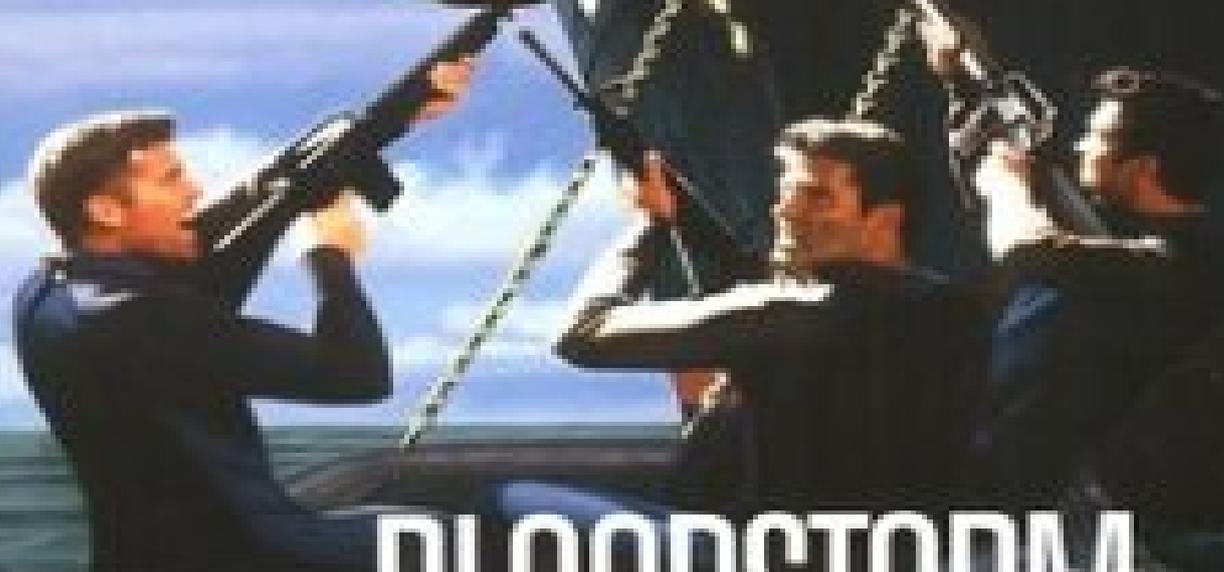


THE EXPLOSIVE NEW NOVEL IN THE SPECIAL WARFARE SERIES!



SEAL TEAM SEVEN



BLOODSTORM

KEITH DOUGLASS

Author of the Carrier Naval Aviation Series



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SEAL TEAM SEVEN: BLOODSTORM

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Titles by Keith Douglass

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BLOODSTORM

*Dedicated to those real-life
SEALs in Teams One, Three, Five
and Two, Four, and Eight,
who are out there on
the covert front lines doing
the dirty little jobs that must be done
to maintain our great nation.
They are the real heroes, the ones no
one ever hears about.
The silent ones.
The deadly ones.
The U.S. Navy SEALs!*

S
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EVEN

THIRD PLATOON*
CORONADO, CALIFORNIA

Rear Admiral (L) Richard Kenner.

Commander of all SEALs.

Commander Dean Masciarelli.

47, 5'11", 220 pounds. Annapolis graduate. Commanding officer of SEAL Team Seven and its 230 men.

Master Chief Petty Officer Gordon MacKenzie.

47, 5'10", 180 pounds. Administrator and head enlisted man of all of SEAL Team Seven.

Lieutenant Commander Blake Murdock.

32, 6'2", 210 pounds. Annapolis graduate. Six years in SEALs. Father important congressman from Virginia. Murdock recently promoted. Apartment in Coronado. Has a car and a motorcycle, loves to fish. Weapon: Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56mm & 20mm explosive round. Alternate: H & K MP-5SD submachine gun.

ALPHA SQUAD

Willard "Will" Dobler.

Boatswain's Mate. Senior chief. Top EM in platoon. Third in command. 37, 6'1", 180 pounds. Nineteen years service. Wife, Nancy; children, Helen, 15; Charles, 11. Sports nut. Knows dozens of major-league baseball records. Competition pistol marksman. Weapon: Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56mm & 20mm explosive round. Good with the men.

David "Jaybird" Sterling.

Machinist's Mate Second Class. Lead petty officer. 24, 5'10", 170 pounds. Quick mind, fine tactician

Single. Drinks too much sometimes. Crack shot with all arms. Grew up in Oregon. Helps plan attack operations. Weapon: H & K MP-5SD submachine gun.

Ron Holt.

Radioman First Class. 22, 6'1", 170 pounds. Plays guitar, had a small band. Likes redheaded girls. Rabid baseball fan. Loves deep-sea fishing, is good at it. Platoon radio operator. Weapon: Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56mm & 20mm explosive round.

Bill Bradford.

Quartermaster's Mate First Class. 24, 6'2", 215 pounds. An artist in spare time. Paints oils. He sells his marine paintings. Single. Quiet. Reads a lot. Has two years of college. Squad sniper. Weapon: H & K PSG1 7.62 NATO sniper rifle or McMillan M-87R .50-caliber sniper rifle.

Joe "Ricochet" Lampedusa.

Operations Specialist Third Class. 21, 5'11", 175 pounds. Good tracker, quick thinker. Had a year of college. Loves motorcycles. Wants a Hog. Pot smoker on the sly. Picks up plain girls. Platoon scout. Weapon: Colt M-4A1 rifle with grenade launcher; alternate, Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56mm & 20mm explosive round.

Kenneth Ching.

Quartermaster's Mate First Class. 25, 6' even, 180 pounds. Full-blooded Chinese. Platoon translator. Speaks Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Bicycling nut. Paid \$1,200 for off-road bike. Is trying for Officer Candidate School. Weapon: Colt M-4A1 rifle with grenade launcher.

Vincent "Vinnie" Van Dyke.

Electrician's Mate Second Class. 24, 6'2", 220 pounds. Enlisted out of high school. Played varsity basketball. Wants to be a commercial fisherman after his current hitch. Good with his hands. Squad machine gunner. Weapon: H & K 21-E 7.62 NATO round machine gun.

BRAVO SQUAD

Lieutenant (J.G.) Ed DeWitt.

Leader Bravo Squad. Second in command of the platoon. 30, 6'1", 175 pounds. From Seattle. Wiry. Has serious live-in woman, Milly. Annapolis graduate. A career man. Plays a good game of chess on traveling board. Weapon: Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56mm & 20mm explosive round. Alternate: H & K G-11 submachine gun.

George Canzoneri.

Torpedoman's Mate First Class. 27, 5'11", 190 pounds. Married to Navy wife, Phyllis. No kids. Nine years in Navy. Expert on explosives. Nicknamed "Petard" for almost hoisting himself one time. Top pick in platoon for explosive work. Weapon: Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56mm & 20mm explosive round

Miguel Fernandez.

Gunner's Mate First Class. 26, 6'1", 180 pounds. Wife, Maria; daughter, Linda, 7, in Coronado. Spends his off time with them. Highly family-oriented. He has relatives in San Diego. Speaks Spanish and Portuguese. Squad sniper. Weapon: H & K PSG1 7.62 NATO sniper rifle.

Colt "Guns" Franklin.

Yeoman Second Class. 24, 5'10", 175 pounds. A former gymnast. Powerful arms and shoulders. Experienced mountain climber. Has a motorcycle and does hang gliding. Speaks Farsi and Arabic. Weapon: Colt M-4A1 rifle with grenade launcher.

Tran "Train" Khai.

Torpedoman Second Class. 23, 6'1", 180 pounds. U.S.-born Vietnamese. A whiz at languages and computers. Speaks Vietnamese, French, German, Spanish, and Arabic. Specialist in electronics. Understands the new 20mm Bull Pup weapon. Can repair the electronics in it. Plans on becoming an electronics engineer. Joined the Navy for \$40,000 college funding. Entranced by SEALs. First hitch up in four months. Weapon: H & K G-11 with caseless rounds, 4.7mm submachine gun with fifty-round magazine.

Jack Mahanani.

Hospital Corpsman First Class. 25, 6'4", 240 pounds. Platoon medic. Tahitian/Hawaiian. Expert swimmer. Bench-presses 400 pounds. Once married, divorced. Top surfer. Wants the .50 sniper rifle. Weapon: Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56 & 20mm explosive round. Alternate: Colt M-4A1 rifle with grenade launcher.

Anthony "Tony" Ostercamp.

Machinist's Mate First Class. 24, 6'1", 210 pounds. Races stock cars in nearby El Cajon on weekends. Top auto mechanic. Platoon driver. Weapon: H & K 21-E 7.62 NATO round machine gun. Second radio operator.

Paul "Jeff" Jefferson.

Engineman Second Class. 23, 6'1", 200 pounds. Black man. Expert in small arms. Can tear apart most weapons and reassemble, repair, and innovate them. A chess player to match Ed DeWitt. Weapon: Alliant Bull Pup duo 5.56mm & 20mm explosive round.

NOTE TO THE READER

Just wanted to warn you that this is an *interactive* book. You read it and then you write to me and tell me what you think about the story, the characters, and the SEALs. A kind of grown-up book report. How about that? You thought you were just going to have a couple of hours of good reading, watch the SEALs do their job, and then reach for another beer.

Tough luck this time. Well, yeah, it's a part of a bet I made with my writing buddy. I waged a small inheritance on the idea that I could get a thousand letters from you guys and gals out there who read these SEAL books.

Now, don't let me down. If you like them, if you don't, tell me to take a hike, whatever. Just figure out on dropping me a quick line or two, and I can keep the ranch instead of letting this Simon Legree character foreclose on me because of a few lousy letters I didn't get.

Where? Oh, yeah. Send those cards and letters to:

Keith Douglass
8431 Beaver Lake Drive
San Diego, CA 92119

Hey, thanks a lot. Now you're cleared to go on reading this brand-new *SEAL Team Seven* book. Have fun.

—Keith Douglass

Odessa, Ukraine

Chen Takung paused in the darkness next to a boarded-up building with peeling paint and graffiti sprayed walls. To the left a woman screamed. Someone began sobbing. A baby cried. A cool breeze whipped a newspaper down the street. Chen stepped quickly into the dark alley and waited. He was good at waiting. This strange land was nothing like Shaanxi Province in China, where he grew up. Here it was dry, harsh, unfriendly, and even smelled bad. Not at all like the softness of a Chinese night with a pale moon riding high.

An older car with three colors of paint on it drove up slowly, stopped for a moment, then moved on. Chen was near the Odessa port district that fronted on the Black Sea. Odessa had once been the busiest port and main southern outlet for the Soviet Union in the glory days. Chen had heard that ships from all over the world had lined up to get dock space. Now the new nation that had split off when the Soviet Union fragmented was known as Ukraine, and it struggled to keep its economy going well enough to maintain its independence. Chen knew that ships still stopped here to discharge and take on cargo, but not in the volume they used to.

The smells assaulted him again. It wasn't the night-soil odor of the Chinese country, but more cloying smell of unwashed bodies and decomposing garbage. He hated it here in Ukraine. He hated any place that wasn't China.

Chen Takung had come to Odessa on board the *Star of Asia*, of Chinese People's Republic registry, a beaten-up and weathered freighter, which now sat at a dock awaiting its special cargo. Chen eased against the building, not letting the two-hour wait drag at his senses. He saw everything that went on in the area, evaluated the actions, and determined that none of them held any danger for him.

He tried to relax tense muscles. His senses were on instant alert, searching for anything dangerous. He had made covert buys of sensitive goods from foreign nations before, but nothing of this magnitude.

Chen glanced where his backup crouched in the darkness across the street. The other man had a sniper rifle and was deadly accurate. No one would see him until they should see him.

Chen was highly trained in his field of international relations and secret operations. He was extremely efficient when dealing with those who worked outside of the law of their own countries.

He squeezed his left arm against his body and felt the reassuring bulge of the 9mm pistol. The two men he was to meet were late, which he had expected. He had played that role often in his dealings.

He faded to the left out of the mouth of the dark alley, and edged into the doorway of the run-down building. The door was inset two feet, giving him plenty of room to vanish completely in the shadow of the Ukrainian summer night.

The smell came again. Something dead, maybe a rat or a cat. He pushed it out of his mind.

Time dragged. Tension knotted a muscle in Chen's neck, and he rotated his head trying to calm it. Sweat beaded his forehead even in the cool night. Where were they? They should have been here a half hour ago.

He heard them first. Footfalls on the cobblestones coming from the right. Slowly two men

materialized out of the darkness from the downtown direction, and paused at the side of the same building that shielded Chen.

“Nabokov?” Chen whispered the password. He felt better now, more sure of himself. Only two of them.

The men walked toward him slowly with nervous caution.

“Yes, I am Nabokov. Are you Chen?”

“Yes, I’m Chen.” They spoke in Russian. Chen stepped away from the doorway. The two men stopped three paces from him.

“You are early,” he said, still in Russian.

“Yes, we are ready to do business.”

“First I need to inspect the merchandise. Then I’ll show you the payment.”

“You have the seventy-two million U.S. dollars we agreed upon?”

“Yes, the equivalent in gold bars, diamonds, and U.S. currency. I’ll show you it after we see the goods.”

“Yes, we agree. Come with us.”

Chen had expected more than two of them. He made a curt motion, telling his backup rifleman to return to their headquarters.

Chen and the two Ukrainians walked down a block, where the three entered a ten-year-old Ziv auto.

A short drive later, the car stopped at a large run-down warehouse near the docks.

“The merchandise is inside,” the taller of the square-cut Ukrainians said. “We have security. We’ll tell you so you won’t be surprised.”

“I would wonder if you didn’t.”

Six Ukrainian soldiers stood just inside the warehouse’s first door. They had the newer Russian-made AK-74 rifles. A Russian RK-46 machine gun stood on its mount of sandbags, and a soldier trained it on the door. At each of the next four locked doors there were three soldiers armed with the Portuguese-made stubby Lusa A2 submachine guns. They had an interesting closed configuration. Chen counted twenty-four guards before he came to the last locked door. They had worked their way to the far side of the warehouse. This last section was bathed with bright lights. Chen could smell a salty dampness in the air, so this area must be right next to the water.

When the door opened, he stared at the contents of the huge room. Chen caught his breath, but made sure the two Ukrainians didn’t notice. The merchandise was as negotiated. Six of the Russian Sata intercontinental ballistic missiles. The six lay on shipping dollies with wheels for easier movement. All looked identical: painted brown and green in a camouflage pattern, eighty feet long, and should weigh a little over thirty tons each. Chen knew that when fired from a land-based mobile launcher silo, one missile could travel over 6,500 miles and dump nuclear bombs on ten different independent targeted cities.

Chin shivered. Right in front of him were six of the large missiles waiting for him. They looked to be as ordered, with the correct Russian words and configuration. Ten nuclear warheads should be inside each of the sleek nose cones.

“I’ll need to inspect each missile, to be sure there have been no changes, no sabotage,” he said.

The two Ukrainians nodded. Chen crawled over and around the missiles for a half hour. The long-range ICBMs were in mint condition. He had trained at the Karkoff Institute of Scientific Research in Moscow for two years, specializing in the Russian ICBM system and its missiles. There was no evidence that any of the nose cones had been tampered with or the warheads removed. Good.

Back with the two Ukrainians, he nodded. “They appear to be in good condition and unaltered. We do not need the auxiliary launching and guidance systems. If we find any irregularities after we take possession, we’ll come back and kill you.”

“Have no worries. These missiles are as you ordered.”

“Where do I go to make payment?” Chen asked.

“Do you have it in a vehicle?”

“Yes, a truck with the U.S. dollars, the diamonds, and the gold. Together it has a value of seventy two million dollars.”

“Bring it here.”

“First our freighter must be under way so it can redock here.”

The Ukrainian who did most of the talking smiled. “There is no need for that. Your ship, the *Star Asia*, has been redocked just beyond those large doors.”

Chen smiled. “Ukrainian efficiency. I’ll go and bring the payment. We must have our ship loaded and be ready to cast off our lines before daylight.”

“There should be no problem. Our harbormaster has been told of your departure.”

“And compensated?” Chen asked.

They all laughed.

“I understand that not all levels of your government have been informed of this sale.”

Nabokov, the larger man, chuckled. “This is a private sale.”

“Good. If this works out, perhaps we can do business again.”

Chen went with the other two back through the locked and guarded doors to the street. They loaned him a car and driver to take him where he needed to go. He had the driver drop him off two blocks from the small office he had rented two months ago when negotiations first began with Nabokov, director of the Nuclear Arms Arsenal just outside of Odessa. Chen knew that these were missiles that Ukraine had kept out of the inventory of the large numbers of nuclear weapons, missiles, and warheads that were transferred to Russia in 1994 and slated for destruction. That had been part of the disarmament accord between Russia and the United States. Chen had been told that now the hoard of nuclear weapons were orphans, known about only by a few men high in the government. Six of the missiles would not be missed due to the sloppy management.

Chen walked to the small office, opened the locked door, and turned on the lights. Everything must appear normal. He went into the back room and grinned at his six men. A chorus of questions greeted him. He saw his backup man had returned.

He held up his hands. “Yes, it is arranged. We take the money to them now. I know the way. Is everyone ready?”

The six men wore black combat uniforms, with vests and webbing hung with the tools of the elite Chinese military strike force specialists. All carried Russian AKSU-74 submachine guns with thirty round reversible banana clips that had been taped together for fast reloading. All of the weapons were fitted with sound suppressors.

The truck was a 1974 Chevrolet half-ton pickup that had somehow found its way to Odessa. In back it held storage boxes filled with currency, gold bars, and boxes of cut and polished, brilliant diamonds.

“Let’s go,” Chen said. He drove the pickup, and the men stepped into an old van of mixed manufacture. Chen would pick up Nabokov and the other man at the front of the same warehouse. The Ukrainians would show Chen how to drive the small truck directly into the section of the warehouse with the missiles.

When Nabokov entered the pickup with his yes-man shadow, he frowned and looked behind them.

“There is a van following you,” Nabokov said.

“That’s my security,” Chen said, and chuckled. “You didn’t think I would try this transfer by myself, did you?”

Nabokov scowled this time. “I hadn’t thought about that. Surely you must trust us as we trust you.”

“My trust is the same as yours. You have twenty or thirty security men at the warehouse. I have m

own security men. It is necessary.”

“I want everything to go smoothly.”

“We are paying you a great deal of money, Nabokov. I insist on my own security.”

The Ukrainian licked his lips and took a deep breath. At last he nodded. He took out a small radio and spoke into it in Ukrainian for a moment.

“The rear guards will let us pass, both vehicles,” he said.

After driving several blocks, they came around the corner of a building. It was right on the dock and Chen saw his ship tied up at the adjoining pier. A large truck door rolled upward. Two guards barred their entrance until they recognized Nabokov. Inside, Chen saw the bright lights and the missiles. When both vehicles had driven in, the large door rolled down.

Chen nodded, and they left the pickup. Nabokov and the other Ukrainian went to the rear of the Chevy and examined the boxes.

The six Chinese Special Forces men left the van and fanned out inside the building. They had the orders. Two Ukrainian soldiers came through the door from inside the warehouse.

Chen shouted something in Chinese, and watched with satisfaction as both Ukrainian soldiers were shot by the Chinese commandos. They slammed backward with four submachine-gun rounds each in their chests as they stared in surprise at the black-clothed killers.

Nabokov looked up from the payment boxes in shock. “What are you doing?” he bellowed.

“Securing the area,” Chen said. He held his pistol pointing at the Ukrainian. “I’ll take your side arm and the radio now, Nabokov. You have no armed support inside. Let’s not make this worse than it has to be.”

Nabokov took out the radio, pretended to hand it to Chen, then pushed a button on it and shouted to the Ukrainian: “Alert, alert, the missile room, now.”

Chen shot him three times in the chest with his silenced pistol, then turned the weapon on the young man with Nabokov and shot him twice as he surged away. Both rounds took him in the back, one crushing his spine and dumping him into a death spasm on the concrete floor. Two Ukrainian soldiers burst through the small door at the back of the big room.

Chen saw them coming and shouted at his men, then dove behind the pickup. Both Ukrainian soldiers went down in a murderous cross fire of silenced submachine gun rounds. Two more soldiers raced through the inside door, and got off a dozen unsilenced rounds before the black-clothed Chinese specialists fired at them. The surprise entry caught the Chinese commandos by surprise, and two were down in the enemy fire.

Chen saw it all and jumped up, screaming and firing his pistol at the intruders. The other Chinese commandos cut down the Ukrainian guards.

“Lock that inside door that leads to the other rooms,” Chen said into his radio. Two of the black-robed Chinese darted to the door, and closed it and snapped on two locks. A pair of shots sounded from outside the door, but the rounds didn’t penetrate.

“The big doors, now,” Chen said to the radio. “We must move quickly.”

Two of the Chinese ran to the lift doors, looked at the row of buttons, and found the right ones. One of the twenty-foot-wide doors rolled up on greased tracks. Just beyond a thirty-foot-wide dock sat the *Star of Asia*. Deck sailors on watch took hand signals from Chen. A moment later a rusty-looking panel slid upward, revealing a thirty-foot-wide dock-level loading hatch. The interior of the ship looked like anything but a rust-bucket freighter. It was brightly lighted, and well painted. Quickly a loading platform bridged the three-foot gap between freighter and dock. A small tow tractor rolled over the bridge to the dock, and inside to the dolly holding the first missile. The tractor driver hooked up to the missile dolly, and then carefully towed it out of the warehouse, over the bridge, and into the hold of the freighter. It vanished somewhere to the left. Two minutes later the tractor came back for

another missile.

A sudden burst of rifle fire came from the small door beside where the pickup had driven in. Two Ukrainian soldiers stood there firing at the Chinese Special Forces. One Chinese went down with a round to his chest. The other armed Chinese pounded the guard soldiers with thirty rounds of silence to death. They jolted backward. One man got off two more rounds before he died in another flurry of firing.

“Secure that back area,” Chen shouted at his gunmen. One man ran to the door, and kept a watch outside.

Ten minutes later, five of the ICBMs were stowed in the decrepit-looking freighter. The Chevrolet pickup with the seventy-two-million-dollar payment for the missiles was driven across the bridge into the freighter. Then the remaining three Chinese Special Forces men carried the bodies of their dead comrades into the freighter.

While the tractor loaded the missiles into the freighter, Chen took a brisk walk down the dock. His destination was the sleek-looking freighter that was moored just in back of his down the pier. Its flag showed that it was of Panamanian registry. A sentry challenged Chen as he approached the gangplank.

As they talked, an officer came to the rail and saluted Chen. He quickly came down the plank, and they walked along the new, trim freighter. It was slightly larger than Chen’s ship, but this vessel was in freshly minted condition.

“You have the goods?” the officer asked.

“We do. You have the payment?”

“Yes. Bring the missile here and we’ll show you the payment.”

“You have dockside-level loading?”

“No, we’ll use two of our cranes. They are rated at over fifty tons.”

“Good.” Chen touched a button twice on a small radio he took from his pocket. “The goods are on the way.”

Five minutes later, the small tractor towed the sixth ICBM from the warehouse to the Panamanian freighter. Now a stiff canvas covered the missile and shrouded its identity.

One huge crane swung out and down; then a second moved into position. Men attached cables to each end of the missile and the dolly. Winches ground. Slowly the thirty-ton missile and dolly lifted off the dock. It wouldn’t fit into any of the holds on the ship, so they positioned it slightly aft on the main deck, secured it, and added more camouflage.

The Panamanian captain signaled, and a small crane swung down a pallet board with a wooden box on top of it. Inside the box were stacks of U.S. currency.

“There it is, fifteen million in hundred-dollar bills. Mostly used, but some with sequential serial numbers.”

“We’ll check it,” Chen said. The tow tractor pushed its lift bars under the pallet board and carried the money back to the *Star of Asia*.

A few minutes later it was loaded on board. Chen stepped into the ship through the side loading hatch, and the tractor pulled the loading bridge inside. The heavy steel panels on the side of the freighter closed, and the rusty camouflaged plates slid down into place.

It took another five minutes for the crew of the Chinese ship to cast off its lines. Aided by a tug, it worked its way out of the dock area toward the channel that led to the open Black Sea. Within ten minutes they had cleared the port, paid the pilot double his usual fee, and put him in his small boat.

All of the regular clearances had been filed. They checked out with the port master’s radio in a faltering Russian, and were on their way.

For two hours, Chen stood in the bridge, listening to the radio and watching for fast-moving ships that might be overtaking them. He paced the small area, smoked one cigarette after another, and

always looked to the rear. He saw and heard nothing unusual. Only when they were a half hour at sea did he take out a bottle of rice wine he was partial to and pass around drinks to the Chinese Navy captain of the ship and his executive officer.

“Due south?” the captain asked.

“Yes. Later we can change course to come to the Bosphorus Strait.”

The captain tipped his second small glass of the wine and lifted his brows. “All goes well. You will be a hero of China.”

Chen’s face froze into a steel mask. “Not yet. We have a long way to go. We have the greatest prize any warship has ever won. We have the future of the Chinese nation’s place in history. We have fifty more nuclear warheads that we can retrofit and then use any way that we want to.

“They will give us flexibility. We have some nuclear weapons, but not as many as the Western nations believe. This will give us massive potential. They will fuel a power drive gobbling up nations and territories that no nation on earth will have the nerve to challenge.

“There will be no stopping this vessel in any port. We will go through the strait, then on into the Sea of Marmara and out the Dardanelles.

“Once in the Aegean Sea, we will be able to relax and to meet one other ship. We must avoid any suspicion by any government. We are an oily old rust bucket of a Chinese freighter making for the Suez Canal on our homeward trip. Nothing we do can alter that image. We are the future of China.

“We also saved the seventy-two million dollars we were to have paid for the stolen goods. We have sold one missile for another fifteen million. We will go down in Chinese history books as the key moment in jolting China into the forefront of the world powers and in carving up the Far East in any fashion that China wants to.

“I make a toast, Captain, to China, the greatest nation on the face of the earth.”

“To China,” the captain and Chen said together. Then they drank.

When the rusty old freighter was fifty miles south of Odessa in the Black Sea, sailors from the ship held a short Buddhist funeral service and slipped the bodies of the three Special Forces men into the Black Sea. Chen watched. The bodies sank immediately. They were good men, good soldiers of China.

NAVSPECWARGRUP-ONE Coronado, California

Senior Chief Will Dobler grinned as his eleven-year-old son, Charles, stared in wonder at the “course while a squad of tadpole SEALs scaled the walls and walked the logs and powered over the obstacles.

“Wow, Dad, I want to do that. Please?”

Dobler chuckled. “Not quite yet, mister. You’re not big enough to get halfway up that wall. When nobody is using it we’ll go out and you can give one of them a try.”

It was visitors’ day at the Navy SEALs training facility on the strand at the south side of Coronado and the senior chief of Third Platoon of SEAL Team Seven had his family on the tour. The Navy Special Warfare Section, Group One, was a secure facility. But the part of it that was the BUD/ training section and the home base for SEAL Teams One, Three, Five, and Seven was not actually part of the secured area. It was a little more relaxed, and from time to time visitors were permitted to look over the training areas and the SEAL facilities.

Senior Chief Dobler’s wife, Nancy, and Helen, his fifteen-year-old daughter, were along as well. It was to be an all-day family outing. First the base, then a picnic and surfing and swimming down at the Silver Strand State Beach on the ocean side.

Gunner’s Mate Miguel Fernandez had brought his family along on this Sunday afternoon, and they’d teamed up for the tour. Maria Fernandez had been a help to Nancy, and now they were good friends.

At the fifty-foot-deep tower tank, Charles wanted to jump in, but his father gave him a curt no. The tank was little used now. The waterproofing of the tadpole SEALs was done in a new pool.

Helen had asked to stay in the car during the tour, but her mother had persuaded her to come. “Want you to know where your father works and what he does here,” she had said. Helen had pouted a little, but had gone along. She was tall, slender, and dark-haired like her mother. She had filled out during the past year, and Senior Chief Dobler had been worried about the boys who began to come to their house to talk to Helen. He knew they had more in mind than talking, and it bothered him. So far, no major problems.

The tour moved to SEAL Team Seven’s headquarters and the Third Platoon office. Jaybird Sterling sat behind one of the desks, working on his machinist’s mate specialty and getting ready for striking for first class. He stood as the civilians came in, then saw Senior Chief Dobler and relaxed.

The chief introduced his family and Maria and Linda Fernandez to Jaybird. While the chief told his family what he did in the office, Jaybird moved over beside Helen. Jaybird had felt his jaw drop in amazement when he saw the pretty girl.

She had to be eighteen, long dark hair, dark eyes, beautiful skin, and a face and figure that made him stop and look again. He grinned foolishly as he motioned to her.

“Hey, how do you like our digs?” Damn, what a stupid thing to say. She probably wouldn’t even look at him.

She turned and smiled, and Jaybird almost melted into a puddle on the floor. "Jaybird. Yes, I've heard Father talk about you. He wonders how you got your nickname."

"That's classified. Sorry. You like the tour?"

"First time I've been here. Seen a lot of the Navy, of course. Ever since I could walk and talk."

Senior Chief Dobler looked at his daughter and frowned. He went on explaining what they did in the office. Then he looked at his daughter again.

"Jaybird, knock it off. I'm trying to talk up here."

Jaybird waved, and looked at Helen and grinned. "I'll get chewed out tomorrow," he whispered.

Helen laughed softly, and her smile brightened. "I hear there's a fish fry for the platoon coming up."

"Yeah, someone is always having one. Oh, you would come. Yeah, I'll look forward to it."

"That would be nice. I haven't made many friends here yet."

"Hey, I'll be your friend. Maybe I could call sometime."

"Jaybird, I hope so." Her smile was perfection.

Senior Chief Dobler growled at Helen as he led the group from the office. Jaybird stood watching Helen was last to leave. She waved and gave him her best smile, then hurried out.

"Damn," Jaybird said softly. Now there was a girl. She had to be eighteen. He could check on the chief's personnel file. Hell, no. She was at least eighteen. He'd call her tonight and have a chat. The chief couldn't object to that. Jaybird snorted. The chief damn well would if he knew about it. He must protect Helen like he was a Doberman pinscher without a leash.

Later that afternoon Jaybird went to a movie by himself, had a beer, then from the apartment he shared with two other SEALs, phoned Senior Chief Dobler's home. Helen answered.

"Hi, this is Jaybird, hoped that you would be home. How was the swim?"

"Fine, but those breakers are so rough."

"I could teach you how to duck under them."

"That would be great. Only . . ."

Jaybird laughed. "Only your father wouldn't let you anywhere near me in your swimsuit. Hey, if I were in his place, I'd probably do the same thing. You have a boyfriend?"

"No. We've only been here a short time. I hardly know anybody."

"That will change. Are you out of school?"

"No. Soon."

"You'll probably go to college."

"I hope to. Did you have any college?"

"Just a few courses. No chance now that I'm a SEAL."

"Is it . . . do people shoot at you?"

He laughed. "Oh, yes. From time to time. But not when we're on base or in training."

"It must be hard. All that training. Then you go on the missions. Dad tells us a little about them, but not much. Mom goes out of the room when he starts talking about them."

"Good idea. Then she won't worry." He wanted to ask her if she would worry about him when she went on a mission, but he couldn't. "Hey, maybe we could go to a movie or something sometime."

"Maybe. Dad doesn't like me to go out on dates."

"You have been on dates?"

"Sure, not a whole lot."

"You ever go to the Coronado library?"

"Once or twice."

"Maybe you could go there to research something and I could just happen to be there. Your dad wouldn't know anything about it."

“We could talk?”

~~“For hours we could talk. How about tomorrow night, about seven at the library?”~~

“Yes. I’ll be there. I better hang up. Bye, Jaybird.”

Jaybird said good-bye and sat there grinning. He hadn’t been so pumped up in years. A girl? He was getting this excited about a girl who was also the apple of the eye of his senior chief? He must be nuts. He laughed. Yeah, he was nuts, all right, nuts about this little lady Helen. Right then he couldn’t wait for Sunday to end so he could wait for Monday night. If they had a night exercise or night training tomorrow, he was gonna kill somebody.

Monday came at last for Jaybird, and the training was easy, some classroom things about new weapons and then a ten-mile training run along the sand. He was tired, but so nervous he couldn’t sleep as he walked up to the Coronado library. He was ten minutes early.

Jaybird found a table with no one sitting at it in the far corner of the reading room. He picked a book off the shelf and pretended to read. When he looked up from the book for the twentieth time, Helen stood across the table from him. She watched him as she stood there smiling but with her arms folded protectively across her chest.

“You came,” she said, sliding into the chair opposite him. She reached out and touched his hand across the table. “I told Daddy that I wanted to bring home some mysteries. Let’s do that first, then we can talk.”

They found the mysteries, checked them out, then went back to the table and talked. Mostly she listened to him. He told her about his growing up in Oregon. She told him about moving from one Navy base to another. It was so comfortable, seemed so right to Jaybird. He’d never been this open with a girl before.

Helen looked at her watch. “Oh, dear. I have to be home by eight-thirty and it’s almost eight already.”

“I’ll walk you home, almost all the way. First, let’s look in the stacks.”

They went into the long rows of books and stood close. When nobody was in the row, she reached out quickly and kissed his lips, then came away.

She sighed, her smile radiant. “Oh, my,” she said softly.

He kissed her back and held it longer. They clung together.

“I think I love you, Jaybird,” Helen whispered to him.

“Oh, yeah, I feel the same way. But you’re my boss’s daughter and he would kill me if he could see us right now. What the hell am I supposed to do now?”

Tripoli, Libya

Three days after the *Benghazi Messenger* left Odessa, it docked in Tripoli. The port authorities knew it was coming. They had reported the time of arrival to the twelve-man Revolutionary Command Council and Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi, the council head as well as Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Commander in Chief of the Libyan Armed Forces.

A huge celebration had been planned and exploded the moment the sleek, twenty-two-knot freighter touched the dock with its light cargo strapped down on the deck.

What few Western journalists there were in the capital had no idea what the celebration was about. There was no television or radio announcement about the landing. Nor when Qaddafi made a short speech at the site did he explain what was so important on board the ship.

Qaddafi had spoken from a low platform surrounded by two hundred of his elite personal guards. When he finished, he marched away in the center of this guard to his armored limousine, and it rolled away in a six-car caravan. The vehicles began changing places until it was confusing which one the Libyan leader rode in.

Two hours later, Qaddafi paced back and forth in a well-guarded warehouse near the waterfront. He watched his best engineers dismantling the nose cone of the Russian Sasin ICBM.

“Can’t they go faster?” Qaddafi asked.

The man generally considered to be the number-two man in Libya had been pacing with his commander. They both stopped. The second man was Abdul Fantoli.

“Now is an excellent time to exercise some patience, Mr. Prime Minister. That way we don’t rush the engineers so they make a mistake and ten nuclear weapons go off all at once, reducing our beloved Tripoli to an ash being washed over by the boiling Mediterranean.”

Qaddafi stared at Fantoli for a moment and shrugged. “Just so the ten little packages are all safe inside and we can get them out and use them. For fourteen years I have been waiting for this day. So well I remember our blistering defeat in Chad back in eighty-seven when we had to pull out and leave a billion dollars worth of military equipment behind. That will never happen to us again. Never again.”

“This time we will sweep in with power and speed that will make the Nazi Blitzkrieg look like a schoolboy game. This time we will overwhelm them and make them pay.”

Fantoli nodded. “Yes, we are ready. Our special strike forces can be ready in three days, then move out to the assembly areas in the desert. One thing we need to finalize is the delivery method.”

“Finalize it today, Fantoli. Test it tomorrow, alert the strike force the next day. Three days from then we strike.”

Fantoli acknowledged the order and hurried away. In his own limousine, he phoned his top engineers. They met in his office, both arriving at about the same time in the bomb-proof structure four stories below ground.

The engineer listened to the timetable.

“I suggest that we use a MiG-23 Flogger jet to deliver the bomb,” he said, “It will be recalibrated to detonate at ten thousand feet in an airburst. Our engineers know how to do this. Releasing the bomb

from the hard point on the Flogger's wing will arm the bomb. It will be delivered over the target and descend from thirty thousand feet on a parachute to the ten-thousand-foot level, where it detonates.

"This will give our pilot plenty of time to get out of the way of the bomb blast itself or any effect of the radiation. He will circle thirty miles out, then return for a flyover for a report on the effect of the bomb. Pictures will be taken as well. When the nuclear engineers finish their work and give us the bomb ready to drop, we will be ready."

Fantoli drew diagrams on a pad of paper on his desk.

"You're sure that this will work?"

"The targetable nuclear warhead is relatively simple. We take off the guidance system and the smart rockets, readjust the arming mechanism, and set them to detonate at ten-thousand feet of air pressure. Nothing can go wrong."

"I agree. That's why the Prime Minister and I and half of our staff will be in Benghazi for the next three days directing the attack from there. Good luck, and we'll see you when we get back." Fantoli chuckled. "That is, if nothing goes wrong, we'll see you when we get back."

Fantoli checked the target. It was just over the border into Chad a hundred miles, a small town called Yebbi Bou. None of the staff or the field commanders knew if they would actually drop the nuclear bomb or only threaten to. They would find out in three days. He had no current population figure for the town, but the estimate was about fifteen to twenty thousand people. It would be a wake-up call for Chad.

He made three phone calls alerting those who needed to know. Their troops would begin moving tomorrow, and would be in hidden camps along the border at the right time.

Fantoli knew it would happen. The engineers had researched this project for three months, had come up with their changes on the warheads and the propulsion systems and the arming device. They would have the bomb ready on time. The parachute had been tested a dozen times on a mock-up of the same weight. It had worked perfectly every time from thirty thousand feet.

He made one more phone call. Then was on his way to pick up the Prime Minister for their quiet flight to Benghazi. It would be an interesting three days.

NAVSPECWARGRUP-ONE Coronado, California

Commander Dean Masciareli slammed the flat of his palm down on his pristine-clean desk.

"Listen up, SEALs. There are going to be some changes around here. No more of this cowboy shit. You will go through channels of command. You will not bypass me or Admiral Kenner on any matter whatsoever. Is that distinctly clear?"

Lieutenant Commander Blake Murdock, his 2IC Lieutenant (J.G.) Ed DeWitt, and Master Chief Petty Officer Gordon MacKenzie all nodded.

"Gentlemen, I want to hear you say it," Masciareli barked.

"Yes, sir, clear, understood," all three said, and Masciareli snorted and sat down behind the large desk.

"All right. Any time this Don Stroh character contacts you, he should be bumped up the chain to me and I'll tell the admiral. Then if there is an assignment, it will come down the chain from the Chief of Naval Operations to the admiral, not from some chicken-sucking CIA man."

Master Chief MacKenzie was the most relaxed man in the room. He had seen commanders come and go through this office. He cleared his throat, and Masciareli looked at him.

“Master Chief?” Masciareli asked.

“Sir. Let’s say I get a phone call or a signal from the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. I am to buck that up to you?”

“Precisely, Master Chief. The admiral and I are tired of being bypassed and not even knowing where our Seventh Team Third Platoon is half the time. We have to be in the picture. Admiral Kenner just talked with the CNO this morning and ironed things out. The CNO will not be calling you, Master Chief, or you, Commander. This CIA man, Stroh, may be a problem. If he calls, tell him simply that he must get into the loop and go to the CNO, who will then contact Admiral Kenner and we’ll get the word down to the concerned platoon. Is that all perfectly clear?”

Again the chorus of agreement came from the three SEALs.

“Good. Now sit down. We’ve had a tentative alert for sometime next week. It seems that the CIA has been monitoring a cache of former Russian ICBMs in the Ukraine. They all were supposed to have been returned to Russia years ago for their agreed-on destruction. Most were. Some were not. Now the CIA tells us that some of those missiles have been moved from the underground armory near Odessa in what is now the independent nation of Ukraine, and put on board a Chinese freighter.

“The satellites have lost the freighter, but the CIA believes it to be somewhere in the Aegean Sea. It’s moving at only ten knots and the freighter is said to be an old rust bucket. The CIA thinks it’s on its way to China.

“Those ICBMs are the type that have ten independently targetable nuclear warheads in each nose cone. If the Chinese get three of them, that’s thirty more nuclear bombs they can add to their arsenal. If they get ten missiles, it’s a hundred more nukes for them.

“There is a chance that your platoon may be asked to intercept that freighter and take it over, destroy the warheads, or simply sail the ship into a neutral port where U.S. forces could take control of the nose cones of those missiles. Comments.”

“Why would the Chinese use an old rust bucket to haul out such a valuable cargo?” DeWitt asked.

“We don’t have an answer.”

“How fast is the ship traveling?” Murdock asked.

“That we do know,” Masciareli said. “Ten knots. Which seems strange when most freighters can make from eighteen to twenty-three knots. Comments why?”

“A ploy to throw us off the scent,” Ed DeWitt said. “Nobody would put all those missiles in an old scow that could make only ten knots. They hope to slip through the net.”

“Why didn’t they fly them?” Murdock asked. “Be a lot simpler and faster.”

“Probably too hard to get a Chinese transport plane large enough to take the type missile we’re talking about,” Masciareli said. “Then getting clearances in and out of an airport in Odessa would be much harder than slipping away from a dock at midnight.”

“So we could have a wet takedown on the scow if we can find her,” Murdock said.

“About the size of it,” Masciareli agreed. “The admiral will keep us up to date on matters. He said Don Stroh will still be a field rep for the CIA, but official action will go through the admiral.”

“Yes, sir,” Murdock said.

“That’s it. I would guess you might have some wet training to do about now.”

“Yes, sir,” DeWitt said.

The three stood.

“You’re dismissed,” Masciareli said. The SEALs walked out the door and left the building.

“Good-bye, Don Stroh,” DeWitt said.

“Not a chance,” Master Chief MacKenzie said. “Oh, he’ll pull back, send requests through, but there will be a time when it just won’t work through channels and he’ll jump the CNO to call me direct and get things moving. Won’t be long. Kenner and Masciareli had their big shot, moved things to Naval

time, so they'll be happy for a while. First thing you know they won't want to take the time to keep tabs on us, and we'll be back to business as usual."

"Hope to hell you're right," Murdock said. "Stroh has been a pain sometimes, but he gets the job done. Now, for some training. Take down a freighter at sea. Ideas, 2IC?"

"Yeah, a couple."

They stopped at the Quarterdeck, where Murdock put in a request with the master chief for the use of a destroyer for two days for sea training. The request went to Masciareli, who asked for Murdock on the phone.

"A destroyer for two days? You know what that's going to cost the Navy?"

"A few hundred gallons of diesel fuel and some tired sailors. We need the actual at-sea training going up the side of a ship. Hone our skills on daylight practice, then chasing down the ship at night and doing the same thing. Think what it will cost if we can't do the job and that freighter gets through to China."

An hour later they had the authorization through Admiral Kenner. By 0935 Murdock was on the phone with Commander Zertiz, CO of the *Donald Cook*, DDG 75, ported at the 32nd Naval Pier for some minor repairs.

"You want to do what?" Zertiz asked.

Murdock explained it to him.

"Whatever the admiral says," Zertiz replied. "My crew is on board. We were due to sail in the morning on a training run. We'll just jump it a few hours. We'll see you five miles off Point Loma sometime after fifteen hundred."

"Right, Commander. Once on station, set a two-mile-box course at ten knots. That's the speed we need."

Third Platoon of SEAL Team Seven had been scheduled for a five-mile run and a five-mile ocean swim that afternoon. Ed DeWitt made the needed arrangements. They took a bus to nearby Naval Air Station, with a flatbed truck right behind them holding two fully inflated IBSs. The Sea Knight chopper sat on the flight line warmed up and ready to move. The Sea Knight is a workhorse medium assault helicopter with two contrarotating, three-blade main rotors fore and aft of the fuselage. It can haul twenty-five fully combat-ready troops or fifteen litters on a hospital run. It is armed with two .50-caliber machine guns, and can use door gunners with freewheeling machine guns. It has a maximum speed of 165 mph, with a maximum range of 420 miles.

The sixteen SEALs, wearing cammies over their wet suits, loaded on board the helicopter and pushed the two IBSs and their special equipment inside through the aft hatch. All the men wore their usual combat vests and carried their assigned or selected weapons with full loads of ammunition.

The chopper's pilot checked with Senior Chief Dobler, who gave him a thumbs-up, and the bird lifted off just after 1435.

"How many of you have done this before?" Dobler asked. He had a response of twelve hands out of the sixteen. "Nothing to it. Just follow orders, work slowly and carefully, and it will go off like clockwork. Any questions?"

"We're going to run down a destroyer in our IBS?" Tony Ostercamp, Machinist's Mate First Class, asked.

"The destroyer will be making only ten knots. That's the speed this rusted-out freighter supposedly doing. We'll drop in ahead of the ship, power over to her and match speed, then latch on to the side of the destroyer with our magnets. We've been over the procedure a dozen times."

"Jump time in three minutes," the speaker in the chopper said. The men stood and began checking each other's gear, then lined up with one squad on each side of the big bird waiting for the aft swing-down hatch to open.

A minute later it yawned downward. When the red jump light came on, the first two SEALs pushed the two IBSs out the rear, picked up their flotation drag bags, and looked at Dobler.

“Go, go, go,” Dobler shouted to be heard over the sound of the chopper. The SEALs ran to the back of the CH-46 and stepped into space. The craft was only ten feet off the water. They hit almost at once, went underwater, came up grabbing at their flotation bags, and swam toward the floating IBSs.

Once all the SEALs were on board the two rubber boats, the engines were started and the small craft began nosing to the left to meet the path of the destroyer about a mile behind them. They plowed through a medium sea at the assigned ten knots.

Murdock watched his men. Jaybird would be the first one up the side of the destroyer. Out of the other boat it would be Fernandez, Gunner’s Mate First Class, who had done it before. Murdock judged the angle of the destroyer and motioned for the two boats to move ahead another hundred yards. They waited. The men on the destroyer were supposed to ignore them.

As it came up, Murdock thought that the five-hundred-foot-long destroyer had never looked large. He watched as it sliced through the water fifty yards to the left. Kenneth Ching, Quartermaster’s Mate First Class, who was on the motor, revved it at just the right time and moved the rubber boat ahead at nearly full speed as it ate up the distance to the big ship and came alongside amidships. Holt and Bradford slammed the strong magnets against the side of the destroyer and tied them off to the side of the IBS. They were latched on. Behind them he saw the Bravo Squad boat miss the tie and surge away from the destroyer. It powered back to the side of the craft, landed the strong magnets, and tied the IBS to the mother ship.

At once Jaybird and Fernandez began to work their way up the sloping sides of the destroyer. They had strong hand magnets and smaller ones on their boots. They lifted the hand magnets off the side of the ship, extended their arms as far upward as they would go, and let the magnets clamp tight as they took a step upward. Each man trailed a strong woven nylon line behind him.

The side of the destroyer was maybe a quarter of the distance from water to rail that a freighter would be. The two SEALs worked upward quickly, and were soon over the rail.

On the deck of the destroyer, Jaybird ignored six curious seamen, and tied off the nylon line to the strongest rail support and gave it two quick tugs. Below, Joe Lampedusa, Operations Specialist Third Class, grabbed the rope and began to climb upward, walking up the ship as he heaved his body upward hand over hand on the strong line.

Murdock was the last man up from his boat. He left Vinnie Van Dyke, Electrician’s Mate Second Class, to stay with the boat. On the actual operation all eight men would go topside.

On the destroyer’s deck, Murdock gathered his men around.

“That’s how we’ll get on board. It will be a lot tougher climb than that. We’ll go back to base tomorrow and work on the rope climbs. Now everyone over the side on the rope in reverse order from the way you came up.”

They all went down the rope. In a real operation they would leave the nylon line attached. On the training exercise one of the destroyer crewmen was asked to untie it once the last man was down.

They unlatched from the destroyer, surged away from it, and went to the other side, where they worked the climb again. By that time it was turning dusk. They stayed on board this time, had chatted with the crew, and got ready for their night exercise. It would be much the same, only without the lights. The destroyer would be in combat mode showing few lights.

Captain Zertiz came down on deck and watched the SEALs go over the side. He found Murdock.

“You guys always have this much fun?” he asked.

Murdock grinned and shook the commander’s hand. “Usually it’s best when nobody is shooting at us. Thanks for your help. We needed some polishing.”

“You do this at night?”

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