of the landscape. Talking to the mule was somewhat therapeutic and Snoopy eventually put Jay Jay’s death behind him, to the extent that was possible. He could not forget, but no longer focused on the horror of his friend's death. Day-to-day life went on.

They raised hogs and butchered them in the fall to provide meat through the next winter. The hogs were hung in the smoke house and slow smoked for several days and then covered with salt to preserve the meat. This meat and the fruits and vegetables canned by Ruth provided the majority of their food during the cold of winter. But, the Richards' family always had plenty to eat.

A small amount of money was needed to supplement their income, so each spring Elmo and Snoopy would cut down a dozen trees from the surrounding forest to sell to the sawmill up the road in Guntersville. This cash money was greatly appreciated and allowed the family to purchase items such as flour, salt, sugar and coffee; those items that were not home grown.

Snoopy was a handsome kid, reminding me of Elvis Presley with his dark, almost black wavy hair. He was tall with an athletic build and
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could have played basketball, but didn't, as he had little interest in sports. When Snoopy graduated from the only high school in Holly Pond, he had one simple objective, a burning desire to get away from there as quickly as possible. His defiant attitude had by now caused Snoopy several encounters with the authorities. Snoopy was a marked man in Holly Pond. It was the Sheriff who coined the nickname "Snoopy," because of his mischievous, defiant behavior, and the nickname stuck. The quickest way out of Holly Pond was military service, and being fond of shortcuts, Snoopy traveled down to Birmingham and enlisted in the Air Force.

Following basic training in San Antonio, a very long bus ride through Louisiana took Snoopy to Biloxi, Mississippi and Keesler AFB. It was at Keesler where he attended 26 weeks of Morse Intercept Operator School and learned to copy Morse code with a radio, earphones and a beat-up Smith-Corona typewriter. However, the truth was that Snoopy hated Morse code and was not very good at listening to and copying the code, which is sent in little five character groups that are totally unintelligible. It was a matter of aptitude, and Snoopy had none for "ditty bopping," as it was sarcastically called.

Snoopy's only carefree moments came while listening to Elvis Presley bang out "Blue Suede Shoes," "Love Me Tender" or "You Ain't Nothing But a Hound Dog" on the jukebox while drinking beer at his favorite hangout, The Biloxi Blues Inn on Jefferson Davis Street. During the course of such an evening nearing the completion of his course at tech school, Snoopy switched from his usual beer to a rum drink called Zombie. Each Zombie was created with layers of different proofs of rum and was a potent elixir intended to render the zombie-like state suggested by its name. Just what Snoopy was looking for.

Walking back to the base with a classmate following several hours of drinking, Snoopy noticed some statues of little black jockeys painted in bright colored silks standing beside a motel swimming pool. The motel was on the shore side with the beach and Gulf of Mexico on the other
side of the highway. In front of the swimming pool was a three-foot chain link fence separating the motel from the highway.

The classmate, Airman Third Class Dwight VanDeventer, mentioned how great it would be to have a statue of a jockey in the barracks. Without another word, Snoopy put his left hand on the fence and jumped over to free one of the brightly colored statues. He looked up. Over his head was the unmistakable and very surprising sight of water. Snoopy had stumbled over the fence and fell into the deep end of the swimming pool. Luckily, Dwight helped Snoopy extract himself from the pool without either one drowning. As they made their way through the front gate, the Air Policeman on duty didn't try to stop the two Airmen as they staggered their way onto the base, but seemed slightly amused by the squishing sound Snoopy made with each step he took.

The school was demanding. And for many of the students, it was extremely frustrating. There was a high rate of failure as young men were pushed to their limits by well meaning instructors. Returning from a shopping trip into North Biloxi, Dwight VanDeventer and Snoopy were crossing the bridge at Popp's Ferry Road over the Back Bay in Dwight's bright red 1955 Chevy convertible. They saw an Airman standing on the top rail who was obviously going to commit suicide by jumping into the river. Dwight stopped the Chevy and Snoopy called to the Airman, "Hey you, don't jump! It can't be all that bad. Think about your momma and papa back home."

"My mom and dad are both dead," the depressed student replied in a broad Yankee accent.

"Well, think of your wife and kids," Snoopy yelled.

"Not married, I'm gonna jump," he muttered.

Snoopy countered, "Well then, think about Robert E. Lee."

"Who the hell is Robert E. Lee?" the distraught Airman asked in return.
"Well, just go ahead and jump, you Damned Yankee!" Snoopy snarled as loud as he could.

With that, the Airman began to laugh as he straightened up and stepped down from the railing. He accepted the offer of a ride back to the base in Dwight's convertible and neither Dwight nor Snoopy ever saw or heard about the young man again. Hopefully he graduated with honors and ended up somewhere in Europe.

Just prior to graduation from Morse Intercept School, two civilians dressed in dark sunglasses, black suits, stark white starched shirts and black ties addressed the class. They looked like twins, which of course they were. At first glance, they appeared to be Federal Bureau of Investigation agents. They were actually from an organization known as NSA, the National Security Agency, which was virtually unknown to the general public and far more secretive than either the FBI, Secret Service or the Central Intelligence Agency.

One of the twins, Joe Daigle, explained their mission for the day. From his cheat-sheet, Joe read, "Emile Daigle and I are from the National Security Agency, which is our nation's primary cryptologic organization. We coordinate, direct, and perform highly specialized activities using sophisticated electronic equipment to protect U.S. information systems and collect and analyze foreign intelligence primarily through signals intelligence, or SIGINT for short."

"SIGINT is a unique discipline with an important and storied past. Our country's roll in SIGINT, at least in the modern era, dates to World War II, when a precursor of NSA broke the Japanese naval "J" code and learned of plans to invade Midway Island shortly after their attack at Pearl Harbor. The project was called, 'Magic.' An appropriate name as it seemed to provide us with supernatural knowledge of Japanese plans."

"Magic allowed us to defeat Japan's superior naval task force, the Japanese Navy's first significant defeat, thus proving the value of
SIGINT beyond question. Midway marked a turning point in the Pacific theater. We learned that an out-numbered force can defeat an enemy if we can correctly anticipate their intentions, strategy, and tactics.

"We are here today to recruit Morse radio operators from this class for a highly classified special program. You will attend a language school at Monterey Bay, California. This is an unusual pilot project and a rare opportunity for a very few of you. We cannot, nor will not say exactly what sort of program it is, or how long you might be so engaged. We can tell you that the project is classified Top Secret and naturally has to do with intelligence gathering. Sound exciting?"

Emile, the second agent asked in a down-east twang, "Did anybody here take a foreign language in high school or college?" Seeing hands go up, he continued, "Did any of you do WELL in those classes?"


"Good for you, son. You from the South by any chance? Why don't you join us up here at the desk and we'll ask you a few simple questions. Get to know each other. Fill out a few forms. And like that." Emile then asked, "Say, any of you fellas hail from Maine?"

The room fell deadly silent. If there was anybody from Maine, they wouldn't admit it. No matter how you looked at this, it was a classic case of buying a pig-in-a-poke. Which was right up Snoopy's alley. Snoopy immediately volunteered because he could not imagine himself spending his entire career listening to di-di-di-dah over a pair of headsets, and further he had never been to California and was eager to see if it was really full of dates and nuts as he had so often heard. Whatever the program was about, it had to be better than a career as a Morse code operator, at least as far as Snoopy was concerned.
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As the rest of the students filed out, Snoopy was called to the table in the front of the classroom where Joe and Emile were seated. Joe handed Snoopy a manila file that contained a single form and asked, "Is the personal information on this form correct, Airman Richards?"

Snoopy quickly surveyed the form and determined that the information was correct and of a very basic nature; little more than his name, address, birth-date and his parent's names. "Yes sir, it looks alright to me."

Emile asked, "Ever been in trouble with the law, son?"


"Well, your high school grades are certainly acceptable. You did do well in Latin and French, which is a major plus. But, there's more than a couple of speeding tickets here, son, especially the stuff about this Jones kid. Would you mind elaborating on your run in with the Sheriff there in Holly Pond?"

Oh crap, thought Snoopy. They have more in that file than they showed me. Being quick witted, Snoopy made a decision to come clean with the two agents and let the chips fall where they may. He answered all of the rest of their questions fully and honestly and gave them a detailed history of his life in Holly Pond, warts and all. To Snoopy's great surprise, the two NSA agents seemed satisfied with his explanation.

Joe put his hand on Snoopy's shoulder, "Thanks for fessin' up, Airman Richards. And don't worry too much, there's nothing here that would prevent you from joining our little organization. We're going to recommend you be accepted into the language school at Monterey, conditionally at first assuming your security clearance comes up clean. Good luck Richards."
4. Shave-Tail

In the language school at Monterey, we were drilled on the syntax and vocabulary of the Russian language mercilessly. From the very beginning, I had a terrible time learning to read and pronounce Russian words as the Cyrillic alphabet has 33 letters instead of our familiar 26. Several letters looked and sounded the same as our corresponding letters and weren't a problem. A few Cyrillic letters simply have no corresponding English equivalent and it was a matter of memorizing their sounds and meanings. The main problem was those letters that looked the same as ours, but had a totally different meaning. Such as the Cyrillic "C" which is our "S" and "P" which is our "R." Therefore the familiar CCCP was actually SSSR for Soyuz Sovetski Sotsialisticheski Respublik which translates into English as "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics."

Language was not our only problem, however. Fridays presented a totally different challenge.

Our Friday afternoon retreat ceremony was particularly difficult for the Air Force students. It was an open-ranks inspection usually conducted by a brand new Army Second Lieutenant fresh out of Officer Candidate School.

The Air Force had become an independent branch of service on 18 September 1947, breaking away from the USAAF, or U.S. Army Air Forces. Although it had been ten years and perhaps hard to believe, the USAF was still in a transition period as far as uniforms were concerned. A current Class A winter uniform consisted of a blue wool uniform with four button blouse, light blue oxford shirt, dark blue tie, black shoes and garrison hat. Standard issue collar brass, hat brass and belt buckle was dull gray under a coat of lacquer.

However, several variations were possible but still recognized as official Class A. Although being phased out, the blouse could be the short Ike
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Jacket that Snoopy was so fond of and usually wore. Old timers who were pre-1947 could still wear Army issued brown shoes. One Airman had a shirt that was several shades darker than the light blue oxford and of a different material, but still regulation Class A, even though no longer in service.

On one particular Friday, Army 2nd Lieutenant Charles McCarville walked up and down the ranks inspecting the troops on a cool winter afternoon. As he began his inspection, he stopped at several Airmen because there was so much difference in their uniforms. They must not have gotten the word about Class A being the uniform of the day. The Lieutenant had no idea what a Class A Air Force uniform looked like, being a recent OCS graduate, and this seemed to perplex him. Several times Lt. McCarville turned to the Sergeant beside him and said, "Sergeant Leonard, take this soldier's name for not being in a Class A uniform."

"Not soldier, sir, an Airman," Sergeant Ed Leonard corrected the shave-tail. "And the Airman is dressed in a Class A, Air Force uniform. I can uniformly confirm that for some reason the Air Force is uniformly FUBAR, Fucked-Up Beyond All Recognition, in the uniformity of their uniforms, sir."

As this was repeated several times, Lt. McCarville became increasingly agitated. Snoopy seemed to take a perverse pleasure in the Lieutenant's distress. Sergeant Ed Leonard became increasingly jumpy as well and tried to hold back a nervous grin. The Lieutenant's displeasure grew with each Airman he inspected as he moved from man to man. Lt. McCarville eventually ignored the remaining Airmen because there was obviously no standard by which to judge their dress. "Damned Air Force," he muttered under his breath.

It was usually a different Shave-tail each Friday, but this was a typical retreat ceremony.
Shave-tails aside, one of our classroom instructors was Yelena Rusenski, who taught Conversational Russian. She was a plump, rather dumpy middle-aged woman with light brown, straw-like hair, who was fond of arguing that everything in the USSR was better than America. Schools, hospitals, police, sardine sandwiches and housing were all superior to ours. The question she avoided was, if everything was better in Russia, why did she come to America? Much of Conversational Russian was taken-up with long debates about the merits of life in the USSR. As our discussions were conducted in Russian, I was never quite sure if Yelena was baiting us into an on-going argument as a strategy to help us learn the language, or was she just home sick and extremely pig headed.

Following a bout with influenza, Yelena observed, "Medical costs are outrageously high here in the U.S.A. and one can't afford to get sick. Can you believe that a doctor's visit can cost nearly twenty dollars? In Leningrad, every citizen has free medical care. No citizen is turned away because of a lack of ability to pay with money."

"Free, but not very GOOD medical care," Snoopy took the bait.

"If somebody important gets sick in Russia, they come to the good old U.S.A. for the best possible treatment," A/2C Carl "Rob" Roberts chimed in. Rob was always eager to join in an argument.

Yelena continued, "The finest doctors, the finest hospitals are available in Leningrad. And it is all free to the citizen. In the Soviet Union, the government cares about its people, regardless of their position."

"Horse pucky!" Rob answered, stumbling over the Russian translation of horse pucky. "The hospitals haven't changed since the great October revolution and doctors get their degrees from mail order houses in Moscow. With the miserable weather there, it's a wonder that everybody isn't sick as a dog all of the time. Free to the citizen is not accurate 'cause there is a very high price to pay in loss of freedom for the poor commie bastards."
Yelena chided, "No cussing in our class, Mister Roberts."

A Navy Seaman in the back of the class joined in, "Rob wasn't cussing miss, he was just describing day-to-day life in the USSR as horse shit. My grand-daddy always said, if it's true, then you've got to say it so that they understand it. And THAT ain't cussing."

"Enough of this, lets get back to work comrades," Yelena finally cut the argument short.

"Comrades?" snorted Snoopy. "Y'all take care with the comrade handle, we're all dyed in the wool Republicans here."

Another civilian instructor was Katrina Korbashev who was nearly the exact opposite of Yelena. Katrina was a real beauty, an eye-filling knockout. She was shapely, had a bubbling personality and dressed in low cut sweaters and blouses to please a room full of young men. She looked a lot like Marilyn Monroe with her hour-glass figure, soft blonde hair and full, ample breasts. She loved pastel colors, and especially loved pink. Pink sweater, pink blouse, pink panties and if still in high school, what would pass for a full poodle skirt. Most of Katrina's students spent their time either fanaticizing about how to get her into bed or pretending to drop items on the floor to improve their view of Katrina's thighs. We had the clumsiest class at the Presidio.

Katrina was the topic of many of the bull sessions held during the evening meal. Everybody had a plan to get her into bed. Snoopy's plan was to invite her out for a drink on Friday evening during happy hour at the Enlisted Men's Club. Get her totally shit-faced and then take advantage of her. Not very original or ethical, but it had a certain ring of possibility to it. It was certainly inexpensive, and compatible with Snoopy's lifestyle, but had one major disadvantage. Katrina would have to agree to a date with Snoopy, which stood two chances for success, slim and none. That obstacle aside, Snoopy was a typical Alabamian who preferred the most direct and least complicated approach, especially if it involved beer, with or without female companionship.
Rob Roberts devised the most elaborate plan of our small group. He planned to anonymously send Katrina flowers, a dozen pink roses, every Monday morning. He would include a short note or poem expressing a secret longing in a detailed and graphic manner, a pastel Kama Sutra of lust. For the remainder of the week, in class, Rob planned to drop subtle hints about pink roses. Finally, after several weeks of roses and hints, Katrina should become fascinated with her secret admirer, and then Rob would admit that he was the one sending those flowers. According to Rob, they would then skip down a meadow path together, throwing pink roses into the way in front of them, leading to a blissful night in the sack together. It was only when he compared the cost of a dozen roses each week to his meager Air Force salary, did Rob see the financial drawback to his plan.

As far as I was concerned, my plan was a "win-win" proposition. It involved asking Katrina to tutor me in the evenings, which would help me become more than a student, perhaps even a friend and confidant. All designed to improve my chances of nailing her, but at the same time help me get better grades and somehow get through her class, which was an important consideration. The truth is, neither Snoopy, Rob nor I acted on our campaign and Katrina ended up marrying some civilian jerk, who was an instructor from the Chinese language division. Somehow, I didn't want to see the children of that union.

Many students had real talent. As students, we varied greatly in our ability to pick up new languages. Some never quite mastered the verb "to be," but, most of us fell somewhere in between. Snoopy and I were near the top of our class, the top one percent. However, I had a much more difficult time of it than he. And no matter what our abilities were, most of us developed a sincere fondness for our new Russian language. We were eager to expand our knowledge and also eager to put that knowledge to work.

The last class period of every Friday was especially enjoyable, beyond looking forward to the week-end. It was our cultural hour, a brief
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interlude where we formed a choir and sang old Russian folk songs. Privates and Majors joined together in song as equals, or very nearly equals. A favorite was "Vniz po maturshke po Volge," or "Down the Mother-Volga River." It reminded me of the Platters record, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes."

Many of us were too young to lawfully imbibe alcohol in California, where the legal drinking age was 21. So most of our social time was spent on the Army post where the law did not apply. However, the Dew Drop Inn on South Pacific Avenue was a popular downtown bar as the husky, crew-cut bartender never asked to see identification. Very likely, he was ex-military and sympathetic to our predicament.

The Dew Drop Inn was upscale compared to our regular watering holes, and far more expensive than the EM Club on campus. We didn't go downtown often, but had good reason to spend a few relaxing hours there on many Saturday nights. I must admit that I never actually saw her, but Kim Novak, the celebrated and beautiful actress, would occasionally show-up and dance with the GI's. With all of her money and fame, Ms. Novak was said to be isolated and lonely and enjoyed the company of young men who were absolutely awestruck by her charm and beauty. Whether or not that was true, I often wished that I had met Kim at the Dew Drop Inn. I was a great fan, but it never happened. Nevertheless, I did have several very interesting dreams starring a ravishing Kim Novak.

As graduation day grew near, many of us spent time at the EM Club celebrating the fact that we were short timers. In addition to language, the final two months were spent covering military jargon and learning to operate sophisticated intercept equipment, finally learning what the secret nature of this program was all about. We were extremely well qualified and would soon be assigned permanent duty stations. No longer students, no more temporary duty. No more evenings filled with memorization.

Snoopy, Rob and I nursed our beers and listened to "Everyday" by Buddy Holly and the Crickets on the jukebox over and over again. As
the beer had its desired effect, we loudly sang along with Buddy as we felt graduation day getting closer and the song echoed our feelings to a tee. Graduation was getting closer and we were anxious for permanent assignment.

Time seemed to stand still for several days prior to graduation day, like the uphill side of a roller coaster. And then it happened. All of the hard work, the sweat, the hours of memorization was finally over. We marched in review at our graduation ceremony and smartly saluted the base commander and other dignitaries on the reviewing stand as completion certificates were handed out one by one. The entire event seemed like a dream come true, or a nightmare ended, both at the same time. The scene was a Technicolor movie of mixed uniforms. Just like in the movies, we threw our hats into the air to celebrate.

After a short thirty-day leave to visit the family, I was scheduled to report to McGuire AFB, New Jersey in order to catch a flight to my newly assigned duty station in Europe. Rob was sent to Misawa, Japan, the other end of the world, but we vowed to stay in touch. Snoopy and I were both going to Bremerhaven, West Germany. Buddy Holly was right, everything was moving faster than a roller coaster.
5. Capt. "Bat" Guano

Following graduation from USALS, and a short visit home, Snoopy and I joined-up at McGuire AFB, New Jersey. At about 11:00 o'clock in the morning of 12 August 1958, we departed McGuire, aboard an Air Force C-118 Liftmaster. The C-118 was a military version of the Douglas DC-6 commercial airliner. It entered service in 1947 so was getting along in years. After a couple of hours into the flight, the pilot came over the intercom to inform us that we had a malfunction and were unable to keep the cabin pressurized. We would drop the altitude to 7,500 feet and make an unscheduled landing at Harmon AFB, Newfoundland, for needed repairs.

Our trip was getting off to a rocky start. At Harmon, we were told that repairs would take overnight, so we were taken to the transient quarters to spend the night and await continuation of our journey to Europe.

Early the next morning, we dressed and made our way to breakfast. It took a second cup of coffee to wake us because Harmon's transient quarters were not intended for restful sleep. Immediately following breakfast, we were bussed to the terminal and boarded the Liftmaster for the next leg of our journey. Less than an hour out, the pilot came over the intercom and ordered us to put out any cigarettes as we had lost an engine and would dump fuel for the return to Newfoundland. You could see the worried look on everybody's face. Strike two! Snoopy was doing an imitation of Chuck Berry playing "Roll Over Beethoven" on an air saxophone to show his lack of concern, courage, or just plain stupidity.

Back at Harmon, we were told that our plane would take several days to repair and that the Air Force was sending another C-118 from McGuire to transport us for the remainder of the journey. About five hours later, we were finally on our way to Germany. The flight from Newfoundland to Frankfurt, West Germany, seemed to take forever. In truth, it was only a little more than twenty hours. Twenty hours sounds like a short time, if you say it very quickly.
Snoopy and I were two of perhaps twenty-five aboard a Military Air Transport Service, MATS flight, where meals consisted of little boxes with a two-day old ham sandwich, an apple, cookie and served with a cup of warm coffee. All this served by a young Airman flight attendant who obviously wished he were elsewhere. MATS was definitely not first class aboard TWA.

As we deplaned at Rhine Main AFB in Frankfurt, we were told to refrain from going into town until we had been in Germany for a few days. You know, get used to the language and the people before making fools of ourselves and, more importantly, embarrassing the United States. The admonition did little or no good. Ten minutes after throwing my B4 bag onto the temporary bunk assigned, two other Airmen, Leroy Mercer and Fred Gaskill, suggested we go into downtown Frankfurt, see the sights and perhaps find a quiet little bar and have a beer or two. The four of us found a taxi at the front gate and asked the driver to take us to the location that was most popular with the local GIs. I am not sure what I expected, but several things surprised me during that first night in Germany. It seemed eerily familiar. The taxi took an on-ramp onto an autobahn immediately beyond the front gate of the base, which could have been a highway anywhere in America. The autobahn was impressive and far more sophisticated than anything we had in America. Still, it was all very familiar.

In just a few minutes, we were in downtown Frankfurt. As we exited the taxi in front of a basement level bar, I heard Elvis Presley banging out "Heartbreak Hotel" from a jukebox within. Again familiar. All Germans we encountered in the underground bar spoke English, and other than the Germanic accent, it was all entirely familiar. We could have been in Omaha, Nebraska, for Pete's sake.

The four of us settled down and drank several bottles of Beck's Beer and generally had a good time observing the locals and listening to very loud music. "Over the Mountain, Across the Sea" by Johnnie and Joe seemed appropriate somehow. Leroy Mercer, being from the Virgin Islands, had a unique sound when signing along with the music. German beer was
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much more potent than anything we had come across before. The beer quietly had its predictable effect, but we could not ignore our scheduled train ride. About midnight we hailed a taxi to return us to Rhine Main only because we had to catch the train to Bremerhaven at 6:00 AM the next day. We caught the train without incident, although slightly hung over.

The view from the train from Frankfurt to Bremerhaven was breathtaking with exceptionally beautiful scenery. It was like a picture postcard, only better. Vivid colors splashed against our senses and we saw scenes that simply did not and could not exist in the USA. Ancient stone castles stood atop green hills along side of narrow, rushing rivers as we journeyed to the northern-most tip of Germany. If you closed your eyes, you could see knights in armor mounted on gigantic white steeds riding the winding road to the castle gate.

Bremerhaven is located on the banks of the North Sea. Snoopy and I had finally arrived at our first permanent duty station, the 6913th Radio Squadron Mobile, a unit entirely dedicated to gathering signals intelligence for the Air Force and NSA.

We were now a part of the USAF Security Service. This little known and highly classified command, USAFSS, one of the silent services, was established in June 1948 at Arlington Hall Station, Virginia. The initial command was made up of three AF units, the 1st, 2nd and 8th Radio Squadrons, Mobile and the 136th Communications Security Detachment of the Army Security Agency, which was reassigned to the Air Force in February 1949. It felt like a promotion to the officers and men of the 136th as they transitioned to the Air Force. The 2nd RSM was itself the results of a merger in December 1945 of the 2nd and 3rd radio squadrons, which began life as part of the 9th Air Force during World War II, copying and breaking German Luftwaffe coded communications.

The unofficial history of the 6913th RSM, which started life as a detachment of the 2nd RSM in Darmstadt, Germany, according to the old timer M/Sgt Ted Hanson, a senior Non-Commissioned Officer, was
Ralph McDonald

unusual to say the least. However, the NCO swore to the following history:

The military post at Bremerhaven, a German word from "haven" meaning a safe haven or refuge and "bremer" meaning slow witted, was originally built as a training camp for German youth called Charlemagne Jugend in 789 AD on the bank of the North Sea. It served that purpose until 869 AD when it closed due to an outbreak of bacterial flatulosis evidently caused by eating contaminated clams. The base stood empty for hundreds of years until it reopened in the late 19th century as a youth training camp for the Kaiser Wilhelm Youth, or Jugend, and later the Von Hindenburg Jugend. For a short time, it was home to the Abraham Koppelstein Juden Jugend, which mysteriously disappeared in 1939.

Following the confusion surrounding the German words Jugend (Youth) and Juden (Jew), the area remained unoccupied until it was taken over by desperate Luftwaffe airmen toward the end of WW II. Acting on complaints from several cruise lines, their mission was to save the town from destruction by allied bombers trying to close the Port of Bremerhaven. Having no operational aircraft, the Luftwaffe soldiers resorted to setting buildings on fire in the form of a huge arrow pointing toward Cuxhaven, where submarines were docked in camouflaged sub pens. This being an ill advised attempt to draw bombers away from the port city. Some of those burned-out buildings were used to house what later became the USAFSS 6913th RSM.

As victorious Allies penetrated the German homeland in 1945, forward elements of British Gen. Montgomery’s tank corpse demanded surrender of the Port of Bremerhaven. German response was, "Crazy man!” This being an all too obvious attempt to duplicate the now famous "Nuts" reply issued to German officers by Gen. McAluff of the 101st Airborne when asked to surrender at Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge.

Outrage over the "Crazy man" response was immediate and the reaction by Allied might was instantaneous and severe! In retaliation for this insult, a skywriting plane was dispatched to write "Hitler eats the big
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one!" over the skies of Sunny B, as GI’s affectionately called the cold, dreary, coastal city in later years. Unfortunately for Bremerhaven, a flight of several hundred B-17 bombers returning from raids on strategic targets at Oktoberfest saw the message as 'leno gib eht stae reltiH'.

The crypto officer aboard the lead aircraft, S/Sgt Dee DeBopp (obviously a fictitious name to protect the innocent) believed this to be a coded message from the underground and quickly deciphered it. Sergeant DeBopp later became the first cryptanalyst at the 6913th. The message, which appeared to be a simple substitution cipher, read, “Bomb this @#%*#.” The @#%*# was never fully decoded nor was it understood. In a matter of seconds, word flashed throughout the formation and the bombers went into immediate action. As they had no bombs left, thousands of rolls of toilet paper and condoms filled with urine rained down on the town without mercy. In less than ten minutes, the town was covered with tissue and rubber. Subsequent aerial reconnaissance showed that while the town had suffered terrible damage, it in fact, looked no worse than before the bombing, with the obvious exception of condoms hanging from all the shrubs.

A British officer, Capt. Basil "Bat" Guano felt that this was a divine sign from above (not counting Monty). He recommended that the base be used as the Port of Embarkation for occupation troops after the war because it had (1) divine protection, (2) a large body of water and (3) newly discovered condom bushes. A two year, nine million dollar study later revealed that the "condom bush" theory was erroneous.

Following Germany’s surrender, Capt. Guano felt that, because of the deciphering incident described earlier, this site was destined to become a state-of-the-art cryptographic center. During Nickel Boiler Maker Night at the Officers Club at Kowdungerdorff, home of the Army’s crack 69th Venereal Decontamination Unit, he had the good fortune to meet 1st Lt. Hardley Hearya of the 3rd RSM of the U.S. Army 9th Air Force who was in Kowdungerdorff looking for antenna locations. Lt. Hearya was tasked to create the "Intercept Enemy Communications and Try to Figure Out if They Are Going to Attack Us" (IECTFOTAGAU) Command, later
shortened to USAFSS. Bat described the Staging Area of the Port of Bremerhaven to Hardley with unbridled enthusiasm. After much negotiation, an agreement was reached and the Staging Area of the port was leased to the U.S. on the condition that all sales generated from the condom bushes would be deposited into a Swiss bank account known only to Capt. Guano and Lt. Hearya. It is rumored that this negotiation led indirectly to the creation of NATO some years later.

At Brooks AFB, Texas, in June 1951, the 41st RSM was created following the prototype (multi-talented, ambidextrous, heavy drinkers) developed by Lt. Hearya based on his experience gained during the final months of World War II. The 41st RSM was later renamed the 6913th RSM. In November of that year, the troop (and 1,162 cases of Lone Star Beer) was transferred to Bremerhaven. It was six years after the end of the war, but the buildings remained unchanged. The Swastika was reluctantly removed from the Marine Barracks however, for aesthetic reasons. The first U.S. barracks units were designated as "semi-field" quarters as they lacked heat and hot water. Authorities justified this classification as a way to expose and train troops to the rigors of life in a partially destroyed city. 41st RSM personnel lived like ground squirrels, but without the advantage of fur coats for warmth. An effort to reclassify personnel as "semi-human" failed, but the ration of SOS, shit-on-a-shingle, was doubled. This was the beginning of a trend that spread to Air Force bases throughout the world, with the possible exception of Goodfellow AFB, Texas, where they didn't have enough "shit." I kid you, not.

Or so said M/Sgt Ted Hanson. There were times that I seriously doubted the veracity of the old (he was probably over 30 years old) timer's oral history, but you had to admire its creativity. And much of the fun was derived from the way Ted embellished the story as he told and retold it. Subtle differences sometimes crept into the story based on the number and quality of drinks provided by his audience.

The U.S. base at Bremerhaven was officially an Army Post and acted as the Port of Embarkation for all troops entering or leaving continental
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Europe. Originally, the post was built by the German Luftwaffe as an air base organized to protect Cuxhaven, Bremen and Bremerhaven during World War II. The post itself was nicely arranged like a small town with barracks surrounding a large open grassy area called the quadrangle. Barracks buildings were a dark red brick and most were three stories high. Because of our rotating shifts, each group was assigned to a single floor in a single building so that shifts would not disturb each other.

The large hanger building was now used as a movie theater, snack bar restaurant, gymnasium and bowling alley. What was once the flight line of the airfield was transformed into a golf course, helicopter pad and the antenna fields which were essential to our mission there.

We also had a beautiful little chapel, a mess hall, motor pool and several other supporting units, such as the NCO Club. All the comforts of home, if you weren't too particular about where you lived.
6. Elvis and Buddy

After establishing ourselves in Bremerhaven, we settled into a routine that most would find distracting in the extreme. Our work schedule was based on rotating shifts called "Four-One, Four-One, Four-four." We would work four evening shifts followed by 24 hours off. Then work four midnight shifts ending with another 24 hours off. This was followed by four day shifts and finally four full days off. An eve shift was from 5:00 PM until Midnight. A mid shift was from Midnight until 8:00 AM. The day shift covered from 8:00 AM until 5:00 PM.

The best feature of this rotating schedule was that with a four-day break, a mini vacation, places such as Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Frankfurt and Paris were within easy reach by train or automobile. England, Ireland and Scotland were reachable by air or boat. And we took advantage of those four-day breaks to visit several European cities. The worst thing about rotating shifts was that they covered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. Holidays were simply another workday if they fell on one of your regularly scheduled shifts. Another of the tangible joys of military life was spending Christmas Eve in front of a warm, glowing military R-390 super-heterodyne radio.

A fun time in Bremerhaven was had in its social gatherings. If you were off base or in town after 6:00 PM, protocol called for class A uniforms, or if in civilian clothes, a coat and tie was required. Obviously, our government wanted troops to present themselves as fine, upstanding young men to the local inhabitants. Fine, upstanding young men could always find a way to debauch themselves regardless of protocol and regulations.

Four other Airmen, Snoopy and I were engaged in a social gathering that began in the early afternoon at a local watering hole, the Blue Angel Bar. Since it was early afternoon, we were dressed in casual attire, open sport shirts and slacks. As six o'clock approached, the bartender brought out the most hideous looking ties and sport coats possible and demanded we
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put them on. I had never seen a chartreuse and lavender paisley tie before. If the Military Police arrived, we might look ridiculous, but be in strict compliance with the protocol.

The six of us put on the borrowed clothes, but Snoopy suggested we test the outer limits of the rules, stretch them as far as possible. Coat and tie required, pants were not mentioned and therefore could be considered optional. All six of us took off our pants, hung them with care on the coat rack and took our places standing at the bar dressed in coat, shirt, tie, skivvies, and shoes. "Johnny B. Good" by Chuck Berry was blaring in the background. Another round was ordered much to the bartender's chagrin, even as he tried to hold back a snigger.

At about 8:00 PM, two MPs finally arrived. They burst out in laughter as they took in the sight of the six Airmen at the bar. Lucky for us, they had a robust sense of humor. Rather than arresting and hauling us off to jail, they had a good laugh, and simply ordered us to put on our trousers, keep them on and to avoid trouble for the remainder of the night. We enthusiastically followed their suggestion.

Not all of our time either on or off duty was spent engaged in good clean fun. Sometimes we got down right dirty. We had a chore that came around about once every six months called Burn Detail. As a by-product of our work, a great deal of paper was generated. Six-part continuous paper, carbons, forms, reports, computer punched cards and such was collected in burn bags for disposal. The hot, dirty detail consisted of taking these sacks of paper products to the small furnace structure located behind our Ops Building. There, the classified material was dumped into the furnace where a roaring fire was stoked and stirred until all of the papers were reduced to ashes. IBM tab cards were particularly difficult and took extra prodding with the long metal stoker to thoroughly burn. The detail was always an Airman and an armed Officer. The Officer was there to make sure that first, nobody would steal the trash and second, that the Airman sufficiently covered himself in sweat and soot. The detail wasn't complete unless the Airman ended up looking like a vaudevillian in black face.
Following my first turn at Burn Detail, on 1 October 1958, about half the population of Bremerhaven, as well as Snoopy and I went to the port to watch the USS General Randall arrive. The Randall was just another gray troop ship bringing soldiers and military equipment to Europe. This day was different, however. Today, Private Elvis Aaron Presley of the U.S. Army strolled down the gangway and stepped foot onto Germany. Elvis was on his way from Fort Hood, Texas, to the 1st Battalion of the 32nd Armor Regiment of the 3rd Armored Division stationed at Ray Barracks, Friedberg, West Germany.

Elvis was going to man a tank in defense of NATO in case the Soviet hoards came streaming across the East German border. He smiled and waved to the cheering crowd and did a little hip-roll as he made his way down the gangway. Snoopy and I were caught up in the excitement, but as I looked at Elvis, I couldn't help but wonder why he was in a combat unit and had seemingly forsaken the privileges his money and fame could have made possible. After all, he was the King. Even as a draftee, he could have been assigned to a special entertainment unit and visited Europe with Bob Hope and company. I was not a big Elvis fan, he was a little too rock-a-billy for me. But Snoopy was a great fan and owned most, or perhaps all of Presley's records. That day, I gained a new appreciation and respect for Elvis Presley the human being and soldier. Elvis was OK.

Listening to Armed Forces Network radio was another of the mainstays of our lives. If you liked Elvis, you could hear him on AFN. Tommy Cash, who was Johnny Cash's brother, was an AFN disc jockey stationed in Berlin. We had a secret kinship with Johnny Cash. Not many people knew that the man-in-black was the man-in-blue prior to becoming a big star. Johnny Cash was in the Air Force as a radio intercept operator prior to his career in music. Johnny had a little country band and played in clubs in and around Darmstadt between his military duties and on his four-day breaks. Music and news was our lifeline, from Hillbilly Revelry in the morning to Easy Listening in the late evening.
Intermittent news broadcasts kept us in touch with what was going on at home and the world at large.

Elvis was safe here in Germany on that early February 1959 day when we learned that Buddy Holly, Richie Valens and the Big Bopper had died. The world of rock and roll would never be quite the same. My world was truly rocked. I listened in disbelief as the newscaster described what had happened, "A Beech Bonanza, N3794N, crashed at night approximately five miles northwest of the Mason City Municipal Airport, Iowa, at 1:00 AM, 3 February, 1959. The aircraft was demolished. Charles Hardin Holley also known as Buddy Holly, Richard Valenzuela aka Richie Vallens and J.P. Richardson aka the Big Bopper were passengers aboard the light aircraft."

"They along with the pilot, Roger Peterson, were killed upon impact. The entertainers had appeared at a concert in Clear Lake, Iowa the night before and were on their way to Moorhead, Minnesota to continue their tour. The Civil Aeronautics Board is investigating the cause of the crash. It is known however, that weather was a contributing factor. There was an overcast sky, falling snow with gusty winds and no definite horizon at the time of take off. The weather had…" I switched the radio off. Snoopy and I were staring at each other in disbelief. Real men don't cry but I fought back a tear the night the music died.

Life went on and as sometimes happened, a surprise Military Alert was called early one evening in the Spring of 1959. A Military Alert is similar to the fire drills held in elementary school, but scarier at times. This meant that all off-duty personnel were to don their steel helmets, strap on canteen belts, mount backpacks and assemble on the front steps of the Operations Building. From the basement of the Ops Building, we could be issued weapons in order to repel invaders, if necessary. Captain Al Perras was in charge of our assemblage.

The Alert dragged on for several hours with nothing to do except mill around. Midnight chow started at 11:00 PM. Eventually, Capt. Perras decided to dismiss the men one at a time so that they could get something
to eat at the Mess Hall. He had the men come forward one at a time and answer a question about the Air Force, our unit or our Cold War mission. Those who answered correctly were dismissed and allowed to make their way to the Mess Hall. Those who failed were sent to the rear of the line to try again. Snoopy and I watched as A/3C I.B. Newbie failed several questions and was sent back a number of times. When only the single man remained, the Captain became sympathetic toward Newbie and asked the following question, "What does the abbreviation S-I-D-N-K stand for?"

Airman Newbie bowed his head and quietly answered, "Sir, I don't know."

"Correct, or at least close enough," Capt. Perras said with a wry smile, "Now, go on and get something to eat."

Like all military installations, we were at times subject to visits from a team from the Inspector General's office, in our case, the USAF Inspector General's office. In addition to looking for negative things or those things needing repair during an inspection, I.G. team members also looked for unit members who were performing above and beyond the call of duty. These folk were dubbed "Professional Performers" and were recognized for their outstanding work during the out-briefing ceremony which followed the formal inspection. Since these inspections lasted only four to six days, Professional Performers were hard to find. Usually, the unit being inspected would point the inspector at some fellow who was doing an outstanding job and hope the inspector would recognize the obvious.

Tech Sergeant Tom Caron was assigned to the I.G. team, which was tasked to inspect the 6913th RSM during the summer of 1959. As he reviewed the daily log sheets, he saw that log entries showed spotty results at best. But, then he noticed that on one of the shifts the log revealed line after line that was filled in completely with seemingly good intelligence. "You can tell when Snoopy Richards comes on duty," the day shop analyst said, "just by looking at the logs."
"Looks like a Professional Performer to me," T/Sgt Caron replied. "But I can't award this honor just by looking at logs. I need to talk to him. Where can I find this Snoopy fellow?"

The shop analyst, A/1C Ron Fandrick answered, "Well, he's on duty right now up on the third floor of the Ops Building. This is his last day shift, so if you don't talk to him today he'll be on his four day break and you may never find him."

"Very well, Fandrick, and thanks. I'm on my way right now to interview Airman Richards."

Sergeant Caron found Snoopy right where Ron had promised he would be. What he found was a rather tall trooper in unstarched and untailored fatigues with a lock of dark hair hanging over his forehead and eye. He had a grease pencil behind one ear, a ballpoint pen clenched between his teeth and carried a clipboard. On this day, Snoopy was acting as a traffic analyst rather than an intercept operator, as he often did. He zipped from one intercept station to another like a water bug, issuing instructions and making notes on his clipboard. Other operators yelled questions, which he answered in his Alabama drawl.

Snoopy ignored T/Sgt. Caron as the sergeant tried to get his attention in order to interview the young over-achiever. Finally, after several failed attempts, Caron stepped in front of Snoopy and asked if he could have a few minutes of Snoopy's time. "Get outta my face, Sarge! I've got a fighter, an F-86 bumping down the East German border stirring up their air defense units and we're very busy right now," Snoopy growled at the inspector.

Tom Caron made the following entry in his inspection notes. "If this ain't a professional performer, I've never seen one." He passed his nomination up the line to the Inspector General, who reviewed it with his full team but denied Snoopy the award because of "image/appearance issues." Barely presentable, Snoopy was not the best-dressed Airman in
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Bremerhaven. Tom covered his mouth and made a coughing sound that could have been mistaken for, "Hack, hack, ummmm, bull shit!" That was as close as Snoopy ever got to a commendation. He did however, get promoted to Airman First Class as he added another stripe to his uniform.

Snoopy was following the evolution of an enlisted Airman:

E-1 Airman Basic. You've been in the Air Force all day and don't know squat. You're being taught how to fold your underwear and that two silver bars is a Captain, not a Colonel even though you are still saluting E-3s.

E-2 Airman Third Class. You still don't know squat, however you are going to technical school and learning a trade that will serve you well in the future. You no longer salute E-3s.

E-3 Airman Second Class. You have now graduated from tech school and are probably assigned a permanent duty station. Although you now know which end of the screwdriver to hold in your hand and that "lefty loosey," and "righty tighty" is the key, you have a long way to go before anybody will believe you know what you are doing.

E-4 Airman First Class. Considered a Non-Commissioned Officer if you've been in over four years, you are now a journeyman. You can remove and replace a component as long as there are no more than four bolts, but throw in a lock washer and some safety wire and you're looking for help.

E-5 Staff Sergeant. You are now an NCO, a low-level supervisor of young men who look up to you. You wanted more responsibility and the Air Force generally agrees with you.

E-6 Technical Sergeant. You've been in the Air Force for about ten years and feel that they couldn't possibly get along without you. Lower ranking men look to you for expertise and leadership. You now have one
hell of a chip on your shoulder and feel you are God's gift to the Air Force.

E-7 Master Sergeant. With six stripes, you are in the top three and believe that since you made it this far, you will take on the world and make Chief Master Sergeant. You complete the Senior NCO Academy by correspondence. You take on more responsibility, and are managing a shift or small duty station. You seldom do more than write performance reports or decide who will work the mid shift.

E-8 Senior Master Sergeant. Six stripes down and one over, allows you to attend the in-residence Senior NCO Academy. You will probably never touch a radio or toolbox again. Lower ranking Airmen know better than to ask you about difficult problems because they know you have forgotten most of it by now. Your only concern is keeping your nose clean and making Chief.

E-9 Chief Master Sergeant. You have made it to where few in the Air Force do. It's been ten years since you've performed any meaningful function or labor. Your job is to be present, listen to the Airmen's concerns, act as if you actually care, and delegate tasks to subordinates. You reach the thirty year mark, retire and listen to the compliments that people had to dream up about you for your retirement ceremony. As you drive out the gate for the final time, the Air Force returns you to society the same way they found you. Once again, you don't know squat!

November 1959, Thanksgiving fell as, now A/1C Snoopy Richards and I, were working eves. Four of us finished an early and very festive turkey dinner and prepared to walk to the Operations Building to begin our five PM shift. As one, we noticed a fully roasted turkey surrounded by garnish, on a platter sitting on a long table in the middle of the mess hall. I don't think this golden brown turkey was meant for consumption by mere GIs, it looked much too good for that. A plan was quickly hatched.

A/2C Jim Reusch and A/1C Brent "Huk" Tracy suggested that Snoopy get his car and move it in front of the mess hall, park there with the
motor running. We watched the street in front of the mess hall until Snoopy had reached his objective. Snoopy parked right in front of the main entrance with his engine at idle much like John Dillinger may have done in 1933 while robbing a bank. Without hesitation, Jim and Huk grabbed the turkey, one on each drumstick. I grabbed the platter. The three of us made a dash for the front door and the white Volvo. This offered an entirely new meaning to the phrase "Hot Turkey Sandwich."

An Army Private near the front entrance was nearly trampled as we bolted through the door to exit the building. We heard loud, chaotic sounds coming from the mess hall behind us as diners realized what was happening. I think I heard some applause in the mix.

Piling into the Volvo, we then raced to the Ops Building where we parked immediately across the street in the AFN parking lot. Finding a towel in the back seat, Jim wrapped the bird as best he could. We crossed the street and somehow managed to get the turkey past the Air Police security guards, which was no mean trick. It was messy as Huk cloaked the turkey beneath his field jacket to slip it past the APs. The bird was still hot and greasy and the towel was not a perfect solution. We were proud of our "great turkey heist" and placed the platter and bird on top of one of the radios in "B" block. Another victory for the common dogface.

However, the Military Police had been alerted that a white Volvo had been observed leaving the mess hall with the platter of roast turkey. Two Army MPs, a Captain and a Corporal, arrived at the scene within a matter of minutes. Seeing the soldier near the front door who had just avoided being run over by the turkey wranglers, Captain Arnold Franco asked, "Private, did you witness the theft of the Thanksgiving turkey?"

"Yeah, I did, I saw it all," the Private stammered, still trying to catch his breath and recover from the shock.
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"Hold on there, Private. 'I did, sir,' is what you meant to say, wasn't it? I am a Captain. OK, let's start over. Did you witness the theft of the turkey, Private?" Captain Franco asked once again.

"No, Sir! I didn't see a thing, Sir!" the Private responded.

Even without cooperation, it didn't take the MPs long to find the Volvo in the AFN station parking lot. They couldn't be sure that it was the car in question, as they didn't get a license number, so their first option was to question the personnel in the AFN building. The car did not belong to anybody at AFN. The MPs decided to take their investigation to the Ops building. Our NCO In Charge, M/Sgt Robert "Jake" Jacobs was called down to the secured front gate by the Air Policeman on duty. Our entire facility was classified Top Secret (Codeword), therefore so restricted that not even the MPs could enter.

Sergeant Jacobs was held in high esteem and enjoyed credibility with the MPs as he was well known as a highly successful football coach. In fact, he was known as "Coach" to most personnel stationed in Bremerhaven. "To what do I owe this honor, Sir?" he asked Captain Franco as Jake arrived at the stairwell guard station and entrance to the Ops Building.

"Good evening Jake. We have good reason to believe some of your misguided troopers snatched a turkey from the mess hall and brought it here. Sometimes I'm just amazed at what you people think you can get away with because your building is so secretive. Do you know anything about this turkey business?"

"Not a thing, Sir, but if I find out any of my crew was involved, you can rest assured there will be hell to pay," Jake denied that any of his troops would pull such a stunt while fearing that it was possible. He had a few subordinates who were capable of pulling off such a stupid stunt, if strong drink was indicated.

The MPs had little choice but to accept Jake's denial, as they could not gain entrance to the Ops Building and so eventually left the scene. Up
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until this point, Jake had not been to "B" block and had not seen the turkey. However, he could imagine that his men were capable of such a stunt and had a good idea of who might have been involved. When he did see this magnificent bird sitting atop the radio, Jake blew his stack. He yelled and cussed, he threatened; but funny, he never asked who was responsible. He never asked who had brought the turkey into the building. Luckily, Jake Jacobs was extremely loyal to his charges and didn't pursue the matter further, nor did he ever punish any of his usual suspects. It didn't hurt matters that both Jim and Huk were starters on Jake's football team. The incident took on heroic proportions as its legend grew with each passing day.

Snoopy declared that it took almost an entire box of Ajax Cleaner to remove the grease stains from the back seat of his Volvo left by the purloined Thanksgiving turkey.
now danced on the walkway in the whirling wind and our brogans made a crunching sound as ice gave way beneath our feet. Cold wind cut through our field jackets like a knife. It was a little past midnight. Our long evening shift had finally ended as the subsequent crew relieved us. We trudged across the quadrangle between our barracks toward the mess hall and midnight chow. It had been a very long, yet uneventful evening and Snoopy and I were tired and now chilled to the bone.

“Are you really hungry, Snoopy?” I asked.

“Well, do you mean for real food or midnight madness? If you’re talking mess hall, then I ain’t one bit hungry, but I am a little thirsty and could use some antifreeze,” Snoopy drawled his Alabama best.

“Me too,” I said, “let’s go into town and hit the stick. My old grand daddy always said, there’s a pork chop in every bottle!” The stick, or sometimes stem was slang words for Lessing Strasse, the main street of the bar district that catered to the military and underside of this port city. It only took a nod of Snoopy’s head and we made a quick turn and headed into the barracks to change out of our fatigues and into civilian clothes.

Like a metronome keeping time with the radio, windshield wipers moved back and forth to remove the snow from the windshield of Snoopy’s white Volvo. The Volvo acted as if it were on autopilot and knew exactly where we were headed. And, of course it did. Snow and ice on cobblestone streets made them treacherous and difficult to navigate, but we had no trouble this night. It was now about 1:30 in the morning so no traffic could be seen on the street and we parked right in front of the Blue Angel Bar on Lessing Strasse behind a black Mercedes. The bar was almost empty and the jukebox was playing “Lonely Teardrops” by Jackie Wilson, a good match to our melancholy mood. Anita, the barmaid brought us two Beck’s Beers without a word being spoken.
At first, I didn’t notice the middle aged gentleman sitting alone in the back booth. Snoopy and I made small talk and ordered another round of beer. The civilian got up from the booth and walked to our table. He was well dressed and had a camel hair overcoat draped over his arm. In German, he introduced himself as Manfred Rickmer and asked if he could have an American cigarette. Snoopy immediately offered one from his pack of Pall Mall. Herr Rickmer accepted the cigarette, lighted it, took a deep drag and then thanked Snoopy as he turned toward the front door and left. Snoopy and I returned to small talk while nursing our beer.

Less than five minutes later, Herr Rickmer reappeared and seemed highly agitated. In a very loud whisper he explained to Anita that he had a flat tire and he did not have his tools in his Mercedes. He was in a hurry to get home and was at a loss as what to do. Anita motioned for me to join them at the bar. Anita asked, “Herr Noble, would you please assist Herr Rickmer with his auto wagon problem? His tire is kaput.” Snoopy glared at me and shook his head in the negative. He wanted no part of changing a tire for a stranger at this hour and in this weather. He took the keys out of his pocket and placed them on the table in front of where I had been seated. I understood that this was the extent to which Snoopy was willing to help.

It was cold, but it didn't take long to change the tire on Herr Rickmer’s Mercedes. Using the jack and tire tool from the Volvo, it was a simple matter to replace the flat with his spare tire. As we worked, Manfred became friendly and we further introduced ourselves. He wanted very much to show his gratitude for my assistance. “Tell me, Herr Noble, what can I do to show my appreciation? Can I pay you?” he asked.

“No problem,” I said, “you don’t have to do anything.”

Manfred responded, “I understand, Herr Noble, but I want to do something. Would you come to my house on Sunday and have dinner with me and my family?”
Not wanting to appear rude, I agreed and he gave me a card with his home address and telephone number. We removed our gloves and shook hands, thus committing me to the appointment, although I didn't look forward to it.

Sunday afternoon arrived. All morning I invented reasons why I could not go to Herr Rickmer’s house. Excuses to use that would not show me as an ugly American. But, I had given my word and so was stuck. At 4:20 PM, I made my way to the front gate where the bus would take me to the Post Exchange in downtown Bremerhaven. From the PX, I hailed a taxi and gave the driver the address from Herr Rickmer’s card, 10 Schmidtskuhlweg Strasse.

Frau Olga Rickmer greeted me at the door. She showed me into the living room where Herr Rickmer waited for my arrival. We exchanged greetings in a combination of mixed languages. Warm aromas wafting out of the kitchen interrupted my broken German and their excellent English. An empty stomach that excited my sense of smell identified veal, potatoes, gravy and freshly baked bread with a complement of several other unidentified dishes. While the exchanges of etiquette lingered, my eyes became fixed upon the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. "Oh forgive our rudeness, this is our daughter, Gabriele," said Frau Rickmer.

I was so taken in by her beauty that I did a silly thing. While gently shaking her hand, I gracefully performed a stylized bow.

Dinner was wonderful from the very first salad, bread and wine through the heavy main course to the delicious cream dessert. Trying not to be too obvious, I paid very close attention to Gabbi. Gabriele was a gorgeous young lady, a Teutonic beauty who was twenty years old. Her soft blonde hair was shoulder length and had an herbal fragrance of fresh-cut flowers. She weighed about 110 pounds, which was distributed in wonderful proportions over her five feet, two inches, giving her a tiny waist and full, firm breasts above a movie star's legs. I couldn't take my
eyes from her. I watched her eat and I watched her sip her wine. I watched her breathe.

Eventually, I remembered that I was working the midnight shift in this rotation and my shift started in just a couple of hours. I had to tear myself away from Gabbi. Saying my good-byes, I thanked Herr Manfred and Frau Olga profusely for the wonderful meal and kind hospitality. Making my way toward the front door I casually grasped Gabbi’s hand, "Do you work here in town, and if so where?" I asked, trying my best to not appear completely mad.

“Yes, Herr Noble, I do work. I am a hostess at the Marine House Restaurant in Langen, not far from your station. But, my Sundays and Mondays are usually free,” she spoke softly.

“Gabriele,” Frau Rickmer scolded, “do not be so forward! You are a lady, after all!”

I shook hands with both Olga and Manfred as I bid my farewell and retraced my steps back to the Staging Area barracks. It was a good thing that we were working a midnight shift that night, as I would not have slept in any case. I spent the entire watch listening to Russian communications, but thinking only of Gabbi. If love-at-first-sight is a virus, then I caught it good.

North of Bremerhaven is the small port city of Cuxhaven. Cuxhaven's main claim to fame is the submarine pens that were so active during World War II. On the tree-lined highway between Bremerhaven and Cuxhaven is the quiet little suburb of Langen, less than five miles from the Army Post located in the Staging Area of the port of Bremerhaven where I worked and lived. The Marine House Restaurant was on Jager Stasse, the main street through the village. A single-story, large square building with a Tudor exterior had a faded red neon sign that sizzled and popped "Marine House Restaurant." Two evergreen trees standing tall on each side, guarded the front door.
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I caught the Cuxhaven bus at the small brick and glass guard shack at the main entrance to the Staging Area. The bus went right by the Marine House Restaurant, where luckily there was a bus stop in front of the building. Gabbi told me that she worked at the Marine House and I hoped to find her there, even if it took several visits. As I stood in the restaurant doorway, my heart raced when I saw Gabbi working behind the cash register. She was just as I remembered, absolutely gorgeous.

"Hello, Gabriele," I said softly.

"Herr Noble, what a surprise it is to see you. I am very pleased. Have you come to our Marine House to have a fine seafood dinner? We have the best restaurant in Langen."

"No Fraulein, I came to see you. But please, call me Mark instead of Herr Noble. That is much too formal for me. Just call me Mark. Please forgive my boldness, but after your shift ends, would you please have dinner with me?"

"I would like that very much, Herr, … ah Mark, but the kitchen will be closed when my work day has ended. It is not possible tonight. Could we make it another day, perhaps next weekend? Sunday? I work Tuesday through Saturday here at the restaurant."

"Yes, of course, that's swell. I'll pick you up at your house Sunday evening at seven o'clock. We can have dinner anywhere you would like. Do you have a favorite spot?"

"No, not really. I know several nice places, but we can decide that later. We will pick a family restaurant, so it is not so terribly expensive. I will be ready at seven, Herr, … ah, I mean Mark, but now I must get back to work. The owner is watching me. Please excuse me for now."

I was elated that Gabbi was so receptive to a first date. Maybe she was as attracted to me as I was to her, a concept that I found very difficult to
believe considering our differences. But, she certainly seemed to be and I was overjoyed by the possibility.

When I arrived back at the barracks, I went straight to my roommate and best friend and asked, "Hey Snoopy, good ole buddy, can I borrow your car for a few hours next Sunday evening?"

"Yeah, ole buddy, promise to take good care of it and it's yours. And don't forget to fill it up with gas when you bring it back. You know, the good stuff. Did you get lucky at moose hunting?" Snoopy asked.

"Moose hunting" was GI slang for looking for the opposite sex usually with fun and pleasure in mind. It was a phrase widely understood within the military community even though its origins were long forgotten.

That Sunday evening, Gabbi and I enjoyed a most delicious dinner in this quaint countryside family restaurant. We chatted through two bottles of wine and finished our pleasurable evening dancing until three o'clock in the morning. Her body felt as if it were a perfect fit with mine, as I held her tight while we danced to Conway Twitty singing "It's Only Make Believe" from the jukebox at the side of the tiny little dance floor. Thus began a relationship that drew Gabriele and me closer together with each encounter. We spent some part of every Sunday and Monday together, depending on which shift I was working. I could see that I was falling deeper in love with her with each passing day and I ached when we were apart. I had never felt such emotion.

After about three months, and now desperately in love, we discussed renting an apartment in downtown Bremerhaven and moving in together. Living together without being married was highly unusual and it presented my first real challenge, one that I was not entirely prepared to face.

The unit where I worked strictly prohibited fraternization between military servicemen and German frauleins for national security reasons. It appeared that our government didn't trust German nationals and their motto was, "In God we trust, all others we monitor." If in their
monitoring, they discovered fraternization, the punishment was the loss of security clearance and immediate transfer to one of the supporting units such as personnel, mailroom, or supply. As much as I griped and complained about it, I enjoyed my job of intercepting and translating Russian communications and I took great pride in the importance of my mission. We were constantly told that our unit was the cream of the crop and our intelligence gathering was vitally important to our national security. Each morning, NSA’s intelligence summaries were delivered personally to the President of the United States.

I had witnessed several occasions where our special Security Service Air Police came into the Operations Building and escorted an Airman out of the building so quickly that he left behind either a hat or jacket. It was swift and sure and I did not want that to happen to me. I couldn’t afford to buy a new hat or coat at my pay level. Evidently, our leaders had learned nothing from the prohibition experience, when liquor was illegal, thinking that a policy against fraternization would actually keep soldiers from getting involved with frauleins. Not a well thought-out position as it contradicted millions of years of human evolution.

After a great deal of discussion about marriage and living together, going back and forth, Gabbi and I agreed to rent an apartment, but to keep it a secret from all but Gabbi’s immediate family and a few of my most trusted friends. We planned to marry when I had only a couple of months left in my tour of duty. Gabbi’s mother was adamantly opposed to our plan. She was unhappy that her daughter could consider such a dreadful possibility, living with a man without the benefit of marriage. But she loved Gabbi very much and eventually agreed not to stand in our way.

I could not bring myself to consider moving the date of marriage any sooner because I had a compelling sense of duty telling me to complete my tour in Bremerhaven as I had been trained to do. But spending more time with Gabbi was certainly a wonderful idea. I knew that I was on shaky ground, but I was so in love by this time that I was willing to take the chance of discovery and loss of my security clearance. If I lost my
clearance, we would just get married that much sooner. How could I choose between love and duty?

Within a few days we had found and rented a three-room apartment from the family of a taxi driver named Hans Ahrens, who was a friend of the Rickmers. Neither of us had any furniture, so we begged, borrowed and purchased some essential items such as a table, two chairs, a small radio and a bed. Luckily, a small refrigerator and stove were furnished with the apartment. Gabbi borrowed some other things such as a couch, chair and a bookcase from her mother. It was modest in the extreme, but home is where the heart is.

Our first day together in the apartment was exhilarating. We spent an entire afternoon arranging and rearranging our meager furniture, trying to make it look like we had more than we really did. But no matter how it was arranged, it still looked like a scene from "The Grapes of Wrath." As the afternoon gradually turned into evening, we agreed to stop worrying about it and just leave it as it was. We hung two more photographs and called it a day.

I stood behind Gabbi, took her in my arms and kissed her neck. Her aroma filled my senses. "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" by the Platters was playing in the background as we pretended to dance. Gabbi turned slowly and our lips met as if it were the first time. We seemed to melt together, to become one. My eyes were closed, but I saw her clearly. I gently ran my fingers up her back and across her shoulder, seeing her with my touch. I kissed Gabbi's forehead, her cheek and her nose and then pressed my mouth against her's. I could taste Gabbi and it was a taste of honey. Struggling for breath, I whispered how much I loved her. I felt her love in return as her body pressed against mine with an electricity that bound us together. Beneath her sweater, I fumbled with the clasp of her brassiere and felt it snap apart as it released. Slowly I moved my hand from her back to her side and then cupped her breast. My fingers traced little circles around and across her nipple as it became engorged. I lifted her sweater and kissed her breast while rubbing my tongue over her now hard nipples. We slowly undressed each other. She
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took off my shirt and released my belt. I slipped out of my slacks. I lifted her sweater over her head and gently removed it. I unbuttoned her skirt and let it slip to the floor. Passion grew from the fire of our love. We fell together and made love until we fell asleep early the next morning.

Gabbi was on my mind every waking moment. But, so was the possibility that the Air Force would discover my relationship. I knew that we were on borrowed time and that eventually the Security Service would discover my secret. But, by this time, Gabbi was the most important part of my life.
8. Uncle Willie

Manfred Rickmer had a younger brother who lived in the East German sector of Berlin. Herr Wilhelm Rickmer, or "Uncle Willie" as Gabbi called him, was a tall, thin man who looked to be in his late thirties. Uncle Willie was a rather loud, boisterous fellow who had a pencil-thin mustache that appeared painted on a colorless face. Willie visited Manfred and Olga quite often, which was unusual because travel between East and West Germany was difficult at best. Willie explained that his position as a low-level city bureaucrat in East Berlin afforded him the opportunity to travel in the West with an unrestricted passport.

Gabbi introduced Uncle Willie to me. Uncle Willie was obviously very fond of Manfred, Olga and Gabbi and as time passed, he became almost a permanent fixture in Bremerhaven. He seemed to spend more time here than in East Germany, by quite a margin. About once a month, he traveled by car to Hamburg and then took the train on into East Berlin. After a few days in Berlin, he would make the return trip. This monthly round-trip appeared to be Willie's only concession to regular employment.

I became increasingly uneasy and nervous around Uncle Willie. He was too inquisitive. He asked far too many questions, to most of which I couldn't give a straight answer. He seemed particularly interested in my work schedule and the duties I, and others performed at the Staging Area of the Army Post.

A very generous and energetic man, Uncle Willie was fascinated by my co-workers and loved to have impromptu parties where he furnished beer and cognac for all. These parties were always in one of two places, Wilhelm's apartment or the Blue Angel Bar on Lessing Strasse. Although I didn't know it at first, he also provided prostitutes for all-too-willing, lonesome, or horny young GI's. The more I learned about Willie, the more anxious I became.
"Snoopy, I'm really worried about this German guy I know in town. I think he's a communist. He supposedly lives in East Berlin, but spends most of his time up here in Bremerhaven. And you know him too. There's something really weird going on with this guy. My problem is, he's Gabbi's uncle and she might be upset if I let her know how nervous Wilhelm makes me."

"Hey man, you're talkin' about Willie Rickmer aren't you? He's OK in my book. A hell raiser with a pocket full of cash and he's not afraid to spread it around. He throws some damn good ..."

"I know, I know all that Snoopy, some great beer busts for sure. But, there's something really fishy about this guy. It just doesn't smell right. He makes me nervous. He asks too many questions about us, all of us, and what we do here. What our jobs are. And where does he get all those Deutsche Marks he spreads around, as if money was growing on trees?"

"What kind of questions, Mark?"

"Why do I speak Russian? Why did I learn that language? Why are Air Force personnel stationed on a US Army Post in the British sector of West Germany? What is the explanation for our rotating work schedule; what do we do from midnight until eight AM? Why is the antenna field at the Staging Area so large? How many people are stationed here in Bremerhaven? And like that, those kinds of questions, Snoopy."

"Hey, that's some bad news. You didn't tell him anything, did you?"

"No, I didn't. When he asks what my job is, I tell him that I am a pastry chef in the bakery and my recipes are strictly on a 'knead-to-know' basis. But he is asking the same questions of everybody and you know they get pretty bombed at those beer busts of Willie's. Loose lips sink ships, and all that. No telling what they may be blabbing to Willie. These are swell guys but they seem to be a little naive and far too trusting. What do you think we should do?"
"Look Mark, this is out of our league, man. Let's take it to the Captain of the Air Police, or better still, the head of security at that Army Counter-intelligence unit in the Admin building. The 513th Military Intelligence Group, I believe. They handle this kind of shit. Let them look into Uncle Willie. But, be careful Mark, don't tell them about your girlfriend Gabbi, or you'll be in a world of hurt. You could end up sorting mail somewhere in Alaska."

Snoopy and I dropped in to talk to the counter-intelligence group the very next day. We were careful with what we did and didn't say, but described our serious concerns about Herr Wilhelm Rickmer. We described the unusual interest Willie had in our unit. The beer parties, the prostitutes, his unending questions and that never-ending supply of money he seemed to have. The Army Staff Sergeant in civilian clothes listened to us, asked a few questions and then got on the secure scrambler phone to his headquarters in Stuttgart. After identifying himself as S/Sgt Boyd Carnahan of the 513th MIG, he talked quietly with somebody there for several minutes. While still on the scrambler, Sergeant Carnahan asked us to leave and come back tomorrow morning at 10:00 AM. He looked serious, so we made sure to be there on time.

The following morning, Sergeant Carnahan's baggy eyes showing the effects of a night without sleep, quietly said, "I'm sure you two know Colonel Glen Berry, your unit's Commanding Officer, and this other gentleman is Army Specialist Larry Farr. We have spent the night in ongoing discussions. First with our counter-intel people in Stuttgart, NSA analysts at Fort Meade and then the operations people at CIA Langley, who …"

"Hold it Sergeant!" Colonel Berry interrupted, "What we are about to tell you cannot leave this room. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir, we understand," I replied for both of us without hesitation.
Carnahan continued, "Our Army counter-intel unit working with NSA and CIA, has evidence that Wilhelm Rickmer works for the East German secret police, the Stasi. He has a small ring of intelligence operatives here in town, most of them women, for fairly obvious reasons. His primary mission is to collect performance information about our European intercept stations. Who, and what are we copying and how well we are doing. Passing along what he learns to the Russian KGB. His mistake is using radio to report to Moscow."

The infamous Stasi was established in 1950, modeled on the then-operating Russian NKVD, predecessor of the KGB. Stasi was the secret police force for the communist-controlled GDR, German Democratic Republic. East Germany used Stasi to repress its citizens through a network of informants and spies. Working with the KGB, Stasi also collected external intelligence to share with the Soviet Union. At its zenith, Stasi had 85,000 full-time officers and several hundred thousand informers. Uncle Willie was believed to be a high-ranking officer in Stasi.

Colonel Berry instructed us, "We're guests here in West Germany and have no jurisdiction to deal with nationals such as Rickmer. Unfortunately, we cannot involve the local authorities at this time for political reasons. President Eisenhower is very worried about his upcoming meeting with Khrushchev in Paris next May. However, Rickmer's operation cannot be allowed to continue unimpeded. US Army Europe, Air Force Security Service, NSA and CIA have all kicked this situation back into our hands. They have asked us to handle this matter personally, and covertly, so as of now it's our problem. We must be absolutely sure that this man is Wilhelm Rickmer, and that he is working for Stasi. If so, the three of you working with this Army detachment must end his operation with certainty. This is to be accomplished with great haste. I say again, this matter cannot leave this room. Do you have any questions?"

My jaw dropped open.
Later that same afternoon, Snoopy and I met with Specialist Larry Farr who was an expert on covert mission activity. After he described several alternatives, none of which seemed appropriate or at all attractive, we came up with our final plan of operation. Putting a bomb under somebody's car was beyond anything we had learned in language school. It sounded more like assassination than intelligence gathering.

Snoopy and I were linguists, not special agents and we had little stomach for this assignment. This became especially apparent as Specialist Farr issued Luger 9mm parabellum automatic pistols to each of us. The old Roman proverb "Si vis pacem, para bellum" translates to "For peace, prepare for war." You could tell by its looks that the German Luger took its name seriously. That thing was definitely prepared for war. As I tucked the pistol under my belt, my thoughts turned to Gabbi and what she would think if she could see or hear any of this conversation. Willie was, after all, her uncle.

Our plan evolved quickly. Larry, Snoopy and I decided to set a trap for Willie to prove whether or not he was a spy. First, we created a portfolio of some real but mostly false, believable information about the intercept station in the Staging Area. We included under-stated staffing requirements, skill levels, work schedules, target sites and other information that might be of interest to Stasi. Completing that, I introduced Larry to Uncle Willie as my Army buddy and lead him to believe that Larry was a trainee alcoholic looking for female companionship who just happened to work in military intelligence. In other words, I refused to lie to Willie.

Larry was the inside man. Snoopy, proficient in both voice and Morse code, was to scan the radio frequencies that NSA provided which they claimed were preferred by Stasi field agents. My job was to monitor Willie's telephone for any communication to Moscow or Stasi headquarters in Berlin. I opened the small satchel case that Larry gave me and looked at the device within. It was a unit that projected a light beam onto a windowpane. The beam picked up speech vibrations and bounced those vibrations back to the listening earphones. There it was...
converted back into speech and recorded on a tape recorder. It was called an L-402 Remote Microphone. I'd never seen anything like it. It worked much like radar and sonar, but with light, and I was eager to put it into action.

To us, our plan seemed to offer powerful bait. It must have been powerful as Uncle Willie took it hook, line and sinker. Over the next several days, Larry was treated to unlimited booze and female companionship courtesy of Herr Rickmer. It was a dirty, rotten job but Larry was up to it. In my opinion, he seemed to be enjoying himself a little too much. Especially enjoying himself as he danced the evening away with numerous female agents to such rousing tunes as "Do You Wanna Dance" by Bobby Freeman.

The Army Specialist made sure that he carried his brown, leather brief case with him at all times. Slowly at first, Larry fed disinformation to Willie through his whores. This went on for well over a week. When Larry felt that Willie was primed, he left the brief case with the entire bogus portfolio half under the davenport sofa in Willie's apartment where he knew Willie would find it.

Within a matter of hours from the time Larry left the portfolio, Snoopy intercepted a radio transmission from Willie to a handler in Moscow. The message was encrypted so until it could be deciphered, it did not offer conclusive proof of Willie's intentions. Shortly after the radio transmission however, I intercepted and recorded a conversation between Willie and Stasi headquarters in Berlin using the windowpane microphone. Feeling safe, this conversation was in clear German because they knew that the telephone had not been tapped. They used the latest electronic bug detectors to clear the phone and insure that it had not been tapped. They did not consider or did not have knowledge of the remote light beam mike that I used. On the telephone, Willie described what he had found in the portfolio to his superior and the two agreed to transfer the contents to Stasi headquarters that night at ten o'clock. A local Stasi courier would pick it up and transport it to East Berlin.
We now knew that Willie was an East German spy.

Larry, Snoopy and I met him at the pre-determined exchange point just before ten o'clock while he still had the portfolio in his possession. The Stasi courier had not yet arrived on the scene. Our intention was to apprehend Willie and take him to the counter intelligence detachment for debriefing by specialists. Our hope was to try and turn Willie around and create an asset for our side deep inside Stasi.

"Hello Willie," I quietly addressed him, allowing him to see the German Luger in my hand, "The jig is up, my friend."

Willie appeared rattled by our appearance. "What, what do you mean?" he asked. "Are you out for some cold, fresh air?"

Snoopy answered, "We planted the portfolio, Willie. No use trying to hide it. Besides, it doesn't contain anything of any real value, just stuff we made up. We planted it on the merry-go-round to catch a spy, and it looks like you caught the brass ring. You're it!"

We moved closer to arrest Willie. Still showing the Luger, I said, "Don't move, Willie. Stay where you are and don't try anything foolish. Your undercover days are over. We're going to take you to our headquarters where our people will ask you a few questions."

Willie quickly recognized what had happened and how he had been set-up. A strange look of panic briefly crossed his chalky face. He caught us by surprise and before we could stop him, Willie removed a cyanide capsule from his coat pocket and bit down on it. He swallowed hard. Then he doubled over in pain and dropped to the ground. Willie stiffened and his legs shook violently as the cyanide took affect. His hands clutched at his throat as if he had changed his mind. A white frothy foam formed around his mouth and he gagged as he choked spitting up a thick milky mucus and then was stone dead all within two minutes. We were helpless to stop him.
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Our mission was successful in that Willie’s operation was exposed and for all intents and purposes, terminated. The courier was arrested, the ring of whores broken-up, but we were disappointed about the way it ended. Especially Col. Berry. Had Willie lived, he could have been turned around, perhaps even turned into a double agent. We certainly did not intend for him to end up dead. But, Willie was obviously a hard-core Communist being a member of Stasi. I was especially upset because I didn't know how Gabbi would react if she ever discovered why her uncle was missing, or that I played a part in his disappearance. Certainly, she would never know about her uncle's clandestine life as a spy, at least not from me.

An unmarked van from the counter-intelligence unit picked up Willie's body and both the van and Uncle Willie disappeared into the night. He didn’t even say good-bye.
9. F.G. Powers

Our world was looking much brighter now that April's showers had finally given way and May's flowers were promised, though not yet delivered. Spring was in the air, the snow melted and days were growing longer as the shadows of winter slowly receded. Snoopy and I were glad to be back in our familiar but noisy din amid the never-ending clatter of pounding typewriters, teletype machines, the tapping of Morse code and sounds of Russian, German and a variety of other languages. We were extremely happy to be out of the spy business. We weren't very good at it and it wasn't much fun.

Glenn Miller's 1940 recording of "In the Mood" was playing on Radio Luxemburg as I looked forward to midnight chow at the Mess Hall and then the short journey to my apartment. I looked forward to spending another day with the love of my life, Gabbi. She worked evenings at the restaurant so would be home shortly before me. I thought about her touch, her supple body and sweet aroma. This was on my mind even as I went about my job with an uneasy feeling that something big was in the offing.

Yesterday, on 30 April 1960, 1st Lieutenant Bert “Frenchie” Fortier had alerted us to the fact that a U-2 high altitude reconnaissance aircraft was scheduled to over-fly the Soviet Union on a highly classified photographic mission. In addition to photo recon, U-2 also carried out an eavesdropping program, code-named "Green Hornet." Not even Kato, Green Hornet's sidekick, was aware of this program because it was so well guarded. Green Hornet recorded data on large reels of Mylar tape from scores of small antennas on the fuselage tuned to particular frequencies. The primary target was to be the Tyuratam Missile Test Range in Kazakhstan where it was believed that the USSR had built a second space launching pad under extreme secrecy.

USAF Security Service was to monitor this May Day exercise, just as it had the previous 23 over-flights. The U-2, we called the Black Lady,
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was to take-off from its base in Adana, Turkey, continue over Pakistan and enter USSR territory near the soviet nation of Kazakhstan where the missile test range was located. Black Lady was to take miles of film and gather electro-optic, infrared, radar imagery and other valuable SIGINT. This surveillance aircraft flew at well over 70,000 feet, normally out of range of Soviet intercept aircraft and anti-aircraft missiles. Produced by the "Skunk Works" of Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank, California, the U-2 became operational five years ago, in August of 1955. Few outside of the Air Force, NSA, or CIA knew about the Top Secret aircraft. President Eisenhower was not a huge fan of the U-2 program feeling that it was too provocative and especially so on the eve of the Paris peace conference scheduled for mid May of that year.

Lt. Fortier ordered Snoopy and me to act as lead language specialists to coordinate the project. We would intercept voice communications between Soviet radar stations as they tracked the U-2's flight path across the USSR. We needed to monitor the Russians as they performed their radar tracking to document their capabilities and look for gaps in their coverage so that in the event of a "Hot War" with the Soviet Union, we could be damn sure of their strengths and weaknesses. We recorded the exact date and Zulu, or Greenwich Mean Time as each radar station reacted to the U-2 and scrambled fighter aircraft from near-by airfields. Non-voice positions were also assigned to the project as we covered the entire spectrum of electronic communications. We also used direction finding through triangulation to pinpoint locations of each intercepted site. Morse radio operators copied Soviet PVO (Air Defense Forces) as they tracked the U-2.

1,300 miles away, in Adana, Turkey, Captain Francis Gary Powers was preparing for his May Day flight. The son of a Virginia coal miner, Capt. Powers was the most experienced U-2 pilot in the USAF. Even though a Captain in the Air Force, he was sub-contracted to the CIA for this highly classified mission.

In addition to being a U-2 pilot, Powers also flew Republic F-86 Thunderjets, excelled at aerial gunnery and combat flying, was trained in
aerial photography and had the necessary Top Secret security clearance. This was to be his fourth flight across Russia for the CIA, but he had also been very active in "Ferret" flights along the border in F-86 fighters. Ferret flights darted into Soviet airspace to stir up PVO radar sites, light them up so that we could intercept communications between them, air bases and their command and control centers. He would zig-zag along the border to get their attention and after getting their attention, would dash back into NATO airspace for safety. Powers had flown two such flights in 1956, six in 1957, and fifteen in both 1958 and 1959. The captain had been a very busy little ferret.

On 1 May 1960, huge crowds were assembled on Red Square in central Moscow for a typical May Day demonstration at the Kremlin. Suddenly, Premier Nikita Khrushchev's holiday mood was spoiled by a message from a KGB Colonel, a member of his military guard. The Colonel reported that their anti-aircraft defense ministry was tracking an unidentified airplane that had penetrated the border of Kazakhstan. Unfortunately, the altitude of the plane was too high, well beyond the ability of Russian fighters to reach, which was cause for anxiety.

Premier Khrushchev was visibly upset. He was well aware of the history of the U-2 and suspected that this was one more insult. Starting on 4 July 1956, a U-2 stationed at Wiesbaden, West Germany, over-flew both Moscow and Leningrad with total immunity. Over 20 other flights had occurred, and with each such flight, an anger born of frustration grew more intense. Khrushchev could not admit the existence of U-2s any more than Eisenhower, because of the embarrassment over Russia's inability to shoot them down and the U-2 could after all, be carrying a nuclear bomb. Unlikely, but possible.

Lt. Fortier was delighted with this new opportunity to jab at his Russian adversaries. For the Russians, the U-2 spy plane would only be a white-hot dot on the radar screen. It would be indiscernible to the naked eye of ground observers. U-2 was able to take photographs of hidden factories and secret military installations without interference and return to base untouched. From these photographs, the Strategic Air Command would
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be able to develop precise target information for SAC's B-52 Bombers. Plus, our NSA monitoring stations would have a field day with Russian communications and there wasn't a thing the "rooskies" could do about it. For several hours, the men of the 6913th performed their duties in a routine and professional manner. Non-Morse equipment operators, ditty boppers, language specialists and analysts went about collecting data as the U-2 made its way across the Soviet Union. And then… "Lieutenant, there are four MiG-19s following Black Lady right now," Snoopy reported. "Looks like they are trying zoom-climb intercepts, but can't get high enough to get off a good shot. There's a lot of chatter going on and they seem agitated."

"Good job! Stay on them Snoopy, boy. What are you hearing Mark, anything from their surface-to-air missile sites? What are they chattering about?" the Lieutenant asked.

Talking loud and fast I said, "Sir, SAM-2 sites are tracking Black Lady. They have asked the Air Defense Ministry several times for permission to fire on her, but have been denied so far. They are excited."

Frenchie barked, "No sweat, Mark. Those SAM's burn out at about fifty thousand feet, so our Lady is in no immediate danger. Stay loose people. Let's get it done."

Peering in his small rear view mirror, Captain Powers kept track of Mig-19 fighters behind and below his aircraft. They had been following him for just over an hour. At 75,000 feet the pilot could see for more than 300 miles in all directions, beyond the curvature of the Earth. The view was breathtakingly beautiful, but the presence of the MiGs was nerve wracking, and Powers paid close attention to their maneuverings. Especially when they fired their afterburners in an attempt to gain altitude in what was known as "zoom climb intercept." As they reached the apex of their climb in the rarified atmosphere of their maximum altitude, they fired air-to-air missiles in his direction without success. Air-to-air missiles would lock onto the U-2 briefly, but were unable to
Ralph McDonald

maintain a lock as they quickly began to lose altitude. This cat and mouse game was very dangerous.

Slowly working with the tuning dial on my radio while trying to improve the reception, I yelled to get the Lieutenant's attention, "Frenchie, the Sverdlovsk SAM site is again requesting clearance to take a shot at Black Lady!"

Seemingly unconcerned, Lt. Fortier quietly replied, "OK Mark, no sweat. Remember, nothing to worry about at his altitude, so keep your skivvies dry. Black Lady is doing her job, so you do yours. Keep your ears open and let me know if anything changes."

Still standing on the reviewing balcony overlooking the square, Premier Khrushchev motioned for the KGB Colonel to come closer. He whispered into the Colonel's ear. Immediately Colonel Vladimir Zutin raced from the balcony, and into the adjoining room. The Premier could never be far from a command and control center where high-powered communications equipment connected the various military and political units of the Soviet regime. Colonel Zutin pushed aside the radio operator, who was in contact with the PVO Air Defense site at Sverdlovsk, and grabbed the microphone from his trembling hand. In a stern, command voice the Colonel said, "Under the authority of comrade Premier Khrushchev, you are authorized to fire missiles at the unidentified aircraft. This is Colonel Zutin and the authorization code word is 'Inert Stallion.' Proceed now, I repeat, proceed now!"

The Sverdlovsk anti-aircraft battery rushed into action. The first SAM missile prematurely exploded far from Capt. Powers and his U-2. A second missile homed in on the lead MiG-19, tracked it as it banked to the right, closed to kill distance, exploded in a gigantic white flash and destroyed the Soviet craft. Gary Powers watched in amazement as the remaining fighters quickly disengaged and turned for their home base, to avoid what seemed to be new, untested SAM-2 missiles. As two more missiles were launched from the anti-aircraft battery, Powers watched contrails appear as the missiles burned their way into the rarified air of
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this altitude. One of them had obviously locked onto the U-2 and was headed straight for him and closing rapidly.

I stuttered, "You're not going to believe this Frenchie, but Moscow authorized Sverdlovsk to shoot and they downed one of their own fighters. They are really pissed now. But, it's worse than that. They exploded a SAM right behind the Black Lady and they claim she is losing altitude like a rock."

The explosion caused the U-2 engine to flameout and the spy plane was going down, fast. Also, the tail and wings were damaged by the blast, making control of the plane just about impossible. A checklist of a dozen items ran through Powers' mind as the plane plummeted out of control.

Foremost, the aircraft and all of its sophisticated hardware had to be destroyed to keep it out of Soviet hands. The self-destruct timer must be activated just before bailing out. He should also check the contents of the survival bag; maps, five 100 Rubles bills, five twenty dollar gold coins, silk stockings, a condom and a U.S. silver dollar with poison pin hidden within…

But first, Powers had to open the canopy so that he could exit the aircraft. Problem: the canopy wouldn't open. It was iced shut. The checklist of a dozen items was immediately forgotten as Gary Powers used his feet to kick the canopy open and pull himself from the falling plane. He was about to jump when he realized that he was tethered to the cockpit by his oxygen mask. With Powers half in and half out of the stricken craft, the oxygen mask finally broke and he was free of his aircraft.

One of the Morse positions tasked to pick-up traffic from Soviet radar stations was copying plain text from the primary station following Black Lady. Intercept Operator A/2C Jim Odom raised his voice over the background din, "Black Lady is definitely down, gentlemen. PVO is reporting that she just disappeared from their radar screens."

"Tell me what's happening, Mark?" Lt. Fortier demanded.
"Oh my God, Frenchie. The Black Lady IS down! I don't know if the pilot got out or not. Leave me alone for a minute while I listen to the SAM site," I tried to respond to the Lieutenant's question. The SAM site didn't know any more than we did. They confirmed the U-2 was hit and disappeared from their screens, but didn't know more than that. Jim Odom stared at his now silent radio in stunned silence.

We spent the remainder of our shift trying to sort out what had happened, and prepare written operations Flash Reports for delivery up the chain of command. From Russian police reports, we learned that Capt. Powers had survived the crash and had been captured by local farmers. They reported also, that the pilot was to be handed over to the Army or KGB, but was safe for the moment in the hands of local police.
10. Gabbi

Our little three-room apartment in downtown Bremerhaven was simple, but a very special place. On the third floor, it was a safe harbor; my retreat where I recharged my batteries, regained my equilibrium and let the great issues of the day slip beyond my conscious thought.

Gabbi was not yet home from her job at the restaurant, which always made the space seem so much smaller as her presence made the ramparts fall away and the world would be ours for the hours we could spend together. But while I waited for Gabbi to return home, I had time to reflect on the events surrounding the loss of the U-2 spy plane earlier that day. I switched on the radio, tuned it to AFN and settled into a chair at the kitchen table to wait for Gabbi to arrive.

A nagging feeling of hunger made me aware of the fact that I hadn't eaten anything for over twelve hours. I opened the refrigerator hoping to find a snack, a piece of cake or leftover sandwich, but settled for a bottle of Beck's Beer instead. The beer seemed to satisfy my hunger as I settled down at the small kitchen table and sipped from the dark green bottle. I couldn't get my mind off the U-2 as I waited for Gabbi. Other than within the Ops Building, there was nobody I could talk to about the day's events. It was all highly classified. Was Captain Gary Powers still alive? At last report, he was in the hands of the KGB, which was bad enough, but what happened to his plane? Did he succeed in destroying it? How did the Russians manage to bring down the plane at that altitude? So many questions with no easy answers.

I was on my second bottle of beer when Gabbi finally arrived. Bobby Darin was singing "Dream Lover" on AFN as I jumped to my feet and rushed to greet her. We kissed. My God, she lit up the night. Gabriele had a beauty about her that, though muted, made people gravitate toward her and gave her an air of maturity beyond her years. Quite simply, she was beautiful and I was in love. She was my dream lover, regardless of
what Bobby Darin might say about it. Gary Powers and the spy plane flew from my mind.

Gabbi had a paper sack that contained two meals from the Marine House Restaurant, kept fresh by a wrapping of aluminum foil. We interrupted our kiss long enough to place the sack on the table and then resumed where we had left off. However, after a few minutes, Gabbi pulled away from me and moved to the kitchen cabinet where she pulled plates and silverware for the two of us. As she prepared the food, Gabbi became unusually quiet.

Sometimes life doesn't seem fair. Just when we think we have our direction, something rises up and slaps us in the face. Each and every day spent with Gabbi, I was more and more sure that there was just no way I would be able to let her drift from my life. The flip side of that, of course, was my obligation to the Air Force, my job and my country. How does one tell the heart that it doesn't have the right to be the first priority?

Gabbi and I settled into our quiet and secluded life, me working shift work and Gabbi at her job. She seemed less curious about my work and we concentrated on the joy of the time we had together. Even so, there was an undercurrent of discontent that I just couldn't put my finger on and Gabbi wasn't willing to discuss. It was palatable, a blip in the electrical connection between us. Still, we carried on, our overwhelming bond building layer upon layer. Yet, it was time to put it all on the table and so Gabbi turned to me and searching for just the right words, began to share what had been such a burden on her heart.

"Darling, what are we to do?" Gabbi solemnly asked.

"What cha talking about, sweetheart?" I asked in return.

"I love you Mark. I want us to spend the rest of our lives together." There was a sense of desperation in her tone, something I'd never heard before and believe me, I was now listening very closely.
"I love you too, Gabbi. You know how much I love you, don't you?" My heart took on an erratic pounding as I wasn't sure where this conversation was going and it just couldn't mean what I feared it might.

"Darling, I don't think we can go on like this."

"Like what?" The anxiety was building as I imagined the worst.

Gabbi's voice faltered as she went on, "My family is very upset about us living together. My father fears you will return to America when your duty is finished here and forget all about me. He worries that you are not serious with me."

I couldn't believe this was happening. "That's not true, Gabbi." Words always seem so small when the heart is involved, the future would be a black hole without her, a void so empty that I'd be lost for all time.

"Mother believes that we are living in sin. What am I to do, Mark?" There was a pleading appeal in her eyes, looking to me for answers. She was torn by the need to appease her family and the need to love me and make a life of her own.

Trying my best to reassure her, I poured out my heart and pleaded for her to believe, "Sweetheart, you know that I love you. You know that I'm serious about you. I want very much to be with you forever, I don't want to live without you. Please don't pay attention to what your father is saying. He loves you very much and wants to protect you, but he's wrong about me."

Gabbi turned away and wiped her eyes, "Yes, I know Mark. Father worries too much for me. I know that. He has always been that way." She smiled a sad little smile as she thought of her father. "But, it's not just him. Mother is also concerned about us, both of us. She is in fear for our very souls."
Of course I understood her mother's fears. My folks would feel exactly the same, but God knew my intentions even if nobody else did. A flash of anger arose, unreasonable as it was, "Your mother spends too much time in church. Damn it, she worries too much about you. About us. This is our life and we have to live for ourselves, with or without her."

"Mark, I love my family dearly. I can't ignore how they feel." She was asking that I understand that she was caught in the middle and torn in opposite directions.

My brain was in overdrive and I was trying to put the pieces of this scattered puzzle back together, "Gabrielle, are you trying to tell me that you want to break-up? Do you want to leave and move back in with your parents?" The question had to be asked, even if I feared the answer.

"Oh no, my darling," Gabbi cried softly, as she saw that I didn't completely understand her position. "I love you and want to be with you always. I don't want to leave. I don't want you to leave me. How can we keep each other together? I do love you so."

A flood of relief poured over me, and at that moment a feeling of coherence cleared my mind, as I finally understood what I must do. It hadn't been the first time I'd thought of the possibility, but the time was now and I asked, "Fraulein Rickmer, Gabrielle, will you be my bride; please, will you marry me?"

The realization that I meant all I'd been telling her rolled the shadow of doubt from her eyes. Gabbi was overcome with happiness. She sobbed, "Oh yes, do you mean it, darling? Oh, I love you so much my darling, Mark. I will, I'll marry you. You make me so very happy. I love you so much. Tell me you mean it."

It surprised me that she even had to ask, "Yes, I mean it. I've always meant it, sweetheart. Tomorrow, you tell your parents. I'll have to inform the Air Force." Now that a decision was made, there was so much to do, so in a verbal tickler, I recounted all that had to be done.
"I'll write to my folks and let them know what we are doing. Maybe we can use the chapel on the base, if that's all right with you? Or maybe your mother and father can help us decide when and where we'll have the ceremony?"

Passion that had always been between us took on a much less desperate sense now we knew we belonged to one another and Gabbi and I spent the rest of the night making love and planning for our upcoming wedding. We were very excited and the remainder of the night passed much too quickly.

Back at work in the Ops building the following evening, I told Snoopy about my decision to marry Gabrielle. He was surprised, not by my announcement but the timing of it, "Mark, you just don't get it, do you? Wait until your tour of duty is over, then take Gabbi home and marry her. You know the Air Force will take away your clearance without a second thought. You'll be transferred for sure."

Snoopy seemed a little upset, so I calmly replied, "Yeah, I know. But, we've spent a lot of time thinking and talking about our future and we both want to spend that time together. And we want to begin our lives together right away."

Now Snoopy let some of his anger show, "You'll live to regret this decision. You're bound and determined to break-up a winning team, aren't you?"

"Now I get it, Snoopy. You're just upset because we won't be working together any more. Crap man, I feel the same way. We've been together since Monterey Bay and you are my best friend. Whether or not I get married, that's not going to change."

Snoopy let a big breath of air escape with a whooshing sound, "You're right, I hate the thought of not working with you any more. But, there's more to it than that. I cannot understand why they automatically take away your clearance just because you want to marry a German girl."
From early on, starting with Basic Military Training, the Air Force had programmed us to a particular way of understanding the world. It was naturally a patriotic, my country right or wrong program with a heavy emphasis on following orders without questioning them. They did a damned fine job of it, too. We were trained that the Russians were a wicked bunch and we were the good guys. They were the evil empire out to take over and rule the world and therefore God was on our side.

It was of course, as in all such matters, a mixture of truth, propaganda and pep talk designed to raise our morale and cause us to accept certain rationalizations. One such rationalization being that if we married a German national, we automatically became a security risk and lost our top secret clearance. It certainly seemed to be an oxymoron, a case of military intelligence.

Snoopy, always the pragmatist insisted that much of what the military told us was to be taken with a grain of salt. He argued, and insisted that a reading of history would change some of our preconceived notions.

It was certainly true that Russia was one of our allies during World War II. They entered that war much earlier than we did, and sustained millions of casualties during the German invasion and subsequent drive into the heartland of Germany. Snoopy predicted that eventually, the Soviet Union would disintegrate because their form of government simply could not be sustained indefinitely.

Snoopy also argued that we may not be as pure as we would like to believe. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the United States transformed itself from thirteen states nestled along the eastern seaboard into a mighty nation stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. This was at least partially due to our national policy of ethnic cleansing. Not often discussed, but "uncivilized" Native Americans were routinely massacred to the point of near extinction.
He offered a gruesome example in the 1864 U.S. Calvary raid on a camp of Indians at Sand Creek, Colorado. The Sand Creek braves were away hunting when the Calvary attacked the village and killed over 150 Indian women, children and old men who were basically defenseless. President Teddy Roosevelt not only approved of this atrocity, he believed it to be one of America's shining moments. About the Sand Creek massacre Teddy said, "In spite of certain most objectionable details, it was on the whole as righteous and beneficial a deed as ever took place on the frontier."

Teddy went on to say, "I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth."

Our actions were not limited to the American Indians. The western United States became part of the U.S.A. as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico's territories of California, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming and parts of Arizona were ceded on 2 February 1848. Why did Mexico concede these territories? Our simple answer was "Manifest Destiny."

History according to Snoopy, shows that President James Polk started a conflict known as the "Mexican-American War," but referred to in Mexico as the "U.S. Invasion." Ulysses S. Grant (later a general in the Civil War and U.S. President) fought in the war as a young man and wrote in his memoirs that "we were sent to provoke a fight" and that the war was "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." Mexico was unprepared for such a war and sued for peace within two years with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

I was in no mood to argue philosophy or politics with Snoopy. I knew that I couldn't win and besides, I had bigger fish to fry. I called First Sergeant Thomas Pfaffman and set-up an appointment to see my Commanding Officer the following day.
It was as if a twenty-ton weight had been lifted from my shoulders. What a wonderful feeling now that Gabbi and I had finally made the decision to get married. No more indecision, no more sneaking around and most importantly, no more worrying about what the USAF Security Service might or might not do. I knew that I would be reassigned to new duties, and I was prepared for that event. As much as I loved my job, as much satisfaction as it gave me, I knew my life would be meaningless without Gabbi. Now, there was the paperwork.

Shortly after filing the necessary papers informing the Air Force of my intention to marry, First Sergeant Pfaffman advised me that I would have to meet with our commanding officer, Colonel Glen Berry. I had not talked to or seen the Colonel since our little spy caper had ended with the unfortunate death of Willie Rickmer. Full Bird-Colonel Berry was extremely unhappy with the way that incident had been handled, or mishandled as he believed. I did not look forward to being interviewed by a commanding officer, whose main purpose would be to try and talk me out of marrying Gabriele. This was the Air Force's way of calling in the big guns to blow me out of the sky. The appointment was set for the following day, which came all too quickly.

Col. Berry was a slight man, standing just over five and a half feet tall. He was a special individual, a man of quiet dignity who was highly respected throughout our unit and the entire command. He was very thin, almost gaunt, and ramrod straight. He had extremely good reason to be thin. Col. Berry was a survivor of the Bataan Death March. War correspondent Frank Hewlett penned a poem in 1942 that was mounted in a simple wood frame and hung in Berry's office behind his desk:

The Battling Bastards of Bataan

We are the Battling Bastards of Bataan,
No Mama, no Papa, no Uncle Sam!
A native of Drinkman, Oklahoma, Berry was just twenty-six years old when we were drawn into war by the Japanese with their sneak attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941. After months of rumor and inference, the inconceivable had happened. The Japanese Navy attacked the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet and other military installations at Pearl Harbor without warning at dawn and destroyed most of our Battleships anchored there. The aircraft carriers were spared only because they were at sea that fateful Sunday morning.

In the Philippines, Lieutenant Glen Berry was acting Intelligence Officer stationed at Nichols Air Field on the outskirts of Manila. Lt. Berry followed the news of the Japanese attack with alarm, as he was mindful that their next move would probably be in the Philippines. He also recognized that the U.S. Army and Naval forces in the islands were undermanned and ill equipped to handle a full-scale war. If the Japanese did attack, there would be hell to pay throughout the islands.

They didn't have long to wait for the Japanese to make their move. At 8:15 A.M. Monday, 8 December, a scant 30 hours after Pearl Harbor, Japanese carrier based planes began the invasion of the Philippine Islands. Simultaneously, they bombed military targets at Corregidor, Manila and as far as 200 miles north of the capital, Camp John Hay in Baguio. Nichols Field was bombed and strafed before noon that first day, as was Clark Air Field. Almost all of the operational aircraft stationed at both fields were destroyed on the ground within the first few hours, leaving ground forces without effective air cover.

Along with other soldiers from Nichols Field, Lieutenant Berry was ordered to military headquarters in Manila, and three days later moved by ferry to the Bataan Peninsula as a part of their effort to consolidate defensive positions. Facing impossible odds, approximately 15,000 U.S. and Filipino troops held out for four grueling months in the jungles of
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Bataan with little food, ammunition, medical or other supplies. The situation was desperate. Men were starving. They ceased to be an effective fighting force and on 8 April 1942, the inevitable came to pass as U.S. forces surrendered to the Commanding General of the Imperial Japanese Army.

The name "Bataan Death March" was well deserved. A few days following the surrender, groups of prisoners were assembled at Mariveles and started on a forced march to San Fernando, approximately 90 miles away. Lt. Berry's group began their journey on 12 April 1942. It took six days to complete the journey, but much happened in those six days. Berry watched helplessly as soldiers were denied food and water, bayoneted, shot, and bludgeoned with rifle butts. He watched as a Japanese officer forced a fallen soldier to kneel at the side of the road. The officer ritualistically poured water over his samurai sword and then in a single stroke, beheaded the poor devil. A majority of murdered soldiers were those who were too weak from hunger, wounds or sickness at the beginning of the march to maintain the pace required by brutal, sadistic guards.

Lt. Berry spent the next three years in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, first in the Philippines and then later in Japan. He survived two Hell ships on his way to Japan. First was the Noto Maru that had been an inter-island freighter prior to the war. He was taken by ferry to the middle of Manila harbor where over 1,100 men were loaded into the 1,000 square foot cargo hold. There wasn't enough room between the men to sit down. They had to stand or squat, but could not stretch out. The temperature in that hold would rise above 130 degrees and drinking water would be confined to one cup each per day. The latrine was a big tub about six feet long and three feet wide and to get there required crawling over the other prisoners. The hold reeked and was unbearably hot as there was little ventilation. Noto Maru carried Berry from Manila to Takao, Formosa. From Formosa, the Iwo Maru continued on to the Japanese mainland. The Iwo Maru was smaller than Noto Maru, but there were now fewer prisoners because the death rate was high on these Hell ships.
Effects of the Magnetic North Pole

Berry also witnessed medical experiments performed on prisoners by Japanese doctors. When the Japanese finally surrendered at the end of World War II, Berry did not stand up and cheer. He simply sat down and wept. Yes, Glen Berry was a very special human being.

"At ease Airman Noble," Col. Berry said, as I stood braced at attention in front of his desk. "What's this I hear about you wanting to marry a German National? A Gabriele Rickmer?"

"Yes sir, it's true," I answered as I tried to hide my nervousness.

The Colonel was now pacing back and forth behind his desk. "Gabriele Rickmer. Isn't she the daughter of Manfred Rickmer and niece of Wilhelm Rickmer? The name is very familiar to me and I must say, leaves a bad taste in my mouth."

I could see that this wasn't going to be easy, "Yes sir, I understand."

"My young friend, you run with a pretty dangerous crowd. You do understand the consequences of your request, do you not? Just how much your request will affect your career?"

"Sir, I've met and fallen in love with a wonderful girl with whom I wish to spend the rest of my life. I certainly do understand that I may lose my clearance and be reassigned to a different job. I've thought this over in great detail and my decision is final, sir. I love her."

Col. Berry turned his back to me and paced back and forth for a few minutes, trying to collect his thoughts before continuing. "Look Mark, the work we do here is vitally important to our national security. It is more important than either one of us individually or what happens in our personal lives. I made a vow to myself about fifteen years ago that what happened to our country at Pearl Harbor will never happen again. Not on my watch. We simply cannot afford to be caught unprepared for war,
especially in this nuclear age. We may not survive the next sneak attack. We are on the front lines of preventing that from happening."

I began my rehearsed counter argument, "I understand, sir. But, there are a lot of …,"

The Colonel interrupted, "Lots of other Airmen who can take your place? Is that your point? Well, of course that may be true. These other Airmen are in school now, studying radio, Morse-code, the Russian, Chinese or Arabic language, or some such thing. They have no experience, they're neophytes. Experience takes time to develop. Are you telling me that you're willing to put your country at risk to get married to a girl you just met and know very little about?"

"No sir, I will not put my country at risk …"

The Colonel interrupted again, "Good. I have an assignment for you. We'll continue our discussion of love and marriage when you get back. If you still feel the same, I'll not only sign your request, I'll act as Best Man at your wedding."

"Because of your experience with the Stasi agent, I am going to give you a chance to redeem yourself. I want you, and one of your buddies, Snoopy Richards, to volunteer for temporary duty that requires you to travel south to Frankfurt, to Rhine Main airfield in Frankfurt, to be exact. There is a new unit being created that will take part of our mission airborne, with some newly developed hardware. A prototype of that unit is being assembled now and I want you to be a part of that prototype."

"Normally, you would be required to attend air crew survival school and endure the altitude chamber, but because of the urgency of this mission, I am authorizing a provisional waiver."

"Get back to your barracks, inform Airman Richards of the assignment, he's going with you, then pack your bags, and report to the Hauptbahnhof
train station at 6:00 AM tomorrow. Don't speak to anybody about this assignment, is that understood? Especially not your girlfriend."

"On your way out, tell the First Sergeant to come here. He will have your orders cut in an hour."

"Yes sir!" I responded to my commander as I saluted and executed an about face to leave the office. This is terrific, now I have another secret to keep from Gabbi. My life seemed to be way too complicated.

I made my way back to the quadrangle and the barracks to tell Snoopy about our new assignment. "Snoopy, my man, we have been volunteered to some temporary duty down south. Col. Berry is cutting orders as we speak."

Snoopy appeared to be agitated by my announcement. "Damn it, Mark, why do you keep dragging me into your adventures?"

I looked him straight in the eye and answered, "This isn't going to be so bad, Snoopy. You're going to be part of a prototype mission working with some state-of-the-art equipment and it is going into the wild blue yonder. We're going to Frankfurt tomorrow morning to join a flight crew. What do you think of that?"

"I take back everything I thought about you, Mark," Snoopy let a smile cross his lips. "I've wanted to fly from the very beginning. That's the reason I joined the Air Force in the first place."

Snoopy began packing right that instant. Most of my clothes were in my apartment, so I said so long to Snoopy and headed into downtown Bremerhaven to gather my things and tell Gabbi that I would be away for a few days. The good news being that Col. Berry had promised to be my best man at the wedding.

The next morning, Snoopy and I met at the station at 5:30 and caught the early train to Frankfurt and Rhine Main air station.
12. Major Pilot Sonovavitch

Shortly after noon on 1 July 1960, the Security Service team and flight crew of our RC-130 noisily gathered in the briefing room to learn about our afternoon mission. We settled into wooden student desks in a room filled with European weather maps. There was eighteen of us including the backend and air crew. Lieutenant Colonel Ron Lovern, our briefing officer was a tall, blond 37 year-old veteran of reconnaissance operations. Col. Lovern was a quiet and self-assured man with a strong command presence. The briefing room became still as Col. Lovern explained what our token cover story would be. In a quiet, almost exhausted voice he told us, “In the event that anything goes wrong, the world will be told that this flight is a scientific reconnaissance mission whose purpose is to study the effects of the magnetic north pole on radio wave propagation. Pretty much the standard cover story for these operations and I'm sure you've heard it before.”

He went on to explain that our true purpose was three-fold. First, we would stir up the Soviet radar network positioned along the Kola Peninsula of the Barents Sea in order to get them chatting among themselves. This was to learn how effective their tracking systems were by intercepting and analyzing their communications. Second, we would gather and record electronic and electromagnetic signals emanating from their ELINT collection ships in the Barents Sea. Lastly, we would photograph those same ships with extremely high-resolution film. We were particularly interested in their "fishing trawlers" that were top heavy with eavesdropping booms, antennas and dishes. It appeared to be a routine mission, with the exception of flying so close to the extreme cold of the Arctic Circle.

“Let me remind you all of one thing. Just a couple months ago, 16 May, Premier Nikita Khrushchev walked out of the Paris Peace Conference. He was madder than hell because President Eisenhower refused to apologize about the U-2 incident. He threatened retaliation if any more U-2, or similar flights were flown over Soviet Union air space. So,
things may get a little dicey out there, and they may be looking for you. Stay focused,” Lovern warned us.

I jabbed Snoopy in the ribs and whispered, “Come on man, wake up. Khrushchev has a hard-on for us and is taking it out on Francis Gary Powers. That poor bastard will probably never get out of Siberia.”

Snoopy responded with his own jab and said, “Powers will get out. We won’t let that boy rot in some gulag. He'll be home before Christmas. Hell, he'll be home before we are.”

Normally the RC-130 had a flight crew of five: two pilots, co-pilot and two navigators. Today however, Major Arlen Trapp was the sole pilot and AC, or Aircraft Commander and Captain Leo Walls was the co-pilot. Navigators were the two Bills, Lieutenants Bill Curry and Bill Nye. There were 14 of us “Bats” as we called ourselves.

Bats have big ears and use sonar to navigate, so there should be an interesting story behind our nickname, but there’s not. It originated because each operational monitoring station in the backend was officially called a "battery" and as we communicated with each other, we used the description Bat-1, Bat-2, Bat-3… to identify each other and our positions as you moved from fore to aft.

Bat-1 was radar. Bat-2 and 3 were Electronic Counter Measures, ECM, our electronic warfare officers. Bat-4, 5 and 6 were Morse intercept operators. Then came Bat-7 and 8, which was where Snoopy and I toiled. As Bat-7, my job was to listen in on any Russian fighter pilots who might be scrambled from the airfield in Murmansk and their ground controllers to make sure we knew what they were up to. The remaining Bat stations had sophisticated electronic recording, non-Morse teletype and photographic missions covering a wide range of the electromagnetic spectrum.

In case of equipment problems during the mission, we had two senior maintenance technicians, A/1C Carl "Joe" Duncan and A/1C Arnie
Ralph McDonald

Olson to fix things. AMS was Airborne Mission Supervisor, the controller and liaison between the Bat stations and the Aircraft Commander. Today, AMS was Tech Sergeant Jim Weiss. Jim often reminded his crews that he was, in reality the aircraft commander and the pilot was simply the "bus driver" whose sole responsibility was to get us there and back.

We took off in total secrecy shortly after 1:00 PM from Rhine Main air field. Our mission was on a strict need-to-know basis. In case somebody was listening in, radio contact with the tower gave no clue as to our true identity, mission or our destination. Major Trapp gave bogus call signs and asked for weather reports for the Mediterranean, Barents Sea and English Channel to further obscure our destination. No air controller clearance was given for our take off as we rolled onto the flight line, waited for visual clearance from the tower and then roared into the air.

The crew took it easy for several hours during the flight north from Rhine Main to the Barents Sea. There was a certain nervous energy aboard, especially among those of us on our first airborne mission. Each Bat station checked, rechecked and triple checked equipment and then catnapped when possible. Major Trapp piped AFN over the intercom to help the crew relax. I heard crackling static through my headset as Frankie Ford invited us along on his musical "Sea Cruise." The signal was weak but I could make out that he was telling us that we had nothing to lose, and there was no use singing the blues. I, for one, could tell Frankie Ford something about the blues.

I knew that this would be my final assignment as a member of the Security Service. With my decision to marry Gabbi, my Top Secret clearance would be pulled immediately on my return to Bremerhaven. Col. Berry made that abundantly clear as I left for Frankfurt and Rhine Main Air Base. I loved Gabbi very much and understood the consequences of my action, but couldn't help feeling melancholy about this mission. I would miss this group of young men who were brothers in our brotherhood of silent service to our country.
Once over the Kola Bay, everybody was busy and I put Gabbi out of my mind. We circled in a wide arc covering as much of the Kola Peninsula as possible. Several passes over Russian ELINT trawlers making their way to the open sea provided us reels of magnetic tape and many high resolution photographs of Russian seamen grinning and waving to us along with details of their antenna towers, booms and configurations.

Our flight plan called for us to remain in International Waters, but we were flying much closer to the peninsula landmass than Major Trapp had expected. "I'm getting mixed signals from navigation. Leo, go back there and find out if we're where we are supposed to be. We seem to be off orbit and too close to land. Sometimes I wonder where the hell they learned to navigate."

"Yes sir," Captain Walls responded as he moved to the rear where the navigators sat at their stations and asked, "What's our exact position?"

Lieutenants Curry and Nye glared at each other as they disagreed as to which beacon they should be following. "We are on-course, right on our flight plan. I've double checked and we are still in International Waters," Bill Curry stated with cold assurance.

Bill Nye vigorously disagreed. He had just talked to A/2C Floyd Irlbeck manning Bat-4 who was intercepting Morse communications from their Air Defense Forces (PVO) who claimed we were violating Soviet air space. "We're not on course, we're following the wrong beacon and we're well within Russian air space. We better change course and get our butts back into the international safety zone. Check with Bat-4, he's copying Soviet PVO and they've been tracking us on radar since we got here."

Lt. Curry shrugged off Nye's suggestion, "That's nuts. Back-enders don't know anything about flying, or navigation, for that matter. Captain Walls, tell the Major we're good to go, right on orbit. I'm zeroed in on the beacon."
Walls nodded and returned to the cockpit somewhat confused. He agreed with Bill Curry's assessment of the backend crew. Other than a commercial airliner, most of them had never been in a plane before and they couldn't possibly know if we were on or off course.

Sergeant Weiss opened his intercom, "AC this is AMS, we've got miles of good stuff back here. We've been here for almost an hour and we've strayed well into Soviet air space. I think it's time to bug out. We're working up a sweat, doing some heavy lifting and they're getting wise to us. Remember the warning that Col. Lovern gave us before we took off?"

"AMS, this is the AC, I hear you five by," Major Trapp answered, "Yeah, let's make a home run. Our work here is done, we've earned our pay for today and we're too close for comfort, as far as I'm concerned."

I pressed my intercom send button, "AMS, this is Bat-7, I copy ground control barking at some pilots who are on the flight line at Murmansk. Three of them just got the call to scramble. They're on to us for sure, coming up to take a closer look and they sound more than a little agitated."

"Bat-7, this is AMS," Sergeant Weiss coolly responded, "Keep an ear on them and let us know what they're doing. Bat-1, Bat-1 what do you see on your scope?"

"AMS, this is Bat-1," A/1C Art Rydeen answered, "Hot damn, I've got three bogies going air borne out of Murmansk. I'm tracking them. They're gaining altitude and turning toward us at six o'clock low."

"AC, this is AMS, radar has three bogies coming from our six. Abort, abort, let's get the hell out of here! For Christ's sake, we've on overtime now and there's no telling what those bastards might do."
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“Weiss, this is the AC, what the hell is going on back there?” the Major tried to regain control of the situation. “Get a hold of yourself. We’re not aborting! We still have some work to do.” Major Trapp was caught in a quandary. He agreed they should leave the area, but he couldn't appear to be taking orders from a back-ender, especially an enlisted man.

“AC this is AMS, are you crazy up there? They’re close. They have visual. They're right behind us. Jesus Christ, I can see them! Let's get out of here, now, before something happens, like they blow our butts off.”

"Bat-2 and 3, this is AMS, screw them up, guys. Do some counter measures and throw everything you have at them. Drop foil and fire the ECM flares. Give them some additional targets, screw up their radar and don't let them get a lock on us,” the sergeant directed his frustration toward A/1C Fred Wimmer and S/Sgt Don Hassenbien who were the electronic warfare operators.

"AMS, this is Bat-2. We're on top of the situation, Jim," Hassenbien responded as he tried to reassure Sergeant Weiss.

"AMS, Bat-8 here," Snoopy joined in, "Ground control is ordering the three pilots to take us into tow and force us to land at Murmansk. Somebody better do something before it gets serious."

“Aircraft Commander, this is AMS, Bat-8 has fighters talking to their ground controller. Bat-8 is pretty excited. They're going to force us down. Do you read me?”

Major Trapp was now catching the fever, as the thought of losing his ship became a real possibility. “AMS this is the AC. Stay alert back there! Are they closing? Do they have a lock on us yet? What the hell is happening? I don't have a rear view mirror up here.”
"AC this is AMS, yes, yes they’re MiG-21s and they're closing fast. They lit us up like a Christmas tree. They're pinging us with radar and infrared. Our ECM is not effective, they're too close and can see us."

Major Trapp was now in full fever and he bypassed the mission controller, "Bat-2, Bat-3 this is AMS. Get on ‘em, you guys. Do all counter measures, fire counter measures now! Light up the flares."

"AMS this is Bat-7," I interrupted, "The pilots have acknowledged ground control's instructions and are now speaking directly to us. The lead pilot, a Major Sonovavitch wants us to follow them or they'll blow us out of the sky! We're to follow them and surrender our plane at Murmansk."

"AC, this is AMS. Holy shit, Bat-7 says the MiG's have been ordered to force us to follow them. And to splash us if we don’t comply. They're ordering us to turn around and follow them to their base at Murmansk."

"This is the AC, AMS, you’ve got to be kidding! AMS begin ECM now! I'm ordering you to begin counter measures now! We are not going to surrender this craft."

"AC this is AMS. Counter measures are in effect. But, it ain't doing any good, they're just too close. They have visual contact." The Sergeant's heart was pounding, but he tried to maintain his composure to avoid panic within the crew.

S/Sgt Hassenbien was busy, but reported, “AMS, this is Bat-3. I'm popping everything I’ve got. They're too close for it to be effective. There are three of ’em and they have a visual on us. They're squawking friend or foe, they know who we are, and they're sure not friendly.”

Three Soviet MiG-21s over-took us, one immediately behind and the other two on each side. They each had a 23 mm Gryazev-Shipunov twin barrel cannon, plus air-to-air missiles and unguided rockets mounted in four under-wing fittings. They were true war birds, after their prey.
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Brand new and with a top speed of mach 2.1, we weren’t going to out-run them by any stretch of the imagination. They were birds of prey, and we were the prey. Major Ivan Sonovavitch, the senior pilot, motioned for us to turn around. He wanted us to follow him. Major Trapp shook his head and pushed the throttle forward to maximum thrust and at the same time dived for a cloudbank just below us. We were bugging out.

Captain Leo Walls had removed himself from the co-pilot's chair and slowly worked his way to the rear of the RC-130. The craft was totally unarmed and the only thing we could aim at the MiG fighters was one of our cameras. This represented our full offensive threat. I watched in disbelief as Captain Walls pulled a side-facing camera from its mount leaving a small, open porthole in the starboard fuselage wall. Wind whistled through the hole. The camera bounced on the deck and slid until it lodged itself against a film safe that was fixed to the floor. Captain Walls was armed with a standard issue, Colt 45 automatic pistol, which he pointed through the opening and fired at the MiG-21 which was along side our aircraft.

I listened to the three pilots first cuss us, then inform their ground controller that we had fired on them. They did not explain how an unarmed aircraft had fired at them or whether or not they had been hit. They insisted that we were taking evasive maneuvers and were trying to escape into the cloud cover. Excitedly, the squadron leader requested permission to fire on us. I listened in quiet disbelief as the ground controller ordered the three MiG-21 fighters to shoot us down. I reported what they were saying to Sergeant Weiss and Major Trapp. "God be with us all," the Major prayed into the intercom.

I grabbed the equipment rack in front of me for support. The two fighters beside us peeled away as the third MiG-21 opened up on us from behind. Machine gun and cannon rounds tore through the fuselage as if it were tin foil. There was nothing we could do. In horror, I watched my friends fly across their stations as they tried hopelessly to protect themselves from the incoming rounds. Fire flashed from the electronic equipment as tracer rounds ripped through hardware racks. I felt a
shudder as the RC-130 entered its final descent now totally engulfed in flames.

AFN interrupts this program to bring you the following news bulletin, "A C-130 U.S. Air Force cargo plane, performing a scientific reconnaissance mission crashed today in the Barents Sea near the Artic Circle. The purpose of the flight was to study the effects of the magnetic north pole on radio wave propagation. Search and rescue operations are now underway but no survivors have yet been found. It is feared that the six crew members may be lost, but rescue operations continue. The cause of the crash is under investigation."

As seen from the distant shore of the Kola Peninsula, the icy Barents Sea rose and fell in a choppy motion as a cold Arctic wind blew across its surface sending shivers of white-capped waves moving in a southerly direction. In an attempt to escape the frozen north, the sea moved as if it were alive. The day changed into early evening as sunlight faded into a gloomy semi-darkness. Objects appeared to go out of focus as the light slowly receded. The last remaining sunlight reflected on the waves. Water in the sea turned from black to silver to blue to black again, as the sun dropped below the horizon. A lone rubber raft bobbed on the surface as the RC-130 and its silent crew waited to be heard.
Appendix A

Following are a few of the approximately 300 air crewmen of our armed forces who were shot down during the "cold war" decade from 1950 through 1960. Many of those listed here gave their lives in defense of our country.

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