

Black Winter

A Twilight: 2000 novel



By Twilight2000v3MM

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST DAY. Sunday 7th January.

The ghosts called to him. 'TITAN!'

Whispering through the static that haunted the UHV wave bands.

'TITAN, DO YOU READ, OVER?'

He listened to them as he sat hunched forward against the hatch of his Russian built T-80 Main Battle Tank; hands laid across the top, gloved fingers interlocked with his chin resting against them. He tried to ignore the ghosts like he ignored numbingly cold wind that clawed at his back. He'd survived forty five Siberian winters; twenty-eight of which had been spent in the service of the Red Army. He'd grown accustomed to the sterilising cold that permeated from within the heart of his great country and almost welcomed the icy talons that clawed through the layers of oil skin and wool into his skin and deep down into his bones; seemingly singling him out as it's only victim' like the ghosts did now.

Paranoia. Yet he knew the wind was indiscriminate in who it chose. Neither age, sex nor rank bore preference. It would freeze the bones of the youngest conscripted private as readily as those of a Lieutenant Colonel. Unlike the ghosts. They were there just for him. Calling him, taunt him to the deaths he'd condemned them too.

'TITAN, MOVING OUT'

He knew most of their voices and most of their names. Men and women who had died for him.

'TAKING FIRE FROM THE RIGHT FLANK - I NEED HELP TITAN'

All of them gave themselves completely and selflessly at his word, believing he knew their sacrifice would not be vain.

'WE NEED HELP TITAN - WE'RE TAKING HITS.'

He wondered whether he'd have the commitment to do the same? Once, maybe, but now?

'TITAN WE ARE DYING OUT HERE!.....TITAN!'

Three years the war had raged between his country and Germany. Three years in which nothing had been achieved. He'd fought them every day of it, forced back from the Oder river through Poland and Russia to with kilometres of Moscow and to where they made a stand. He and so many others had stopped the combined might of the German, American and British armies and turned them back.

'TITAN, THIS IS HATCHET.'

Three years had returned him to his start point. To the same village, the same river where he had first fought them. Nothing had really changed. Tonight, he swore, it would. Tonight he would make it all worth something. He would take his tanks for the first time onto German soil.

'TITAN. THIS IS HATCHET ARE YOU RECIEVING - OVER.'

He pushed the talk button. "Hatchet, this is Titan. Reading you clear. Over "

'TITAN - CROSSING IS SECURE AND BRIDGES ARE CLEAR - OVER.'

"Copy Hatchet. Moving off now. Out." He switched to the divisional net. "All units, all units. This is Titan. Move off single file. Keep it steady at ten kph. Out."

The T-80's 800bhp V-60 diesel engine growled loudly, belching out a huge cloud of blue/grey exhaust into the cold air almost in unison with the other tanks in the division. Gears rattled, slack links in the track snatched taut as the column stirred into life. Rutowski's 42-ton monster moved; inching forward onto the hard packed roadway. The T-74 parked alongside his moved to follow, struggling in the deep snow that had drifted up almost to the height of the engine deck.

'DRIVER!' The concern in the commander's voice was clear over the open radio channel. The driver slewed the T-74 into the hole left by Rutowski's tank. The tracks found firm footing and hauled the tank clear.

Rutowski watched the tank struggle. They'd been stationary for far too long on the Schwedt - Chojna autobahn. Two miles ahead stood the village of Krajnik-Dolny, even in the darkness it stood black against the snow fields. Once little more than a local crossing point on the Oder river, it had survived since the Patriotic War of 1940-45 relatively unchanged until the unification of Germany. Then they built the autobahn linking Neubrandenburg in Germany to Gorzow-Wielkopolski in Poland. It crossed the river at this point and it was this bridge that would take Rutowski's tanks into Germany. Sappers had spent the previous day clearing the carriageway of tank traps and scatter mines laid by the retreating Coalition forces during the autumn rout. It had been a laborious task, slow and difficult, hampered by nine inches of hard packed snow. But totally necessary if the tank were to negotiate the road safely.

The task had been completed just after nightfall when the Sappers entered the Krajnik-Dolny under the protection of Rutowski's armoured reconnaissance arm to secure the two bridges. They were meant to be near Passow by this time, nearly 20 kilometres inside the German border, securing the forward staging area. Instead, the 157th Motor Rifles were still bottled up with the Sappers inside the village.

He cursed his own lack of foresight. Even at this early stage of the operation vital flaws were becoming blatantly clear to him. Simple, obvious things a junior officer should have picked up. Yet there was nothing he could do about them. Wheels had been set in motion which he could no longer stop. He was committed to this course of action and there was no way back. Not for him or any of those who served under him.

A lone Hummer waited for them beside the first burnt-out house of Krajnik-Dolny; part of the 157th Motor Rifles command section. It had been acquired along with the three other vehicles: another Hummer; a larger and newer version of the venerable jeep, and two LAV-25: robust eight-wheeled armoured cars; from the Americans some months earlier. Still painted in U.S. European summer camouflage scheme, the only thing that distinguished these four vehicles as a friendly element were the new identification number and the small Russian flags painted on each side, but these were only visible from within fifty feet of each vehicle.

This was a twist of modern warfare that no one had been taught at the academies, not Russian, American or British. And all had fallen foul of it. Rutowski had learned that lesson early in the war, like so many others, the hard way. Having spotted three T-80s on the outskirts of a village in Central Poland, he'd presumed they were friendly and ordered a Mechanised Infantry Company to move across the open ground under their protection. Nineteen seconds, eleven burning BMP-2s and 153 casualties later Rutowski realised his mistake. One he had never repeated.

The Major climbed onto the roof of the Hummer and stepped across onto Rutowski's tank as it passed. "We're three hours behind schedule, Major. What's the hold up?" Rutowski demanded from his chief engineer.

"We've had half a dozen snipers taking shots at us from either side of the river. It seems a few of the locals weren't as pleased to see us as we hoped."

"Casualties?"

"Yes, three. One fatal."

"And the snipers?"

"Flushed them all out. But we've got another problem," the Major continued. "Someone's had a go at blowing both the bridges some time ago. They're both have been badly damaged -"

"Are they still use able?"

"Yeah. Whoever did it made a complete mess of the job. The old steel bridge is in better shape and we've managed to patch it up. The autobahn bridge is not so good. It's taken a demolition charge on one of the pilings and they've punched a hole through the road deck. It's only safe to take the light stuff across it. I reckon fifteen tons tops and that's one at a time."

Rutowski grimaced. That meant it would be near dawn before the last element was clear of the crossing. Things had to move faster. "Can we wade the river or build another bridge?" He knew the answer before he'd finished the question.

The major shook his head. "It's too deep to wade and we have neither the equipment nor the time to build another bridge. It's these two or nothing. The approach to the old bridge is tight and awkward. There's rubble all over the place and the road is almost blocked at several points. It can be cleared, but I've got sod all to do it with."

"One of B Company's tanks is fitted with a bulldozer blade. I'll have it brought up."

"Yeah, that'll help."

A shout reached them both. They stopped and looked towards a man standing in the street shouting at someone else. "Where are the civilians?" Rutowski asked, drawing the major's attention back.

"All indoors if they've got any sense. We've had a few on onlookers, but most have enough sense to know guns mean trouble."

"Good, I want as few civilian casualties as possible."

"Providing they stay out of my way, that shouldn't be a problem. I've stationed one Humvee back there to control the flow of traffic onto the crossing; split 'em up for the two bridges. There's an LAV on either bank, the TOW variant on this bank, the chain gun on the far side, in case we get any more trouble in here. The other Humvee's on the far side to direct everything to the staging area."

The T-80 halted alongside the TOW fitted LAV-25 and the Major stepped across onto it. The Staff Sergeant sitting in the turret handed him a scribbled radio message from a reconnaissance platoon. The Major read it then turned back to Rutowski, "Sir, there's reports of more sniping from the forward staging area."

"Can they deal with it?" He asked glancing round at the darkened windows, wondering who might be staring out at him - another sniper perhaps?

"Yes sir. It's only sporadic at the moment. If it hots up I'll send something heavy to deal with it."

Rutowski laughed briefly. "I want the 21st across first to push ahead to staging point two. We're behind time, so let's get things moving and try to make some of it up."

"Right sir." He turned to the sergeant, "Have the 21st waved straight through. They're first priority." The lead T-74 came to a halt along side them.

"Use the south bridge." Rutowski shouted across at its' commander. "Proceed over one at a time then follow the directions on the other side."

The T-74's commander waved a hand and ordered his driver onward. The tank jerked forward again, following the road up to the old bridge. There it stopped and turned 90 degrees on its tracks to face it. Decorated with fake medieval parapets, it was a narrow bridge, barely a road width wide. As a minor crossing point restricted only to citizens of the Communist Bloc it saw nowhere near the same volume of traffic as Szczecin or Frankfurt. The two charges had blown away part of the girder work that gave the bridge its strength. The major's engineers had welded 'H' section alongside the damaged beams and across the gaps. The tank commander glanced over the hurried repairs then up at the newer autobahn bridges. He wondered whether Rutowski had got his information the right way round, this structure hardly looked strong enough to support the weight of a light truck.

A corporal clambered up onto the -74's glacis plate.

"Move forward, slowly and follow my directions," he told the driver. Then he slid off and walked onto the bridge. He turned back to face the tank and waved on. The driver eased out the clutch and crawled the monster onto the narrow bridge. It was almost too narrow for the tank. 60mm thick steel plates hung from the factory fitted side skirts, lending the T-74 the appearance of a World War Two German Panzer. They added almost two tons to its weight.

The commander saw the width restriction sign suspended from the structure - MAX WIDTH 3.7M - and did the quick arithmetic, barely a 100mm clearance, just 50mm each side. The T-74 inched forward. The left-hand skirt scraping chips off the frost crazed stone parapet before cracking the masonry and nudging the block over the side into the ice-covered water below.

The corporal pointed right and the tank edged away from the masonry and continued onward under the steel beams of the bridge; crawling ever so slowly. The structure creaked and groaned under the weight of the 44 tons Main Battle Tank. He watched the ice break away from the repaired beams as tiny shock waves dissipated through the structure. He could almost imagine the stresses working through them, pulling the hot riveted joints apart, tearing at the crude welds, threatening to plunge him to an icy death in the river.

It took five minutes for the tank to pass the opposite parapets. It performed another 90-degree left turn and accelerated past the second LAV to rejoining the autobahn.

Rutowski glanced at his watch. Five minutes, too long. That translated to a nearly an hour and a half to get just the heavy armour across and an additional half an hour for the 157th to clear the crossing. Four hours. Too long. He'd planned to be clear by 0200 at the latest. There must be a quicker way!

He looked back at the autobahn bridge. "Are you sure about that fifteen-ton weight limit."

"Yes sir, and that's pushing it," the major replied. "The demolition charges may have been poorly set, but they've done a lot of damage. Punched a hole right through the road deck and there's hell of a big chunk out of the west side piling. I can repair the old bridge. It's steel, I can weld it up. But that one's reinforced concrete. I can't touch it. We're lucky it's still standing. I've had three gangs working on it since nightfall, patching the sod up as best we can. We've bolted on additional support beams around the piling and laid a new road deck to try and even out the stress loading. But," he shrugged, "you can try for more, though I wouldn't recommend it."

The Major was right, of course. He'd spent eight years as a structural engineer before being conscripted into the army; he knew what he was talking about. Blue flashes of welding arcs lit up dark figures moving about under the road deck. Above them the first BMP moved across. Rutowski turned to watch the second tank negotiate the bend off the bridge. Snow had started falling again. Three inches of snow had already fallen since nightfall, hindering the major in his task. More snow would set them back even further

The Chancellor looked out of his office window. The darkness had turned to grey shadows with the morning. That night's snow had left an unblemished covering on the lawns that stretched from the German Federal Parliament Building to the high security fencing that separated them from the city beyond, obliterating all traces of the previous day. Behind him his Minister for Internal Security was speaking.

"...we must keep the foreign nationals here as long as possible," he repeated. There was a mutter across the room, someone openly agreed with him.

Chancellor Hellor shook his head without turning from the window. "Bernard, the people are against that. They see the foreigners as an Army of Occupation - especially the British. Since they occupied Hamburg, no-one gets in or out without their say-so; not even our own troops. That is a situation I cannot allow to continue."

"Look at what the British have done with Hamburg. Last Christmas the city almost tore itself apart with civil unrest and food riots. This year they have only been a few minor disturbances - mainly in the outlying areas where the military presence is less pronounced. The British control the city; control its food distribution, control its resources, control its population. We've had ten counts of major rioting within Bonn already this year." Bernard Hauer continued. "Sir, the people don't know what's best for them. They have no comprehension of what's has to be done to rebuild this country. They only see the problems that befall them right now, right this minute, not six weeks or six months ahead. They are so concerned with the day to day problems of survival that they can't even contemplate the route to economic recovery."

"But the people see the British as an occupying army, a suppressing army. Hamburg is under Marshall law. They have a shoot to kill policy during curfew hours. You are not going to tell me the population of Hamburg are happy with that?"

"The largest movement of population in December was into that city. I cannot tell you how the population feels about the situation within the city. All I can tell you is what they are doing. And that is voting with there feet. The British sector maybe seen as dictatorial and suppressive, but it's also seen as safe."

"But Joseph tells me there is unrest with the way the British are running things."

"Yes, of cause there is. Under any stick military regime there will be discontent. We see that against our own troops. That's fine. Let the population think that, Chancellor. Let them vent all their anger and frustrations against the British. You can't lock a city down that hard without repercussions. It will blow soon and the British will have to deal with that when it comes. However if they leave, the city will turn on our soldiers and they will see our own army as the suppressers."

Hellor finally turned from the window. "Do we know for certain the British are intending to withdraw?"

"Yes Chancellor."

"How much detail have we got on the withdrawal plans?"

"Enough to be certain it will happen." Replied Joseph Vonnegut, the Defence Minister and former Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz - BfV - Military Intelligence officer. "They've just acquired three more ships in the past week. Two are confirmed as Ro-Ro ferries from the Baltic; one Scandinavian, the other Lithuanian. The third is allegedly the Arctic Voyager, she's a 48,000 ton bulk container vessel that's been aground off the Holland coast for nearly a year. We'd presumed she was unsalvageable. If they have managed to re-float her, she gonna need some serious work before she'll be sea worthy again."

"How long will that take?"

"From two weeks to two months, Chancellor. That's a conservative guess."

Hellor walked across the room to sit in his plush leather chair. "And after that, how long do you anticipate it would take before the British have enough ships to make the withdrawal?"

Vonnegut sighed. "That depends. If they intend to follow the American's example and leave all their heavy equipment behind, then with the Arctic Voyager they already have enough. However, we believe they are intending to take everything with them. So I estimate they will require at least a half dozen more vessels."

"And what does that give us as the most likely timetable for their withdrawal?"

"Early to late spring for an expeditionary force. With the main body following in the summer. They'd most likely establish a beach head at one of the East Coast ports before pushing inland. From what we've seen of their plans, they are treating it a potentially hostile operation."

"Do we have any indication to how the UKLF will react to their presence?" He referred to the United Kingdom Land Forces.

"No Chancellor. Information coming out of the United Kingdom is very sketchy and unreliable. However BAEUR - " British Army of Europe, "- believe they will be in for a hostile reception."

Hellor sat quiet for a moment. "I've heard talk of a growing resistance to the withdrawal. Can you shed any light on these?"

"The original withdrawal order was issued to BAEUR by the British Government last September, about the same time as the Americans issued theirs. The order was for an immediate relocation of all British military personnel from Continental Europe to the United Kingdom for integration into the UK Land Force or disbandment into civilian services. At that time the orders didn't include the movement of any heavy equipment or vehicles; this was to be handed over to us and the Belgians. Nor did it include non British military and civilian personnel in the service of BAEUR. We estimate there are in excess of 6000 of these, mostly Americans and Germans, and a smaller number of Eastern Europeans. Due to these restriction BAEUR refused to acknowledge the orders and the British Government subsequently withdrew their support. Both the British Government and UKLF view BAEUR as hostile. How this will manifest itself when the two come face to face is unknown. BAEUR

has spent the past six months consolidating its position around Hamburg, systematically handing over their outlying strong-holds to our control. The British 5th Mechanised Division is the only large concentration of troops outside the city, and they are handing Hanover back to us in three days time."

"Chancellor," Hauer stated. "The Hanover garrison has been bolstered by surplus American equipment to enable them to continue governing the city. Equipment we should be sending east to strengthen the garrison along the Polish border. Muncheberg, Pasewalk and Prenzlau are all undermanned and under strength. If the British leave, they remove over 20,000 men from our internal security structure. Men that will need replacing to control and protect the population of the city. That will mean pulling more men and equipment away from the front line area. This is not inherent to the security of our borders"

Heller knew this. "I could see what the British had done to Hamburg. They've brought order to the city and this is what was needed if we are to rebuild Germany. But they also controlled it, totally. It was as good as foreign territory to us. The industrial heart of his country was in the hands of foreigners." He held his arms out. "I can't allow that. Haven't you read the slogans?" He left his desk and returning to the window. "Look," he pointed to the cream coloured concrete building beyond the fencing. "Have you seen the slogans? 'Germany for Germans' in metre height letters."

"Yes, I see it most mornings."

"The people don't want them here. This government doesn't want them here"

"Chancellor, we need them."

He turned back thumping his fist down on his desk. "Surely we should use this to unite the country. The people have identified a common foe, the British, and as their democratically elected representatives, we should respond to this."

"Chancellor?" Hauer rose.

"Bernard!" The uneasy moment of silence broke as Heller's face softened. "I have a lot of information here and I need time to study it in detail."

"And how do we stand in regard to the withdrawal?"

"I will let you know in my own time. Good day Bernard."

Hauer and Vonnegut returned to the Security Ministers office in silence. "That was Koch specking." Vonnegut muttered as she climbed two flights of stairs.

"May be, but she's out of it now. Heller's got few allies left."

Hauer's office was two floors above the Chancellor's, it was high enough above the surrounding city for its single broad east facing window to catch the first rays from the low sun and bathe the office in a warm welcoming glow. However, two days ago while taking to

Eurika Koch; the former Minister for Agriculture, a single assassins bullet shattered the plate glass window and struck her in the back. Although Hauer knew that assassin would never return for him, he'd had the window boarded up and sandbagged so now only artificial light now welcomed him. However, this was a small sacrifice to maintain the facade. And one he made without regret.

Once seated at his desk he summoned Han Kubrick, the young man who had been promoted into the crippled Eurika's shoes, to his office. He was in his eyes a good replacement for her, younger by nine years and more receptive to his political opinions, Kubrick understood the problems faced by his country as it clawed it's way to recovery. Eurika had been foolish and deserved her fate. She believed Germany could have stand alone and regain it's greatness unaided. At forty-nine, she'd spent over half her political career in a divided Germany. She'd rejoiced at the reunification and believed in her country's independence. She saw herself as a new German. She was a fool. Germany could not stand alone, it could neither defend its boarders or feed its people without the help of foreigners. Foreigners were sustaining Germany's growth, not hindering it as she believed.

"He'll make the wrong choice." Vonnegut said from one of the easy chairs. "Koch still has his ear, she'll will convince him that they should go. Dame that man!"

Kubrick entered half way through the conversation. "So Hellor hasn't decided either way yet."

"No. The man's incompetent, too scared to take a decision without Eurika holding his hand. If she'd had been there he'd have decided, she'd have seen to it. He should be removed from office, before he can do more any damage."

"Eurika still has a large hold on him. There is a lot of loyalty to her and she could still be very persuasive." Hauer added, gesturing at Kubrick to take a seat.

"She's out of her office now," Vonnegut answered. "She's lost control of her department and if we can discredit her, she'll lose that loyalty. You've seen the figures she's been playing with, Han, she's been fiddling them for the past three months to make it look like we'll end up with a deficiency. And I'm dam sure we won't."

"She's been juggling them in her favour" Kubrick replied. "I'm just not sure where, not without taking a closer look."

"Good. See what you can do for tomorrow morning." Hauer grunted, then turned to Vonnegut. "What about the withdrawal. How soon?"

Vonnegut breathed in through his teeth. "Maybe as soon as next month for the expeditionary force."

"That soon! Why'd you tell Hellor spring?"

"The man's under enough pressure already. If I'd told him this month he'd have decided it was already too late to do anything. The decision would have been made for him, again."

Hauer lent back in his chair. "Next month, you sure?"

Vonnegut nodded. "My people inside BAEUR have seen reconnaissance photos identifying several East Coast ports."

"Anywhere in particular?" Kubrick asked.

"Hull, Lowestoft and Felixstowe are favourite."

Kubrick frowned. "I thought most of the British Army in England was in the South-east. Why aren't they going for one of the southern ports?"

Vonnegut smiled. "The British Army of Europe and the United Kingdom Land Forces are not actually seeing eye to eye at the moment."

Hauer leaned forward. "Hellor has to be removed. He's long out lived his political usefulness. I need to know what the atmosphere is within the government, who I can count on, who I can't. Becker, the Transport Minister has been making noises. I want to know if we can use him? Can we push him forward as a challenger to Hellor? Now Eurika is out the way, there is no strong successor to replace him." He looked at them. "Find out."

THE SECOND DAY. Monday 8th January.

FM. Western TDV, Pila,

TO. Major General Straczynski

Discontinue current assignment. Transport helicopter is on route to airlift you and your unit to Pila. Contact helicopter on normal channels with rendezvous detail prior to 2100 hours. This is urgent Misha.

General Chorski

The helicopter was just an Ex-Aeroflot Mi-17 'Hip', still painted white with the blue logo visible above the passenger windows, except it had been stripped out and retro fitted with the same guns and rocket pods as it's military counterpart. It was nothing spectacular; noisy, dirty, cold and uncomfortable. However it use, more than anything else, conveyed to Major

General Mikhail Straczynski the urgency of his recall to Western Theatre Headquarters - TVD - at Pila, Western Poland.

Aerofuel was a scarce commodity and helicopter a valuable piece of kit to dispatch to collect his unit without first receiving confirmation their location. Something had to have gone very wrong.

Straczynski's Spetsnaz had spent the past three weeks tracking down a rogue Slovakian Army platoon who'd stolen a live SS-22 'Scaleboard' battle field missile; reputedly the missile was fitted with a nuclear warhead. TVD feared they'd try and launch or detonate it at some point. Straczynski had pursued the renegades across Slovakia and the Czech Republic towards the German town of Regensburg, where less than ten kilometres from the German border they'd caught it and eliminated the deserters. The recall signal came as they prepared to return to Pila with the launcher. No mention of the missile was made.

The warhead code had confirmed it to be a 500 Kiloton device. He now held the launch codes and keys, but these were only electronic barriers to prevent accidental detonation. A determined person could still achieve that through several means. Destroying the was not a viable option, nor was move it to a safe location. Time constraints prevented it. As the chopper lifted clear from a snow-field, Straczynski felt uneasy about his solution. Both missile and launcher sat barely a metre below the icy waters of a Czech lake. Not an ideal solution, but the only one available to him at this time.

CHAPTER TWO

General Chorski lit his cigarette and drew deeply on it until he felt the nicotine contaminated smoke filled his lungs. It still gave him that warm heady sensation he remembered and craved from his adolescence. Fifteen years earlier, after a heart attack and a stern warning from his doctor, he'd reluctantly given up. Nardia, his wife, had been delighted by that decision and didn't seem to mind the crabbiness that followed and the boiled sweets that put two inches onto his waist, and after several weeks he too became more aware of the subtle tastes food and fine wines. Gradually he realised that this had been a privilege that he, then a full Colonel of the Red Army and Secretary to the Defence Minister, had denied himself for far too long. But now his Nardia was gone, lost to him nine years this Christmas; taken as retribution for his unfaithfulness and he'd mourned her passing with every breath.

He held his breath as long as he could, closed his eyes and slowly exhaled through his nostrils, letting the smoke drift away from his face; just far enough to momentarily lift away the mask of weariness that he permanently wore, before drawing half of it back in with his next breath.

He spat out a loose flake of tobacco and replaced the cigarette between his lips. "This report is correct as of 2200 hours yesterday." He dropped the copy onto the desk. Straczynski's eyes

remained fixed on his old friend. Anatoli looked tired and old, far older than he remembered. But then weren't they both: Two grey haired old men caught up in a conflict two generations out of their league.

The young lieutenant who'd met him from the helicopter and lead him here stood in silence near the office door. The fourth person in the room; Colonel Petrya Andreyov, the egotistical son of the 'new' KGB's General Andreyov, also sat in silence. Colonel Andreyov revelled in the power of his father, and though not KGB himself both Straczynski and Chorski knew every word that would be uttered in this room would find its way back to those dark corridors.

"What date is it today, the 8th?" Straczynski asked taking the seat opposite Chorski's desk and picking up the report.

Lieutenant Borrisovich almost said the 7th before looking at his watch. 2.15 in the morning. He had problems comprehending the time. Like Chorski he hadn't slept since the crises erupted, all most 48 hours ago. As Straczynski sat in silence and read the report, he walked over to the pot in the corner of the office and pored himself a cup of coffee; more caffeine to fend off drowsiness. Chorski held his cup out and he filled it too. Andreyov refused.

"And how many Divisions are involved?" Straczynski asked taking the cup offered by Borrisovich.

"Eleven." Chorski answered. "Four Tank, five Motorised Rifles, and two Cavalry. There's a full listing on the back page."

Straczynski turned to it. "That's almost enough for two or three Army Groups."

Chorski picked up a separate sheet of paper from his desk and passed it to him. "We confirmed this less than an hour ago. All the divisions belong to either the 1st, 2nd and 20th Guards Tank Armies. All of them are now refusing to acknowledge orders."

Straczynski took the sheet. "What are they up to?" He muttered.

Chorski breathed out another lung full of smoke. "We're not sure. Our first assumption was a mass defection -"

"Possible." He shook his head. "But not eleven divisions."

"That's what we thought." Borrisovich said. "We could expect one or two to defect, especially due to the harsh winter. It's already happened with a Motor Rifle Division on the Austrian boarder. But eleven is too large a number. We're still trying to gather more information from their encampment sites, but it's proving difficult."

Chorski pointed to the second page of the report. "All the Divisions kicked off within an hour of each other, converging on three staging points east of the Oder before crossing at Frankfurt, Szczecin and Krajnik-Dolny. We've identified several staging points on the west bank, inside Germany. This can't be a defection, it's too neat, too precise, it reads like a planned operation."

"How accurate is this information?"

Chorski tapped his cigarette into an ash tray and picked up his own copy of the report.

"Accurate, assuming the Army Groups are still operating under the same command structure and with the same commanding officers. We're been trying to contact the command divisions to establish what orders they are operating under and where they came from. So far only two are talking back to us. They are the 9th Guards Tank, the 21st Motorised Rifles -"

Straczynski looked up at him. "The 21st? That's Lieutenant General Rutowski's Division?"

"You're very well informed sir, for someone who's just returned from the field." Borrisovich commented a bit too abruptly.

"Pavel!" Chorski snapped.

"And you're very outspoken, lieutenant." Straczynski replied. "General Rutowski and I served together in Georgia and Azerbaijan during the uprisings, as did his predecessor. He contacted me with the news just before I left."

"Sorry Sir. I didn't mean anything by that."

"However I detected a note of scepticism in your voice, Anotolli. You suspect something else?"

"Wouldn't you?" Chorski replied. "Their old CO drops down dead of rabies or something, Rutowski takes over then this whole thing blows up."

"Do you know where his Army Groups is now?"

"Not exactly. Rutowski crossed the Oder at Krajnik-Dolny in the early hours of this morning. We think his division is the main body of the Group and is somewhere close to Prenzlau." He let the cigarette burn slowly towards his fingers for a moment. "I spoke with him about an hour ago. He's confirmed that all the 2nd Army Group has cross the Oder. That no aggressive action was taken while on Polish soil other than in self defence. And that the Army Group, to a man, is no longer responding to orders from us. He's also refusing to inform us who's orders if any he is following or what his intentions are."

"There's a small German garrison at Prenzlau, An Army Group the size of the 2nd could not sneak past with them noticing something. Has there been any abnormal radio activity from them?"

He shook his head. "No. It's normal. Just regular German Army radio traffic."

"What about the other garrisons in the area?"

"Nothing from them either." Borrisovich said. "It's as if General Rutowski's tanks are invisible."

Chorski drew on his cigarette. Realising he'd let it burn down to the filter, he dropped it onto the floor and stamped it out. "We can only assume the Garrisons are unaware of them. But I

can't see how that is possible. The German's have a large presence in the area and the British still operate patrols. How could three Army Groups slip over the Oder unnoticed by either of them."

"Who supreme commander of the 1st Guards?" Straczynski asked.

"Lieutenant General Marian Kobiechi. She's with the 9th Tank Division."

"And it's the same story there?"

"Almost. She's at Munchenburg -"

"There is a substantial German Garrison there. There is absolutely no way she could be there without their knowledge. Has there been any reports of fighting?"

"No. Again every thing is quiet."

Defection? It re-emerged in his mind. But why? And why now and on such an unprecedented scale? "How much of the 1st Army has crossed the Oder?"

Borrisovich answered. "As far as we can ascertain all four Divisions under her command. However, she's proving to be a little more guarded with her co-operative than General Rutowski."

Straczynski turned to the back page. Four Divisions including the 9th Tank Division. A Category I Division that had seen action on both the Far East Front and the European Front, Kobiechi had been commented in both theatres. It had been her division that struck as visually into Western Poland, smashing the American XI Corps. She had rescued them all from the disaster at Malbork and started the rout. So why defect? There had to be a reason. "The last estimates on the strength of the Munchenburg Garrison were what? 500 to 1000 men and half dozen tanks?"

"It's nearer a dozen now. They've recently received a lot of equipment left behind by the American withdrawal." Borrisovich replied. "But even so Lieutenant General Kobiechi commands almost five times their numbers. She could have overrun the town. She has the firepower and the experience to do it."

"That would have involved some fighting, of which you tell me there has been none. The Germans also watch the bridges at Frankfurt very closely. It is protected by tank traps, barricades and anti-personnel mines, as well as being wired with detonation charges. There is no way Kobiechi could have crossed that bridge unless the Germans wanted her too. The Munchenburg Garrison controls everything between Berlin to the Oder. It's too vital an area for them to lose. There is no way they would abandon it even in the face of overwhelming odds. Which brings us back to a defection." He turned back to Chorski. "Have you personally contacted Kobiechi?"

"I have. She has only confirmed her location as Munchenburg. Like Rutowski, she refuses to give a reason for her actions or what her intentions are. I'm hoping she will hold her position there long enough for a company from the 20th Cavalry to reach her."

"How are they involved?"

"They're the nearest unit to her, and as she's the only one we know for sure where she is, I sent them to assess the situation first hand."

"When will they get there?"

"Tomorrow."

"Then what?"

"Find out what she's up too. Get her to withdraw back across the Oder. Whatever it takes to avoid conflict with the Coalition." Chorski lit another cigarette and blew another cloud of smoke across his desk. "If needed I will fly out to speak to her myself."

Straczynski turned the pages of the report. Decorated three times during this war. Marian Kobiechi was the embodiment of the Russian hero, able to turn the most hopeless situation into victory. Even in defeat she would emerge victorious.

Chorski knocked an inch of ash off his cigarette. "It is possible the cavalry could be walking into a trouble, or she might try and entice them into defecting with her. We just don't know. I've had their CO briefed to expect a hostile reception."

Straczynski turned to the logistic lists on the back page. "What about the 20th Guards Army? There is very little in this report about them."

Chorski became noticeably uncomfortable, Straczynski sensed this and looked up. "Who's the command element?"

"The Army's under the command of the 12th Guards Motorised Rifle." He told him.

"Colonel Solvac's Division." Borrisovich informed them.

Straczynski's eyes shot to Chorski. "Leonid Solvac?"

"Yes."

"He's in command of a Division again!" Chorski averted his gaze. "My God, Anatoli, the man is not fit for command. Five years ago he was responsible for the deaths of forty-three men in a training exercise."

"We are all aware of Solvac's record and he was exonerated from any blame in that incident."

For the first time Andreyov spoke. "However, he is a proven officer with combat and command experience."

Solvac had been a fast track candidate, given his first command before the war; the 109th Motor Rifles, a category two infantry division, only to lose it less than four months later due to a live firing training accident. Straczynski had witnessed the massacre of those men: A multiple rocket barrage landed on the 109th position as they waited in a woods to out flank a

'hostile' 5th Tank Division. The enquiry showed that Solvac's division had been a kilometre from their hold point. Solvac had been aware of this and had made that decision to react quicker to the 5th once the barrage had cleared. It was also shown that the battery had fallen almost half a kilometre off target, onto his division. Solvac was proven innocent of the incident, but it had halted the career of the ruthlessly ambitious officer at the rank of Major. The advent of war resumed his rise up the ranks and he quickly acquired the position of Second in Command of several divisions in the Western Theatre of operations, and apart from the one incident, his military record was impeccable. He was eventually rewarded with Colonel clusters on his shoulders and the 45th to Command, only to lose it in the disastrous assault on Malbork, ironically to a mis-directed artillery barrage.

Andreyov stood up and walked across the office. "He was the logical choice. That is why I recommended him for the position."

Straczynski turned to him. "Since when did logic over-ride common sense? Have you read his psycho analytic reports. He is too volatile for divisional command. I'll admit he shows genuine inspiration for the tactics but he has no inclination for the logistics required to -"

"That can be said for almost all of our divisional commanders, including Marian Kobiechi. This is war, not peace time." Andreyov shouted. "Since then he has consistently proven himself as a competent officer. He has earned the position!"

"And Malbork?"

Andreyov leaned onto Chorski's desk. "The incident at Malbork, although disastrous for the assault, was merely... unfortunate."

"Unfortunate! The failure of his division to cut off the southern approaches to Malbork resulted in over 90% of Coalition forces escaping across the Wistla. The attack on the city as a near disaster and almost resulted in the Northern sector crumbling. If Kobiechi hadn't smashed the heart of the Americans on the Centre sector, the Coalition would have held onto the Baltic Coast. Then they -"

"Those are the risks of war!"

"They would have consolidated west of the Wistla and sliced down through central Poland, encircling what was left of our army. As it was there were countless pockets of Allied troops left behind by the rout stabbing at our supply structure. The damage they inflicted was immense."

"You over estimate the effectiveness of these pocket of defeated soldiers." Andreyov rebuffed.

"I wouldn't have called Major Carling a defeated soldier." Borrisovich muttered louder then he meant too.

Andreyov frowned at him. "Carling was a mere myth who actually did very little damage to our supply lines. You should be careful of what you say Lieutenant Borrisovich, or you may find you career in the Russian Army short lived."

Borrisovich took his scolding from the KGB's bastard with contempt. He had personal experience of Major Carling during the Autumn Rout. One he did not wish to repeat. It had been her actions and that of the other units cut off in Poland that forced Chorski to halt the advance just inside the German boarder. Unable to secure the rear sector, he'd had been forced to pull more and more troops away from the front line back into Poland to deal with the threat. It was only the stern stare from Chorski that stopped Borrisovich from provoking Andreyov further. Straczynski smiled to himself, he was beginning to like this young officer. He was the sort of man Russia needed to rebuild herself.

"Solvac had no control of the artillery batteries that disabled his division. It was a miscalculation by an artillery officer who subsequently paid for his mistake." Andreyov continued.

"As I understood it," Borrisovich replied. "The artillery was redirected by a Coalition counter-insurgency unit."

"That was mere propaganda put about by the Coalition to boost their moral."

Straczynski remained silent, knowing otherwise. He turned back to the report. "What else have you got on Solvac's divisions. This report is vague to say the least."

"Next to nothing." Chorski answered. "His division is refusing to even acknowledge radio communications. All we know is they all crossed the Oder last night at Szczecin. According to the civilians there, they took control of the Autobahn bridge at around 2300 hrs in full assault formation."

"It was a precise, well executed military manoeuvre. Which is exactly why he was chosen to command the 20th Army." Andreyov commented.

"And Chociwel. That was where Solvac's division was wintering, wasn't it? What have the civvies got to say about it?"

"Not a lot." Chorski muttered. "They were glad to see the back of them. It appears Solvac was not particularly sympathetic to the civilian population. When they left, the town assumed they were under orders from us."

Straczynski turned to him again. "Is that all we have?"

"Only one other thing. A helicopter visited Solvac several time during the two weeks running up to this. We believe it's the same helicopter that was also seen visiting Rutowski and Kobiechi."

"Do we know who's?"

"No. Some say it was a Hip, others a Hind. We've even had a few identify it as an American Hughes. Even if we had a positive identity on the helicopter it still wouldn't prove anything. We all use whatever equipment they could get their hands on these days."

"What about the people on board?"

"Just people."

Straczynski glanced back at Andreyov. "And where is Solvac now?"

"We don't know that either. After leaving Szczecin he moved North-West, possible towards Neubrandenburg."

Straczynski dropped the report on the desk and stood to stretch his weary bones. He'd cat-napped on the flight in, taking in almost a full night's sleep in only a couple hours; one of the few benefits old age had brought him. It was a skill Anatoli had not acquired. "Out of the three Army commanders, Solvac is your problem."

"What about Rutowski?" Andreyov asked.

"He's a good officer -" Straczynski started.

"Ha!" Andreyov blurted out.

Straczynski ignored him. "What did he tell you when you spoke to him."

"Only that he was acting in the best interest of the Divisions under his command."

"That sounds very much like him." Straczynski muttered. "Any ideas what orders he meant?"

"No, he refused to say. And like Kobiechi, he's no longer acknowledging our radio communications."

"What was the state of Rutowski's divisions before this happened?"

"Like most others, under orders to return home at the earliest opportunity."

"What about the conditions of their troops and vehicles, the state of their supplies. What was their moral like?"

"I don't know." Chorski shrugged.

"Pretty shitty." Borrisovich uttered.

"And Kobiechi's?"

"The same." Borrisovich admitted.

Straczynski watched Chorski stub out yet another cigarette. This incident seemed to have unsettled his friend more than any other they'd encountered. "If you can find out what her orders are and where she got them from, you'll have a good idea what Rutowski is intending to do."

"How do you know that?" Andreyov asked.

"Because he's a soldier!" He snapped. "Not a puppet officer like you, who only got to that rank because his father was shagging some tart in the Kremlin. He came up through the ranks. We served together in Georgia. I know him. He will do what is best for his division."

"But not what is best for Russia. He has disregarded a direct order from Moscow. What ever you may have come to believe in Georgia, in my book, that is still treachery."

Chorski lit a fifth cigarette. Taking his time to savour the smoke as they argued. Then stepping closer to Straczynski and lowering his voice. "Misha. If just one of these Divisions run into a single British or German unit, We can expect this war to restart. We've got to defuse this first." His cigarette wasn't quite shaking in his hand. "And that's where we have the problem. If I storm in after them and try to turn them around by force, my actions will be interpreted as a resumption of hostilities."

"We have to tread very carefully on this." Straczynski answered calmly. He glanced quickly across to Andreyov but he had his back turned and didn't notice. Straczynski picked up the report again. "The best way to react would be to send small special forces units after the Divisions. Target the Divisional commanders. Establish what their intentions are and where their loyalties lie. If they are defecting I'd suggest we let them go and make sure the Coalition commanders know that."

"No, we can't do that!" Andreyov shouted. "These three Armies control over 300 armoured vehicles. We cannot let such a large position of our armoured strength just walk away. Not into the Coalition hands. Moscow will never allow it."

"Moscow have little concept of what is happening here." Chorski snapped.

"Moscow is fully aware of what is happening out here, General."

"It is the safest thing to do." Straczynski stated. "We cannot risk another conflict."

"And if this isn't a defection?" Andreyov's question hung like a loaded gun.

"Eliminate the commanders and return the Division to Poland." Straczynski replied unemotionally.

"And I suppose you'll have us send in half a dozen Spetsnaz unit for the job."

"Yes," Straczynski nodded. "Apart from my unit is the only operational unit left on this front." He turned to Chorski. "I presume this is why we were summoned back."

Chorski nodded. "You're GRU, you've dealt with situations like this before. I have a dozen hand picked men available for you, if you need them. They're the best I have."

"Wouldn't this be better handled by the KGB. Apprehending rogue officers is more their type of operation, isn't it Andreyov." Straczynski remarked was snide. "And considering you seem to admire Solvac so much, maybe you can tell him to come back."

"Those KGB bastards would see this as an opportunity to finally smash what's left of the Coalition again." Chorski said without thinking.

Andreyov frowned. "You should be careful General Chorski, making a remark like that is likely to get you shot. The party still has its followers."

"Yes, and there's one stood over there." Borrisovich muttered so only Straczynski heard.

Chorski noted Andreyov's warning. "Once the 20th Cavalry reach Munchenburg we'll be able to establish Kobiechi's intentions. Rutowski and Solvac are a different problem entirely."

Straczynski sat again in silence and read the report for a moment. "The KGB have operative in Hamburg, don't they Andreyov. Surely they have contacts who could prevent this from escalating."

Dam it Misha! Didn't you listen? Chorski nearly blurted out. He glanced round the room not sure whether Straczynski's remark had been for Andreyov's benefit. The GRU - Glavonye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye, the intelligence branch of the Russian Army, had lived too long in the shadow of the KGB. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the KGB's demise, the GRU rose to share an equal prestige with their predecessor the RVS - the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. Yet since the re-election of a Communist Government to the Russian Parliament, the Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnost - KGB - had re-emerged, like a Phoenix, from its post Cold War successor. The KGB and GRU had always hated each other, even to the point of sabotaging each others operations and betraying operatives to Non-Russian intelligence Agencies. That prejudice had ran deep during the Cold War day, it ran even deeper now.

Straczynski finally turned to face Chorski. "Okay."

"Tell me what you need and I'll have it ready."

"Have the helicopter ready at 0630 hours. I'll need full logistic listings for the Divisions and personnel files on all command level officers. My men will need accommodation for the night and feeding."

Chorski nodded. "I'll have the information ready for you in a couple hours. Come, I'll show you to your room." He ushered Straczynski quickly out of the room, as if frightened he might change his mind.

Once the office door closed behind them Andreyov turned to Borrisovich. "I don't trust him?" he said.

"Sorry Colonel." Borrisovich replied.

"I don't trust that man. He may be twice a Hero of the former Soviet Union, but do you trust him?" He collected his papers and left the young Lieutenant alone in Chorski's office.

Anatoli lit up again as they walked through the half deserted building He savoured the smoke for a while before speaking. "The KGB are conducting investigations into the failings of this war. They're looking for people to publicly sacrifice in a bid to uphold civil order. They're looking for scapegoats, Misha. People like you and me who have skeletons to hide. I'm sure I'm already under investigating. Andreyov has made that clear. And now Kobiechi has gone, no doubt they think I'm involved some how. And from the questions Andreyov been asking me about you, I'm positive they're also investigating you too."

Marian Kobiechi had been the woman Chorski had had an affair with whilst serving at the Kremlin. Straczynski remembered the incident clearly; although he hadn't realised until recently she had been the other woman. It was the sort of scandal that the corridors of power loved, and never more so then when it could be manipulated to the advantage of a political rival. Nardia had found out at one of the many official dinners held within the Kremlin wall, a quiet word from a rival of the Defence Minister and the deed was done. Anatoli's marriage was finished, a victim of politics. Discredited, his career halted short of the office of Defence Minister that he desperately sort. Another would be promoted above him when his superior retired. The confidence the Defence Minister had in his undermined. Nardia became hysterical at the revelation and was determined to confront her wayward husband during that dinner, but Misha convinced her it was not the thing to do, that she was being used as a pawn in the deadly games of the Kremlin. He accompanied her home, assuring her the rumours where nothing more than that. Later that Christmas, while Anatoli was 'aboard', she learnt the truth and confronted Misha, accusing him of protecting 'that bastard Anatoli' and aiding him in his indiscretion. As part of her revenge she had decided to entice him into her bed, to destroy their friendship. But he resisted. The next morning Misha heard she'd taken an overdose and died.

Chorski looked at Straczynski, but Misha avoided meeting his eyes in case he betrayed the secret he'd kept from his friend for so long. "I sometimes think it's time to leave this place." Anatoli sighed. "I sometimes feel I done all I can in this war and should start thinking of myself. Abandon all this to the likes of Andreyov and walk away. Would that be so wrong?"

Silence.

"Misha, would it?"

"No." He breathed. "Nattasha asked to do the same some years ago. I think your right, it is time to leave. There is nothing left of our country, nothing to be proud of. We'll go away from this mess. The two of us. We'll go somewhere where -"

"Nattasha's dead, Misha."

"- where they won't find us."

"She's dead Misha!" Anatoli turned away, unable to face him. "Just like Anna. Just like Nardia. They've all gone."

"No! Nattasha is alive."

"God dam it Misha. She's gone! She was killed in the Petersburg Uprising."

Misha eyes remained fixed on the darkness. Despite receiving the official telegram from the Kremlin; stating that his Nattasha, his only daughter, had been taken hostage by the Petersburg Motorised Division and had been killed during the fight to regain control of the city, he knew it wasn't true. She wasn't dead, he still felt her presence in his heart. He tried to picture her young face, but he couldn't. "Can you remember what she looked like?"

Anatoli suddenly became repulsed by the taste of the cigarette he smoked. He dropped it onto the cold concrete floor and crushed it. "Nattasha, she looked like your wife did at that young age. Beautiful." He laughed quietly. "You remember how we courted them during our academy days. You with Anna, me with Nardia."

"I can't picture her any more. Anatoli, I can hardly remember what she looked like. I don't even have a photograph of her."

Anatoli placed a hand on his shoulder. "We must stop this madness before it gets out of hand."

Straczynski paused at the door leading out to the Hip. "Be careful of Petrya Andreyov, he is dangerous."

"I will watch him." Chorski pushed open the door. "I sometimes wish Nattasha was still alive. Then maybe we might..." He paused. "There is billeting on the far side of the compound for you and your men."

Straczynski stepped past him and walked towards the helicopter, pulling up his collar against the cold wind. Chorski watched him walk away. He'd known Misha since their youthful days at the Frunze Military Academy which they'd both entered with ambitions to become officers. Billeted together, they quickly forged a lasting friendship which had spanned over forty years. Both from good parentage, they married well, to the daughters of high ranking party members. This alone would have guaranteed their ambitions, even if they had not truly been the officers they turned out to be. But the death of Anna; shortly after the birth of Nattasha, had changed him. A subtle change that most failed to notice, but not to Anatoli.

Straczynski's corporal sat with one leg hanging out the doorway of the Hip. Stepping out, he walked across to meet his officer. He was a young man like Borrisovich, no more than twenty five who wore a months worth of beard and grime on his face and an equally grimy German combat jacket on his shoulders. "What's the story sir." He asked as they met, his German accent still tainting his Russian.

"Three rogue Army Groups to track down." Straczynski said walking past him.

"Three Army Groups!" The corporal followed him back to the Hip. "Sir, three?"

Straczynski took his back-pack from inside the chopper. "Yes Kurt, three. They've arranged food and beds for the rest of the night. Get what rest you can. I want you all ready to go at 0600 hours."

"Which one we going after first?" One of the others asked.

"I'll brief you in the morning." Then he headed away in the direction Chorski had pointed him.

Kurt watched him for a moment before turning back to the six slobbery dressed soldiers sat inside. "Don't get pissed up tonight. They'll be plenty of time for that and a woman when we get back." Kurt left them and followed Straczynski. "Which one are we going after sir?" He asked as he reached his side.

"We're not. We are going to talk to the British."

"Colonel Jones?"

Straczynski glanced at him and gave a slight nod. "0600 hrs Corporal."

Kurt left him to continue to his quarters alone. They'd had dealings with this British Colonel twice in the past six months, though by the way the two greeted each other he was sure they had met many times before. The familiarity between his GRU superior and this SIS Colonel was sometimes unsettling and he occasionally feared that some kind of treachery going on between them. But what right had he to think of treachery. He wasn't true Spetsnaz, he was at once GSG-9; the German equivalent.

THE THIRD DAY. Tuesday 9th January.

The Hip hovered over a snow covered clearing in the half light of just before dawn. The rear wheels just scraping the surface of the snow as it remained stationary for barely 10 seconds before climbing away in to the paling sky. By the time the haze of flying snow settled, not even the wheel marks remained. Another lesson learnt in combat: like the Americans in Vietnam, the Russians had lost countless helicopters to booby-trapped landing sites during the Afghanistan campaign.

Once the Hip had faded into the darkness a single head came up from under a white poncho. It's eyes scanned the land slowly, studying every rock, shadow and tree searching for any sign that they had been seen. "Go!" He finally ordered and eight white figures sprinted to the tree line.

Kurt crouched along side Straczynski against the first tree. "All clear." He said as the last man passed them.

Straczynski grunted in agreement, pulling out his map. "Templin is about a days march from here, due west. We'll push on until mid-day then stop to rest. We'll try and contact a British patrol then." He checked his watch. "Let's move out."

Kurt came to his feet and called the section to order. They moved off west in single file at a slow walking pace, 50 metres apart. All except Kurt. For the first time in too long he was back on his native soil. He stood looking at the white landscape; the bare trees and burnt out farm house. It neither looked or felt any different to Poland.

James Bridgewater entered the office of the Commander in Chief of the British Army (Europe)- CINCPAC - through the door from his secretary's office. "General." Field Marshal Sir Robert Collins greeted him. "Tea?"

"Please, Bob." He dropped his document folder onto the coffee table and took the china cup and saucer from his superior

"You sleep well?"

"Not bad. Still got a hell of a crick in my back, I don't think my mattress is firm enough." He took his seat opposite the other two men in the office. "Morning Richard, Michael." They both nodded in acknowledgement.

Collins took his seat beside them, ignoring the one behind his large polished desk. "We got that boat yet Michael?" He asked starting the proceedings of on an informal footing.

"Just about sir." Nodded Commodore Michael Chester, the Senior British Naval Officer in Europe. "They are going to try to refloat the Arctic Voyager on tomorrow mornings high tides."

"And when will she be ready?"

He flicked through his folder until he found the status report on the ship. "She's in a bad state. She took a missile hit above the waterline whilst part of convoy NF/EP-34. The skipper ran her aground off the Belgian coast last February."

Norfolk/Euro Port-34 was the last ill-fated supply convoy to cross the Atlantic from the States. Twenty merchant ships escorted by five warships had set out from Norfolk in mid-January with a fully equipped National Guard Divisions aboard. When they made Lands End seven days later, they'd lost three warships and sixteen merchant ships to sustained air and

sea attack. A fourth warship and two more merchant vessels were lost to a submarine attack in the Channel. A final attack by Backfire bombers crippled the last warship and the Arctic Voyager. She was only saved due to her skipper running her aground. The single ship that made Europort was the last to arrive from the States and marked the turning point in America's decision to withdraw from the war. Arctic Voyager had carried half the National Guard's LAV-25's, M-113's and M-60 tanks in her hold. A third of the equipment was successfully recovered from grounded boat and reassigned to existing front-line Divisions, since the National Guards, the 58th Maryland, 34th Iowa and 46th Michigan Nation Guard Brigades had been lost to a man in mid-Atlantic aboard the cruise ships Fascination and Oriana.

"She's going to need a lot of work before she'll be seaworthy again." Chester continued. "Her engines and lower desks have been under water for the best part of a year, and the hull's taken a battering. Divers will check her over as soon as she's docked."

"How long do you estimate the work will take?"

"Four weeks is a conservative guess."

"With the addition of this ship, how does it effect the logistics of the withdrawal?"

"She's 48,000 tons dead weight. Along with the two Ro-Ro's, we should have enough tonnage to move all our vehicle."

Collins looked across at Fitzwilliams for confirmation. "Richard?"

"Approximately 5000 tons of armour, an additional 2500 in light vehicles and 22,500 men and personnel. That number is not final." The Commander of the 1st Armoured Division replied "I estimate at least two thousand will opt to stay behind and possible a thousand more non British Nationals will wish to be evacuated with our forces."

"With the Arctic Voyager, we have the tonnage to move the armour," Chester continued. "We still have a problem with moving the men. I estimate we'll need another two ferries to be able to make the withdrawal in a single operation. Alternatively we could double up on a few of the boats. Send the first three passenger ferries back to take the last of our men off."

"What if the Arctic Voyager can't be made seaworthy?" Bridgewater asked. "She has been sat on a sand bank for almost a year."

"That would seriously hamper our ability to move the armour. The Ro-Ro's only have the tonnage to move two thirds of it. It would require almost all the vessels making a double trip. And frankly, I don't think half of them are up to it. We're sailing close to the wind on the seaworthiness of at least seven boats. All we need is a heavy sea and we could lose them."

"Jesus." Collins placed his empty cup on the saucer. "How many Ro-Ro's would we need to replace the Arctic Voyager?"

"At least three, maybe four. Depends on how tightly we can pack the stuff in. But I think the real problem will be the tonnage."

"Jim, Do we know of the location of any more suitable ships? What about the Americans? They promised to send some back."

"They were due to send four back this summer. As far as we can assess they're all still Stateside. I don't think we're gonna see them in this decade." He glanced down at his note book. "There are a couple of possible in the Thames estuary and a third at Hull. But even without considering their seaworthiness, getting our hands on them and getting them out to open sea could prove to be costly. Alternatively there's the Baltic Coast States. We haven't looked too closely at them yet. At an estimated guess, there could be half a dozen vessels, but in what condition and under what circumstances, we don't know."

Collins looked unhappy. "Richard, what's this about the men?"

"Bit of a morale problem. A lot of them have family here, especially those how were stationed here before the war. They fear they want be included under the withdrawal orders. And many feel things are no better at home. While the conditions here are not good, they're a dam sight better then they are else were. It's pretty much the same problem we had when we got the relocation order from UKLF."

"If we include direct dependants in the withdrawal, how does that swell the numbers?"

Fitzwilliams sighed. "It could quite easily double it. Then where do you draw the line at direct dependants? Spouses and children?"

"There's no way we can move that number of people." Chester added.

"The obvious way is to move the men, then have dependence follow some weeks later. That's how we used to do it."

"That won't work this time." Bridgewater commented. "A lot of the dependants rely on our men to provide them with food and protection. Remove the men - Well you can see what will happen. And so will the men. They won't wear it, and we'll have trouble if you try and make them."

"I need some figures Richard." Collins straightened in his seat. "Not guesses, hard figures. I want to know how many we're talking about."

"What action will be taken against any that wish to remain behind?"

"I'll talk to Bonn and see if we can have them absorbed into the German Army."

Fitzwilliams nodded in approval.

Collins turned to Bridgewater. "What's the situation with the advance party?"

"First two units are going out in two weeks. Air Coup have allocated a Ch-53 for the operation. She's big enough and fast enough for the job, and more importantly it's got the range. I'm putting one team into Lowestoft, the other to Felixstowe. They'll rendezvous with local resistance movements and recce the ports. Intelligence reports indicate both ports are relatively intact and free from UKLF influence. Out of the two I would prefer Lowestoft."

Felixstowe is too close to UKLF territory and they could respond to our presence before we have time to establish strong enough defences."

"You still feel we could get a hostile reception from them."

"Yes sir. I do. The Government has made it clear they no longer regard us as part of the British Army and our presence will be viewed as that of a hostile force. The shooting down of our reconnaissance Canberra was proof of that."

"Is this view echoed through out UKLF and the general population?"

"In parts. There are those who will welcome us. Others will be against us. This is another reason for selecting Lowestoft. Being further away from the Home Counties we can get, the less influenced by UKLF policy has on general population."

"Do you believe we could end up fighting UKLF?"

"Yes sir. I believe Civil War is a realistic possibility."

Kubrick was with Hellor just after nine that morning presenting the adjusted figures on the food situation. Vonnegut sat with them, silently listening to the young man's thirty minutes appraisal of the situation. Kubrick had been very clever, far cleverer than Vonnegut had expected. He hadn't tried to slander Eurika's figures, but just identify some anomalies that were serious enough to cast doubt on them. He knew Hellor's closeness to Eurika, both sexually and intellectually, wouldn't allow for direct confrontation. It was no secret they'd become involved with each other more than three years ago. It had been speculated by some lesser ministers that she only attained the position of Minister for Agriculture due to her relationship with the Chancellor. Eurika was very attractive for a woman in her forties. She also had a razor sharp mind and wit that complimented her figure. Vonnegut had occasionally found himself fantasising about her, although that was as far as it ever went. He'd learnt from the experience of others that she was not a woman to cross. Though as Kubrick proceeded to discredit her he felt pity. She was wrong in what she was trying to do and he had to put right what she had already done. The assassin's bullet should have done its part, bringing the first stage to a swift conclusion. It had not. Although aimed at the base of her skull, the toughened glass of Hauer's office was sufficient to deflect it slightly and cause it to tumble. It struck Eurika in her right shoulder, smashing the collar bone, before passing diagonally down through her right lung into her pelvic cavity. She now lay in a hospital bed. The bullet had been removed and the shoulder rebuilt. But her pelvis still required major reconstruction. She was not expected to walk again and would have to rely on others for her mobility. A situation that anywhere else would certainly be terminal. But despite emphysema and other complications following surgery, she had survived the assassination attempt. Though politically she was dead.

Kubrick fell silent as he finished his summary and waited for a reaction from Hellor.

The Chancellor sat quietly behind his desk, rubbing his chin. "Can you double check your figures?" He finally said.

"I re-checked my calculations this morning sir, and I get a figure within fifteen tons of the one I've just told you." Kubrick answered. "But yes, I will re-check my figures again if you like. I can have them for you this afternoon."

"If you would please." Hellor turned to Vonnegut. "Have you anything else?"

"Our garrison at Pasewalk is not responding to radio communications." He said. "It's possibly nothing more than a downed transmitter or broken radio. But being so close to the Polish border, I think it should be checked out."

Hellor nodded. "I agree. Have one of the other garrisons in the area check it out."

"I was considering asking the British to do it."

Hellor frowned. "Why?"

"Our garrisons are stretched to the limits, especially now we're having to pull men back to police Hanover. The British are still operate long range recognisance units in that area. We do have an agreement with them for them to do a bit of running about for us in return for the use of our garrison facility."

"How long has this been going on for?"

"Since October when they handed back Ederswalde."

Hellor pondered over this revelation. Vonnegut had noticed he'd become even less decisive since Eurika's hospitalisation, and on some occasions close to the point of incompetence. Something must be done about this, for the sake of Germany.

"Yes, have that done." Hellor finally answered.

Vonnegut collected his papers. "I'll see to it right away."

Both men left the Chancellor's office and spoke briefly in the corridor before heading off to their own offices.

After an hour Hellor called for his car and went to see Eurika. He found her sleeping, so he sat beside her bed in silence for five minutes. It pained him to see his former lover like this. The operation to rebuild her pelvis had been postponed for a third time due to more pressing needs for the operating theatre. Painkillers kept her drowsy and she seemed to sleep most of the time. When she did wake she was lethargic and they spoke briefly before the conversation became forced. Hellor didn't tell her about Kubrick's briefing or the doubts he'd raised in his mind. Nor did he mention the pressure he was under to decide the governments policy over BAEUR. She finally asked him if he still loved her and he answered her like a true politician.

Then he sat in silence until she drifted back into sleep. He remained there for a further five minutes wondering if he should have told her he'd taken a new lover.

She woke again two hours later knowing Hellor had lied to her; she was a politician too and had attended the same school of diplomacy. She knew she had lost him and would never again feel him making love to her. She cursed her broken body and wished the bullet had spared her this misery.

THE FOURTH DAY. Wednesday 10th January.

Charlotte McKenzie watched the frozen North German countryside slipped past beneath them. A heavy carpet of snow covered this war torn land, softening the edges, hiding the scars beneath it. There was no grass, no hedges, no trees. Just white undulating snow. Pure, soft and untouched.

The helicopter ride out of Hamburg had been unusually pleasant for a change. Nothing had happened. They'd got into the Puma, it took off and headed out to the drop zone. Just like they should. No one had fired at them and nothing had gone wrong with chopper. A pleasant flight, so far. Her only complaint were the cabin heater. She was dressed for the arctic conditions outside, in heavy combats and white poncho and they were making her feel uncomfortably warm. She slumped back in her seat next to her backpack and rifle; both covered in white rags and paint, and for a moment staring at the sealed glass cabinet that hung on the Puma's forward bulkhead. The words 'In case of Peace, break glass' were printed across it and an unopened bottle of Jack Daniels stood inside. She'd suspected for some while this was why the crew had named helicopter Black Jack, and the Jack of Spades painted on both doors were only after thought to satisfy the curiosity of the grunts.

She turned her mind back to the mission and running her fingers through her straight black hair before re-read her orders. This mission was going to be an easy job, a piece of cake. Nothing more than a policing patrol. The regular fourteen day walk round the countryside north east of Berlin, checking up on the settlements and helping themselves to their hospitality before another flight home. An easy mission before they hit the UK in a few weeks and a change from the last job to Regensburg, Southern Germany, chasing the ghost Russian SS-22 missile that had allegedly fallen in the hands of the 1st U.S. Cavalry Division and up for sale to the highest bidder. Colonel Jones, her superior, had briefed her to either destroy it or bring it back. As it turned out the rumours were untrue and the SS-22 wasn't there. But it cost two of her men to find that out.

She unfolded her map and studied it. She knew the region well, having patrolled it several times before. She knew its safe spots, its no-go areas, and the friendly settlements. She'd already marked several places on the map which Jones wanted her to look in on. The main one being a downed transmitter at the Pasewalk German Garrison. She also wanted the chance to tie up a few loose ends before they left. A few debts to pay off and a few favours to call in. Jones usually gave her a free hand on the running of these jobs. He organised the flights and pointed out anything he wanted looking at. The rest was down to her.

Across from her sat Slater, the new girl. This was only her second mission the unit; a newcomer to replace one of those she'd lost retrieving the reconnaissance film from the Canberra. She looked rough and ready, a typical tomboy and well capable of looking after herself. She'd spent most of the flight chatting up one of the Puma's two gunners, not really integrating with the rest of the unit. But that wasn't too unusual. Traditionally new kids were always given a hard time. McKenzie had developed the opinion Slater liked to flirt a little too freely and maybe a little too easy with her favour. That was something that bothered her. She couldn't afford her section to become embroiled with love triangles, it would detract from the cohesiveness of the fighting unit or interfere with the mission. She would have to clamp down on it.

Her attention drawn away from the gunner, Slater noticed McKenzie staring at her. She became quite conscious of herself for a moment and almost looked uncomfortable. But only for a moment before leaning across the cabin. "Who's the American?" she yelled over the noise of the engines.

McKenzie looked questionably at her for a moment, then remembered the Goodman hadn't been on the SS-22 job. Like Taylor, the section's medic, he'd been wounded on the Canberra job and had missed out on that one. She glanced down the cabin at him, sat with the rest of the section playing cards at the back. "That's Richard Goodman." She shouted back. "Dick it his mates."

"What the hell's a Yank doing with us?"

"Same as you, following orders."

"Yeah, but aren't they Colonel clusters on his shoulder? I thought you were in command."

"I am. We're British Army. He's an American with no say in how this section runs. You take your orders from me and you'll do fine."

Slater watched him throw in his hand of cards and shake his head dejectedly. It was the fifth hand in a row he'd lost. He slumped back on the seat before noticing Slater. She winked at him and he smiled back, a touch uneasily. Daark nudged him and offered him the cards to deal. He pondered over them for a moment then refused. He turned back to Slater, she was still watching him. He smiled again, this time a little more broadly, before making his way forward and slumping himself down next to McKenzie. "You couldn't lend me some cash until pay-day could you, Skipper? Daark's just cleared me out."

McKenzie shook her head. "Again? You've no chance. You already owe me from last week."

He let out a dejected sigh and sunk further into the seat; avoiding looking at Slater. But she watched him. He was a big bloke, built like a brick shit house; and sometimes acted with the brains of one she'd heard McKenzie say, 'but reliable when things get sticky' she'd quickly add. With a square jaw and short cropped hair, these days he never looked pretty. Although no doubt he may have been quite handsome in his younger days, Slater pondered. Middle-aged spread and relaxed muscle had now taken over and grey has started appearing. She leaned forward again and touched his knee. His eyes shot up. "What do I call you?" She shouted. "Colonel Goodman, Richard, or Dick?"

"Rik. I don't go much for all this rank crap."

Slater noticed McKenzie did her best to hide a smile before burying herself in the map and subconsciously biting her bottom lip.

"Your the new girl." He continued. "Mac tells me you're pity good out in the field, didn't you skipper. You pulled Daark out the shit in Regensburg."

"Yeah, I'm shit hot." She laughed. "Pulled Matt Daark out from right under their noses."

"You should have left him there. Would have saved me a few dollars." The dryness was not intended and the conversation fell silent. After a couple of minutes Goodman turned to McKenzie. "What's up?"

"Nothing. Just a little diversion we've got to make, that's all."

"What for? You said this was gonna be a easy job."

"Calm down Rik, it will be. We've got a soft gang to drop in on first. To sort out a bit of business before we bug out next month. Jesus, you getting edgy."

"Come on man, I'm short. I'm counting off the day 'til I bug out. I don't want any touch shit mission. No 'boocoo bad-ass' gonna waste my hide. Ha ha, no sir."

"Your as short as the rest of us Goodman; in it for the duration."

"Go on captain, please let me stay in the chopper. I don't wanna die."

Ignoring him she rose and made her way forward to the cockpit.

Slater thumped him on the leg. "'Boocoo bad-ass' what the fucks that?"

"That's Nam talk, man."

"You were never in Vietnam, you're not old enough."

"Nar, but I watched enough films. Chuck Norris - Missing in action, or Charlie Sheen in Platoon. Rambo!"

McKenzie ignoring the jiving and crouched between the pilots. "Hey Wilson, how far out are we?"

He glanced round at her. "Just north of Malchow, about 30 clicks short of Klein Plasten. Why, what you planning Mac?"

"Change of orders." She showed the pilot her map. "Can you put us down close to Neustrelitz?"

"A bit of free lancing?"

"Yeah, something like that."

"No problem." He turned the Puma slightly south over lake Muritz. "I guess you don't want Jones to know."

"You've got it."

"Okay. Just over ten minutes then."

She slapped him on the arm and returned to the cabin, clambering past Goodman and Slater and their discussion on films, and into the rear of the cabin the other three members of her unit. They sat playing cards. Corporal Landers glanced up at her momentarily as she sat down on the other seat.

"Come on Corp., your call." The unshaven Garret shouted, eager to play his hand.

"Eh.... no. I'm out." She placed her cards face down in the bench seat and moved round to face McKenzie. "What's going on? We've changed direction."

"Just as we discussed earlier. We're touching down close to the main Berlin - Greifswald road and heading north towards Neustrelitz. We should pick up the soft gang sometime tonight. Rest of the jobs just as the briefing." Landers listened as McKenzie ran through the mission details again. "Ten minutes. Get that lot ready." McKenzie finished and returned forward.

Landers turned back to the game. Daark had just won the hand and was collecting in his winnings. Garret collected in the cards and looked at hers out of curiosity. "Christ Corp." He showed her her cards. "You had the winning hand, you could have beaten him."

Daark looked up smugly, grinning from ear to ear.

"Yeah I know." She pocketed her own winnings. "We touch down in ten minutes. Make sure you've got every thing."

Garret stuffed the deck of cards into his backpack and checked it was securely fastened. They felt the chopper bank left as it came up on the LZ. Freeman opened the side doors, letting in a blast of icy cold air which struck McKenzie in the face as she returned forward. She shuddered at the thought of leaving the warmth of the Puma and stepping quickly out of the draught, dragging her poncho down off her shoulder and pulling it around her. Freeman didn't seem to notice the cold, he hung out the door watching the landing zone as they circled it, talking to Wilson through Black Jack's inter-com. Garret joined him at the doorway, hanging on by one hand, leaning out into the howling gale as the rest of the section assembled behind them. The five individuals indulged in a brief but important ritual to assure a successful

mission. Garret didn't join in, he looked on with contempt for the ceremony, ridiculing it. But Freeman ignored him, he knew the importance of such things.

Wilson checked the field, taking a good look at lay of the snow and picking out a reference point to land on. Satisfied it was clean with no viable hostiles. He brought Black Jack in to land, throwing up a blinding cloud of snow as it touch down. Garret took a flying leap from the door into the crisp snow, his yells drowned out be the Puma's engines. The rest of the section climbed out lazily, sinking up to their knees in the stuff before wading past him.

"Pillock!" Landers uttered and slung Garret's pack into the snow.

He picked himself up, grabbed the pack and followed them towards the road, his uniform already covered in snow. He would suffer for that later, Landers smirked.

McKenzie was last out. She dragged her backpack out of the door and swung it onto her back. Freeman handed her rifle to her. "See you in two weeks!" He shouted.

They clenched hands briefly. "Just make sure you do. Now get out of here before we change are minds." She shouted back. She walked away from the chopper before turning back to look at it. Wilson saluted her as he brought the engines back up to power. McKenzie raised her fist in reply. Then turned and rejoined her section.

CHAPTER THREE

"ALPHA, come in ALPHA this is RED FOX ONE, do you copy, over." Captain O'Brian released the send key and listened to the static. The absence of a reply didn't worry him at this time. He knew the Citadel's choppers were in transit to pick them up and were probably still out of range. They would have flown McKenzie's and Hamilton's units, RED FOX TWO and THREE, out in the early hours of the morning, but due to the extreme range they were operating at, they lacked the fuel hang around to pick them up

He keyed the radio again, "ALPHA, this is RED FOX ONE, do you copy? Over."

"Problem?" Straczynski asked from behind him.

"No. Nothing to worry about." The Spetsnaz unit had rendezvoused with them shortly before daylight after making radio contact earlier that night. "They're not late, we're early. You seeing Jones over that lot Sims ran into?" He nodded towards the third group of men waiting beneath the trees.

"Partly."

The second section, RED FOX FOUR, had walked into the Landing Zone less than an hour ago. They'd tangled with a Russian platoon on the outskirts of Greiffenberg two days earlier and lost two of his men in the exchange. Their reaction on seeing Straczynski's men, almost resulted in the two RED FOX sections firing on each other. After several tense minutes rifles were lowered and an uneasy peace settled on them. However, tension between Lieutenants Sims' section and the Spetsnaz remained high and O'Brian decided the sooner the choppers got here, the sooner things would ease "Anything I need to worry about?"

Straczynski looked at him. "Oh yes. I think you should. But after I've spoken to Colonel Jones."

"RED FOX, THIS IS ALPHA THREE?" The radio interrupted. "AUTHENTICATE A6 AT 1500 ZULU."

O'Brian checked his authenticator card; a simple ten-by-ten box graph with A to J across the top and 0 to 9 down the left hand side. The rest of the chart was filled with random numbers; each unit holding a different card with a different set of random numbers to prevent misuse. Hamilton checked the first column, sixth row - 19. Zulu referred to the start time for the operation, the time they'd left the Citadel. For the two returning RED FOX units it was 0600 hours two weeks ago. It was now 1500 hours, plus nine hours on. He added that to the number on the authenticator card.

"Right on the nail. Don't you just love these guys." O'Brian chuckled before keying the radio. "Load and clear ALPHA THREE, Authenticate 28, over" The system wasn't fool proof, but it worked.

"CONFIRMED RF-1 - WHAT'S YOUR STATUS?"

"I've got RED FOX FOUR and a few guests here with me. They want to know if you've got room for them as well."

"THAT'S A ROGER RF-1 - I'VE GOT HEARTLESS TUCKED IN BEHIND MY TAIL ROTOR. I'M SURE WE CAN SQUEEZE YOU ALL IN SOME HOW - WE'RE INBOUND 5 MILES WEST OF TEMPLIN. CALL THE SHOTS."

"Glad to hear it. Your party's waiting at Landing Zone 29. The board is clean. No known hostiles in the area."

"WE COPY RF - SEE YOU IN TWO MINUTES - OUT."

O'Brian glanced back to Straczynski. "I'll stick half of my lot in the second chopper with Sims. That'll leave room in the lead one for your lot. The further we keep you two apart, the quieter our ride home will be." He walked off under the sparse trees to where the sections had gathered. "Okay you maggots, two minutes and we're out of here!" They let out a muffled cheer. After two weeks out in the cold, snowy wastes of North East Germany, the prospect of a warm helicopter ride home sounded very appealing. "Paul, take half the section and bunk a ride with Sims."

Sims walked over to him. "What about them?" He nodded towards the Russians. He presumed they were Russians; their uniforms were a mixture of several Eastern European nationalities. Except for the old man. His was all Russian, right down to the Major General pips on his shoulder.

"They're with me. That all right with you Simmie?"

"What they here for anyway?"

O'Brian looked at Straczynski. "The old man's one of Jones' people. He's flown into the Citadel with me a few time. Mac knows him."

"That's no recommendation. She's someone else I wouldn't trust. So what they doing flying back in with us."

"Told you. The Colonel want's to see him."

"Don't like the sound of that. If they were meant to be coming back in with us, why weren't we told in the briefing? The whole thing sounds too fishy to me. God sake man, they're fuckin' Spetsnaz."

"It's fuck all to do with us. Jones wants to see the old man. We're just provide the ride. Chances are it's got to do with that shit you ran into."

"Maybe so. But I still don't care much for it."

"Tough shit Simmie. Your not paid to like it."

A few miles to the south, Corporal Hallecki of the Russian 157th Motor Rifles, scribbled down the final part of Captain O'Brian's radio conversation with the helicopter pilot. He handed it to Captain Kutrzeba who read it carefully. Kutrzeba looked at his map and found the landing site clearly marked. LZ-29. "Hallecki, notify 'D' section that the helicopters are arriving at his location in under two minutes." Then he turned to the six heavy mortars that waited behind him.

The weary group of men congregated at the edge of the wood. Eager eyes searched the western sky for the first sight of the choppers that would bear them home to Hamburg. The soft patter of the rotorblades broke the silence and fingers pointed at the black dots low in the dull sky. There, two Blackhawks. They grow in size skimming over the top of the trees before dropped into the snow covered clearing. O'Brian gave the order the instant they touched down and their waded forward through the deep snow towards them.

The first round of mortar shells landed on the tree line. Instantly everyone hit the ground. Amidst the noise of the choppers and haze of snow thrown up by their down draught, it was impossible to tell where the shell had come from, how many or how close they were.

O'Brian brushed the snow off his face and looked up. The two Blackhawks were still intact and waiting, their gunners waving frantically at them. Safety now lay in one place, with the Blackhawks in the air. He came to his feet, dragging up one of his men by the collar and ran for the two-tone green chopper. "MOOOOVE!" He screamed.

The second round got closer. One shell landing almost them as they ran. Sims was lifted from his feet and tossed face down into the snow. Instinctively he rolled up on to his knees and looked for the choppers. "Still there," he gasped.

Close by his Corporal lay on his back with blood streamed through a tear in his jacket. Sims reached out to help him, but pain shot up his arm forced him to cry out and fall back onto the snow; his arm no doubt broken. One of the Russians appeared at his side. "I'm okay!" he spat, resenting his help. "I don't need you!"

A third men staggered into view, his left arm missing and his face frozen with shock. The Russian hauled him over his shoulders than ran for the helicopter.

O'Brian reached his Blackhawk and started helping his men aboard, the mortar shells were already landing around them. "They've got the range!" The gunner yelled over the noise pulling someone in. "How many we got?"

"Ten in this one."

Sims pulled himself up onto his knees again and grabbed the Corporal with his good arm. He rolled him onto his back before struggled to his feet. The task was more difficult them he imagined and he wishing he hadn't refused the Russians help.

Reaching the second Blackhawk, the gunner pulled the one armed man from Kurt as more shells landed close by. Straczynski reached it a moment later dragged another bleeding man.

"COME ON!" The gunner yelled as the fourth salvo landed around them. "It's getting too hot around here!"

Straczynski looked round. His men were safe with O'Brian chopper, and Kurt was with him. They ducked as ice and frozen earth showered down upon them. Sims stumbled under the corporal's weight. Without a free arm to stop himself, he fell forward.

"How many?" The gunner shouted, grabbing Straczynski's shoulder.

"Three!"

Another man scrambled in past them. "GET IN!" The gunner yelled at him above the barracking from those already inside. "We're bugging out."

Straczynski pushed Kurt inside. "Two more!"

"We're leaving now, get in!"

Straczynski pulled free of the gunners grip and disappeared into the fray. The gunner took a step after him, shouting and waving him back before retreating back to the chopper. Kurt watched him vanish among the exploding mortar round with reservation. He couldn't leave him out there and leaped passed the dismayed gunner and followed.

"GO!" The gunner screamed into the intercom as O'Brian pulled the last man in; shells virtually landed on top of them.

The pilot hit the power and yanked back on the collective. O'Brian glanced across at his men and took a reassuring slap on the arm from one of them. Then he turned back to watch the ground move away from them. He breathed relief. They were bleeding and they were hurt, but they were still alive. He almost smiled as the final barrage landed. Shrapnel shot through the fuselage. One piece tearing into the co-pilot's chest, another into the gunner. Then a round struck the tail. The boom broke, violently sluing the Blackhawk sideways: the pilot fighting to regain control of the doomed chopper, slamming off the power and trying to auto-rotate. The nose dropped, rotor blade dug deep into the frozen soil then they hit hard. Inside men were thrown forward. Body panels shattering and the airframe buckled. It broke right behind the cabin, tearing the fuel cells apart. 1300 litres of highly flammable aero fuel sprayed into the cabin, soaking the engines cowling and hot exhaust ports. It ignited instantly, turning the chopper in an explosive fire ball that twisted and tumbled across the snow, shedding burning rotor blades and body panelling.

Heartless's pilot hit the power and yanked his aircraft clear of the snow field as pieces of debris struck his aircraft. "We're leaving!" He yelled down the intercom.

"NO!" The gunner protested. "We've still got four on the ground! WE'VE STILL GOT FOUR ON THE GROUND!"

But Nelson knew they were seconds away from the same fait. Heartless nosed out of the black smoke and snow haze out and climbing away over the trees as more mortar shells landed.

"The Lieutenant!" Sergeant Kneale screamed. He was nearly out of the door. "What the hell you playing at? The Lieutenant's still out there!"

The gunner knew this. "Skipper." He was yelling into the intercom. "There's still men on the ground!"

"I know that. But you know the rules as well as I do."

"Do something!" Kneale screamed grabbing the gunner by his flying suit. "GET US BACK, NOW!"

"Skipper?"

"There's no fuckin' way, we're not turning back. No chance!"

"SKIPPER!"

"If we go back, we're DEAD! And you know it."

"You callous bastard!" Kneale lunged across the chopper at the pilot. Heartless lurched sharply sideways as he hit Nelson. The gunner grabbed Kneale round the neck trying to pull him off, but Kneale grip on Nelson was too good. Heartless started to spin out of control as he dragged the pilot half out of his seat. He thrashed wildly as Kneale hit him again, unaware his legs were jamming the controls and thwarting the co-pilot's frantic efforts to regain control. One of the section grabbed Kneale's arm before he could lay a third blow. The gunner finally broke his grip and Kneale was dragged, still kicking, to the back of the chopper.

Nelson pulled off his broken sun glasses and spat a mouthful of blood onto the deck. "You're on a charge, pal!" He snarled, wiping blood away from his mouth.

Kneale lunged for him again but he was restrained by other members of the section.

"Drop it Nelson!" Cole shouted back at the pilot. "And you," He turned to Kneale. "You pull any of that shit again, I'll kick your worthless ass out of that fuckin' door. You understand me! We're going home. You Lt's gonna have to fend for himself for a little while."

Kneale slumped back against the bulkhead, still seething.

"Cease fire." Hallecki relayed the observer's orders to his Captain and the mortars fell silent. "Confirm one helicopter destroyed and the other hit but still operational."

Through his binoculars Kutrzeba watched the lone Blackhawk flying away erratically; trailing smoke.

"Sir, 'D' section wants to know if you require him to search the Landing Zones for survivors." Hallecki continued.

"No." He turned back towards the LZ. It was out of sight from where he was stood, but a column of black smoke rising above the trees marked it. "Order all sections to report back here immediately. Then notify headquarters that one helicopter destroyed, the other crippled. Unlikely to make it back."

Sims struggled to his knees amid the acidic stench of burning bodies and kerosene. Everything around him was silent, like someone had hit the mute button. He knew the sounds were there; the sounds of the burning Blackhawk and the cries of those trapped inside, but he couldn't hear them. Nausea took him. He fell forward and wrenched, crying out. Or he thought he did. Sounds were coming back, but not the right sounds only a high pitched ringing from within his own head. He rolled onto his back and stared at the sky. The ground beneath him felt like it was moving, lifting up beneath him, screaming from the scares recently inflicted on it. He lay still until he could stand the stench no longer. Then dragging himself into a crouch he coughed up another lung full of black smoke.

He looking round. The crumpled carcass of O'Brian's chopper was less than twenty feet with the charred bodies of the pilots, still strapped into their seats, clearly visible among the flames. Pieces of burning debris littered the field around him. There was no way anyone could have survived the crash, he hoped, no way to have survived that and been burnt to death. He really hoped. If Heartless had waited a second longer it would have surely joined it. And for a moment he was pleased to know the chopper and his men had got away.

Finally remembering the corporal, he forced himself across the snow to where he lay. Tossing aside a piece of hot body panel, he rolled the corporal blackened body over.

"We should get out of here before they come looking for survivors." The voice startled Sims, so crisp and clear. He shot round and stared at the old man stood over him. "They will come looking for survivors. We should move." Straczynski continued.

"What about those guys in the chopper." Sims' voice sounded too distant to be his own.

"There's nothing we can do for them. Now come on." He pulled him up to his feet.

"Just back off Russkie." He pulled away, stumbling again, his sense of balance not yet fully restored.

"We have to leave. They will search here, then come looking for us. We have to move now."

"They're my men in that chopper." Sims spat.

Straczynski grabbed his arm. "They were my men in there too! Now we leave before they come looking for us." Pulling the unconscious man onto his shoulders, he headed for the tree line.

Sims hesitated for a moment, pondered his best choice of action. Follow the Russian or head out on his own. He pulled himself up; no rations and no map, how far could he get? And with no weapon, how long would he survive? He walked as close as the flame would let him to the chopper. A man hung half way out the carcass. His whole body was charred black apart from part of his head and arm. A rifle was still clutched in his hand but the heat prevented him from getting close enough to reach it. Left with no choice, he turned away and following Straczynski.

In the trees, Straczynski rolled the corporal onto the snow. His body was limp and lifeless and blood soaked the front of his combat jacket. He checked for a pulse, but found none.

"Sir?"

Straczynski looked up at a scorched Kurt. "What are you doing here? You should be on the helicopter."

"I came after you."

"You should -" He nearly laid into him but stopped as he saw Sims trudging towards them.

He slumped down onto his knees next to his man. "Two Russians. Great, stranded in the middle of nowhere with two fuckin' Ruskies." He nodded towards his corporal. "How is he?"

Straczynski stood up. "He's dead."

In Muchenburg things were not good. Hamilton had taken a hit in the arm and it was hurting like hell. He was pinned down behind a low stone wall on the outskirts of the town, less than a hundred yards from a hostile Marder A1A. The infantry carrier's 20mm autocannon had caught them as they moved across open ground away from the cover of a housing estate. Two of his section had made the wall with him, three were still back in the houses and he had two down in the open. The Marder's platoon were in prepared positions on either side of the dug in vehicle and had picked up the fight within seconds of the 20mm lacing of its first burst. The autocannon had fallen quiet for now, no doubt conserving its ammunition, but the twitching of the turret assured him it would rejoin the fray given due course.

"Campbell." He yelled over the hail of automatic fire coming up at them. "Where's the radio?"

"Jackie's got it." The Sergeant shouted back, less than five feet to his right.

"Where is she?"

"Back there. Half way between us and the houses."

Hamilton peered through a gap the 20mm had blown in the wall. She was laid flat on the ground beside another of his men, though he couldn't tell who. She was still alive, he could see her flinching as stray shots churned up the snow around her. "JACKIE, CAN YOU HEAR ME?"

"Yeah skipper?" Her voice only just audible.

"You all right?"

"No, I'm fuckin' scared."

"You got the radio?"

"Yeah I've got it. But I don't think I can get to you. Danny's dead."

Danny Hepworth, one of his best men. "Okay girl. Just hang on, we'll get you out."

She let out a screech as one round got exceptionally close. "GET A MOVE ON THEN!"

"I'll get her." Campbell started to move but Hamilton pulled him back.

"I'll do it. I want you to head along this wall about a hundred yards and lay down suppressing fire on the Marder, draw their attention away from me and Jacz. As soon as I get her clear, we're pushing north to grid 278 for a dust-off. Get into position, radio the other three and let 'em know. You've got one minute." He turned to the other soldier with him. "Cassy, go with him. I'll grab Jacz and follow."

"You sure?" Campbell asked.

"Yes, now go!"

The two scrambled along the wall and were soon lost from sight. Hamilton sat and waited, hoping Jackie could last out. Forty seconds later he heard the crackle of Campbell's voice on the radio net and then ten seconds after that a hail of fire came down on the Marder. Hamilton scrambled over the wall ran the 20 yards to where Jackie lay. He threw himself prone beside her as the platoon returned fire at him. "You all right girl?" He asked crawling closer.

"No. I've just pissed myself."

"Don't worry about it, we're getting the chopper back here to pull us out." He pulled the radio towards him and powered it up. "Citadel, Citadel. This is RED FOX THREE. Do you read, over. - Come on Citadel, answer - This is RF3, do you read?"

The transmission was picked up by one of five surviving geosynchronous DSCS-III communications satellite; 36000 kilometres above Europe, and bounced down to the ground station at BAEUR headquarters where it was redirected to the Citadel. It took less than two and a half seconds but to Hamilton it felt like two and a half years.

"COPY RED FOX THREE - AUTHENTICATE H-4 AT 1700 ZULU - OVER."

This was an unwelcome hindrance he didn't need at this moment. "Citadel. Authentication 34, over."

"CONFIRM RED FOX THREE - GO AHEAD - OVER." They finally replied.

"Citadel. Under attack from elements on west side of Munchenburg. Taking loses and have wounded. Request immediate extraction, over."

"CONFIRMED RED FOX. EXTRACTION NOT POSSIBLE AT THIS TIME - NO AIRCRAFT IN YOUR VICINITY - STAND-BY, WE'RE GETTING YOU YOUR BEST TIME - WHAT STRENGTH IS YOUR OPPOSITION? - OVER."

"In excess of German Garrison. We're taking fire from one German Marder and have seen Russian marked BMP's. It is possible that Munchenburg has been over run by new advance or Marauder activity. What's that extraction time Citadel, over." There came no reply.
"Citadel, let's have that extraction time, over."

Again nothing.

"Shit, we've lost 'em!" Jackie croaked. "We've lost 'em. They're not coming."

"Calm down girl. They're coming. - Citadel. We are not receiving and have not heard extraction time. We are moving north to grid 278. Will talk again at 2200 hours for extraction. Repeat. Are not receiving. Not heard extraction time so moving to grid 278. Call back at 2200, out." He yanked the radio onto his shoulder. "Come on Jacz, we're going." He pulled her away from Danny's body and started back towards the wall.

The gun fire that had been tracking the rest of the squad as they fell back switched onto them as they came up. Hamilton took a round in the leg and stumbled yards away from the wall, nearly pulling Jackie down with him until he let go of her arm. She continued, taking three more steps before vaulting onto the wall as a volley of machine gun slicing across her back, carrying her out of his sight.

"JACZ!" He screamed, trying to crawl forward before taking another round in the shoulder. He slumped against it, unable to move any further. "Jackie. Come on girl. Talk to me."

"Skipper?" Her voice was shallow.

"Yeah Jacz?" Hamilton whispered back, unable to find the strength to talk any louder. "I thought you'd left me."

"Nar, not this time... I'm in a bad way, Skipper. I'm real fucked up."

"Y'know... Me too. I think I've just pissed myself too."

Jackie managed a brief laugh. "You can share my bath when we get home."

"Yeah.... Guess we're gonna miss the ride home this time."

Jackie didn't reply.

"Aye Jacz, you up for a walk?" He listened but there was nothing. "That's it girl... You sleep. They can't hurt us now."

Jones watched the last body bag being lowered into the hole in the rapidly fading light. The five surviving members of Sims' section had scrapped a shallow grave in the frozen earth for their three fallen comrades. At the head of the grave stood the padre, wearing his stolen greatcoat with the collar turned up against the icy wind. He waited for them to climb out of the pit before opening his pray book and starting to read.

Jones stood in silence. Listening. He'd never considered himself to be old, but at time like these he felt it. Recent years hadn't been kind to him. They'd weighed heavily on him, draining his spirits and making him into this drawn and sombre person.

The Military Personnel Graveyard was a desolate place on the east side of Hamburg just beyond the southern ring-road. Former parkland, it was now the resting place for a thousands bodies. Jones wondered how many, how many names. The padre read three more out, but they were carried away on the cold wind before they reached him. The book and Sergeant Kneale brought the section to attention. They stood in silence for a minute then Kneale dismissed them.

The padre walked across to Jones. The wind whipped at tails of his coat. "I've got a bottle in the Landrover if your interested." He said. "It'll take the chill off this wind."

"No, not today padre, I've still got the paper work to tidy up on this lot." Jones replied, nodding towards the grave.

The padre looked down at the frozen bodies. "You know Alan, you're the only man I know who'd turn down a free drink in favour of a desk load of paper work."

Beside them Corporal Karl Harris shuffled uncomfortably from foot to foot. This unshaven young man had been Jones' driver/body-guard for the past two years. Harris didn't like funerals, but unfortunately this was one of his duties, if Jones attended, so did he. "Maybe so," he replied. "But someone's got to."

"Next time then." The Padre pulled his collar tightly round his neck and headed across the grave yard to his Landrover.

Jones watched him go knowing there would definitely be a next time; the only question was which one of his men it would be? He sometimes felt there were more of his men buried under his feet than anyone else's.

Kneale walked around the grave to him. "Sir." He said handing him the mission report. "Jackson had a sister in a cavalry unit with the Queens Own. She's a close friend, I'd like to break the news to her personally. As for the Lyall and Taylor, well, they were new. Never really got to know them." He said that as if there was no camaraderie between the two men and the rest of the section. There was, but like he said, they were new and hadn't served their time. "There er... There were these Russians with O'Brian, Well I think they were Russians. They were with O'Brian when we walked in. Scared the shit out of us after earlier. One of 'em was a general or something. O'Brian seemed to know him."

"What did he look like?"

"Er. Tall, thin with white hair. Mean anything?"

Jones scanned down the list of casualties at the top of the report, thirteen men and the four Blackhawk crewmen dead, two unaccounted for. No mention of the Russians. "There's nothing here about them here."

"I know sir, I wasn't sure what the situation was concerning them, so I put that bit on a separate page, it's inside."

Jones found the page. "Good work Sergeant, stand your men down for 48 hours. Report to Ops at 0730 hours on the 13th."

Kneale shuffled uneasily before asking. "What want a chance to go back to get the LT."

Jones looked up from the report. It was clear Kneale wasn't prepared to give up on his CO yet. "Lieutenant Sims is a good Soldier. If he's alive, he'll get back in without risking the lives of more men."

The two men exchanged salutes and Kneale rejoined his men, who had remained to fill in the grave. Jones watched them shovel the frozen earth onto the three bodies for a while until he became aware of Harris' growing uneasiness.

"You should learn to get over you fear of graveyards Karl." He commented.

"I blame my aunt. I never did understood why she had to live next to one."

"Too many Hammer Horror films more like."

"Oh believe me sir, ghosts and ghouls are real enough."

Jones face cracked into a smile. "I could really do with that drink now."

Harris nodded in agreement, "There's a bottle in the office."

The Citadel was situated on the south side of the Elbe River in the midst of the city's harbours. It had originally been a shipping agent office and consisted of two large holding sheds and a sprawling three storey office block. The buildings had survived the war relatively unscathed, mainly through good luck than anything else. Being stuck out on the end of one of the jetties, it was on a route to nowhere, so most people left it alone. The shipping agent only abandoned the complex last year after the food riots that had plagued the city that winter.

It suited it's new purpose perfectly. It's isolation made it easy to defend. High fences and defective ditches had been constructed round three sides of the compound and heavy concrete blocks guarded the entrances. The fourth side opened onto the river. The quay now served as a helicopter landing pad large enough to handle four helicopters, while the two towering gantry cranes that used to work the quay stood at the two extremities of the pad, each one

armed with powerful arc lights, deadly snipers and heavy machine guns. The holding sheds provided ample hanger and garage space for the small collection of helicopters and vehicles operated by Jones' department, and the sprawling office block served as both operations centre and barracks block.

Jones occupied a large room on the second floor which served as both his office and sleeping quarters. Battered filing cabinets cluttered the walls and a large overflowing map covered table dominated the centre while his unmade bunk hid behind a curtain at the far end. Plastic sheeting covered the broken windows and buckets collected water as it dripped through the ceiling. Light came from three fluorescent tubes, powered by one of the two huge generators that supplied all the Citadel's electrical power. The middle one of the three tubes was flickering as Louise entered. She tapped it with her finger and it flickered on. She walking across to Jones desk and placed a file full of papers requiring his signature on it. Then moving over to the filing cabinets, she took a pink loose leaf file out of one and pushed the draw shut with her hip as she read it. "Where the hell does McKenzie get off pulling these stores?" She muttered to herself, reading McKenzie's latest mission brief and compared it to the stores receipt she'd just collected from the quartermaster. The two didn't tally up. McKenzie's job was only a two week policing action, yet she'd drawn more stores than she had for the SS-22 job. Mostly medical and food stuff, but still far more than were necessary. Louise had noticed this trend several weeks ago. All the RF sections had been doing it recently, but only on the policing jobs. She heard a door open and glanced up as Jones and Harris entered the office. "Sir, this report from Captain McKenzie." She showed Jones the file. "Have you seen the amount of supplies she drew?"

Jones took the file after draping his parker over the back of a chair. He read the quartermaster's receipt. "A bit of free lancing, no doubt. I'll see to it when she gets back." He handed it back to her.

"And ROGUE radioed in." She added filing the report away. "She's found a lost German fuel bowser and want's to know who to thank for it."

"I wondered whether she did actually 'found it'." He pondered. He wouldn't put taking a fuel bowser by force past her. She'd done it before. "They're bound to be looking for it. Did she give a number or something?"

"Yep, make, mark and model. Everything but the chassis number."

"Pass it on to the Germans. Tell 'em it was found empty and abandoned. Anything else happened?"

"We also received a brief radio message from RED FOX THREE. It was garbled and was cut short. There's a transcript on you desk."

Jones picked it up and read it.

Z170010ZJAN Authentication. 34

Fm. RED FOX THREE.

To. CITADEL.

RF-3 - Under attack from elements on west side of Muncheberg. Taking loses and have wounded. Request immediate extraction. Over.

Citadel - Confirmed RED FOX. Extraction not possible at this time, no aircraft in your vicinity. Stand-by, we're just getting you your best time. What is the strength on your opposition? Over.

RF-3 - In excess of German Garrison strength. We're taking fire from one German Marder and have seen Russian marked BMP's. It is possible that Munchenburg has been over run.....

..

Communication Lost.

"Did you try to get them back?"

"Yes sir, but they'd stopped transmitting."

"Well that means they either won't answer or can't. Log it and let's hope they contact us later." He walked over to the large map table and pulled a map of Northern Germany from the bottom of a pile. Spreading it over the others he opened Kneale report and started reading.

Harris pulled opened another battered cabinet and took out a bottle of spirits. He poured it into three chipped mugs and handed one each to Jones and Louise. She sipped at the harsh whisky. It was a harsh home made liquor that tasted like it was refined rather than brewed, 'Glen Death' she called it and for good reason. Harris watched her. She had long slender legs covered in black woollen stockings and a heavy calf length skirt. She noticed and smiled at him. "What are you staring at?" She whispered.

"Oh, nothing." He answered before turning to Jones. "Were the losses worth it?"

"I think so." Draining his mug, he held it out for a refill.

"Do you think MAJOR's among the dead?"

"I don't know. Kneale reported he was left behind when 'Heartless' took off." He held out the casualty list. "Louise."

She took the list and read it. Seventeen dead. Seventeen more names to add to the already too long list of people who'd died in the service of the Citadel. She pulled the seventeen personnel files out the cabinets and carried them through to her own office. This was the macabre part of job she hated, but Jones would insist it should be done properly. Each death had to be meticulously recorded. The location of each body located as precisely as possible, and any know relative serving with the British Contingency notified. Usually in person by Colonel Jones.

No. 1450 Lyall, R.J. Lance Corporal.

Jesus. One thousand four hundred and fifty dead. She'd never really kept track of the numbers, just automatically writing down the next one in the sequence. But this one stood out. So many dead. Few of the other commanding officers recorded their dead with such accuracy, they preferred to forget them as quickly as possible and move onto the next mistake.

She finished writing down the last record, shuffled the files into a neat pile then carried them back into Jones' office. A solitary black filing cabinet stood against the wall directly opposite Jones' desk. Each death was filed in this. She would sometimes find him sat in the half light of the night watching this cabinet. Staring at it over the top of the map table as if it were some pagan god that demanded regular sacrifices from him.

Straczynski lent against a frost covered tree to catch his breath. He wasn't as young as he used to be and wasn't as fit either. The deep snow made walking hard going. Kurt walked on for a few more paces before he too stopped and looked back. Sims followed a dozen steps behind, preferring to keep both Russians were he could see them. Straczynski didn't particular like the situation, but the potential threat Sims presented to them was insignificant when compared to the danger the LZ held. Straczynski was determined to put as much distance between it and them as possible. "How is the arm?" He asked watching the Englishman stumble to a halt still several yards away.

"It bloody hurts." He barked. "I think it might be broken." He took a few more steps through the deep snow. He stopped as the trees thinned. "Where the hell are we?"

"Somewhere north of the LZ."

"I can see that!" He snapped.

"You don't trust us do you?"

"You're Russians, I wouldn't trust either of you as far as I could spit. Where are we heading?"

Straczynski straightened and followed Kurt's foot prints. "Hardenbeck." He announced. "That's were we're going."

Sims walked past Kurt. "Why Hardenbeck?"

"Because it is safe," Kurt answered.

"Is that your operational base Mister Major General what-ever-your-fuckin'-name-is. You running this show from there?"

"No."

"Then why Hardenbeck?" Sims demanded.

"You want that arm fixing don't you."

"Yes."

"That's why."

CHAPTER FOUR

Night had fallen by the time they got near to Hardenbeck. The heavy grey clouds had turned darker as the light faded and the snow now appeared deep blue as the temperature fell. The wind had also picked up, driving it even lower. The original village was a burnt out shell. Civil unrest midway through the war had been savagely put down by an American unit returning from the front. It sparked an international incident between the American and German governments which heralded the first chink in the seemingly impregnable armour of the Coalition forces. From out of Hardenbecks ruins a small shanty town grew. Originally just residents from the old village along with a few families from surrounding farms clubbing together for their own protection; but slowly it grew as more dislocated people joined them. The waifs, strays and ordinary people that the war had picked up and discarded. The brought with them rusting trucks and buses, and knitted them together with tin shacks and tattered tents to echoed something from Eastern Africa rather than Central Europe.

Sims looked down upon it from the hills to the west. Straczynski was crouched just in front of him studied the town through his fieldglasses while Kurt kept watch near by from under a tree. A battered eight wheeled Luch armoured car had turned up from somewhere and was stood guarding the main gate. It was covered in snow and was no-doubt inactive. But looks has so often proven deceiving. Medieval style defensive ditches surrounded the rest of the village and Sims thought he could make out signs of a field system beneath the snow. "Well?" he asked.

"Looks clear." Straczynski answered. "Few smoking chimneys, couple of guards."

"Nothing abnormal." Kurt added.

"Nothing abnormal. What the hell does that mean?" Sims demanded as the two Russian stated down the hill.

Two guards huddled out of the wind beside a glowing brazier. They watched as they approached; one stood over the fire warming the palms of his fingerless gloves, the other sat slightly further away warped in a heavy coat with a scarf tide over his ears. Kurt nodded to one as they passed, the man nodded back; not distracted from warming his hands.

"What was that," Sims sneered in his ear. "Secret nod?"

Kurt stopped abruptly and span to face the Englishman. Sims shuffled backwards his hand already on his pistol. Straczynski hand clamped down on Kurt's shoulder. "Leave it." He ordered.

"Not this time. I want to know what his problem is. He's been on our backs all the way here." He turned back to Sims. "So come on, what is it British? Ever since we pulled you arse out of those burning choppers, you've been on our backs. So what is it?"

Straczynski pulled him back. "This is not the time or the place for this," he notice the two guards pick up their rifles. "Let's find Carter first." Kurt turned and continued along the street. Straczynski glanced back at Sims. "Maybe I should have left back there, you're proving to be no benefit to us."

An ice covered open sewer ran down the centre of the main street. It cracked and broke under Sims boots as he followed them. A shabby dog tied up outside an old transit van barked frantically at him as he passed, straining at the rope that held it. Elsewhere people watched them, news of soldiers with guns ran ahead of them. Sims found himself feeling uneasy. A few people started to gather ahead of them, some armed. Straczynski and Kurt stopped, aware they were heading for a confrontation.

"Misha!"

The shout came from a man stood behind. He wear U.S. combat trousers partly covered with a drab green poncho.

They turned.

"Hell, never expected to see you back here so soon." He walked forward, laughing, his arms outstretched. He embraced Straczynski before turning to Kurt. "Christ you lot look a mess. Where's the rest of you're unit?"

"Carter, where can we find Jane." Straczynski replied.

"She's down at the hospital, but you not her favourite person at the moment."

"Our friend thinks his arm is broken."

Carter glanced across at the uniform. "British eh? No one of your guys then."

"No, not this one."

Carter looked at him again, the wrist of his left arm tucked into his webbing. "Yeah, we can fix that. This way."

He led them through the gathering crowd towards the hospital. Made from old railway coach bodies and container trailers all knitted together with canvas covered corridors and tents, the hospital was distinguishable from those around it not only by several large red crosses painted on the roofs, but also being one of the few structures that had a generator to run its lighting. Carter led them through a door into the wards. Whispered moans and muffled coughs mingled with the odour of damp lining and vomit greeted them. A single nurse moved among the rows of dank beds which lined the walls, a troubled man calling out to her.

"Helen." Carter called out.

She glanced over her shoulder. "One minute." She returned to the patient and after a minute the man was settled. She turned back to them.

"Hello Helen." Straczynski spoke. "This is Sims, we think he's broken his arm. Can you see to it?"

"Yeah, sure." She turned her attention to him, inspecting his shattered arm carefully. "Certainly looks like it. Come on we'll get it set." She led Sims, by his good arm, towards a crude operating theatre. She stopped in the doorway. "Jane's at the far end of the hospital. She'll be pleased to see you again."

Straczynski nodded. "Thanks, I go and see her."

Carter tugged at his coat. "Do you want me to come with you? As a bit of protection." He asked sarcastically.

"No, I'll find her myself. Kurt, get yourself some rest. I'll see you later." He started down the ward.

Sims watched him walk away, there was still suspicion in his mind. "I didn't want to let the Russian out of my sight."

"The old man will be okay," he said.

Sims glanced at him. "How long you known him?"

"Misha? About 5 or 6 months now. He's all right for a Russian, and Kurt ain't bad for a German either."

"How often does he come here?"

"I don't know. Maybe two or three time since we arrived."

"Who's we?"

"Me and my boys."

Sims pointed to the faded patch on his sleeve. "American?"

"Yeah, we used to be part of the 2nd Armoured Cavalry. Now we're this places militia."

"And the Russian and you, Kurt, how do you fit in?"

The German glanced up. "We just turn up every now and again."

Carter nodded. "Stays for a few days then disappears again. Pisses Jane off something chronic."

"Who's Jane?"

"She's the doctor." Kurt replied. "We brought her with us the first time we came here."

Straczynski walked quietly through the cramped odorous wards. An ancient old man with his right arm missing, watched him cautiously from his bed as he walked past; the Russian uniform obviously making him weary. At the far end two women stood next to a bed, both with their backs to him. Hearing someone approach one of them turned. She was heavily pregnant. Her eyes fell on him. "Misha!" She dropped her clip board onto the bed and rush up to him, throwing her arms round his neck, hugging him then kissing him. "Misha, when did you get back?"

"Just now." He smiled and stepped back to look at her. "You look well."

She rubbed her hands gently over the bulge protruding from her stomach. "He's really grown since last time you were here." Her face beaming with pride.

"You can't have that long to go."

"About another three or four weeks I think. But you know how it is, I loose count these days." They laughed briefly. "You look tired."

"Yes I am, very."

"Where are your men? Do any of them need seeing to?"

"There's only three of us left. Kurt and a British officer, Helen is seeing to them now."

"Where are the others?"

"I lost them yesterday."

Jane turned back to the nurse. "Gill, finish off here and we'll look at it again in the morning." She took Misha by the hand and led him back down the ward under the gaze of ancient man.

They stepped outside into the cold night air. Jane stopped and pulled her jacket close round her neck. "What happened?" She asked.

Straczynski explained as they walked to the old bus parked close to the hospital. The interior of the vehicle was cramped, but warm and clean compared to the hospital. A large pile of cushions and blankets at the far end served as a bed, hand woven drapes covered the side and home-made mobiles dangled from the roof. Jane slumped heavily down on the blankets, pushed off her shoes and sighed deeply. "This bloody thing could have picked a better time to come along." She rubbed her bulge again.

Straczynski looked round for somewhere to dump his pack and rifles.

"Oh, Just drop it anywhere. Then come over here." She patted the cushions

He placed his pack and rifle down carefully. Then took his coat and combat jacket off and hung them up to dry before crossing to her.

"So what are we looking at, more hostilities? She asked he again as he sat beside to her.

Straczynski rubbed his face. "I could do with a drink."

"Misha!"

"It is possible, yes. I need to contact the British."

She got up and placed a jug of water onto the wood burning stove to boil. "So things are messed up again."

"I'll be staying for a couple of days until I can locate a radio. I may need a few of Carter's men as well." He laid back on the bed.

"Our radio's knackered. It gave up the go last month." She turned to him. "And I don't think Mel can spare anyone."

"I need a radio to contact the British."

She poured water from the jug into a bowl. She undressed and neatly folding her clothes, then stood half naked she looking down at him before washed quickly in the warm water. "How long are you staying this time?"

"A few days."

"Then what, just leave again? Like last time."

"I had to. I had orders to follow."

"What was the real reason?" She dried herself.

"You know why." He picked up a clean dress and handed it to her. He would of stayed if he could. "Ten years in the GRU make for too many enemies."

She watched him return to the bed, he was looking older then she remembered. In four months he seemed to have aged years. She pulled the thin dress over her head and smothered it down over her bloated belly. Her taunt skin rippled under the cotton as the baby's shoulder moved, rotating round so it's head could engaged into her pelvis.

Misha leaned back and closed his eyes. She was beautiful, even at eight months pregnant he found her very attractive. He always regretted missing Anna's pregnancy.

Jane watched him for several minutes, listening to the rhythmic sound of his breathing. Then she lifted the boiling jug off the stove and placed it to one side to cool before joining him.

He woke suddenly, disturbed by something off in the distance. It took him a short while to work out where he was, staring at the dark ceiling, listening to the distant rumble of the Moscow traffic. Back home on leave, in bed with his wife lying beside him. He could feel the soft warmth of her naked body through her thin dress, slim, petite and heavily pregnant. He was on leave from Afghanistan barely a month before Natasha's birth. Anna murmured, sensing his awakening. She rolling over and snuggling up against him. It felt comfortable, natural. He pulled her closer and closed his eyes again. He would be back in a month, arriving just in time to see his little girl being born. There would be a bottle of Cognac in his coat pocket; a gift from the Ilyushin Il-76 crew who'd pulled a 110% out of their plane to get him to Moscow in time. They'd briefly wet her head with it after Anna had curse him for making her suffer fifteen hours of labour alone. She would never know of the disciplinary action he would face on returning to his Division. Even two time Heroes of the Soviet Union could only take liberties so far.

THE FIFTH DAY. Thursday 11th January.

The fist hammering on the side of the bus wasn't a dream. Carter burst through the door seconds later. "JANE, SOLDIERS!" He panted. "They're in the hospital." Then he was gone. Disorientated by his surroundings, it took Straczynski seconds to react. Jane moved first, leaping from the bed and grabbed a jacket before disappearing after Carter.

She ran barefoot across the snow, pulling the jacket over her thin dress. Ahead of her sat the squat hull of a BMP-2 tracked infantry carrier. Its commander sat atop the turret toying with the cupola machine gun, while three soldiers stood close by. Shouts and screams echoed from inside the hospital, sharply interrupted by a burst of gun fire. She dived past the soldiers and burst through the hospital doors before they could stop her.

Gill screamed at a corporal who confronted her. He shouted back, but neither understanding the other. She stood her ground fending him off with her bare hands, refusing to let him get to a nearly dead Canadian. Several other patients had been dragged from their beds by the soldiers and forced to crouch or lay against a wall. The Reconnaissance platoon's Captain stood holding the hospital's register from which he selected which one he wanted.

Gill's stubbornness was frustrating the corporal. Newly promoted from the ranks and eager to impress his Captain, he was eager to impress. He shouted orders at her. But she ignored them, refusing to budge. His temper was rising and he gave her a sharp shove with his rifle. She tumbled backwards over a chair. The AKM snapped into his shoulder and levelled at her.

Jane stumbled through the ward doors into the commotion. Seeing Gill first, she grabbed the nearest thing she could find and hit the corporal with it. The bed pan clattered to the floor along with the corporal's rifle as he shrank from the unexpected blow. She stepped between them, blocking his way to Gill and the Canadian. "This is a Red Cross hospital." She spoke clearly and calmly in Polish to the Captain. "You're not allowed in here!"

The Captain looked up from the register, surprised by her fluent Polish. He mumbled something in to a man stood close by. They sniggered among themselves.

The corporal snatched his AKM. He was young and inexperienced, and therefore by definition, very dangerous. He glanced round at his Captain who scowled at him while the other man now laughing out loud. Turning back to Jane, he waved the rifle in front of her and spat out an order. Jane stared back defiantly. The platoon had now stopped dragging patients from the other beds and stood watching his performance. Jane could feel them watching her too. Her heart was pounding, her palms grew sweaty and her throat dry. Despite the cold, she felt clammy and her thin dress clung to her body.

"These people are sick." Jane continued pointed at the patients, her voice remained clear. "They are here because they're in need of medical help."

The corporal looked back at her blankly not understanding a single word she said. Mocking laughter ripped from behind him.

"Don't you speak Polish!" She shouted at him. "Don't any of you speak Polish?"

More laughter.

Carter careered through a ward doors seconds later, cut short the mockery. "Leave her!" He shouted taking a swing at the nearest soldier with an iron bar. The soldier fell as the laughter

stopped, but two more took his place, lunging at him and pulling him to the floor. The bar was wrestled away from his hand and turned on him, while the others laid into him with boots and fists.

"Mel!" Gill cried, started forward but Jane stopped her.

Seeing his chance, the corporal grabbed Jane's arm and tried to pull her aside. But she resisted, pulling her arm away and she push him back. He stumbled and fell over his own feet, not expecting a pregnant woman to put up so much resistance. His comrades now with Carter under control, laughed and jeered out loud. He got up, humiliated, angry. Jane could see it in his eyes. She feared she'd gone too far. Gill sensed it too. She looked as frightened as she felt. From somewhere outside the hospital the heavy clatter of 50 calibre gunfire made her jump. A tight twinge that her hand shot to followed. No, not now.

The corporal stood up and spat a last warning at her. She still stood her ground; one hand on her swollen belly, the other steadying herself against the bed. Pregnant or not, it didn't matter to him now. He swung the butt of his rifle at her. She turned away and ducked, but wasn't quick enough. The butt struck her across the back of her head and her legs gave way. Gill tried to break her fall, but failed.

"BASTARDS!" Carter bellowed, but his struggling only resulted in the soldiers putting the boot into him again.

Heckled and jeered on by his comrades, the corporal grabbed Gill and hurled her aside then pulled his AKM into his shoulder again and aimed it at Jane one final time.

Gill scrambling to her feet, but was pulled her away screaming.

Jane pulled herself up slowly. The protesting pain hindering her. The corporal stepped back nervously and took a better aim. "JANE!" Gill screamed again.

She looked at the corporal. "Go on then, you bastard." Defiantly starring him straight in the eyes.

He pulled the rifle tighter into his shoulder and his finger tensing on the trigger. A single shot rang out. The sharp jab in her stomach forced a cry from her lips as her legs gave way and she collapsed.

The corporal dropped his rifle and fell to the ground clutching his leg. The laughter and jeers instantly stopped as the platoon snatching up their guns to face the man who'd fired the shot. Major General Mikhail Straczynski, in full Spetsnaz battle dress, calmly holstered his pistol. The Captain brought his men swiftly to order.

Straczynski walked towards Gill. "Help her." He snapped in broken. "You too." Glancing at Helen.

They both hurried across to lift Jane onto an empty bed. He watched them, desperately wanting to help, but knowing he couldn't. He looked down at the corporal laying on the floor,

clutching his bleeding leg. The 9mm round had shattered his knee and he knew with sound satisfaction he would suffer for the rest of his life for tormenting her. Then he crossed to Carter who lay in silent beneath his captives. He finally turned to the Captain. "You better have a good explanation for this behaviour." He growled. The officer shuffled nervously. He was short and thin, and had obviously suffered heavily from acne as a teenage. "Well, what explanation do you have for mis-treating these men and that woman?" Straczynski walked up to him. He was a good nine inches taller than the Captain, a good position to intimidate from. He turned to the platoon. "Release those patients then get outside." The Captain started to move. "YOU STAY WHERE YOU ARE!"

The platoon shuffling slowly out, dragging Carter along with them. Two of them picking up the corporal as they passed.

Helen left Gill and saw to the patients.

As the last man left Straczynski turned back to the Captain. "I am still waiting Captain."

"SIR! Major Lampkowski wanted all the Russian troops held prisoner in this hospital repatriated and -" He began.

"And did you find any?" Straczynski cut in.

"No sir!" The captain stammered. He paused for a second. "And he also ordered all Coalition troops sheltering behind the Red Cross sign to be rounded up and held as prisoners of war."

"And did you find any of them?"

"No Sir."

Both nurses listened, aware of the game Straczynski was playing. Their concern mounted as Jane started to come round. "Quiet." Gill whispered to her. "Lay still."

Straczynski briefly glanced across at her and caught her eye. He quickly looked back at the captain. "Wait outside, I wish to discuss your actions with your superior."

"Yes sir." The Captain saluted, hesitated yet again, then left.

Once he was sure he had gone Straczynski looked back at Jane. She was laid on the bed with Gill comforting her. He walked over to them. She was shivering, half from cold, half from fright. He pulled a blanket over her and was rewarded with a smile. "You will get your self killed one of these days." His heavy accent still tinted his English.

"Not with you around."

He took her hand, it was cold and clammy.

"She's gonna be fine. Won't you." Gill said seeing the concern in his face. She brushed Jane's hair out of her face. "I'll get you a sedative."

"No. I -" Jane protested.

But Straczynski's nod over ruled her and Gill left.

Jane waited until she was out of ear shot. "Patronising bitch." She uttered.

He placed a finger gentle over her lips. "You be quiet. I have to find out what is happening"

Jane took his hand. "Stay with me." She pleaded. "Please."

He kissed her gently on the forehead. "I can't. Stay here and behave. I'll be back soon."

He pulled free from her and walked away. She watched him; dressed in his uniform, playing his deadly game of deceit again. Around her the ward was still half in panic, unsettled patients demanding attention from pitifully few nursing staff to see to them. And she, she was helpless as well, helpless and alone. Her insides felt tight, knotted up. She began to shake uncontrollably. Tears welled up in her eyes. She rolled onto her side and pulled a pillow towards her and held it tight. She buried her head in the end and tried to shut the world out.

Straczynski walked out of the hospital to where the BMP stood. To the left Carter crouched in the snow with other members of the militia, their hands on their heads, guarded by three soldiers. Carter's face was starting to show the bruised from the kicking he'd got and the other four didn't look much better. Close to them the crater faced Captain was giving his platoon a dressing down. His men obviously didn't view him with much respect by the way they nudged each other as Straczynski approached. The Captain saw him, cut short his lecture and dismissed his men as quickly as possible before tried to make a quick get away.

"Captain!" Straczynski snapped.

The Captain cursed under his breath. "Yes sir."

"Who is you senior commanding officer?" Straczynski asked.

"I've already told you, sir, Major Lampkowski."

"Do not get funny with me or I will have your commission soldier."

"General Rutowski is in overall command of the Army Group. Major Lampkowski is the commanding officer of this Company, sir."

"And where is General Rutowski now?"

"With the main Army Group at Gerswalde with -" A small scuffle off to one side distracted him. A shot was fired into the air and they turned to see three Russians man handle Sims out into the open. Sims got off another shot into one of the soldiers before the pistol was wrenched from his hand and he was thrown to the ground with a rifle at his back. At that moment a second BMP careered into the opening, demolishing the side of a hut as it did. It stopped short of Sims, rocking on it's soft suspension. The back door swung open and Major Lampkowski stepped out. He was an overweight gross man who turned the simple task of leaving the vehicle into a major feat. He walked up to Sims. "What have we here." He kicked

Sims for no other reason than the hell of it. "British officers hiding with the peasants." Then turning his attention to the Captain. "Captain, why haven't your men secured this area?" Then he saw Straczynski and his eyes narrowed. "And who is this?"

Straczynski didn't reply as the oaf walked towards him. "Well, who the hell are you? A deserter?" Lampkowski cleared his throat. Then he became weary as he saw the Major General clusters on his shoulders and a glimmer of recognition flickered across his face. "Do I know you?"

Before he got a answer, a burst of automatic fire cut across the top of the two BMPs, taking out both vehicles commanders. More gun fire raped the ground around. Lampkowski spun round as his panic stuck troops scrambling for cover. He glanced back at Straczynski, but he was gone, grabbing Sims from under his nose and dragged him into cover. More automatic fire tore through the opening and Lampkowski, visibly enraged by the conduct of his men, hollered orders at them.

An RPG struck the first BMP moments later, blowing it out of existence. Lampkowski ducked as debris ricocheted of his BMP's armour and two more of his men fell to the gun fire. Six down and not a single shot returned. "CAPTAIN!" He spat. "Get your men organised!" But he too lay among the dead. A large piece of shrapnel lodged in the back of his neck. Lampkowski cursed the officer's incompetence and snatched the AK-74 from the dead man's hands.

"No you don't." Carter stepped out from behind the surviving BMP, an automatic in his hand.

Lampkowski swung the AK round on to him, but Carter ducked away as he fired, disappearing into the maze of shacks. Lampkowski emptied the mag after him.

Bellowing at the top of his voice, he turned back to the BMP. "Back this thing up!"

The carrier lurched backwards as gun fire echoed around it. Another explosion further away marked the end of Lampkowski's third BMP.

"Come on, MOVE IT!" He stuck a fresh mag into the rifle, ducking again as more bullets rattled of the armour.

The driver swung the vehicle sharp left, blindly backing it through the flimsy wall of the hospital. The engine stalled. Lampkowski hammered on the hull in rage. He caught a bullet in the leg and slumped against the hull, clutching at the burning wound. The engine restarted. Carter broke cover and sprinted across the opening towards them. The driver saw him and slammed his hatch shut as Carter leapt onto the hull. The BMP lurched forward, pulling Lampkowski down under its tracks. The hospital roof collapsed as it pulled itself free from the wall. Carter grabbed a hand hold on the hull, aimed the pistol into the driver episcopes and blew away the prisms. They swung sharply to the left as the blind driver tried to shake him off, before swinging hard right, then left, then lunging forward. Carter rolled off as it struck the side of Jane's bus. The driver found reverse and tried to back out, but the light weight BMP was entangled in the bus. Carter picked himself up and dived through the open rear door. The driver saw him and grabbed his own sidearm, but the cramped interior slowed him up too much. Carter dispatched him with a single shot.

Lampkowski looked up at Straczynski as he lay in agony on the ground. The BMP had crushed his legs and abdomen. The oaf lay helpless at Straczynski's feet, and at his mercy. He gave a half smile.

"Wh... who the hell are... you?" Lampkowski whispered weakly.

"Major General Straczynski, GRU."

Fear sprung into his eyes. "Of course... know you face... seen you with Rutowski..." He spluttered before regaining his composure. "Now... get me a medic."

"No." Straczynski answered. "Tell me where the main Battle Group is?"

"Gerswalde... of course."

"Still under the command of Lieutenant General Rutowski?"

"Yes... Of course."

"What are his intentions?"

"What?"

"What are his objectives?"

Lampkowski coughed up a mouthful of blood. "Surly the GRU... know that information."

"If I knew that information I would not be wasting my time asking you!" Straczynski crouched down next to him. "The 21st Motor Rifles are meant to be at Strzelce, Poland. Not smashing their way through Hardenbeck. If the 21st is here. The rest of the 2nd Tank Army want be far away. So what orders are you acting on?" He studied Lampkowski's face for any signs of emotion.

"You're no better... then the KGB Bas...bastard." He eyed him back defiantly. "You're the GRU... you find... out."

Even on deaths door he was arrogant. "What are your orders?"

Lampkowski tried to laugh. "Not telling..."

"That is all right. I will just have to find General Rutowski and ask him."

"He won't tell you anything."

"You will never know." Straczynski placed the barrel of his pistol at Lampkowski's forehead and pulled the trigger.

Sims quietly picked up Lampkowski's rifle and cocked it. "Get up." He ordered, aiming it at Straczynski. He turned to face him. "Drop the pistol Russkie. Or you'll join your mate." Sims waved the rifle in front of his face.

Straczynski placed the pistol down on the ground and stood up.

"You're still one of them." Sims took a step backwards. "I never liked you from the moment you turned up."

Carter leapt from the BMP. "Misha, these -" He stopped as he saw Sims.

"And you," Sims glanced at him. "Drop the gun."

Carter stood his ground. Holding the pistol loosely in his hand.

"Just drop it, Carter!" Sims swung the rifle on to him.

Straczynski stepped forward and snatched the rifle out of his hand. Sims leapt back expecting it to be turned it on him.

"Hey, calm down Simmie." Carter held out his free hand. "Misha's on are side."

"He's a bloody Russian. I heard him. He's friggin' GRU."

"So fuckin' what? I'm the President of the United States."

Straczynski handed the rifle back to Sims, picked up his own pistol and walked past him into the Hospital.

A big man appeared from between two shacks. He hoisted his empty RPG above his head, Kurt walking beside him with a second launcher. "Carter." He shouted in a thick German accent. "Carter, we kicked their asses, yes?"

More people appeared behind him. Some carrying guns others carrying the wounded and dying. Women and children emerged from their hiding places. A few crept out cautiously, whilst other ran out as if at a fair.

Carter walked over to Sims. "You should loosen up pal. I told you the he's one of the good guys." He looked round at the people. "Give me a hand to sort this lot out and we'll get that arm looked at again."

The big man approached them. "We did good. You teach us well."

"Too fuckin' well." Kurt uttered. "Got the third one outside the main gate. But we lost the Luch."

Carter cursed out loud. It had taken a lot of effort to get that Luch, and it was treasured by the Militia despite the engine being knackered. It was the psychological effect of its presence that counted.

Three wrecked BMPs and most of the Russian Platoon dead. The surviving twelve or so prisoners were huddled together in the opening, stripped of weapons and webbing. Not bad for a bunch of civvies. Not bad at all, Carter commended himself

The inside of the hospital was a chaotic mess. The BMP had demolished a whole ward, bringing the roof crashing down on the beds. Straczynski dragged away a piece of roofing from one and lifted a terrified child from beneath it. She clung onto him, crying, as he picked her up and he tried to comfort her. In the next bed lay a boy that wasn't so lucky, trapped by a heavy steel beam.

"Gill." He called out as she hurried past. "How bad is it?"

"We're having a bloody picnic. What the hell does it look like." She snapped back, then. "Here, let me take her." She added calmly.

The little girl cried out in protest as Gill tried to pull her from Misha's arms. "No, leave her." He said as she clung tighter. "Can I help?"

Gill looked round at the destruction. Most of the children had already been rescued. Except for one. But they didn't hold out much hope for him. The BMP had backed through the wall and straight over his bed. Trapping him under it and the wall. They pulled the last of pieces of debris away and hauled the lifeless body out. A nurse saw to him straight away, desperately searching for some sign of life. But there were none.

She rose slowly shaking her head. There was nothing anyone could do. She walked wearily up to them. The effort of each step showed in her face. She sat exhausted on the edge of the girl's bed and buried her head in her hands.

"Three dead, and another two that I don't hold out much hope for." Her eyes fell on the little body beside the bed. "Oh no." She felt like bursting out in tears.

Gill ran her fingers slowly through her hair, comforting her.

The little girl in Straczynski's arm buried her head deeper into his shoulder. Her crying had subsided into sniff.

"Do you want me to take her?" Gill asked again.

"No, she's fine." He replied. "Can I help?"

Gill looked round. "I don't think so. Jane's back there in one of the offices. You can check on her if you like." She pointed back to where he'd left her earlier. "I gave her a sedative to help her sleep. God, I hope she doesn't see this. Not yet."

"Is she all right?" Straczynski's voice was heavy with concern. "Her baby -"

"Yes, she fine. Lucky she passed out when she did, or things could have been different. She's resting now. And the baby's fine." She added. "kicking like a mule I bet, but fine."

He left the two nurses to find her.

In the adjacent ward, he found the children that had been moved out from the demolished ward. Another nurse hurried about trying to settle them down. Several shared beds with the ward's original occupants. Others huddled on the cold floor. Straczynski stopped next to the ancient one armed man's bed who watched him again with his sad empty eyes. At the foot of his bed sat a thirteen year old girl with both her legs missing. In her arms she cradled her newly born baby as it fed. A couple more children sat on the floor and he nearly stepped on one as a nurse pushed past with a pile of blankets.

He walked into the casualty hall and was almost run over by a trolley on its way to the operating theatre. A man in a blood stained smock grabbed him. "Where's Jane." He demanded. "We need her, now!"

"She's in no state to help at the moment." Gill shouted from behind Straczynski. She pushed her way past him and checked the man on the trolley. "He's not gonna make it." She told the man. "Take him back and get someone else."

"What wrong with him? He's wounded and needs surgery." The man shouted back.

"He's got multiple internal injuries, including one to the head. He's gonna die whether we operate on him or not. Now get me someone else who's more chance of living. Helen, give me a hand to scrub up." And they were gone into the theatre.

Other patients huddled in what ever space they could find. A woman flitted among them with a hand full of coloured labels. She was quickly diagnosing their injuries and tied a label to them. The one's they could help got red, yellow and blue labels, depending on priority. But others, like the young woman who had the back of her head missing; or the old man who had fallen in front of one of the APCs, she knew they couldn't do anything for and, were given black. Straczynski saw a man take the yellow label from the woman next to him and replaced it with his blue label, and he wondered if he should say something until he noticed the empty stair in the woman's eyes. Instead he picked his way past them and found the office.

Inside it was dark. Not black dark, more twilight dark. A blanket had been drawn across the small window, allowing just enough light through so he could see Jane laying on a couch at the far side of the room. She stirred as he approached, murmuring something in her dream. She looked at peace, oblivious of the carnage around her.

"That's Doctor Bayard." The little girl announced.

She startled Straczynski, almost having forgotten she was with him. "Yes, I know." He answered.

"She's me favourite doctor." She continued. "She's nice. She's going to have a baby soon. And if it's a girl she said she'll name it after me."

"And what's your name then?" He sat her on the edge of the couch.

"Emma."

"That's a nice name."

She looked at Jane. "I haven't got a real mummy and daddy," She said with no sadness in her voice. "I want Doctor Bayard to be my mummy. Then I'll have a baby sister to play with."

"But wont that be confusing if you're both called the same name."

"She'll be Baby Emma and I'll be Big Emma."

He found the conversation with this three year old child oddly comforting. He looked at her dusty face. "Have you got a mummy?" She asked him.

"No, not any more." He looked back at Jane.

"Oh. Is she dead too?"

"Yes, a long long time ago."

"Are you a grandad then?"

Straczynski turned away from them for a little while "No. No I'm not."

Borrisovich hesitated outside Chorski's office door for a second before knocking and entering. He had more bad news, news he knew Chorski did not want to hear. The General was stood over a small wash basin, shaving with a razor he'd re-sharpened more times than he cared to remember. "Pavel." He said, seeing him in the mirror. "Any news from Straczynski yet?" He asked rinsing the razor in the water.

"No sir, not yet." Borrisovich replied. "But the 20th Cavalry has made contact with Kobiechi's division."

"Good, good." Chorski turned and looked at him. "Well lets see it then."

Borrisovich held out the radio message to him. Chorski dried his hands on a towel before taking it.

FM. 20th Cavalry,

TO. Western TDV, Pila.

Under heavy attack from both Russian and German forces from within Munchenburg. Believed to be 9th Guards Tank and 27th Panzer Division. Taking heavy casualties, in excess of 50% losses. If assault against Munchenburg is to be successful, tanks and heavy equipment are required. Munchenburg defences are well organised and fortified. It seems General Kobiechi does not wish to talk to us.

Captain Narmonov (20th C.D.)

"Damn," Chorski uttered. "I was hoping she be a little more co-operative. Tell them to withdraw and await further orders."

"Await further orders?" Captain Narmonov blurted out.

"Yes sir, that what they say, withdraw and await further orders." The radio man shouted back over the rattle of gunfire.

Captain Narmonov glanced quickly round, "Ilya." He shouted, "Take two men and see if you can get to Lieutenant Trowski, tell him to disengage and fall back to -" He pulled out his map. "To here, east of this road. Tell him to get his wounded there. Boris find the Doc."

The soldier grabbed his CO's arm. "The Doc's dead sir. Canister round took him out ten minutes ago. Cut him to shreds."

A HE round landing less than fifty feet away, showering them with ice and frozen earth. Two horses reared and bolted. A third horse tried to follow, but stumbled and fell after a couple of strides; its body peppered with shrapnel.

Narmonov cursed again. "Just go Ilya. We'll find someone."

The frightened boy hesitated for a moment before scrambling out the ditch.

"AND WATCH YOURSELF!" Narmonov shouted after him before turning back to Boris. "Who else is there, who's a medic?"

"There's that young girl in Trowski squad, she used to be a vet or something. She could help."

They ducked again as more gun fire ricochet around them. "Come on, let's get out of here before we need one."

McKenzie was pissed off. Her fingers were cold, her feet numb and this patrol wasn't turning to be the push over she'd hoped it would be.

Things had started to go wrong within a couple of hours of landing. Instead of meeting the soft gang like she'd planned at Neustrelitz, they walked straight into a Russian cavalry platoon. Luck had prevailed long enough for them to get the drop and they disposed of the platoon quickly. The platoon turned out to be a reconnaissance section from the 103rd Motorised Rifles Division, a Category two Division that was supposed to be in Poland. They took the cavalry horses and left, heading north towards Neubrandenburg where they found themselves having to duck out of another fire-fight with elements of the 132nd Russian Cavalry Division.

She was now laying prone behind a low snow drift in the middle of a woods south of Neukalen. A short distance ahead of her was another Russian Cavalry platoon they had been following since Stavenhagen. They were luckier with this one, coming up behind it unobserved. Being the third Russian unit they had encountered, her initial intention was to observe this lot, rather than force a fire-fight. But that idea had gone to the wall once it became clear the cavalry weren't heading back to their division.

To her right lay Goodman, who gave her a sideways glance just to make sure she was still there. Off to her left she caught the occasional glimpse of Slater as she darting from tree to tree. She seemed to know what she was doing.

McKenzie and Goodman slipped over the drift and crawled to a better vantage point. They could see the Russian horses tied up some 50 yards to their left, guarded by a lone soldier, that was Slater's target. The rest of the platoon were further ahead at the foot of a small hill on the out skirts of the village.

McKenzie settled against the trunk of a tree, her outline of her white/brown poncho merging with the snow covered bark. Goodman moved away to her right, sliding on his belly into a

shallow depression where he not only had a clear shot at the platoon, but could also cover McKenzie. Further off to his right were Garret and Landers also moved up. For once Garret had stopped griping about the cold and his wet clothing. And to her left was Daark. "IN POSITION." His was the last conformation over the hand set.

"Check." McKenzie spoke into the net radio. "Mandy go."

Slater made her move, grabbing the guard from behind and slicing his throat. It was quick and clean and the man died silently. However one of the horses stirred, tugging at the tied reins and prancing. The Russian commander looked round.

Thinking they'd had been spotted, Daark opened up, laying a burst of fire at the commander. The rest of the section followed suit, catching the platoon in a deadly crossfire that churned up the snow and shattered the silence. After a few short minutes each gun fell silent, and they waited for the haze of snow to clear.

Goodman broke his cover first, sliding over the edge of the depression and down the bank, his M-16 still trained at them. McKenzie waited until she saw Garret and Landers edging in before she followed. She reached the first Russian as Goodman rolled him over. He was a young boy, no more than fourteen. His uniform was ill fitting and his rifle still had the safety catch on.

"Poor bastards." He uttered. "They didn't stand a chance did they."

He quickly rummaged through the boys uniform, but didn't find anything of interest.

"Captain, this ones still alive!" Garret bellowed as he frisked another.

She moved to the side a middle aged woman, with small blood splattered features and lieutenant insignia. She was weakly muttering something and McKenzie put her ear close to her mouth.

"What's she saying?" Garret asked.

"Can't make it out." She took the map and note book from the woman's pockets. "They're part of the 94th Cavalry Division according to this, 'A' section."

"Aren't they meant to be in Poland?" Slater asked as she waddled towards them, dragging the guards body behind her.

"Last time I heard they where." McKenzie stood up and looked around. "Drag the rest of those bodies over here, strip them of anything useful."

"Then what, burn 'em?"

"No. The locals can do that. Grab the stuff and we're moving out before we lose anymore daylight."

She collected the papers from the bodies and took one dog tags from those that had them. What was left wasn't of much interest, mostly personal effects. Some of the better bits of

uniform were taken, along with all the ammunition and weapons. The heavier equipment and food remained packed on their horses which were fresher than those they'd taken from the 103rd. They took these horses, and cutting others free before turned north towards Dargun.

Dargun was a Ghost town. Gassed right at the beginning of the war after an artillery Commander emptied the full battery of MLRS fitted with chemical warheads on the town; Eight launchers, twelve rockets per launcher, 13,248Kg of C-29 Nerve gas per rocket. Deadly at a ratio of thousand particles of air to one of gas. It was believed a Motorised Rifle Division was hiding in the town, but in truth they were over fifty miles away on the Oderhaff. Over three quarters of Dargun's population just dropped down dead on the spot, they'd have looked up on hearing the warheads airburst three hundred feet above their heads, but before they'd realised what the noise was the C-29 would have already taken effect. A brief moment of a tight chest followed by fitting and nausea, then it would have been all over. The rest of the population left, never to return. Many died on the migration out. Those who had survived that were taken to 'special isolation units' where after a week they too were dead. A week later a clean up team, kitted out in full NBC kit removed the bodies; ordinary innocent bodies from the town and disposed of them. Just men, women and children, not a single soldier among them. The town had remained empty since. The few people who visited Dargun since found to be a museum with no curators or visitors. The shops waiting for customers, offices for workers. Cars stood outside their homes waiting for their owners. That is they would if it wasn't for the inch of dust laying on the bonnets. It was scavengers paradise, but most people still believed the town was unsafe, warned off by the skull and crossed bones contamination signs put up by the clean up team. And if McKenzie was honest with herself, she wasn't really sure whether it had been declared safe. But like so many other things, she kept that quiet.

They set up camp in the same school building they'd used last time they were here. It was near the centre of the town and gave good protection from the elements as well as a clear line of sight along the surrounding streets.

Goodman stood at one of the windows watching the wind whip the loose snow up into swirling clouds before dropping it against the walls. Behind him a small fire cracked away over which Garret cooked a stew while Landers sat close by cleaning her 'new' AK-74.

Daark walked across the class room, stepping over a broken desk and crouching near the fire next to Slater. He watched her for a moment rummaging through her pack. "You lost this?" He held out a gold ring to her. "You dropped it across there." He nodded across the room.

She took it. "Thanks. I'd thought I lost it out there."

"Who's is it, yours?"

"What, you mean where'd I nick it from? It's mine." She placed it on her finger as if to prove the point.

Daark gave a half smile. "Sorry I didn't mean that. You never mentioned anything about being married."

"Five years this May."

"Is he -"

"No. Missing with one of our subs."

"Navy. So what's your background? Regulars?"

"Nar, TA. Drafted in from UKLF last spring, haven't been home since. That was the last time I saw him too. Waving me off from the barracks. His sub went down two weeks later."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. He was a bastard. Thought more of his mates than me. Only time I saw him on leave was when he came home to sober up. Spent more time in a police cell than he did in my bed. So don't be sorry he's gone, 'cause I'm not." She looked up as McKenzie walked in. "Everything all right?"

"Yeah." She breathed, pulling off her wet poncho. "Perimeters clear." She moved to the fire to warm herself.

"What do you make of it all?" Daark asked. "We had the 103rd Motorised at Neustrelitz, the 132nd Cavalry at Neubrandenburg, and now the 94th at Neukalen. They're all meant to be in Poland?"

"Could be part of a new offensive" Landers added as she pushed the bolt into place on one of the AK-74's she'd taken from the patrol. "This equipment is in good nick. Better than that M-16 of mine anyway."

"They seemed to be looking for something. Didn't they?" McKenzie flicked through the Russian officers note books. "Most of the notes in this book are on the military strengths of the towns and settlements in this area."

"Do you think they're checking up on them?" Daark pondered.

"Isn't that our brief?" Garret muttered, as he handed out mugs full of stew.

"Yeah. But what the hell are they doing this far from the Oder?" She dug a report out of her top pocket. "According to this list, the 103rd are part of the 2nd Soviet Guard Army, and the 94th and 132nd are with the 20th. Both armies were last reported in Southern Poland. They're thought to have some 5000 men and over 40 tanks each."

"That's a lot of stuff." Daark observed.

"Can we trust those troop lists?" Slater asked, between mouthfuls of bread. "They haven't been too accurate so far have they. Where does it say we're meant to be?"

Goodman walked over from a window to collect his supper. "Shouldn't we get this information back to Jones?"

McKenzie folded the troop lists inside the book and stuck them back in her pocket. "We'll radio in at 0700 tomorrow."

"Yes! We're going home." For the first time this mission Garret actually looked happy.

"No. We're just sending this stuff in."

Garret's face dropped. "Come on McKenzie, we didn't have to take this stinking job. It was our time to sit it out. And besides I've got a girl waiting for me back in Hamburg."

"Don't worry." Slater mumbled, stuffing another piece of stew soaked bread into her mouth. "She told me she's got a tanker to keep her bed warm while you're away."

"Get off my back, Slater!"

"I didn't hear you complaining when you volunteer for this job." McKenzie pointed out.

"I didn't know we were going to get into this shit. You said it would be easy money. You said fuck all about any Russian Cavalry."

"Sure, like the Captain really knew." Slater butted in. "She just kept us in the dark just to piss us off."

"Just get fucked Slater! What give you a say in this? You still a fuckin' cherry."

"I heard you're not much more." She quickly replied.

"I've seen more combat than you."

"Since when have you had eyes in you arse. Last time the shooting started, you where running the opposite way."

"Yeah? The only action you've had is flat on your back with your legs open and your knickers round your ankles."

"What, with some over weight piss-head like you humping me? You wish! The only humping you ever get is with you hand."

"Cut it out you two!" McKenzie interrupted.

"Anyway." Slater nudged Daark. "Who said anything about wearing knickers."

"Drop it Mandy."

"I just love the feel of DPM against my fanny." She smirked.

"I told you to drop it!"

"So what are we gonna do?" Daark asked after a moment, still trying to keep a straight face.

McKenzie looked across at him disapprovingly as she unfolded a map of the area. "If these are advance elements of main battle groups I'd expect to find 'em somewhere near Pasewalk. If the 2nd and 20th Armies are here, we need to know exactly where, in what strength and why?"

"And if we run into them we wouldn't stand a chance." Garret didn't hide his animosity. "They'll paste us. I say we radio in for a dust-off and let someone else deal with it."

"No, we're staying!"

"Christ! You're trying to get us all killed. What do you think, Goodman?"

Goodman looked round nervously. He wanted to follow Garret but he knew McKenzie was right.

"Come on, we could be back in the Citadel in the warm, with Marie." Garret continued.

"Yeah, we all knew what you'd like to do with Marie. Pity she's got better taste than you." Daark chuckled to the amusement of Landers and Slater.

"I think the Captain's right." Goodman finally said.

"Shit! Trust you to suck up to her." Garret finally lost his temper.

"That's enough Garret!" McKenzie snapped.

"No. That's not enough! If you want to get yourself killed out there, that's fine with me. But I'm not."

"GARRET!"

"FUCK YOU McKENZIE. You're gonna kill us all." He glanced round at the rest. "Isn't she. She's stick us into some fuck arse situation that'll get us killed. Just like she did at Rungensburg. Kingston and Soloman knew it and look how they ended up. I say we radio in, get lifted out and fuck her."

"Watch your mouth Garret. You treading on dangerous ground." McKenzie voice remained calm.

"Well!" Garret looked round for support from the others. "What do you say?"

They all avoided eye contact with him except Landers. "You've just pulled night watch". she stated, the humour in her voice gone. "Now pick up your rifle and get out there."

Garret stood up, gave McKenzie a defiant glare. Then he left the room. She'd never liked him since the day he was assigned to her squad. He didn't fit in then and still looked like he never would. She didn't like the discord he created in her squad and that rattled her. He'd always looked like trouble. Built like your habitual drinker, he was overweight, unwashed, unshaven and had an over high opinion of himself. He'd claimed to be some battle hardened hero from the 9th/12th Lancers. But she hadn't seen any evidence of it yet.

THE SIXTH DAY. Friday 12th January.

Z070012ZJAN

Authentication. 67

FM: RED FOX TWO.

TO: KINGFISHER.

1. Large bodies of Soviet troops encountered.

Z095010ZJAN. 103rd Soviet Motorised Rifles at Neustrelitz in platoon strength.

Z102010ZJAN. 132nd Soviet Cavalry at Neubrandenburg in company strength.

Z145011ZJAN. 94th Soviet Cavalry at Neukalen in section strength.

2. Believe these could be advance elements of Soviet 2nd or 20th Army Groups. Turning east towards Pasewalk area where we believe the main body is located. Will keep you informed.

McKenzie.

message ends

Jones tore the radio communication from the telex machine and read it before placing it in his briefcase and closing the lid. "Louise, I'm on my way to see Bridgewater." He said as he walked out of the radio room. "If you hear anything from Lieutenant Sims or MAJOR, let me know immediately."

Harris was waiting for him outside the operations room reading the latest City Situation dispatch. "Morning sir." He greeted him as he walked past him into Ops.

"Morning Karl. How are things today?"

"The Gun Gangs were active on the west side last night." Harris yawned. "Eidelstedt and Lurup have been declared no-go areas. And it looks like Bahrenfeld will be heading that way later today or tonight. Other wise not bad. It's the first real trouble we've had this winter."

Jones signed them both out. "I'll be with General Bridgewater for most of the morning." He told Meg Riley, the Ops supervisor before following Harris outside.

Apart from the battered car the floodlit pad was devoid of life. The car, Harris' own car, had once been a high performance saloon. He'd brought it new same years ago and suffered the crippling HP repayments and sky high insurance for it. But now, like most things, it had lost it's gleam. It's paint work was faded and covered in rust patches. Home-made nudge bars were welded on to the front and steel mesh covered the windows.

They drove out past the gate guards and out into the city. Beyond the safety of the Citadel's lights the dark desolate streets were a dangerous place. Despite it still being curfew gun-gangs, snipers and wild dog roamed the streets to pick of the unwary traveller. Jones' eyes fell on a body laid on the road side less then 100 yards from the gate. Just a bundle of rags with limbs. Swollen and stuck out at awkward angles. It had probably laid there for days and he wondered why he had never noticed it before.

Harris turned off the main road, cutting through a suburb towards Eilbek. The headlights lit up a street barricade. Two burnt out cars and other household debris piled across the street by a local gun-gang. One of the cars was a Merc, top of the range model, now it was nothing more than a burnt out shell. Harris skirted round it and shot down a dark side road, taking an elaborate route today, avoiding the worst barricades and the no-go areas. He'd read the reports and knew the areas well. That was his job. The headlights picked out concrete filled oil drums from another barricade as they slid round a corner. They glanced off one and it barely moved. They thumped over a pot hole and across the pavement, scattered rubble in their wake.

The arc lights of the Geschäftsstadt, the Headquarters of the British Army of Europe (BAEUR), picked them out as they approached. HALT! ARMED GUARDS! the sign read. It was repeated beneath in German. More signs hung off the security fence UNAUTHORISED PERSONAL WILL BE SHOT! Two bodies in the killing ground between the fences reaffirmed this. Harris threaded the way through the concrete quadrants and stopped at the barrier in front of the Scimitar light tank.

Two armed guards appeared. One shinned a torch through the steel mesh, while the other one covered them with his rifle.

"Morning Sir." The first guard said as it's light flashed across Jones' pips.

Jones pushed his I.D. card up against the mesh and the guard read it.

"Okay Sir, you can go in." He waved his arm and the second guard lifted the barrier.

Harris drove past them and pulled up at the buildings main doors where Jones got out without a word. He walked past the two door guards into the building. Both the desk sergeant and the young woman stood next to him looked up as he entered the foyer.

"Sir." She said as he approached.

"Lieutenant Blake." Jones nodded in reply. "Is the old man up yet?"

"Yes sir, waiting for you up stairs." She was a short well rounded, but pretty woman. Dressed in green fatigues and wearing a Browning Hi-Power on her hip.

Jones handed his I.D. card to the sergeant, who pondered over it for a few seconds before signing him in and handing it back.

"This way, Sir." Blake said out of politeness leading Jones into the gloomy heart of the building. He didn't need her to show the way. He'd trodden the thread-bare carpets of the dimly lit corridors many times before.

A steady stream of people walked past them, each busy with their individual tasks. Occasionally one of them saluted Jones, who'd returned their salutes without acknowledging them. Blake led him through a comfortable looking office on the third floor that had her name tag on the door and into the larger well lit office beyond. General Bridgewater rose from behind his large desk as they entered and met Jones halfway across the floor.

"Alan, good to see you again. How was Christmas?" The old man was an eccentric who still believed in the sanctity of such things. He had small tree still stood in the corner of his office, decorated with aluminium foil strips and an angel made from a doll found on a bomb site. Despite all the sarcastic warnings of bad luck for leaving the thing up beyond the 5th, he lacked to heart to take it down. It brightened an otherwise plain office. "Operations tell me the films McKenzie brought back from the recon Canberra were good. It tells us a lot about the UKLF's deployment north of the Thames. They're sending up another bird as soon the tech boys can rig up another recon pad to get us some good photos of the Felixstowe and Lowestoft."

"What are they using this time?"

"A Tornado or one of the old German Phantoms. Let's hope they don't lose this one." Then he turned serious. "Any way, what's so dam important to drag you out of your castle at this unearthly hour?"

Jones walked across the office and took a seat. "I believe we may have a situation developing west of the Oder."

Bridgewater watched him thoughtfully for a couple of seconds. "Jenny, get the Colonel a drink." He closed his office door and walked back to his desk. "And what gives you this idea?"

He took out a report from his briefcase and handed it to him.

"What's this?" The General asked as he opened the cover.

"My report on RED FOX ONE and FOUR's last policing operation."

"I heard about it. Lost one chopper and a squad. Bad luck. But why go to the trouble of bring it here in person?"

"Just read the report first, sir."

Bridgewater pushed his reading glasses onto his nose and started reading, skimming briefly over the casualty list. But then reading more intently as he turned the pages. Blake entered the office and placed a pot of tea and two cups down in front of them, then left, unnoticed by him. After several minutes he closed the report and sat back into his chair. "This makes interesting reading. How accurate is it?" He asked peering over the top of his spectacles.

"It's as good as my squads can get. Unfortunately both commanding officers are missing, presumed dead, so it's a bit sketchy in places."

"That's Captain O'Brian and Lieutenant Sims." He turned to the casualty list and glanced down the names. "What about your man inside Russian Western Command. What's he got to say about this?"

"I believe MAJOR was with Captain O'Brian at the time of the attack. RF-4's Sergeant has conformed a Spetsnaz unit was with them when they met up for the pick up. It may be they were killed in the helicopter crash."

"You don't know for sure?"

"No sir, Sergeant Kneale had previously never met MAJOR."

"If it was MAJOR, what did he have that was so important he had to come here in person?"

"I don't know. But I'd wager it's something to do with the attack."

Bridgewater glanced through the report again. "What about these troop strengths?"

"Mostly compiled from the report I presented to you last month and estimates from RF-4."

"Mm. That's bothering me." He rose and started rummaging through one of his filing cabinets. Taking out a file, he started skimming through it. "Here it is. According to your last report, the Divisions you have mentioned were being pulled back to Central Poland with orders to return to Russian soil by early spring."

"Yes sir, I know." Jones sipped at his tea. "That was the information we had at that time, and it still seems to stand for most of the Russian Army, apart for these few divisions."

Bridgewater returned to his chair. "Okay Alan, you seem to think there's something else in this. Convince me."

Jones took a mouthful of his tea then walked over to the large scale map of Germany and Poland that covered one of the walls of the office. He stood facing it for a few seconds playing with the thin gold wedding ring on the little finger of his left hand. "As you know from that report, RF-1 and 4 have spent the last two weeks patrolling the usual area north-east of Berlin with standard policing briefing." He turned to face Bridgewater. "For the majority of the time they'd had nothing of any interest to report apart from the usual marauder activity.

However on the 8th, Captain O'Brian's squad, RF-1 ran into advance elements of the 9th Guards Tank at Strausberg, within hours they also encountered the 11th Guards Tank at Buckow." He ringed each town in turn with a grease pencil. "Both these divisions were last reported to be wintering in Mielecin and Pyrzyce, Western Poland. At the same time Lieutenant Sims unit encountered the 157th and 103rd Motorised Rifles at Angermunde and Greiffenberg. These too were last reported in west Poland. RF-1 managed to duck out of the immediate area without drawing attention to themselves. RF-4 wasn't so lucky, they were forced into a fire-fight before they could get clear of the 103rd. They lost two men.

Both sections headed for Templin arriving on the 10th for a dust-off." Jones walked back to the desk and finished off his sweet warm tea. "Independently from this I believe MAJOR received information that was related to this. He made contact with O'Brian on the 9th, rendezvous with his squads near Mittenwaide, before continuing on to Templin. The ambush, as you've read, happened as the helicopters arrived at the LZ. In-coming heavy mortar fire from an unknown source." Jones paused again for Bridgewater to comment. He didn't. "Yesterday another one of my squads, RF-3, reported encountering a large concentration of Russian armour at Muncheberg. Unfortunately, contact was lost before this could be confirmed. We believe this was the 25th Tank Division. But we've been unable to contact RF-3 since to confirm this.

And finally my fourth squad, RF-2 radioed in this morning reporting they'd encountered the 103rd Motor Rifles at Furstenberg, 132nd Cavalry at Neubrandenburg and the 94th Cavalry at Neukalen, in strength ranging from section to company."

"Christ, that's nearly 60 miles inside Germany." Bridgewater finally said. "Are you sure?"

"Yes Sir." He handed Bridgewater the print-out. "Captain McKenzie believes this could be a new offensive and is heading east to try and confirm this. She believe she could be heading into the either the 2nd or 20th Russian Army."

He read the telex. "Can you get anyone out there to check up on RF-3?"

"No sir, not at the moment. If they're not talking to us, it's either they can't or won't. Sims' squad had a rough time, I've stood them down for 48 hours while we assess the situation." Jones returned to his chair. "What's the situation with the rest of the Army?"

He read McKenzie's telex again. "A few days ago we received a communication from Bonn informing us they'd lost contact with their garrison at Pasewalk."

"Yes I know. I spoke to Hauer, their Security Minister the other day. He asked if one of my units could check it out. They think it might be nothing more than a downed transmitter. McKenzie's been briefed."

"They don't usually bother us with such things, do they?"

"Some times. My people are always in the area. So they do a few favours for the Germans in payment for bed and board."

"But Friedland and Strasburg aren't that far away. They've both got a small garrison. Why couldn't they do it?"

"It's more convenient for them to do it this way."

"Maybe." Bridgewater pulled a page from his desk. "This morning Bonn notified us they had lost contact with three more garrisons." He handed Jones the sheet. "And they believe it may be due to action from an unknown source. From the information you've got it points towards the Russians."

Jones read it. "This can't be right. The dates don't fit. They are saying these garrison have been over run, right? Then they must here fallen shortly after Pasewalk. They're saying they only went yesterday or last night."

Bridgewater looked bemused.

Jones returned to the map. "Look, Pasewalk, Prenzlau and Strasburg. They're only 25 Kilometres apart. For the 132nd Russian Cavalry to have reached Neubrandenburg on the 11th, they must have passed Pasewalk by the 8th or 9th. With these two following no more than a day or so later. This doesn't add up. Hauer informed us on the 7th that Pasewalk was out of communication."

"Could your units be wrong?"

"No. Defiantly not!"

Bridgewater got up and walked across to the map and studied Jones' scroll. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. To reach Neubrandenburg by the 11th, Prenzlau must have been passed at least two days earlier. There's over 50 K's between the two places. On top of that the Zarow River bridge is down so any armour would have to go through Friedland to the north, which has a

garrison of about 500 men.; and there's no mention of that here. Or alternatively Burg Stargard to the south, but that a marauder strong hold. And again no mention."

Bridgewater pondered over the grease pencil marks. "What's the situation with your units?"

"I'm treating RF-3 as being out of commission. That leaves me with RF-2 as the only operational recon squad in the area. And they flew out with two men down."

"I thought you were scaling down you operations in that area in preparation for operations in the U.K."

"There is over 2500 square miles north east of Berlin. Since we pulled out of Ederswalde, two units is the minimum needed to patrol the area. Originally only RF-3 was due to be out this time. But following the downed transmitter report and Captain McKenzie's requested to go out to finish some business. I took the decision to put two out."

"What sort of business?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask."

"Was that wise?"

"I've the utmost confidence in McKenzie. She's a good officer. She'd just got back from chasing your phantom missile and I presume she had some business in the area to sort out before she leaves for England."

Bridgewater sat watching him for a while. "I need more information Alan. Hard factual information on this offensive before we can draw any accurate conclusion. The C in C has already heard about the German Garrisons and if what you've been tell me is correct, we'll be hearing from them again pretty soon. I want as many hard facts as you can get me. Christ, this could put back the withdrawal plans to late summer."

"Yes sir. That thought had occurred to me."

Bridgewater pondered for a moment. "What about the survivors from Sims' squad and the rest of McKenzie's? Can we get someone out to find out what's happened to your unit at Munchenburg."

"Until we find out what's happened to Hamilton's squad, I see no point sending more people out to join them. Hamilton's lot could be dead or maybe just gone to ground. If they're keeping quiet, we'll hear from them when it's safe. If they're dead, a second squad could walk straight into the same fate. McKenzie might turn something up in the next day, or Hamilton could have resurfaced."

"Okay." Bridgewater studied the map. "I'll brief Collins."

"There is one more thing. It's possible we may have a security problem either within the Citadel or here."

"Oh yes, go on." Bridgewater turned to him.

Jones walked back to the desk. "From the survivors accounts of the mortar attack, it seems they had the range on the helicopters by the second round, which implies they were set up on the LZ before the helicopters arrived. Only a hand full of personal knew the landing sites codes used by my squads. Mainly their section commanders and helicopter crews."

"The mortar section could have listened in on their chatter?"

"It's quite possible. However when I spoke to Sergeant Kneale, he was certain Captain O'Brian only used the LZ codes, the Blackhawk pilot confirmed it. Which means the mortars must have been -"

"I see you point. How serious do you think our problem could be."

"I don't know. I'm sure the Citadel has been infiltrated. But I don't know by who or how far into the rest of our command structure they've got."

"I understand." Bridgewater looked soberly at the map. "What the hell are our Russian friend up too, what indeed? I'll take what you've got so far to Collins in this mornings briefing. It looks like it's your show at the moment, Alan. Keep me informed."

Harris was waiting for Jones outside the foyer. "Back to the Citadel?" He asked as Jones got into the car.

"Yes. Then I want you to get over to the refinery and get a listing of all fuel deliveries since it came on line. I want to know who to, how much and who authorised it. And find out how it was delivered." He lent back in his seat. "Take Louise with you, she can handle the red tape."

The two tugs churned up the dark icy waters of the Elbe as they eased the Arctic Voyager into the container terminal along side the two new Ro-Ro ferries. They'd brought her up river on that mornings incoming tide without incident. The 48,000 ton cargo ship dwarfed the two ferries despite sitting low in the water and listing 20 degrees to starboard. Both tugs pushed hard against her beam and she slipped sideways to the keystone. Lines were thrown ashore and she was tied off.

They'd finally managed to pull her off the sand bank on Tuesday mornings high tide after two days of failed attempts. They'd held her at Cuxhaven on the mouth of the Elbe overnight were divers inspected the hull. They'd reported it had sustained more damage more than had been anticipated, but was repairable once she was in dry dock. Six bilge pumps were keeping her afloat by removing the water from her holds at a steady rate of fifty gallons a minute, approximately the same rate it was flooding in through the hull breach. Four additional pumps

waited on the keyside to be lifted aboard to assist them in the event of the breach increasing in size before it could be repaired. But no repairs could be made until 1500 tons of rusting National Guard M-60 tanks were removed from her flooded holds. The task wouldn't be easy. Instead of being lined up in the neat rows they were loaded in, they now lay tangled and entwined with each other, tossed aside by the impact of the missile and subsequent explosion, and then by the pounding of the North Sea. The US Army had salvaged the Divisions light LAV-25s and M-113 personnel carriers, but the heavy M-60s were low in the hold, below the waterline.

It was hoped was that some of the tanks could be salvaged or scavenged for parts to keep BAEUR's tanks and PCs operational. But after almost a year under several meters of salt water, opinions were divided.

After seeing the boat close up, Commodore Chester feared he'd under estimated the time needed to make her sea-worthy again. The gapping hole on her port side was big enough to drive a bus through and a large number of deck plates and hull beams were buckled beyond repair. They would need replacing. They were also concerned that after eleven months aground, she might be close to braking her back. They'd have to check that too, but not until she was in dry dock. Addition fire damage on the superstructure was also a worry than anticipated. Tony Hailey, the Arctic Voyager's new captain had reported this damage alone would take at least a week longer then expected to repair. That was news Collins did not want to hear.

From the cover of the Hindenburg Park on the opposite bank, Liddel also watched as the two tugs manoeuvred the crippled ship up the river passed the refinery. The ship listed heavily, deliberately trimmed that way to keep the 5 metre gash well above the choppy water. She blow into her cold hands before picking up the binoculars and studying the ship again. She'd been there for two days waiting for it to arrive and was glad it finally had.

Polmer poured out a mug of steaming broth from his canteen and passed it across to her. She lowered the binoculars and took in, grateful for something to warm her. "What do you reckon?" He asked, taking the glasses and looking at the boat.

Liddel cupped the tin mug in her gloved hands and held it close to her chin. "She looks better then we thought. It won't take them long to get her sea-worthy again."

"What about the hole?"

"The missile went straight into her second hold. It mainly looks like plate damage. From what I've see, I can't see why they beached her. They could have brought her in like that with the convoy."

Polmer focused on the flaking paint on the superstructure side. "Wheel house looks a bit charred."

Liddel sipped at the broth. "Yeah I saw that. They've had a bit of a fire after the missile hit. I bet the Master isn't around any longer to answer any questions."

"No. He'll be long gone by now along with the crew." He handed the binoculars back to her. "So what's your estimate on her being ready. Hauer's gonna want to know."

"Four weeks. Three if they push it."

Polmer took the empty mug from her. "She'll need dealing with, I'll tell you now."

"Well, it can wait." She pulled her parker hood up over her red hair. "Now I've been out here for two days and I'm bloody cold."

They slipped from their hiding place and started the long walk across Hamburg to the Tonndorf district.

Despite the weather RED FOX TWO made good progress. They reached Friedland by mid afternoon as the snow storm eased. Garret, who rode point, was first to spot that something wasn't right. Last time they passed the town, it had been a thriving settlement protected by a small Garrison. Now it looked dead, devastated by recent fighting. McKenzie studied the broken roofs through her binoculars, burnt out and desolated with very little signs of life. Leaving Garret and Landers behind with the horses, she took her squad in, Goodman taking the point.

They moved quickly along the bare hedgerows towards the edge of the town where at a corner of a field Goodman stopped and raised a fist, the others went prone against the base of the hedge.

McKenzie looked around, scanning the snow covered fields but couldn't see anything, so she crawled up to him. "What's up?"

"Cavalry section on the road." He whispered, pointed to a dozen horses just within sight on the roads.

"Have they seen us?"

"Don't think so."

She waved Slater and Daark to join them.

"I count 12, and well armed." Slater observed, crouching besides Goodman as they watched the cavalry cantering towards the town.

"They look pretty relaxed considering they're 40 miles inside our lines." Daark added.

The cavalry slowed as they approached the cover of the first houses. McKenzie waited for five more minutes before ordering Goodman to move off.

She checked her squad at the first house they came to, allowing them a couple of minutes rest before moving off again. Goodman took the still on point cautiously moved through the empty streets.

"I don't like this," he whispered to Slater as they paused for a second. "Last time I was here, this place had over 800 people in it."

"Gives me the creeps." She replied. "Where is everybody?"

Movement at the end of the street sent them both leaping back into cover. The door behind Slater gave way and she tumbled through it, landing in a dishevelled hallway.

Instinct told her she was being watched and sent her rolling quickly over onto her knees, just in time to see a shadow disappear into a room. "Goodman!" She whispered.

"Shut up Mandy, we've got company." He replied in a low voice.

Tell me about it, she thought, scrambling to her feet and moving towards the doorway. A single candle on the fire place provided the only light source in the room, casting long gloomy shadow on the walls. Cautiously she stepped in, noticing the boarded windows and broken furniture. Her foot kicked a child's toy and it squeaked at her in protest as it rolled across the room. She froze, outside she could hear voice. Five, maybe six. Russian by the sound of them. She took another step forward; taking more care where she put her feet. In the back corner, behind an old sofa, she could see a cloud of condensed breath rising in the cold air. She crept nearer, trying to keep her rifle steady. Her heart beat loudly in her ears as she edged round the sofa. The huddled bundle of rags turned towards her. Her finger tensed on the trigger. A face looked up at her, the grubby face of a small child, wide eyed with terror.

"Mandy!" Goodman whispered sharply from the door.

Slater looked up and the child bolted between her legs for the door.

"GRAB HIM!" Slater shouted, forgetting about the Russians outside.

Goodman made a grab, but missed. Slater clambering over the sofa scattering more toys as she went, heading after the child, but Goodman was blocking her path. She cannoned into him, sending them both crashing to the ground. She caught a fleeting glance as the child disappearing up the stairs. She kicked blindly at Goodman as she scrambled after him.

Goodman grabbed her leg. "Slater!" He whispered harshly in her ear, fending off her kicks. "For God sake, Mandy, calm down!" He got a better grip on her. "Mandy! Christ sake, there's half a dozen Russians outside. You want to get us both killed?"

She came to her senses. They both stopped and listened. In the street they could hear the voices. Getting to their feet, they slipped into the shadows of the room just in time to avoid being seen as the soldiers entered the house.

The senior officer waved two of his men up stairs, three more into the back of the house and two followed him into the front room. He switched on a torch and shone it around the room. The beam flashed across the walls just missing Slater as she crouched against it, not daring to breath in case her breath betrayed her. From up stairs, the child scream drew his attention. He switched off the torch and left the room. "Search down here." He ordered before disappearing up stairs.

Two soldiers entered the room, moving cautiously across the floor. From out of the shadows Slater saw the glint of Goodman's knife blade as he drew it. She carefully laid down her rifle and drew her own. One of the soldiers stepped close to her. Without warning she grabbed him, putting her hand over his mouth and driving her knife up through his ribs and into his heart. The sudden movement alerted the other soldier who turned towards her. Unluckily for him Goodman was stood right behind him. All he saw was the flash of steel as it was drawn across his throat, nearly severing his head from his body. Slater picked her rifle up and moved towards the door. Upstairs they could hear the child crying. The voices of a man and a woman could also be heard along with that of the officer. He was shouting at them both, asking questions.

Slater peered through the hallway into the kitchen. She could see two more soldiers enjoying a quick smoke. "Two in the back, the rest upstairs." She told Goodman.

They could now hear the officer's voice clearly, demanding answers from a woman. There was a shot and a thud of a body falling to the floor followed by the woman's distraught scream.

"Not telling them what they want to know." Goodman uttered.

The two soldiers ambled into the hall, one of them headed up stairs as the other loitered in the hall a little longer to finish his smoke. He glanced round at the front room before stepping in, straight onto Slater's knife. She lowered him slowly down onto the floor and gave the knife a final twist to make sure he was dead. Then pulled it out and wiped it clean before starting up the stairs with Goodman right behind her. At the top they stopped and listened. In the back room they could hear the child crying, and from the front bedroom the shouts of the officer. Goodman tapped Slater on the shoulder. 'I'll take the back room' he indicated. She nodded and he moved towards it as she stepped onto the landing; making her way towards the front bedroom. At that moment the door opened and a soldier stepped out. She blew him away with a short burst from her AK-74. Goodman froze, starring at her in disbelief. She'd done it now. He burst into the back room door. A single soldier tossed the child across the room and reached for his rifle. Goodman shot him, silencing the boy's crying. "Fuck it Mandy-" Goodman started as he stepped back onto the landing as the third soldier came running up stairs. He laid a burst from his M-16 into him and sent him tumbling back down.

In the front room it had gone quiet. The officer had stopped shouting, the woman stopped crying. Only the child could be heard screaming in the back room. Slater nudged the door with her hand. Automatic fire ripped through it sending the child into howls.

"GOODMAN, SLATER!" McKenzie shouted from the hallway.

"Shut the fuck up!" Goodman yelled at the boy before stepping to the top of the stairs. "Yeah, up here."

She appeared at the bottom. "Nothing like telling 'em we're here!" She pulled the gun from the dead soldier and rummaged through his pockets.

"We've got two Russians up here with a hostage." He informed her.

"Okay, get it mopped up." She stuffed the soldiers papers inside her jacket and grabbed a couple of full magazines. "Get a move on. And lets hope they don't have a radio with 'em or there could be more on the way."

Goodman looked across at Slater. "Shit, neither thought of that." She admitted.

"You heard her. Let's get it cleared up."

Slater pulled the back-pack off the dead soldier. Getting a good grip, she swung it through the shattered door. One of the Russians fired at the back-pack as it rolled across the floor. Slater kicked the remains of the door wide and fired at the soldier in front of her. Spotting the officer out of the corner of her eye she turned her AK-74 towards him. But he'd been waiting for her and the burst caught her in mid action, throwing her against the wall. Goodman, a step behind her, hit him with a burst from his M-16, blasting him against the boarded up window.

"MANDY!" He shouted, his aim switching first to the bleeding woman, the dead man and finally the other soldier. "You all right Mandy?" He knelt beside her.

"Yeah, nothing more than a scratch." She pulled her torn kevlar jacket open and lay still for a moment until she could control her shaking. "They all dead Rik? Did we get 'em all?"

"Yeah Mandy, we got 'em all." The woman scrambled past them and grabbed the sobbing child as he entered to room, pulling him tight to her and crying in relief. Slater pulled herself up and leaned against the wall to catch her breath. Goodman was already checking the officers body, searching for papers and identity cards before moved across to check the soldier. In one pocket he found a bar of chocolate. "Here, Mandy." He chucked it at her before resuming the search.

Slater tore open the wrapper and took a bit. It had been a long time since she'd tasted any. "You all right?" She asked the woman.

The woman nodded, trying to regain her composure.

"Hey kid, want some chocolate?" Slater continued.

The boy smiled and wiped away his tears.

She broke another chunk for herself and threw the bar at the boy. The poor mite; who couldn't have been much more than six and half starved, tore the wrapper off and stuffed the whole bar into his mouth.

"We've got all that's of use," Goodman announced. "Lets go before more turn up."

He left the room and started down the stairs. "Come on Mandy."

"You sure you're okay?" She asked the woman again, climbing to her feet.

"Yes, thank you." She answered.

Slater looked across at the body of the man, "Who was he?"

"He helped us hide from them. He was trying to get us some horses to escape from here."

"MANDY, COME ON!" Goodman yelled from outside.

"I'm sorry." Slater picked up her rifle and stepped towards the door. "But I've got to go."

"They've got tanks and armoured cars."

She stopped

"Tanks, in the main square."

"How many?"

"Four or five, I'm not sure."

"How long have they been here?"

"Three days."

"Then why are you still here?"

"SLATER! NOW!" McKenzie ordered.

She looked towards the stairs. "Can you show us where they are?" The woman nodded.

"Good, come with me."

The woman picked up the boy and followed her out of the house. McKenzie and the rest of the squad were some way down the street when they emerged from the house and they hurried after them, catching up just as Daark's fist went up. Slater pulled the woman into cover beside Goodman. "What is it?"

"Don't know. Stay put I'll find out." He crawled forward until he lay beside McKenzie.

"Tanks up ahead." She told him before he asked. "Matt's checking it out." From where they were, she could just see the whitewashed hull of T-72. Its front left side skirt was blackened and bent back, and the shredded track twisted from under it.

Daark returned, scrambling over the debris of the houses. "I count five. One tank, four carriers. All out of action." He said sliding down beside them. "Someone's kicked up a stick here. They've all been taken out by RPGs and Anti-tank grenades. A lot of small arms fire as well. Lots of blood but no bodies. Whoever came out on top cleared up after them, don't know why they left the armour. Most of the damage is repairable."

"Maybe they ain't got the facilities?"

"Yeah, maybe. It's all Russian stuff, T-72M, BMP, two BMDs and at PT-76. No Id markings and no bodies to give us clue."

"I want a look." McKenzie replied. She looked round. "Where's Mandy?"

"Ten yards back there." Goodman points.

"Rik, you and Mandy head across to that shop and wait for us." She followed Daark back towards the tanks.

"Who the hell are they?" McKenzie demanded as she entered the shop and spotted the woman and child.

"She's local." Slater explained. "She knows what been happening here."

"Tell me." She ordered. "When did they get here?"

"Five days ago. I counted fourteen tanks." She said. "And five or six trucks."

"Who did that?" McKenzie pointed back out the shop.

"The garrison, two days ago. That was why they rounded every one up and took them away."

"Woe hold on. Your not making any sense. Start from the beginning. When did the Russians Arrive."

"Five days ago." The woman repeated.

Daark glanced at her. "Mac, according to the Colonel this place was still friendly five days ago. And apart for that bit out there I don't see any sights of fighting."

"There wasn't any, not at first. They were here as friend."

"What do you mean?" McKenzie demanded.

"I don't know why. They said they had changed sides and they were our friends now."

"So who attacked them out there?" Daark asked.

"The Garrison commander ordered it."

"But you've just said they'd swapped side."

"I know -"

"So who changed their minds? And why? Didn't they like the way they smell?"

"I don't know!"

"Shut up Matt." McKenzie ordered. "Where are the Russians?"

"They have armoured cars, and more men and horses in the church at the main square. They're using it as a base."

"Sounds like their using this place as a H.Q." Slater commented.

"Yeah, but it still doesn't tell us who they are." Daark muttered.

"The 117th Motor Rifles." Goodman announced proudly, holding out the officers papers.

McKenzie snatched them away from him. "Great. Matt, get on the radio and get Landers and Garret down here with the horses." She turned to the woman. "You know where the camp is."

"Yes, I can show you." She replied.

"Good, come with me. Rik, you too. You're looking after the kid Mandy. If we're not back in two hours, start heading back to Dargun and get a dust-off. We'll try and catch you up later."

It took twenty or so minutes to reach the town's main square, dominated by a gothic style church that cast a grey shadow over the - Tanks? - BTRs. Ten ton, eight wheeled armoured personnel carriers. The standard workhorse of the Russian Motorised Rifle Division. McKenzie studied them from an overlooking house. Two regular BTR-80s fitted with 20mm Auto Cannons, a third an older less well armed BTR-60, and across the square an ultra-modern BTR-90, the latest in the highly successful line of vehicles whose origin started with the BTR-152 armoured truck of the late 40's.

"What do you think's going on?" Goodman asked.

"Don't know." McKenzie replied. "But I don't like the look of it."

"I reckon about 300 troops."

"Mm."

"Captain!"

"What?"

"About 300 troops."

"I heard. Probably the full Division. But why haven't they reclaimed those tanks?"

"Fear of attack?"

"They'd be keyed up then. Look at them, they pretty relaxed down there. They're not worried about being attacked. I still don't get why they've left the tanks. They're all repairable, so why leave them?" She slipped away from the window.

"I don't get it. If they've defected and the garrison invited them in, why they end up fighting? And what the hell happened to them?"

"Beats me." She sat thoughtful for a while. "Come on, back to the other. We're getting out of here. This things to big for us to handle."

They ducked out of the house and headed back to the supermarket.

The Mi-24 Hind Gunship, heavily laden with rocket pods, cannons and two 1250 litre drop tanks, hovered over the rooftops. Chorski shielded his eyes from the swirling cloud of razor sharp ice splinters and squinted up at the unannounced visitor, looking for markings. Borrisovich joined him. "Green nose band." He shouted. "KGB."

"Andryov?" Borrisovich asked.

"No doubt." Chorski shouted back. "I hardly think this is a social visit."

The Hind circled once more then landed in the town square beside the Hips. The pilot shut the engines down while the gunner looked around, causally lighting up a cigarette. As the noise died away the side door opened and a tall gaunt man stepped out flanked by two officers. All three wearing green Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnost shoulder tabs.

"General Andreyov?" Borrisovich asked noting the family resemblance.

Chorski's nod confirmed his fears.

"So what the hell is he doing here?" They walked forward to meet him.

General Andreyov was a slippery, cunning toad of man who'd escaped the purge of the KGB at the expenses of many a better man. He spent years in the political exile waiting for the appropriate time for the 're-birth' of the new KGB.

"General." Chorski saluted.

Andreyov nodded in reply, more interested in looking around at his surrounding than the Supreme Commander of the Western Theatre. "Where is my son?" He asked.

He appeared on cue and they greeted each other in familiar fashion. "You look well father. Did you bring her?"

General Andreyov snapped an order and his men dragged a fourth person out of the Hind.

"Mother of God." Chorski muttered. "Nattasha."

Borrisovich glanced across at him. "Who?"

"Straczynski's daughter."

"But you said she was dead."

Her head came up momentarily and she met Chorski's eyes. He stared back into her dark, haunting and deathly cold eyes. What have they done to her? Not sure whether she recognised him or not. Then her head went back down and she was dragged away.

"That is the daughter of Major General Straczynski." Colonel Andreyov informed them. "No doubt you recognise her Chorski."

"Yes, but I understood she'd been killed in the Petersburg Riots." Chorski replied. I will tear you head off, you ignorant little twat!

General Andreyov laughed. "He appears to have told you a lie as well. I warned you of the dangers of this man."

"Where did you find her?"

"Zdanov, on the Black Sea."

Of course. Straczynski had often sent her there while he was abroad, to stay with Pasha Davidova, a retired Moscow militia officer who had fought along side his father against the Nazis. That's where she would go, and where he would first look for her. Had Andreyov killed the Davidova's too? "What do you intend to do with her?"

"Keep her here until the appropriate time. Then she will stand trial along side her father for treason."

"Treason?"

"Did you not know? Major General Straczynski is being tried as a traitor. You are being summoned as a witness for the State.

CHAPTER SIX

"We've got a problem." Daark announced as they entered the shop.

"Why, what's happened?" McKenzie asked. Then she saw Landers. "Christ, what happened to you?"

"Garret jumped me." She answered holding a blood soaked rag against the back of her head. "The bastard's done a runner."

"When?"

"About twenty minutes after you left. He took everything. Horses, food, weapons and ammo, the whole fuckin' lot!"

"SHIT!" Goodman chucked the rifle down on an old freezer. "Great, that's just fuckin' great. What did you let him do it for?"

"I didn't exactly ask for this!" She waved the bloody rag at him.

"Have you seen what's out there man? The whole 117th Motorised. And you let that bastard run off with our gear."

"Get fucked Goodman, I didn't let him do anything. He slugged me and left me for dead."

"Oh man, we don't stand a chance!"

"Your not helping, Goodman." Slater butted in, anxiously. She was now pacing the floor. "What we gonna do, Captain? He's right we don't stand a chance now."

"She's no idea, have you?" Goodman raved. "When the bloody Russians find us, were dead, man."

"Goodman, shut it!" McKenzie told him.

"We might as well just give ourselves in." He waved his arms wildly at them.

The boy clung to Daark's, tears welling up in his eyes "Rik, you're spooking the kid."

"I don't fuckin' care man, it's her fault." He pointed at Landers. "She's the one that let the bastard get away!"

McKenzie grabbed Goodman's M-16 from the freezer. "If you don't shut it, I'll shove this thing down you fuckin' THROAT!"

He looked at her. She meant it. McKenzie could really terrified him sometimes and she knew it. Still seething, he slung his webbing down on the floor and stormed off towards the back of the shop. She dropped the M-16 on top of the webbing. "Slater, patch Fran up. Daark, shut the brat up." She walked towards the windows. She was tired, her eyes hurt and her limbs ached. This wasn't meant to happen. This was meant to be an easy job. Get in, butter up the soft gangs, cash in a few favours and bug-out before hitting the UK. It felt like she was losing it, losing the edge that kept her alive, kept her squad alive. They relied on her to keep them going, to drive them on when all they want to do is drop. She was getting soft. She knew Garret was untrustworthy, yet she still relied on him. She wouldn't have done that before, not placed trust in any one she wasn't sure of. Outside the light was fading fast. At least that was one good sign, the dark would act in there favour.

"Mac." Daark spoke quietly to her. "Are we stopping here for the night, or what? 'cos if we are -"

"No, Matt. We're moving out." She turned to face him. "We're gonna grab some transport and bug out. Ten minutes. Get everyone ready."

He headed back towards the others leaving her alone by the windows for a while longer. "Okay you lot,, ten minutes and we're moving out." She heard him announced.

Slater dejectedly shuffled off the freezers, "What we doing, walking back to Hamburg?"

"Beats me, she's the boss." Daark turned to the boy. "Hey, kid would you like this?" He held out the stuffed monkey that hung from his pack. The boy took it and started playing with it, a smile returning to his face.

The woman watched for a while. "You're good with him. Have you got children of your own?"

"Yes, two." Matt replied. "A boy about his age, and a little girl."

"What are their names?"

"Wil and Rebecca." Matt smiled to himself. "Wil's a right tearaway, in to everything, just like him at that age."

"And Rebecca?"

His smile faded and he fell into silence for a while. "I've never seen her. She was born after my last visit home. She'll be about eighteen months now. I've got a picture of her somewhere." He pulled out a creased photo out of his flying suit pocket and handed it to her.

She looked at it. "She's a beautiful baby. This your wife?" She pointed to woman holding the baby.

"Yeah, Rachel. As soon as we get back to England I'm going to start looking for them."

"Do you know where to look?" She handed the photo back.

He pushed it back into a pocket. "No, but I'll find them."

McKenzie rejoined the group. "Okay people, gather round." They did. "They're using the old church as a stables for their houses. We hit it tonight and grab a set and head Northeast towards the lake near Sarnow. That's about five miles. It shouldn't take you much more than an hour. The first one there waits for one hour, then turns north to Greifswald. If you don't make it in time, you're on your own."

"You're saying that like you're not coming with us." Slater pointed out.

McKenzie smiled. "I'll be there, just make sure you are. Once you hit Greifswald, turn west and head home. That's unless anyone's got a radio up their sleeve, then we'll just call in an air-strike on this place." They laughed, easing the tension slightly. "Everyone clear. Good, let's get going."

"What about those two?" Daark asked.

"Rik, Mandy. You found them. They're your responsibility. But I don't want you to become heroes for them."

McKenzie took the point as they headed back to the square. Slater brought up the rear with Goodman. "You all right now?" She asked, walking along side him.

"Yeah, just got a bit pissed off with that little shit."

"Garret? I never liked him." She tried to reassure him. "He actually tried chatting me up a couple of times."

Goodman stopped and looked straight at her. "I know I should of shot the bastard when I had the chance."

Slater laughed. "Rik, your jealous."

He turned away, embarrassed.

Landers had noticed they had stopped. "Keep it moving back their."

Goodman hurried to catch up leaving Slater stood pondering. Until then she'd never noticed Goodman's advances. Chuckling to herself, she too caught up with the group.

They arrived at the house at the same time as a cavalry section returned from patrol. That wasn't a good sign. Tired horses were no good to them, and now the stables would be crawling with troops. McKenzie cursed her back luck. She knew it wouldn't be long until the patrol they'd ambushed would be missed, that's if they hadn't already, and their presence known. She had to do something now.

"Where's Matt?" Landers was first to notice he had disappeared. "Did he get here?"

"Yeah, I followed him in." Goodman replied just before Slater spot him, crouched beside the nearest BTR-80. "What's the crazy sod up to?"

McKenzie watched him from the window as he slowly opened one of the hatches and slipped in. "Christ, it never rains does it. What the hell. They'll know we're here soon. Come on." She led the group out of the house and down to the BTR, arriving as Daark re-emerged from the hatch dragging a body out behind him. "This one's clean and ready to roll." He announced, solving their transport problem.

Ducking under the BTR, McKenzie studied the other three armoured carriers. Another BTR-80 to the left, an old '60 to the right. And the '90 in front of her, sat at the foot of the church steps, covered in aerial and half enclosed in a large tent. A command vehicle. It was a good chance that this one could tell them what was going on.

She crawled back to the group. "Change of plan, we grab the '90. Slater, Goodman, you deal with the other two. Fran, stay here with the woman and the kid. And give covering fire when needed. Matt you come with me."

Slater nudged Goodman in the ribs. "Mine's the 80."

"If the '90's no good." McKenzie continued. "We'll blow it and take this one. So stay with it, Fran, till the last second. You all got that?" Nods all round. "Good, lets go."

"Hey Rik." Slater tugged his sleeve. "If we come out of this alive, I'll let you get me drunk and take me to bed." She wiggled her hips provocatively and smiling cheekily, then moved off through a house leaving him lost for words.

"Mandy's promised you her body, eh." Landers had overheard. "Well you best deal with that '60 before she changes her mind."

Goodman looked at her for a second. "Yes, you're right." Then headed of towards it with thoughts of bedding Amanda Slater milling through his mind.

Daark crouched behind the front wheel on the far side of the BTR-80. Above him, he could hear Landers and the woman and child clambering inside. Just behind him McKenzie waited, checking the magazine of her rifle.

"You set?" He asked.

"As ever." She peered round the edge of the wheel, the square was empty. It was forty or fifty yards to the command vehicle. The snow wasn't too deep in the square. That would make running easy, but didn't give much cover if they where caught out in the open.

"How long do we give 'em?"

At that moment the tent flap opened and two officers walked out. Both McKenzie and Daark ducked back out of sight, before edging forward again to watch. The two officers walked across the square towards a building near to Slater BTR-80.

"Go on, go inside." Daark whispered to himself. But he was out of luck and they remained outside, talking for a while. "Dam!" He cursed. One of the officers lit up a cigarette as they talked. Then the other officer entered the building, while his comrade stood outside, looking round as he smoked. "Go inside, you twat!"

McKenzie nudged him. "Mandy." She said pointing out a dark figure moving up on the officer from the shadows and silencing him with her knife.

"Good girl. Come on." Daark had gone, sprinting across the square towards the command vehicle. He reached it and slid underneath.

McKenzie, a few steps behind, lost her footing on the ice and collapsed next to the front wheel. They laid still for a few seconds, catching their breath, listening to the voices inside.

Slater dragged the officers body into a deserted house, then sneaked back to her APC. It was occupied. Trust Matt to pick the empty one. She crawled under it. Above her, she could hear people talking. She pulled off her back-pack and took out two phosphorus grenade. Then

moved forward behind a wheel and crouched there, waiting. From her position, she could see inside the house the other officer had entered. It was lit up and music could be heard having wired up the BTR's auxiliary generator to the house, providing it with all the home comforts. Through the door several people could be seen dancing, several more were drinking spirits and looked in no state to put up much of a fight.

Above her the card game was about to reach its climax. It was down to the sections sergeant and his female medic. On the table lay a vast assortment of stakes, four packs of fags, 9mm auto, two hard porn mags, high stakes indeed. Slater pulled the pins on both grenades, holding down the triggers. The medic upped the stakes again by half a dozen gold rings tied together with an old boot lace. Slater edged her way to the open hatch. The sergeant sat quietly for a while trying to weigh the medic up, was she bluffing? Only one way to find out. He pulled a silver pocket watch out of his top pocket and placed it on the table. He laid his cards down. "Full house. Kings over fours." He reached out to scoop up the winnings.

"Not so fast." She stopped him. "Aces over sevens. My game." She laid down her cards.

Moans of disgust followed as the cards down and she scooped up her winnings. Slater dropped the grenade through the hatch. It bounced between their legs allowing them enough time to recognise it and turn towards the nearest escape hatch before turning the inside of the BTR into an inferno. Slater ran clear, stopping momentarily to throw the other grenade through the house's open doorway before sliding down onto the snow, rolled over and levelled her AK-74 towards the BTR. The second grenade went off moments later, setting the ground floor of the house alight. The occupants came running out of the house with their clothes aflame. She dropped them with short bursts of automatic fire. No one made it out of the BTR-80.

The two explosions woke up the command vehicle's crew. Three of them stumbled out of the tent, uniforms unbuttoned and rifles in hand, straight into McKenzie. She blew two away, then her SA-80 jammed. The third officer, a young man, stood looking at her as she fumbled with the rifle, trying to clear it. He brought his AK up and levelled it at her. "Lay down your weapon and surrender!" He ordered.

She yanked back the hammer to clear the jam but it wouldn't. He smiled at her as his finger tensed on the trigger. The shots went wide, striking the ground beside her as Daark knifed into his back. She slung her rifle over her shoulder, pulled out her automatic and entered the tent and found a fourth officer hurriedly trying to load his rifle. McKenzie aimed her pistol at him, a reverse of her last encounter, but she wasn't interested in prisoners. The remaining two, one an officer, the other an attaché, were both unarmed and quickly surrendered. Daark covered them as McKenzie looked inside the BTR. It was packed with radio sets and other electronic and surveillance gear. She glanced over the maps on the tables in the tent. They covered the region and most likely contained the information she was after. She scooped them up and she stuffed them inside the command vehicle.

"Mac, what about these two?" Daark asked.

"Deal with them." She ordered, before she clambered in after them.

Outside the clatter of an auto cannon followed the two explosions.

Daark smiled at the two Russians. "You scared?"

They both nodded.

"Good." He shot them both.

The explosions had also woken up the cavalry sections. It took them half a minute to grab their weapons and get out of the church into the square. Landers had been waiting for them in the turret of her '80. She fired the 20mm auto cannon over the top of the BTR-90, sending them running for cover as she laid fire on to the church steps and doorway.

Slater slapped another mag into he AK and waited for the next person to emerge from the house. When no one did she scrambled to her feet and headed back towards Landers' -80, reaching it as it was hit by fire from the BTR-60.

"Shit!" She ducked out of the way as another burst rattled off the side. "Where the hell's Rik?"

Goodman had problems of his own. As he approached the old BTR-60, he'd unexpectedly stumbled into three drunks taking a walk. Before their pickled brains had time to comprehend his presence, he dropped two of them. But the third one was less inebriated and quicker, and before Goodman had chance to stop him, he had drawn his Makarov pistol and fired a single shot. The bullet hit him square in the chest, taking him off his feet. His M-16 went in one direction whilst he went in the other, landing heavily on his back. He laid on the ground, gasping in pain from every breath. His forced his head up to see the gaping tore in his flak jacket, expecting to see a blood soaked gash in his chest. There was non, no blood. He caught sight of the Russian staggering towards him, his pistol wavering at his head. From across the square Slater's BTR brewed up and he turned to look at the ball of flames rolling up into the dark sky. Goodman kicked out at his legs as hard as he could and the drunken went down. He forced himself up to grab his rifle, but stopped short, the stabbing pain in his chest caused him to cry out in agony and collapsed back onto the ground. The M-16 was beyond his reach, several feet away. The Russian pulled himself up right, swearing at him and reaching for his dropped pistol. Goodman slumped over onto his side and he pulled his shotgun from his pack. He flipped the safety off as the Russian brought the Makarov onto him and emptied both barrels.

He lay still for a moment willing the stabbing pain in his chest to subside, trying to gulp down each breath. The Russian lay not four feet away, the saw-off 12 gauge had done it job as always. He cracked it and the two spent cartridges sprung out for him to replace with fresh one. Snapping it shut, he replaced the safety and stuck it back into his pack. A last resort weapon, he'd only had to used it three or four times before. The cut down barrel and stock meant it's range was limited. But get in close and it was devastating. He scooped up the spent

cartridges and struggled to his feet, reclaiming his M-16 on the way, before staggered towards the BTR-60.

By the time he'd reached it all hell had broken loose in the square. The church steps were covered with troops, many of them dead, other wounded crouching behind them, pinned down by Landers fire. Slater's BTR was burning along with the adjacent house. His BTR-60 and its section of troops were active, firing at Landers. The old BTR-60's 14.5mm machine gun was taking chunks out of the '80's armour. But Landers was too busy stopping the cavalry troops from reaching the command vehicle to return fire. Goodman slapped a grenade into his 203 and fired it at the turret. It bounced off. A dud! He quickly stuffed another one in and fired again. This one worked, punching a hole through the armour. The gun went quiet, the crew dead. Goodman slipped out of sight and rested against a wall. His chest felt like it had been hit by a sledge hammer. Still struggling to catch his breath he headed away.

The command vehicles engine finally fired, much to McKenzie's relief. From the small side window she could see Landers BTR taking hits and behind her she could hear Daark loading a belt of ammo into the breech of the chain gun. He spun the turret round and laid a burst of fire across the steps of the church.

"CORP!" Slater yelled seeing the '90 go active. She grabbed the boy and pulled him through the open hatch, the woman followed. "TIME TO GO!"

Landers fired a final burst from the auto cannon and clambered after them. They were waiting behind the cover of the giant tyres. Slater pulled a pin on a grenade and dropped it inside the BTR and covered the civvies heads as it went off, blowing open all the hatches.

Landers looked at her. "You sure that was a good idea?"

"Yes, can we go now?"

"Okay. I'll go first with Sonny Jim. When we reach the other side, you two follow and I'll cover you. You got that?"

Landers picked up the boy in one arm and waited for the right moment to run. The gunfire died down and she went, firing blindly across the square as she did. The woman scrambled out a dozen steps behind them.

"NO!" Slater yelled, but it was too late.

The firing started again. Landers stumbled on the icy surface, she dropped her rifle fighting for a moment to keep her footing and reach the cover of the BTR-90. The woman took a hit a moment later and staggered and fell. Slater shouted at her as she tried to get up and was caught by another round. With no choice Slater broke cover and sprinted out into the open. She reached her and pulled her back on to her feet. Then she too took a hit in the back.

"MAAA!" The boy yelled, twisting from Landers grip and bolted into the open.

The woman stuck her free arm round Slater's waist, trying to stop her from falling. "NO! DON'T!" She yelled at him.

Slater took a second and third hit in the chest as she slipped from the woman's fingers. Then a fourth in the back as she collapsed to her knees.

The boy stopped, obeying his mother, half way between her and Landers.

"GO BACK!" She screamed, still trying to haul Slater back to her feet.

He turned, but was caught as he took a step.

"NOOO!" She dropped Slater and stumbled after him.

Mandy rocked precariously on her hands and knees, trying desperately to steady herself. Her head came up and her eyes met Landers. A burst of gunfire tore between them, cutting the woman down only feet away from her son. She pushed herself up, staggering a few steps. Landers could see the despair in her eyes. "COME ON!" She yelled held out a hand, encouraging her onwards.

Another round hit her in the side, quickly followed by a sixth. She faltered, forces back to her knees. She looked up at Landers and reached out towards her, pleading for help. But she could only look back unable to do anything else but watch.

"COME ON!" She shouted as she edged forward towards her. "Come on, you can make it!" A burst of automatic fire tore across the side of the '90, forcing Landers back into cover. She looked back to see Slater take another hit in the shoulder, then a final one in the side of her face.

She slumped to the ground, motionless.

"NOOOO! NOOOO!" Landers screamed turning away, a heavy lump toying in her throat. "No!" But there was nothing more she could do.

Ducked under the BTR-90 she clambered through the hatch and found Goodman was laying just inside, only half conscious.

"Where's Mandy?" Daark shouted at her as she heaved the hatch shut.

"Gone." She croaked.

McKenzie crunched the BTR into gear and slammed her foot down on the throttle. The BTR eight wheels fought for grip on the icy surface as the twin GAZ engines delivered the power. It tore itself free from the canvas tent which surrounded it and accelerated hard away. At every gear change it lurched forward, charging across the square, bullets rattling off its armour. McKenzie threw it round a corner, keeping the power on. It slid sideways, demolishing the end of a house that crumbled in their wake. She straightened up and drove

headlong at a barricade that had built to defend the square. They hit it, bursting through and scattered it.

A painful gasp for breath made Slater open her eyes. She body felt numb apart from intense pain in her head. Through her blurred vision she could see the woman trying desperately to reach her son. She pushed their hands together.

"Thank you." The woman gasped, blood trickling from the corner of her mouth.

Around them they could hear the Russians closing in. Slater dug her last grenade out of a pocket and held it out between them. "I always kept this just in case." She whispered. "Never thought I'd ever use it."

The woman understood and pulled the pin. Then wrapped her hand tightly around Slater's she closed her eyes.

Sliding the BTR into another street, McKenzie slowed momentarily to regain her bearings. Ahead of her in the dark loomed the back of a second barricade. She floored the throttle again and the twin engines roared in response. They hit the barricade, riding up and over it. They came down hard on the other side. Something broke. They all heard it. The steering became sluggish and the ride hardened. She threw it into another corner trying to avoid a mound of debris and nearly lost control. The heavy BTR slide sideways careering through the side of a house and into its garden. The engines screamed as the wheel fought for grip to control the slide. They smashed through a green house, a tool shed, a fence then out into open country.

She kept going, driving hard, leaving the town behind them. The need to stop was becoming desperate, the steering was getting worse and the headlights were smashed and something was banging. She pushed the wind screen shield down to try and get a better view.

"LEFT, GO LEFT!" Daark shouted from the turret. "To the left, down that farm track."

McKenzie slowed and turned down the narrow track. It lead past a burnt out farm house and into a woods. After a miles she pulled up. Daark scrambled out through the turret hatch and ran back down the track to check if they were being followed. Landers followed him through the side hatch.

McKenzie sat still for a moment relieved to be out. She clambering out and stretching. Then she walked round to the front to see what damage the barricades had done. They had a flat tyre and the front of the hull was heavily scared. There must have been something big and heavy in the middle of that last barricade. The tyre was no problem, they had a spare, and providing they hadn't damaged the tracking or suspension they'd be all right once it was changed.

Landers returned first, "No sign of anyone."

"Good." McKenzie replied. "I want you and Slater can keep watch while we get this wheel changed."

"Slater didn't make it." Landers said soberly.

"Eh?" McKenzie hadn't noticed. No-one replied. "Shit!" She kicked the wheel. Slater was a good soldier. She worked well with the squad. Unlike Garret. "When did she get it?"

"Just before we left. Along with the woman and the kid."

McKenzie walked up to the hatch. Inside Goodman lay unconscious on the deck.

"What up with him?"

"Copped one in the chest."

"Is he okay?"

"Haven't looked yet."

"Well fix him up while I see to the wheel."

Landers clambered inside and touched Goodman. He moved as she unfastened his tattered flak jacket.

"Where are we?" He winced.

"In a woods somewhere east of Friedland. Safe for the time being." She pulled open his shirt to reveal the heavy bruising. "That looks painful."

"IT IS!" He barked through gritted his teeth

She touched the side of his chest and he cried out.

"SHIT! I think I've broken - a rib or two." He gasped between short breaths.

"No, just bruised I think. You'll live."

Outside Daark reappeared out of the darkness. "I'll give you a hand." He told McKenzie, helping her position the jack under the front stub axle.

"Anything happening back at the village?" She asked at length.

"No, nothing." He handed her a spanner. "Just the fires from the burning BTRs as far as I can tell."

"Mandy got it."

"Yeah, I know." They fell into silence. Landers reappeared from inside as they cracked the last wheel nut and started to jack the wheel clear of the ground.

"How's Rik?" Daark asked.

"Bandaged him up. He took a hell of a shot in the chest, flak jacket stopped it but his bruised to fuck. I've given him a shot of painkillers. But he wouldn't let me give him anything else 'til we stop for the night." Landers pulled her jacket tighter against the cold. "Said he still want's to be on his toes while we're moving."

The three of them lifted the huge wheel off the axle and replaced it with the spare.

"Right, Fran," McKenzie grunted as she leaned on the spanner. "Get the map and find us somewhere to hide for the night. God knows what we've stride up."

She disappeared inside and they lowered the BTR back down onto all eight wheels. Daark put a final turn on the wheel nuts while McKenzie picked the jack up and chucked it into the BTR's tool locker.

"What's up?" She asked, noticing him scanning the surrounding foliage.

He nodded down at his feet and kicked the surface snow away. Underneath it was hard and well compacted. It was something they'd all missed. "Something heavy's been down here recently. In the last few days." He crouched and looked closely at the tyre marks. "Trucks I'd say. Too narrow for armour."

He handed her the spanner and pulled himself through the hatch.

She dropped the spanner into the locker and slammed it shut. "Okay. We'll check it out later. Let's get moving again, were still to close to Friedland for my liking." Then she took a last look at Friedland.

The engines burst back into life, shattering the silence and filling the air with diesel fumes. She looked at the white cloud. Diesel? he pondered, where the hell's all this diesel coming from?

She swung herself in as the BTR moved off.

After only two more miles they stopped again as the track opened out into a clearing. The ground ahead was uneven and a battered truck stood on the far side. "I don't like the look of that." Daark said from the drivers seat.

"Me neither." McKenzie replied, climbing out of the co-drivers seat. "Landers, come with me."

"No, you stay on the gun. I'll go." Goodman winced as he clambered forward.

"But you're in no shape -"

"I'm fine Mac."

Landers looked down at McKenzie from the turret seat. "He don't look to hot."

"I'm fine Fran." He handed McKenzie her SA-80. "Come on, let's go."

She kicked the hatch open and slipped out.

"I'll be fine." Goodman reassured Landers before following her.

"You're an idiot Rik." She commented.

He smile. "Yeah sure." Then disappeared into the dark.

They moved through the darkness at the edge of the clearing towards the truck, moving slowly and carefully. Abandoned vehicles were seldom just that. many would be booby trapped, not just the vehicle but also the surrounding ground, and usually those who'd set the traps weren't that far away.

She crouched next to a tree and scanned the clearing and mound before waving Goodman onwards. He rose and walked around behind her, not getting too close in case he set off a charge. Then he stopped and crouched and after a moment waved her on.

McKenzie turned and rose, straight into the face of a frozen body. It nearly scared her half to death, Slumped against a tree, the frost covered ghostly white woman clutching a small bundle in her arms. McKenzie nudged it with the barrel of her rifle and it tumbled open onto the snow.

"Oh, God!" She choked.

Goodman walked up to her. At her feet lay the naked body of a tiny baby girl. He placed his hand on McKenzie's shoulder to comfort her but she pushed his hand away and crouched next to the tiny body. "She can't be more than a few weeks old. Not a scratch on her, Poor mite. They must have frozen to death."

Goodman tugged at the woman's frozen frock, trying to find some I.D. The cold material slipped in his hand and she toppled over. "Mac!"

"What?"

"She's been shot in the back." He looked towards the clearing. "Guess she was running from something."

McKenzie followed his stare with an uneasy feeling. With all caution gone, she walked towards the uneven mound in the centre of the clearing. As she drew closer it became obvious. Bits of frost covered bodies stuck out of the snow like some satanic sculpture. She felt sick.

"What's up?" Landers called from the hatch.

"Come and see."

"Oh Christ!" She uttered getting closer.

"They've all been shot." Goodman pointed out, nudging the body of a German soldier with his M-16. "Herded in here and shot. Guess we now know what happened to the Garrison."

Daark turned away and throwing up. He spat out a mouthful of flem and wiped his face. Landers handed him her water bottle, he washed his mouth out and spat it out. "I'm fine," he muttered.

"How many do you think there are?" McKenzie asked Goodman.

"Beats me. I'd say about all of Friedland." He slumped back against a tree with his arms held tightly across his chest. "God this hurts."

"I did tell you." Landers said.

"Yeah, I know. Oh fuck!" He nearly doubled up with pain. "You got any of these pain killers left?"

"In my pack. Want me -"

"No I'll manage." He headed back to the BTR.

She watched him go then turned back to see McKenzie's stern look. "Hey, he's not my problem. He want listen to me." She glanced at the bodies then followed him leaving her in silence with Daark. "No-one's innocent these days?" McKenzie uttered complacently.

"Yeah, maybe. What do we do about them?"

"Nothing." She walked back to the BTR. "Except be somewhere else when spring gets here."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Campbell stumbled as he led the horse up a snow drift. Struggling to his feet he pulled the reluctant animal onwards.

"For Christ sake, John." Cas Redbridge's voice drifted dream like over him. "Can we stop?"

"What?" He was lost in the icy beauty that surrounded him and had lost all sense of direction and time. He looked back at the young woman slumped forward against the horses neck, her arms rapped round it to keep her on, the white of her poncho stained dark red.

"Please stop." She repeated sitting up right, in obvious pain.

"How bad is it?" He asked her.

"Bad."

She pulled her hand from under the poncho. It was covered in blood. Her face paled and her eyes rolled as she toppling off the horse.

Campbell crawled over to her and gently lifted her head as she came round. "It's all right. You just lost your balance."

"John, it hurts."

"It's all right, I'll change the dressing and take a look."

He fumbled at the fastenings of her flak jacket with cold, gloved hands, but he'd lost all sensation of touch. Cursing, he pulled the gloves off and tried again. Her combat jacket was drenched with blood. He'd never seen so much blood before. No matter what he tried to do to the wound, it kept bleeding.

"God! hurry up. It's bloody cold." She uttered through clenched teeth.

He gently lifted the field dressing away. He knew it was serious. The shrapnel had torn straight through her flak jacket and ripped open her side. He'd no idea how much damage it had done or whether it had hit anything important, he wasn't a medic. What he did know was despite everything he did, it wouldn't stop bleeding. Ignoring the cold burning into his fingers, he pulled another dressing from his backpack and pressed it into place before re-fastening her jackets.

"That'll hold for a few hours." He told her reassuringly, but not believe it himself.

She slowly sat up. "Where are we?"

Campbell looked round. "Somewhere near Mittenwaide I think."

She tried to stand up, her agony clear on her face. Campbell helped her. She took hold of the saddle and pulled herself up. He pushed. Something inside her ripped and it took all her might not to cry out. She lay still across the back of the horse, breathing deeply, wishing the pain away.

"Cas! You all right?"

"Yeah." The pain subsided slightly and she swung her leg over the horse. Yet inside she knew she wasn't. She could already feel the wet dressing clinging to her side.

Campbell took the reins again and started leading the horse back up the drift.

"Where we heading?" She asked.

"Hardenbeck."

She was leaning forward against the horse's neck. "Why we heading there."

"You need a hospital and that place has got one. A bloody good one."

"How far is it?"

"About ten Klicks or so. We should be there in three or four hours."

Daark stopped the BTR-90 again, seven K's Southeast of Friedland. The track had led them back to the main road to Strasburg just short of the Zarow River bridge. The strain of driving with no headlights was beginning to show on him. Twice in the last three minutes he'd judged the road wrong and nearly put them into the drainage ditch that ran along side.

McKenzie opened her eyes and looked up, surprised that she'd nodded off. "What we stopped for?"

"We're back on the main road again." He told her, rubbing his eyes.

She glanced round the inside of the BTR to see who else had noticed she'd dropped off. Landers was in the turret seat and couldn't see her face, and Goodman was in the back stripping down his M-16. "Back her up and we'll find somewhere to hold up for the rest of the night.

McKenzie and Landers walked back along the track while Daark reversed the BTR with Goodman shouted directions from the turret. After a hundred yards the track turned left and McKenzie studied the ground off to the right for a second, then she waved her hand towards it. Between her and Goodman they guided Daark off the track and into the small hollow. Landers watched the track until they were clear, then followed them in.

McKenzie met her. "You get inside and make sure Goodman is still in one piece. Give him a shot of something to put him to sleep. He'll be no good to us if doubled up in pain."

"Yeah, I get the picture." Landers disappeared inside.

Daark landed on the snow beside them. "We any good here?"

"I reckon so. This hollow will giving us good cover from the surrounding countryside. Give me a hand to hide this thing. We can hack down some of those hedges and drag 'em in front of us." She looked up at the dark over cast sky. "We're in for snow."

During the course of the night Campbell would glance back at Redbridge. Sometimes she was alert and on edge, her eyes darting from shadow to shadow, but on most occasions she looked pained or vacant. As much as he wanted to stop for her, he knew he couldn't. Hardenbeck was the only place for miles around with anything like a hospital, and he knew getting her there was the only chance she had. As the snow started again, he put his head down and pushed on, not looking back at her, not knowing if she was still alive or not. He closed in on himself, shutting out the numbing cold, turning inwards until the images inside his head became his only point of focus.

He stumbled and fell to his knees, forced down into the snow by shock compounded fatigue. Subconsciously he tried to raise, but it only drove him lower. "Nooo!" He cried.

The orange flare lit up his mind, too bright to look at and scorching the his face. The noise followed less then a second later, thumping the air like close thunder. The Wiala River bridge groaned under it's own stress then tumbled into the river. "Nooo, it can't!" He cried again as the last section of concrete and steel toppled into the dark water, cutting of their escape route from the advancing army. "They were meant to wait until we'd crossed."

"Where's the fuckin' radio?" Daark demanded dropping down from the cab of the truck. "Rik, where's the fuckin' radio?"

"I've got it." The American appeared next to him with the radio set slung over one shoulder.

Daark took the hand set. "BASEPLATE, BASEPLATE. This is RED FOX. Do you copy, over?"

"GO AHEAD RED FOX - OVER."

"You've blown the bridge, you've blown the bridge. You've still got people on this side."

"WE HAD ORDERS RED FOX - BLOW THE BRIDGE AT 1630 HOURS, REGARDLESS - OVER."

"That's bull shit, the bridge was to stay open until under direct threat. There's still a tank company on this side. How the fuck we gonna get across?"

"NOT OUR PROBLEM RED FOX - THE ORDERS HAVE BEEN REVISED, WE'RE PULLING OUT - SORRY MATE - BASEPLATE OUT."

Daark threw the handset back at Goodman. "Jesus Christ, I don't believe this. They've cut us loose. They're buggin' out and leaving us to the fuckin' Russians." He snatched up a stone and hurled it towards the bridges. "YOU FUCKIN' BASTARDS!"

Taylor appeared next to them. "Matt, the Captain's in a bad way. Real bad. I don't reckon he pull through." Captain Forrester had taken a back full of shrapnel from an artillery round and

hadn't moved for the past hour. She'd covering his back with field dressings just to mop the blood, but he needed more. "He ain't gonna make it, Matt. Not now the bridge is gone."

Campbell pulled himself back to his feet. "Got to get back to the town." He said clambering back into the cab.

"What?"

"It's too open out here. We've got to get under cover. Matt, we've moving." He hollered hammering on the side of the door.

Carling was in front of the railway station where she'd set up her HQ. Her battered Chieftain parked tight against the stone wall beside her command Sultan. She was stood between them when Campbell swung the Foden LMLC - Low Mobility Load Carrier - onto the station approach.

"What the hell are you doing back her?" She demanded seeing Daark running towards her. "You meant to on the other side of the river by now."

"The bridge has gone." He panted. "They've blown."

"They can't. How the hell -" She turned to the Sultan radio operator. "Get BASEPLATE. Tell them I want an artillery barrage on the north side at grid 262-655. Lease with forward obs. And find out if it's right about the bridge."

"They've gone, bugged out." Daark insisted.

Campbell joined them. "What are we gonna do. Grudziadz fell two hours ago. We cut off!"

"We're on to BASEPLATE now. Either way we still got this place to hold. How many people you got left?"

"I tell you the bridge is down. They've cut us loose."

"Lieutenant Daark, how many people?"

"Er... Five."

"Kate." The radio operator interrupted. "Bravo four reports disabled. Tanks immobilised, but still fighting."

"Get someone across to her. I want to know if we can save the tank. And tell Telford I want him back here as soon as he can make it."

"Where do you want us?" Campbell asked.

"No response from BASEPLATE." The sultan crewman replied. "The whole net is dead."

"Shit! Go direct to the batteries. I need those guns."

"Major?" Daark demanded.

"Em. South side. Everything's coming from the north east at the moment. They're bound to make a move on the that side once they think they've drawn all armour away. They're a Challenger and a GSR unit on the Dzierzgon road. Give 'em what ever help you can."

The cold penetrated his dreams. "Where do you want us," he repeated lay in the snow.
"Where do you want us."

After a while he pulling himself up. Below him at the foot of the shallow hill was the shanty town. "Hey Cas, it's there. Not far now." He looked back. The horse had wondered of and was nuzzling through the snow for something to eat. She was slumped forward along the horses neck again. He stumbled across to it and took the reins again pulled the horse onwards.
"Not far now."

McKenzie watched the first flurry of snow drift down in the still air. It was just in time. The BTR was nearly invisible from the road and all they needed was the snow to hide the tracks.

"Not bad eh?" Daark said walking back onto the road.

She nodded. "Yep, not bad. You take first watch, I'll have Fran relieve you in three hours."

He looked up at the steady shower of snow. "Yeah sure thing. Looks like it's gonna be a quiet one."

McKenzie slapped him on the arm and headed back to the BTR. Inside she found Landers checking on Goodman again. "Is he all right?" She asked.

"Out cold. This lucky sod's going to be the only one to get a good night's kip."

She grunted in agreement and snatched up a map from the floor. "Let's see what this lot can tell us." She laid it across the tiny map table and Landers joined her.

"Here, this looks like the jump off point into this sector." She pointed at Szczecin. The town had been highlighted.

"I thought the bridges at Szczecin were blown."

"No, the autobahn bridge is still standing." McKenzie ran her finger down the map. "Looks like a three pronged offensive. Through Frankfurt and Schwedt."

Landers scooped up a handful of papers from the floor. "Anything on organisation or current strength?"

"Not yet."

The two women read through the scraps of paper. Scribbled orders, troop movements and radio messages. Landers found one of interest and handed it to McKenzie. "What do you make of this."

Fm: 'A' Section. 94th C.D.

To: 94th C.D. H.Q.

Z120010ZJAN.

R.F.2 has not arrived at Klein Plasten. 132th C.D. recently reported being probed by light infantry elements. Believe this could be R.F.2. Heading our November Echo to intercept.

Lieutenant Kutrezeda. (94th C.D.)

She read it again. "Kutrezeda, that's the name of the woman in charge of that Cavalry platoon we hit at Neukalen."

"The bastards were waiting for us." Landers cleared the map off to find Klein Plasten marked and with the approximate arrival time for RF-2 scribbled next to it.

"Somebody's set us up. They know our call-signs, our LZ's. Even the fuckin' time we were due. We were meant to walk straight into them." McKenzie stated the obvious. She pulled Kutrezeda's note book out of her pocket. "See what else you can find. I'm gonna read through this." She moved forward leaving Landers with the unconscious Goodman.

Daark shook Landers some four hours later. She half wake before wishing him back into her dream and settled back down. "Fran! Come on." He shook her more violently. "You shift."

She came round, her back and neck ached from sleeping slumped over the tiny table. She stretched and eased her cold joints. "What's it like outside?"

"The snow's eased off now." He pulling of his wet poncho, showing her with droplets of ice water. "Bit of a white out earlier, but it's cleared up now." He rubbed his cold hands together to generate some heat. It was cold inside the BTR. What little heat their bodies generated was conducted away by the half inch thick steel hull. McKenzie decision no to use the engine to run the heaters hadn't gone down well with them, but Daark could see her reasons: the rattle of the engine and cloud of exhaust smoke would act as an arrow pointing right at them for any interested parties.

He glanced at Goodman wrapped in his sleeping bag at his feet and McKenzie rapped in her's further forward. That was the best thing to do, climb inside his own bag, pull it tight round his neck and let his own body heat warm him up where the BTR's hull couldn't steal it away. "Been quiet so far." He muttered, nearly asleep. "The snow's kept every ones heads down."

"Yeah, right." Landers said regretting not joining the other two in a few hours sleep before her watch. She fastened up her parker and clambered out the hatch.

Outside it was still snowing. The air was cold and crisp and her breath condensed into huge clouds that drifted away and dissipated as they cooled. Daark had spent most of his watch sheltering behind the front wheel, where he'd dug himself a shelter, plugging the gaps between the hull, wheels and ground with snow to keep the wind out.

Fresh snow covered the trees and the bushes around them, and lay four inches deep on the hull top. The tyre tracks where gone as was any trace of the road. Matt was right, only an idiot would be out earlier. Luck bastard got the easy watch again.

He'd walked around the carrier several times during his watch, leaving deep imprints in the snow. She retraced his foot prints, jumping from one to another in a child-like manner to compensate for his longer strode. After three or four steps, she realised she was enjoying it and continued round the carrier, leaping from one hollow to the next. But after two circuits it lost it's fascination for her and she stopped as the snow returned. Fine flakes of snow drifted gentle down between the bare branches of the trees. She watched them as they fell on her face. As each one melted it stole a tiny piece of heat away from that area of her face, making the rest of her body feel warm in comparison. Then she licked one out of the sky, catching an individual flake on her tongue; just like she did as a child with mother, playing in the snow on their farm. They'd built snowman together; giant one, five, six foot high in the field next to the farm house which she could see from her bedroom window. And the snowball fights they'd had that she was always win to be rewarded with a hot cup of soup to take the chill off her fingers and belly as she sat in front of that giant open fire in the kitchen.

The rate of snow fall increased so she settled into Daark's hole beside the wheel. They wasn't a sound around her except the occasional creek from the BTR. She closed her eyes and returned to the farm.

Garret huddled among the darkness in the corner of the untended field where he'd been waiting for the last hour. He blew into his cold hands and tried to shake some life back into the blue finger tips. Behind him the horses, still loaded with the equipment, stirred and pranced, pulling at their tethered reins. They'd been unsettled for a good ten minutes now, but he ignored them and tried the radio again. "Monroe, this is Garret. Do you read me? Over."

Only static replied. He didn't like this. Monroe's band of marauders were meant to be here or at least in radio range. That's what they'd agreed when Garret contacted him two days ago. So where the hell was he?

He looked back at the unsettled horses. He'd been here too long already. If McKenzie was looking for him she'd be somewhere close by now. And as they'd told him, if you dump on McKenzie, the one thing you don't do is let her find you. He tried the radio one last time. "Monroe, this is Garret. Do you hear me? Over."

Nothing.

"God dam it Monroe. I've got you stuff here. Do you want it or not."

Still nothing.

"Monroe, fuckin' talk to me."

That was stupid. Now anyone listening now knows he's got something of interest. He'd best move.

Packing up the radio he returned to the horses and slung it over Landers' mount. The animal bucked and reared as he to secure it.

"Steady boy." He said calming it down. He untethered the rein and started to mount.

A single shot cracked through the air, hitting him in the leg. The horse bolted, rearing and turning as it did, dislodging Garret from the saddle. He hung from the stirrup as it dragging him along for several yards before he fell free.

He lay on the ground crying out in agony as blood streaming from his leg and ran between his fingers. Then he saw someone move off to his right and shut up.

"Oh God, she's found me." He stammered. "Oh God, it's McKenzie."

Someone else moved in closer from his left.

"No. Please don't let it be her, anyone but her."

He tried to reach his pistol which lay on the ground beyond his reach. A big man stepped from the shadows and moved closer to him.

"Shit Goodman. Hey man it's not what you think." The big man kicked the pistol away.
"Come on man, let me explain."

He crouched next to him and Garret finally saw his face, an ugly Russian cavalry officer.
"Thank God."

"Unlock the door." Borrisovich ordered the guard.

He unbolted the heavy metal door that led to the small damp room beyond and Borrisovich stepped inside. He waited for the door to close behind him and his eyes to become accustomed to the dim light inside. She rose her head to look at him, she was a few years younger than him, somewhere in her early twenties he guessed, or maybe late teens. She had a beautiful face under several days worth of grim. A little soap and water would fix that. But it wouldn't fix her eyes, they were dull and empty. If Andreyov had been torturing her, he'd been subtle about it, other than her haunted eyes there wasn't a mark on her face. As he stepped towards her, she lowered her eyes and started unbuttoning her blouse. It took him a second to realise why. "No!" He said quietly crouching in front of her. Then he saw the bruises and burns across her shoulders. So the bastard had. He gently pulled her blouse open, she let him, allowing it to fall off her shoulders. A couple of the burns had blistered and burst, leaving sores open to infection. He nearly touched one. "They hurt?" He asked looking up into her empty eyes, she was still undressing, having slipped her arms out of her blouse and unfastening her bra, undressing as an automatic reaction to him entering the room. "No stop!" He took her hands.

"But don't -"

"No." Why had Andreyov done this to her. "When was the last time you ate?" He asked.

It took her a few seconds to answer. "Before the helicopter."

"And what about a doctor, when did a doctor last see these?" He pointed at the blisters.

"Hasn't."

He stood up and turned for the door but she pulled him back, refusing to let go of his hand.
"Don't." She croaked. "Please don't go. He'll come back and hurt me."

He crouched down again. "Why are you here?"

She started to reply then stopped.

"I can't help you if I don't know why you're here. What does Andreyov want you?"

"It's -" She looked around the room, still unsure whether was trying to trick her.

"Please."

"Because of my father. Andreyov wants him to come back."

"Straczynski, why?" Again she didn't answer. "Nattasha, I need to know if I'm to help you."

"He says if I don't co-operate with him, he will have my father shot as a traitor." She lowered her head and a tear rolled down her cheek. Borrisovich thought he saw a glint of defiance in her eyes. That was good, it meant she was still alive. "If I help him, he will see that we are given a fair trial."

"A traitor?" He'd heard Andreyov say that too.

Her defiance crumbled. "I never told anyone, I promised I wouldn't." She battled to keep control of herself. But Borrisovich wasn't listening anymore. Major General Straczynski a spy.

"I never told. But he found out." She lost the battle. "It's my fault."

Straczynski, a spy. He couldn't believe it. He stood up and knocked on the door. It opened immediately and he stepped through.

Straczynski. A hero of the former Soviet Union, decorated countless time, a spy. It couldn't be true.

"Pavel." Chorski greeted him as he stood across the square from the helicopters. "Out here by yourself?"

He snapped up from his slouch. "Sir?"

"Have you got another?" He asked pointing at his cigarette.

Borrisovich pulled a pack out of his tunic pocket and Chorski took one and lit it. "It's a bit cold to be admiring the skyline." Borrisovich returned to his slouch without answering. "What's on you're mind?"

Borrisovich pondered on the burning roll-up in his hand before answering. "I've been to see Nattasha Straczynski."

The sentence hit Chorski like a brick. He'd fooled himself into believing it hadn't been her, that it was some other woman who just looked like her. He'd avoided the cell, not even entering the building she was in. Why couldn't Pavel do the same?

"She told me Andreyov has brought her here because Straczynski is a spy. It's not true is it? Your his friend you must know."

"It is true." Chorski said dryly. He watched Pavel's eyes, reading the shock and disbelief in them. He thought about smiling and saying he was joking Misha? Hero of the former Soviet Union, of course not. "I've known for some years now."

It took Borrisovich a second for it to sink in. Although he heard the words, they didn't seem to understand them. Chorski savoured his cigarette. "It wasn't necessary to tell anyone until now."

"I don't understand, he is a traitor of the State and you never felt it necessary to speak up?"

"What defines a traitor?"

Borrisovich hesitated for a moment wondering if there was a hidden meaning in the question. "He has betrayed us, handing state secrets to the Americans."

Chorski managed a smile. "What makes you think the Americans were involved?"

Another question? Borrisovich became suddenly unsure of the situation. Was Chorski testing him, testing his loyalty? Or maybe he was the one who told the KGB where to find her. "The Americans are always involved." He answered cautiously.

"If the information disclosed does not threaten the security or stability of the State, does this still make the crime treachery? Even when no harm has been done?"

"The intention was there."

"But what if it was in the best interest of the State."

"What do you mean?"

Chorski blew a large cloud of smoke into the cold air. "Do you remember the Caron Incident?" He could see that he did. "If that incident had been allowed to develop how much sooner do you think this madness would have begun?"

Borrisovich had been at Frenze when it happened. Two strategic Tu-160 Blackjack bombers were involved with a mid-air collision with two American F-15s over the Arctic. It was rumoured the Tu-160 were conducting trials on the special stealth coating in conjunction with the Navy's Admiral Nakhimov battle group. Though all four aircraft were believed lost the situation escalated. An AWAC which had monitored the collision was fired at. The U.S. destroyer dispatched to rescue the American pilots was also sunk with all hands. An American carrier group was dispatched. Air strikes were called. And then it stopped and an uneasy peace returned. "Why do you think the Americans backed down?" Chorski asked.

"The Americans realised what the incident was heading towards. They realised that further escalation would result in all out conflict."

"Don't you think Moscow also realised this. Yet they didn't back down. So why did the Americans?"

The bits were starting to fall into place. "Straczynski?"

"So did he betrayed his country by saving it from a war." Borrisovich stood in silence. "Did Nattasha say anything else?"

He thought. "Yes, she said it was all her fault."

Chorski walked past him and starred out of the square at the burnt out houses. "I suppose it was. Do you remember his wife?"

He shuck his head. "I think she died before I joined up."

"She had cancer, Hodgkin's Disease. It attacks the Lymph glands in the throat. It was diagnosed while Straczynski was serving in Afghanistan. The army guarantied her best treatment and she started a course of intensive chemotherapy. Unfortunately it was at that time she discovered she was pregnant. They'd been trying for years for a child and Anna refused to continue the treatment until after the child was born."

"Nattasha?"

He nodded. "The pregnancy and birth took a lot out of Anna"

"And she died shortly after while he was in Afghanistan. I know that much." Borrisovich had written his final year thesis on him. It didn't get the highest mark in the year, but it was in the top five per cent.

"He was home for the birth but returned soon after. Afghanistan was in a mess then and he was needed."

"What happened to Nattasha until his returned?"

"Anna looked after her until she became too ill. Then my wife looked after her: We were living in Moscow at the time. He would visit her when he could, but he was a changed man."

"After he returned he was decorated and promoted to the GRU. When did he first betray us?"

Chorski stubbed out his cigarette, it was beginning to make him feel sick. "I don't know. Nattasha told me what was gone on five years ago. Misha was away again and I think Nattasha felt she was becoming a burden on us."

"Was Straczynski a good father to her?"

"He was the best any child could ask for. He never missed a single one of her birthdays. It was just that he was away so much of the time, but that was one of the sacrifices of the position he held."

The guard at Hardenbeck's main gate looked asleep, slouched against the side of a hut near a small pot fire. Campbell approached him, leading the horse past the Luch armoured car, now nothing more than a burnt out wreck, as well the BMP that lay beside it in the ditch.

The horse braided, waking the guard up. He reacted quickly, startled by how close Campbell had get. "Stand. Identify yourself!"

Campbell continued walking, still in a daze. He'd heard the order, but it didn't mean anything to him.

"HALT!" He repeated the order as two more guards joined him from inside the hut.

Campbell looked up, realising they were speaking to him and saw the three rifles aimed sat him. "Oh, don't give me this crap. I don't need it."

"IDENTIFY YOURSELF!"

"I've got a wounded woman here. She needs help."

One of the guards edged up to the horse and lifted Casey's head. "Go get Carter." He ordered to one of the new comers.

The man disappeared into the masses of shacks. Campbell started forward again, tugging at the reluctant horses reins. The two guards snapped their rifles into their shoulders. "STAND STILL."

"For God sake. I'm British Army." He slipped his SLR off his shoulder and dropped it onto the ground. "I'm unarmed and my mate here needs a doctor quick. Now please get me someone to look at her."

Carter appeared a second later, along with a couple more guards. Campbell watched him take a quick look at Redbridge and order his men to take her to the hospital. Then he walked up to Campbell. "What about you? Do you need a doctor?"

"I'm fine. It's her I'm worried about."

"She'll be fine. We've got a good Doc here. She'll be looked after."

Campbell took a step forward. His legs finally gave way and collapsed onto the frozen ground. "Then again, maybe I'm not." He sat upright and looked at Carter. "John Campbell, 14th/20th Hussars." He held out his hand.

"Mel Carter, 2nd U.S. Armoured Cavalry." He took Campbell's hand and hauled him up.

"I could do with something to eat. We haven't had a thing for two days."

"I think we can find something, but first lets get one of the nurses to give you the once over." He picked up the SLR and led him after Cas.

The cold metal table was uncomfortable yet it was a welcome relief from the hours he'd spent on his feet. Gill dabbed the flesh wound in his left arm with a piece antiseptic soaked lint and he winced from the pain. "Oh shut up, you big baby." She teased him.

"That hurts." He played along.

"Good!" She smiled. "Teach you to get out the way next time."

The surgery door opened and a grey haired old man entered. Campbell looked up, not recognising him for a second. "Misha? Christ, Misha. It's good to see you."

He started to get up to greet his old friend, but Gill pulled him back onto the table. "Maybe so, but you can sit back down till I've finished. And as for you, Misha -"

"You'd better do as she says John." Straczynski told him, pulling up a chair. "Carter told me you where in a bit of a bad way What happened?"

"Copped a bit of shrapnel in the arm. I don't know what all the fuss it about."

"It needs stitching." Gill told him. "So sit still."

"You want to watch her, she'll have your head if you are not careful." Straczynski joked, but then became more seriously. "Your unit, what happened to them?"

"Hit a whole Tank Division. Sitting pretty in Munchenburg along side the Germans." He flinched as Gill started sewing up the gash.

"Go on John, please." Straczynski urged him to continue.

"We walked straight into them. One minute we were scouting out the outskirts of the town. Next there were tanks and personnel carriers all over the place and all hell broke loose. We headed out to the north west and wasted a couple of them on the way. But we lost the radio. The captain ordered us to pull out and he went back for it. That was the last we saw of him." He winced again as Gill pushed the sharp needle through the tender flesh ever side of the gash. "We lost five getting clear of the place. The rest of us headed for the LZ at Templin -"

"Why Templin?"

"That's where we agreed to get lifted out from." Campbell replied. "Hamilton arranged it with McKenzie before we flew out."

"Charlotte's out here?" Straczynski's expression was one of shock.

"Yeah. She took the northern sector."

"She should be in Hamburg."

"Aye, she swapped with one of the other squads." Straczynski pondered for a moment. "You use Templin a lot?"

"Since the cease-fire, yes. It's convenient, half way between the two patrol sectors. Why you ask?"

"You are getting lazy. It's no wonder they know where to hit us."

"What do you mean?"

"Captain O'Brian and Lieutenant Sims. Their sections were ambushed by mortars at Templin. I've been trying to work out how they knew they would be there."

"There's five LZ's at Templin, we never use the same one twice in a row. How would they know which one to set up on?"

"Russian 84mm mortars have a range of over 3km. One battery could cover all five."

"Oh, I see. Did they get away?"

"Sims section did. O'Brian wasn't so lucky. Their helicopter took a direct hit."

Campbell cursed to himself, shaking his head.

Gill tugged at the thread. "Hold still."

Campbell looked up at her then turned back to the Major. "Did anyone survive?"

"No."

"When was it?"

"Two days ago."

"Same day we were hit."

"What about Charlotte? What is she doing out here?" Straczynski asked him.

"Like I said, she's on the northern sector."

"But I thought she was meant to be back in Hamburg."

"Yeah, I know. Jones wasn't gonna send her out, but she insisted, said she had something to clear up."

"What?"

"Beats me, you know what she's like, you've a better chance of getting a drink out of a Scotsman." Campbell glanced down at his feet, briefly remembering what he'd just been

through. "Hey she's been in tighter spots than this, she'll be fine." He tried to sound cheerful, but failed.

Straczynski sat quiet for a moment, then continued his question. "So what happened to you? Start from the beginning."

Campbell sat quiet for a while trying to recall where he'd got to. "Right, em. We put down on the 10th at Altlandsburg as per plan and immediately picked up a load of rumours of large armour movement and fighting around Munchenburg. We got caught in the middle of it. Hamilton went down and we tried to bug out. They chased us all the way to Wriezen. By the time we lost them, they got us all but me and Cas."

"Who?"

"Redbridge." Gill answered. "The girl they're operating on now." She yanked the thread tight across the wound, making Campbell wince in pain. "Fuck sake Sergeant, if you don't sit still I'm going to stitch you to the table." She snapped.

"Then we ran into another lot at Finow. That's when Cas got hit and I copped for this." He twisted his arm round to show him. Gill pulled it back.

Campbell paused for a second. "How is she?" He anxiously asked him. "How bad is it?"

"I don't know, you'll have to wait until they've finished." Gill finished stitching the wound and tied a bandage over it. "There you go lover boy, that'll keep you alive for a little while longer."

Campbell moved his arm about admiring the dressing.

Straczynski shook his head. "John, you walked straight into the 1st Guards Army."

"What!"

"The 1st Guards Army. They were at Munchenburg."

"How the bloody hell do you know?"

"They, along with the 2nd Guards and 20th Tank Guards, are no longer responding to Russian Western Command orders and moved into Germany five days ago."

"Shit! How long have you known this?"

"A few days."

"So what the hell's being done about them?"

"What do you think I'm doing out here?"

Campbell looked at him. "Yeah all right."

The door opened again and a tired looking Jane entered pulling off a blood smeared smock.

Campbell starred wide eyed at her, forgetting about Redbridge for that moment. "Jane! Christ, I thought you were dead."

"Thanks John, It's bloody great to see you too!" She dropped the smock onto a pile of dirty lining.

"I'm sorry." He apologised. "It's just that -"

She smiled weakly at him. She looked tired. "How are you then?"

"I'm fine now. But look at you. Now that's not malnutrition is it." He grinned cheekily at her. "How long you got?"

"Oh about four or five weeks." She looked sadly proud of herself. "Didn't Misha tell you?"

"No, he never said a thing."

"It's a long story." Straczynski shrugged. "I'll tell you one day over a few drinks."

"Aye. But what about Cas?" He stood up and started towards the door.

"I've just left her." She told him. "To be honest John, she's only got a 50-50 chance of pulling through."

Campbell stopped, his mouth open as if to say something, but the words didn't come.

"I'm sorry. The shrapnel has done a lot of internal damage. She's in a bad way. I've had to remove her spleen and part of her intestines. She's still got a lot of metal splinters inside her that need removing, but I dare not try until she's had a day or so to recover from this operation. Then if she survives -"

"What do you mean." Campbell burst out. "Why the hell didn't you finish the job now. Why wait a couple of days, then cut her open again. She needed fixing up, so why didn't you do it properly?"

"Because I've just used up half our stock of blood on her so far, if I'd done the full operation I'd have used the lot, and it wouldn't improved her chances. I do have other patient in this hospital that need operations as well." She starred coldly at him.

Campbell lowered his head and sat back on the table. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it the way it sounded."

"Yeah, me too." Jane replied more calmly. "If she last the next two days, she'll have a good chance of pulling through. I'll have been able to build up our blood stocks by then."

"Yeah, I understood. I'm sorry."

Straczynski picked up his coat. "Come on, let's get that drink." He said, hoping to lift their spirits.

"It's gone midnight. I'm too tired. I'm going back to bed." Jane replied wearily.

"Aye. Come on lass. A couple of drinks 'll do you a world of good." Campbell encouraged her.

"Okay, for you." She submitted.

Jane lead them to the office she'd been using to sleep in since her bus was wrecked. From under the couch she produced a bottle of Samogan; a bootlegged vodka they'd learnt to distil from the Russians. Straczynski, like every Russian soldier who spent any time in the fields had tasted it. It was odourless and tasteless, but it had a kick that would set fire to tour throat and belly. But best of all, in the cold depths of winter, it didn't freeze. The three friends pulled up a seat and started reminiscing about old friends and old missions. Before they finished the first glass, Jane had fallen asleep. Straczynski laid her on the couch and covered her with a blanket. He and Campbell continued talking quietly while she slept beside them. Eventually one of Carter's men interrupted them to inform them that Carter had just about got a radio working. As he left the office, Jane woke up. Campbell followed the man out while Straczynski remained with her a while longer to undress her and puts her to bed. Then he sat with her for a short while longer until she fell asleep again before heading off to see Carter.

THE SEVENTH DAY. Saturday 13th January.

"FRAN!" McKenzie shook Landers sharply. "Wake up!"

Her eyes shot wide open. She starred at her for a second. "Shit!"

"We've got company."

It took a couple of seconds for the sound to sink into her brain. "Engines?"

"Yes. And lots of them." McKenzie handed her her rifle. "Come on this way."

She took her rifle and followed her through the trees. Angry with herself for dropping off. Embarrassed at being found by her Captain.

They found Daark laying prone at the edge off the woods. Close to the Strasburg road. And silhouetted against the snow the dark shapes of vehicles. He looked round as they arrived.

"What we got?" McKenzie asked him.

"Five so far. Heading towards Friedland."

"What types?"

"Light stuff, looks like an armoured recon unit. BMPs, BMDs and a M-577 I think. It's a bit dark to be sure."

McKenzie watched the convoy through her night sight. She singled out the American M-577 in the middle of the convoy, sandwiched between the squat Russian carriers. A command variant of the M-113 personnel carrier, the M-577 had a higher roof, additional storage rack for the tents, and an NBC bulge to allow the crew to operate in the most hostile of environment. "Any idea who they are?"

"Part of the 12th Motor Rifles at a guess." Landers took the night sight from her. "They're due to arrive at Friedland today."

Daark gave her a long stare. "How the hell do you know that?"

"It's all back in the BTR." She handed the night sight back.

McKenzie rolled over and looked at her. "What else you found out?"

"According to what's back there, that lot's came up from Pasewalk. Half the 12th are already in Friedland, the rest are meant to be following them up later tonight or early tomorrow."

Daark whistled. "That's what those tanks will be from. How much stuff are we talking about?"

"Some 50 odd tanks at last count. And it's all heading west, towards Neubrandenburg. Due to get there in the next day or so."

"So this is a new offensive." He glanced back at the column.

"From what I can gather, this is the northern flank of a three pronged offensive. This lot's part of the Russian 20th Tank Army. Further south we should have the 2nd, and the 1st Armies." Landers explained.

The last vehicle in the convoy, a BMD, trundled slowly past. McKenzie watched it for a while, then got up and started back towards the BTR. Landers and Daark took a last look at them and followed her.

They caught up with her before she'd got to far. Landers jogged forward a few steps until she was walking along side her. "Look." She said feeling slightly ashamed of herself. "I'm sorry about falling asleep, I -"

"Don't worry about it, we're all tired. How's the arm?" She glanced at her

"It's okay, only a scratch.

"Good, can't afford any more of you out of action." They reached the BTR. "What else you got on all this lot?" She asked, taking hold of the hatch and swinging herself in.

"I've only found orders covering this flank's operations." Landers said, following her in. "There's very little on the others."

Daark followed, closing the hatch behind him and settling into the BTR's cramped interior.

McKenzie switched on the interior light. "Tell us what you've got."

"Like I said." Landers started. "This lots part of the 20th Army. All this junk," She pointed at the papers and maps, "says they jumped off from Szczecin on the 7th in the early hours. The 94th Cavalry Divisions took the point, with the 132nd backing them up. They worked through Pasewalk, Strasburg, Friedland and into Neubrandenburg by the 10th."

"Why Friedland? Why not head straight for Neubrandenburg from Strasburg?" Daark asked.

"It's got the only bridge left standing over the river that'll take armour." McKenzie pointed out. "Don't you listen to the briefings?"

"And what about the Oder? I thought all the bridges over the Oder had been blown." Daark continued.

"Nar, there's still one at Szczecin." Landers told him. "But I didn't think they were in any condition to take armour. Guess we were wrong. What's bothering me more is the absence of any orders for the attack on Pasewalk."

"Why's that?" Daark look at her, puzzled. "Surely they'd have been dealt with by now."

"Maybe, but I would have thought they'd still be some papers or reports laying around. The attack must have taken place sometime on the 8th, which is only five days ago. But there's nothing here. No orders, no casualty reports, nothing."

"So what?" Daark still looked puzzled.

"Pasewalk's a German garrison." Goodman muttered from his sleeping bag. "And a big one at that. So's Strasburg come to think of it."

"Good to see you back with us." McKenzie nudged his leg with her foot.

"How can I sleep with all this chatter going on." He grunted at them.

Landers smiled. "Anyway, like Rik said, Pasewalk's a garrison town. And could have held them off for a good few days."

"Jones ask us to look in on them, didn't he?" Daark asked. "Something about a downed transmitter?"

"Christ Matt you really were asleep at the briefing." McKenzie muttered.

"Could they have been overwhelmed?" He ignored her.

Landers shook her head. "Nar. Pasewalk had some 1000 troops in well dug in positions. They could have held out for days."

"I still don't see why that bothers you so much."

"Look, three well protected garrison over ran within three days of each other and there's not a stitch here. No assault orders, no casualty lists. We do one night on riot duty and we're filling out reports for weeks."

"Yeah, but that's Jones."

"Matt! It's as if they walked into the place unopposed."

McKenzie shifted uncomfortably on the hard seat. "Is that likely?"

"Fuck knows, anything's possible."

"But that's not our main problem." McKenzie told them. "The 117th still know we're around and it won't be long till they start looking for us and this BTR."

"Why? They'd probably write us off as marauders." Daark shrugged.

"Not if they find Mandy's body."

"She could have been a deserter."

Goodman turned to McKenzie with a puzzled look. "Still! You said, 'still around'."

Landers glanced at him. "The 94th weren't snooping around looking for safe havens, they were out looking for us."

Daark burst out laughing "The bastards, and we were behind them all along." Then the smile dropped from his face as the significance of what she'd said. "You trying to tell me they were waiting for us at Klein Plasten?"

McKenzie nodded.

"They knew we were there?" Daark asked.

"Yes. Know we were coming, where we would land, and when."

"How the fuck did they know?"

"Beats me. Someone must have tipped them off." Landers replied.

"Who, Jones?"

"No. This wasn't to be our job. We volunteered remember. If Jones wanted us out the way, he wouldn't have let us go." McKenzie pointed out.

"Then who set us up?" Daark asked.

Landers shrugged. "Garret?"

Goodman shuffled forward into the conversation. "No, someone wanted us all dead not out the way. It's no great secret we pulled the first U.K. job with Hamilton's lot. Could it be something to do with that?"

Landers shrugged. "It defiantly wasn't to stop us discovering this offensive."

"To right. I'd wager Jones knew about it the same day we flew out." Daark chuckled.

"But with no recon squads around it'll make finding out what's going on a hell of a lot harder. With us out of the way it will achieve maximum confusion. But what about the Germans. They've still got plenty of Garrisons around here. So why aren't they doing anything?"

McKenzie nodded. "So it's something else. Something we've missed."

"What about Hamilton's platoon?" Goodman spoke up. "Do you reckon they met the same reception we were meant to?"

McKenzie lend back in her seat. "Depends whether they went into the LZ or diverted like we did."

"You reckon there was an ambush waiting for them too?" Goodman asked.

"It's likely."

"God I hope not." Landers looked round at all their faces.

"Ah man. What the fuck did we volunteer for this for. We could have been sitting this out back in the Citadel." Goodman sighed.

"Shut up Rik, you're starting to sound like Garret." Daark commented.

"Yeah?" He questioned.

"Yeah." Daark nodded.

"Fuck!" He sighed. "Man, you really know how to depress me."

A silence fell over the inside of the BTR. Then Daark spoke up, "Wasn't John Campbell knocking Mandy off?"

"What the fucks that got to do with this?" Landers asked.

"Nothin' much. Just thinking out loud. You know me."

"She was last I heard." Landers paused for a moment, wondering if she had done all she could to save her. "When was the last time you saw him?"

"Day before we flew out. We went for a drink, he wanted to know why you two had been avoiding him." He glanced at McKenzie and Goodman. "Reckons you've gone off him since he transferred to Hamilton's lot."

"Never so lucky man." Laughed Goodman. "Just haven't had the time. Do you really think he could have problems?"

"Yes, if someone went to the trouble of placing a platoon seventy miles inside Germany to get us. It's fair chance they'd go after them as well." McKenzie answered.

"Shit!" Daark lowered his head. "I hope not." The thought of telling Campbell about Slater's death wasn't something he looked forward too. But not having to tell him at all was something that depressed him even more.

McKenzie pulled a small flask from her backpack. She took a swig, licked the last traces of spirits from her lips, then handed it to Landers. "Right. Do you trust Jones?" She asked.

"Do we have a choice?" Goodman took the flask from Landers. "I mean we've got to trust someone, or how the hell are we gonna get out of here."

"I think Jones is a safe bet." Landers said. "Like you said if he wanted us out the way, he could have done it a lot easier than this."

"What about everyone else?" Daark asked.

"Uh?" McKenzie wasn't sure who he meant.

"The chopper crews, Captain Robertson."

"I don't know. Wilson and his crew are clear or they wouldn't have diverted away from the planned LZ." McKenzie took the flask back from him, took another swig, then pushed it back into her pack. "I don't know. To be honest I don't think it really matters. If someone in the Citadel set us up they're bound to know we didn't turn up at Klein Platen by now. So knowing we're still active will really piss them off."

"What about all this stuff?" Daark pointed to the BTR's contents.

"Jones 'll needs to know. The chances are he already knows most of it by now but there might be something here that could tie it all together."

"Yeah, I agree." Goodman nodded. "I still reckon Jones is one of the good guys."

The others agreed too.

"Right." McKenzie pulled her map out of her pocket and unfolded it out onto the deck in front of them. "We radio all this junk in. To play it safe we won't give our location or intentions. Then we bug-out before anyone can get a fix on us and head south towards Templin then west into the Muritz National Park, and sit this thing out."

"I still think something ain't right at Pasewalk." Landers told her. "It just doesn't feel right."

"Okay, Pasewalk then Muritz." She looked round the group. No one objected. She folded the map back up. "Matt can you get one of these radios working?"

"No problem."

CHAPTER EIGHT

The radio had come from Lampkowski's BMP. It was the only one that had the range to reach Hamburg, but it had been damaged by Carter putting an end to the driver. He'd spent most of that day and night stripping it and their own radio down, and utilising the bits to make one that worked. He didn't want to touch the three short range radios, he wanted to use them for his militia if he could get them set up, he wouldn't have to rely so much on runners.

The equipment he'd used for the job was primitive, but he managed. He'd replaced broken components and by pass fuses. It wasn't a tidy job, but it was enough.

"Well?" Straczynski finally asked him.

Carter looked at his handy work. "Don't touch the casing when it's switched on, the chances are it'll be live."

"Yes, but will it work?"

Carter rubbed his tired eyes. "Yeah sure. It comes with three year guarantee." He flicked on the switch. "Give it a couple of seconds to warm up."

Louise pulled back the curtain that separated Jones' bunk from the office. He was sleeping uneasily again. "Colonel." She shuck him gently. He snapped awake, starring wide eyed at her. "Sir, MAJOR has radioed in."

"What?" He answered not fully recovered from his awakening.

"MAJOR. He's on the radio now sir."

He was fully awake. "Now? Get back there and don't lose him."

Throwing back the blankets, he leapt from the bunk and dressed.

"Where is he?" He yelled after her.

"Hardenbeck. With Lieutenant Sims." She shouted, returning to the radio room.

"Where?" He asked again following.

"Hardenbeck, A civvies shanty town about 20 K north of Templin."

He took the handset from the radio operator. "MAJOR, this is KINGFISHER, over."

"KINGFISHER - WE...." The reply was distant and nearly overwhelmed by static.

"Can you get it any clearer?" Jones asked the operator

She shook her head.

"MAJOR, I can hardly hear you, over."

"YOU'RE NOT TOO CLEAR AT THIS END. WE'VE HAD TO JERRY RIG TWO SETS TOGETHER HENCE THE OPEN CHANNEL - OVER."

"What the hell's happening out there? Over."

"MORTAR SECTION AMBUSHED THE HELICOPTERS - CAPTAIN O'BRIAN'S HELICOPTER TOOK A DIRECT HIT. THE OTHER ONE HAD TO GO BEFORE IT TOO WAS HIT - SIMS AND ONE OF HIS MEN WHERE LEFT BEHIND. SIMS' MAN IS DEAD. MY UNIT WAS KILLED WITH O'BRIAN. ONLY MYSELF AND MY SERGEANT SURVIVED - WE HAVE ALSO COLLECTED TWO SURVIVORS FROM RED FOX THREE. THEY WERE HIT HARD AT MUNCHENBURG - OVER."

"Who are they?"

"SERGEANT CAMPBELL AND GUNNER REDBRIDGE. REDBRIDGE IS BADLY WOUNDED AND NOT LIKELY TO SURVIVE. THE REST OF THE UNIT ARE

BELIEVED DEAD - WHAT ABOUT RED FOX TWO? WHY ARE THEY OUT HERE? - OVER."

The reception started to drift. "Say again, I didn't hear." He turned to the girl. "What's happening?"

"Their outputs dropping. I think their radios on the way out."

"IT WILL WAIT. THERE IS A LARGE AMOUNT OF ACTIVITY IN THIS AREA. POSITIVELY IDENTIFICATION ON THE FIRST AND SECOND TANK ARMIES - OVER."

"Say again, I didn't hear."

"RUSSIAN FIRST, SECOND AND TWENTIETH TANK ARMIES. THEY'RE INVOLVED IN OFFENSIVE ACTION INTO NORTH EAST GERMANY - OVER." He could hear Straczynski shouting, but it was make little difference.

"Yes I heard that. What are their objectives?"

"WE DON'T KNOW - THEY ARE NOT ACTING ON ORDERS FROM RUSSIAN WESTERN COMMAND. THEY ARE ACT...."

"WHAT?" The radio link was getting worse. "SAY AGAIN."

"OFFENSIVE NOT AUTHORISED..... RUSSIAN WESTERN....."

"MAJOR!" Jones shouted back. "Can you hear me?"

"It's no good, sir. The link had gone." The radio operator told him.

Jones dropped the handset onto the table and looking at Louise. For the first time he noticed she was only wrapped in a blanket. That was unlike her. He then glanced at his watch, 3:35am. "Christ is that the time."

She pulled the blanket round her shoulders. "What about the -" She started to say before the telex machine cut her short as it chattered into life, churning out a sheet of paper. She walked across and read the top few lines. "It's from McKenzie." The machine finished it's task and fell silent again. Louise tore off the telex and handed it to Jones.

Z033213ZJAN

Authentication. 74.

Fm. RED FOX TWO.

To. KINGFISHER.

1. Z153013ZJAN. Encountered large body of Russian 117th Motor Rifles at Friedland. Estimated strength of 200 to 400 Cavalry Troops, 1 Armoured Recon Platoon. German garrison eliminated along with the majority of civilian population. Register grid 1342-5355 as mass war grave. Immobilised 117th Recon Platoon. 1 BTR destroyed, 2 disabled. Divisions Command Vehicle taken intact.

2. Z020013ZJAN. Spotted Russian elements advancing towards Friedland on Strasburg road, possible Russian 12th Motor Rifle armoured recon platoon. Estimate strength 5 Armoured Vehicles including a command M-557 and accompanying troops.

3. The following information obtained from the taken command vehicle:

a, 20th Russian Guards Army acting under orders to invade North East Germany through Szczecin, Pasewalk, Strasburg, Friedland and Neubrandenburg. Destination afterwards not identified.

b, 94th, 117th and 132nd Cavalry acting as advance reconnaissance for Army. 94th and 132nd acting on orders to secure region around Neubrandenburg by the 10th. 117th have remained at Friedland. Part of 12th already advanced through, remainder of division under transit orders to follow by 13th. This we believe they already have done.

c, 94th, 117th, 132nd and 157th Division very in strengths but all seen to be reasonably close to our intelligence reports. However 103rd which forms the main body of 20th Army. Estimated strength 25 Armoured Vehicles, 2000 Troops. Much larger than reports suggest.

d, There are no orders covering movement of Divisions after Neubrandenburg. No final objective is mentioned.

e, There are no orders emanating higher than 20th Army Command. No reference to logistic support either.

4. Will endeavour to gather further information of their objectives if possible. But this is starting to look too big for us to handle.

5. Also found information suggesting 94th Cavalry were notified of our presence in the region and instructed to eliminate us at the recommended DZ. It is likely R.F.3 would have also met the same reception. This suggests someone told them we were coming. Make of that what you will. We do not trust security of Citadel or BAEUR. Going to ground. See you when it's blown over.

McKenzie.

message end

"What do you make of this last remark." He said showing her the last few lines of the telex.

"I don't know sir." She answered. "But if you've finished here I'd like to -"

"Yes, yes certainly." He told her. "Go back to bed." Jones read the telex again as she left the room. "If any of them come back on, let me know immediately." He told the operator.

Then he walked back to his own office. There was now no doubt in his mind they were facing a new offensive. The only problem was, why? And what was its objective? These three Army groups, the 1st, 2nd and 20th, with a total of around 170 tanks between them. Only the equivalent strength of a couple pre war battle groups and certainly not large enough to be a major threat to the security of the British containment zone, although what it would do though was halt the withdrawal.

"Christ Straczynski, why aren't you still in Poland when I need you." He sat down behind his desk. If they know what was happening at Pila, they would have a far clearer picture of what threat they were facing. Jones ran through the radio conversation in his mind.

'...not acting on orders from Russian Western Command...'

Did he mean it was just the three Army groups. If that was right nothing else in Poland should be moving. "Wish we hadn't lost the Canberra. It would only take it half an hour to check that out." Getting up, he walked over to his map table. "Okay Jonesy, lets just take what we know." He studied the map of Germany, mulling things over in his head, asking questions, then searching for the answers. "If we assume just the three Army groups were involved in the offensive, and no other unit has been mobilised. Then this has to be an independent action by the groups, unsupported by Western Command. That's what he must have meant. So who's supplying them with the fuel and ammunition they need? The possibility the Russians had managed to get a refinery working accrued to him. The fuel could have been delivered to them over land, but that would have required the co-operation of Western Command. "Not acting on Russian Western Command orders. That is what Straczynski had said." He walked across his dimly lit office. The sound of distant gunfire broke the silence. Echoes of a dying city reverberated round the bombed out warehouses and piers that surrounded the Citadel. He wondered for a moment who was firing at who. Another burst of automatic fire followed by a carbine. They were miles away. Someone else's problem. "So if there is no Russian involvement, then who else?" Jones stared at the opaque plastic covering a window.

"The Germans." Louise startled him.

Jones looked across at her. She was dressed now, and carrying two mugs of coffee in one hand and Jones' combat jacket over the other arm.

"Surely not. It took them fifty years to kick them out of Eastern Germany, so why invite them back in?"

Louise handed Jones a cup before placing his jacket over the back of a chair. "I've sown the button you've almost lost back onto your jacket, and repaired the patch and seam."

Jones walked across and picked up the jacket. "Thanks. I don't know you'd taken it." She was good with a needle and thread. "Can't sleep?"

"No, and I knew you wouldn't. Who else is there to get the fuel from? The middle East? Slovakia, Rumania. France?"

"Maybe MAJOR and McKenzie can obtain more information for us."

He walked back across to the map table taking a mouthful of coffee. "Maybe. McKenzie gone to ground, and MAJOR's in no situation to act at the moment. Did you get those fuel reports I wanted from the refinery?"

"Yes sir, they're on your desk, but there's nothing abnormal about them."

Jones found them under a pile of papers. But like Louise had said, they were normal. No abnormally large deliveries had been made, no-one had been sneaking an extra few gallons a time. Nothing. Another dead end. "Where's RF-4?"

"Back from R & R today."

"Good. When this place wakes up, have them placed on stand-by. Bring 'em up to platoon strength and have them assemble in the briefing room at 1000hrs. I want them equipped for a long range recon job. I'll have written orders for Lieutenant Sims and MAJOR by then."

She nodded and started towards her own office.

"And get onto the air coup. I want a chopper on the pad for noon big enough to take them all out."

Major Borisov didn't relish his new position as commanding officer of the 117th Motor Rifles. He always felt the safety of Second in Command more to his liking; allowing him all the privileges of command without the full responsibility. His former CO lay dead in the church hall. Cut down by the chain gun as he attempted to rally his men against the devastating fire from one of his own BTR's. Now the 117th Motorised Rifles were his responsibility.

He surveyed the devastated square before him. It was obvious this had been more than a marauder attack from the moment the first shot was fired. It was too neat, too precise. They weren't after food or supplies, they went straight for the Command Vehicle. And got it. The attackers had done a good job, and to be honest, he admired their ruthlessness and efficiency. Estimates on their strength veered greatly from four to twenty men. The most reliable witness came from a lieutenant from inside the command tent. He'd been shot in the chest at close range by one of the attackers, but was lucky enough to survive. And although critically wounded, he insisted on reporting to Borisov before receiving medical care.

The Lieutenant had told him the attackers, he only saw four, were wearing British uniforms. Except one who's uniform was predominately American. And they were lead by a woman with short black hair. Borisov listened to his statement, taking notes and wondered how accurate it was. The young lieutenant seemed to remember too much detail for someone with a 9mm bullet lodged in his chest. Some of the details seemed irrelevant, like the man who shot him had Flight Lieutenant epaulets on his shoulders, and he called the woman 'Mac'.

The medic finally insisted he should operate and Borisov left, still sceptical at the accuracy of the information. That was until they brought in the bodies and survivors of a patrol that went missing that night. The two survivors confirmed the existence of the dark haired woman and the man in the American kit. He identified one of the three bodies in the middle of the square, now covered with several inches of snow, as one of those that attacked them.

British troops where there shouldn't be any. Borisov pondered, something has gone seriously wrong.

The first he knew of the arrival of the Commander in Chief of the 20th Tank Army Group was when his M-557 crashed through the shattered barricade into the square with the rest of the command platoon close behind. Borisov cursed to himself and shuck his head in despair. This was all he needed.

He walked down the church steps towards the M-557 as it shuddered to a halt. Solvac stepped out of the back and surveyed the square. "Where is Major Borisenkov?" He demanded as soon as Borisov was in ear shot.

"Dead sir." Borisov told him. "I am Major Borisov, I am now in command."

Solvac looked him up and down, assessing the man's potential. "What has happened here?" Borisov explained as they walked up the church steps. "Are those the bodies?" Solvac pointed to Slater and the woman's body. "Why haven't they been moved?"

"The needs of my own troops are more important than of those." Borisov replied. "They're dead, they're not going anywhere."

Solvac grunted in approval. "What are your casualties?"

"38 dead and 57 wounded."

"Once you have dealt with your troops, have those bodies searched and bring everything you find to my tank. What about this Lieutenant who saw the attacker, where is he?"

"Still under the knife."

Solvac surveyed the square again. Thick black smoke was still billowing out of every gap in the hull of one of the BTR-80s. They'd tried to put it out, but ammunition cocking off inside made the task too dangerous. A thin haze of smoke drifted out through the blackened hatches of the old BTR-60. While the second BTR-80 appeared intact, the force from the grenade had

gone out through the hatches, hardly damaging the insides. "I'll be in my PC. Let me know when I can talk to him."

"Yes sir." Borisov started down the steps towards two young soldier. "You two, come with me." He stopped them and directed them towards the bodies.

The two youngster looked at the three bodies. The two women were laid face down in the snow. The boy lay close by staring up into the dark sky, the toy monkey still clenched in one hand. The younger of the two brushed the snow away from Slater's face. "Pretty isn't she." He said. "Too pretty to end up like this."

The elder one pulled her head up by her hair. "Here, give her a kiss." He teased, then dropped it back down and brushed the snow off the woman. "Hey!" He nudging him and pointing to there clenched hands. "Maybe they were lovers."

They both laughed out loud. Then stopped as they saw Borisov disapproving looks. They wiped the smiles of their faces and continued with their task. The elder one pulled open the woman's shawl and coat to found her bare breast beneath. He touched it, it felt warm against his cold hand. "Ever made love to a dead woman before?" He smiled.

"Eric, you're sick in the head." The younger one replied. "You've never even made love to a live one yet." He pulled open Slater's pack and rummaged through. Removing a ration pack, looking quickly around before stuffed it inside his jacket.

"Maybe so, Peta." Eric continued. "But at least she can't object."

They both laughed again. "Let's see what they looked like." He rolled Slater onto her back, pulling her hand free from the woman, releasing the grenade.

They both saw it. Eric made a grab for it, while Peta leapt backwards, throwing his arms across his face. But neither of them were quick enough.

The explosion echoed round the square. Solvac turned round at the sound and looked at them.

Peta lay on his back, thrashing wildly and screaming. He's legs and abdomen lay in the snow beside him. Eric was slumped over the two bodies with nothing left of his right arm or head.

Solvac shook his head in despair. "We are fighting a war with school-boys and old men. What hope have we." He looked across at Borisov. "Bring me what is left. And put his out of his misery."

Solvac's attach, opened the rear door of the M-557 for Borisov. He stepped in and dumped Slater's blood stained combat jacket and webbing onto the floor. Solvac immediately picked up the jacket and emptied the contents of the pockets onto the table. "Is this all there is? The woman had nothing on her except a little food. I think she may have been a local." Borisov picked up Slater's I.D card and read it. "Private Slater, Amanda. R G. British Army."

Solvac pulled a photo from an inside pocket. It showed Slater, Landers and Daark relaxing in front on a British Warrior APC. Solvac pondered over this photo for a second, then placed it to one side.

Borisov started on the webbing. "What's this?" He handed Solvac tatty envelope. "My English isn't that good."

"It's addressed to her." Solvac pulled out two equally tattered letters and read them. "This one explains that her husband is missing, presumed dead, following the loss of the submarine HMS Swiftsure. And this one lists her family among the dead following the nuclear strike on Portsmouth Naval Base."

"This must be them." Borisov showed him one of three photo that had fallen out of the envelope.

Solvac muttered in agreement, before picking up the other photos.

One showed Slater and Campbell holding bottles and looking drunk with several other in the background. It had been taken in Germany from the look of the buildings behind them, properly late Autumn. The second one showed Campbell again stood with a small group of soldiers next to a battered truck. Solvac studied this photo more closely. The tall blond haired woman was in this one too, talking to a dark haired woman in the background. "Yasmin!" He whispered. He looked closely at the photo with the warrior, studying the background. "Malbork. This was taken in Malbork. You said there was a woman leading the group."

"Yes, it looked that way."

"Tell me what she look like?"

Borisov shrugged. "From the description, about one metre six with dark hair."

Solvac stared at the photo of the drunken Slater and Campbell. "Is this her?" He pointed to a woman in the background talking to Landers.

"I didn't see her, but she fits the description."

"Has there been anything else from the 94th Cavalry?"

"No sir, they've been quiet. The 132nd were probed by marauders on the 10th. The 94th were reacting to that."

"And there has been nothing since. They were meant to intercept a British reconnaissance unit at Klein Plasten. They warned us about this unit, that it could be trouble. Their code name is RED FOX TWO." He held up the group photo. "If this squad is this RED FOX TWO, then I think we could have trouble. They may have eliminated the 94th and captured you command PC. We should eliminate them before they can discover what is happening and inform Hamburg. Find out what the situation is with 132nd and where they are."

"They're around Neubrandenburg waiting for the rest of the Army to move up."

"I want to know exactly were."

"Yes sir." He left.

"Yasmin Zarudin," he hissed through his teeth. "You traitorous bitch." He kicked wildly at the table as his temper flared, scattering Slater's webbing across the deck. "You fucking traitorous bitch." He grabbed his parker and stormed out of the M-557. Outside his attach, and three of his men were busy erecting his tent between the M-557 and his BMP communications vehicle. They stopped and saluted him.

"Get that lot cleared up." Solvac ordered, pointing back towards the M-557. "Get rid of the uniform. Leave everything else on the table."

The attach, glanced at the mess through the open rear door. "Yes sir."

Solvac strode off across the square to where Borisov's command BTR had stood. The remains of the tent flapped wildly in the strong breeze. Loose sheets of paper blew across the square, mixing in with the drifting snow.

Borisov emerged from the communications BMP and walked across to meet him. "The 132nd have got reconnaissance platoons probing Klein Plasten, Stavenhagen, Kittendorf and Rosenow. The main body is still in Neubrandenburg waiting to be relieved before continuing to the next objective. They want to know what's the hold up. They've still heard nothing from the 94th Cavalry. They think they might have run into marauders or something."

Solvac turned round to face him. "More likely they ran into Yasmin Zarudin."

"Who?"

"RED FOX TWO." He spat, waving the photo at him. "This is the recon platoon they were meant to ambush." He calmed slightly, "What armour have you in this area?"

"One company from the 12th. The Garrison destroyed the second company as it was moving out."

Solvac grunted. "That is one of the burdens we must overcome. Trust no-one Borisov, just because your comrade claims to be your friend, does not mean they won't stab you in the back as soon as you turn. We are fighting a war of deceit and counter deceit. The Garrison commander deceived us and we lost a tank company, but he lost everything as a result. You've done well here Borisov, controlling this situation and resolving it. You have stepped well into Borisenkov shoes. But now our problem lies with this RED FOX TWO and more importantly this woman," he pointed to McKenzie. "We must find and eliminate this unit before they discover what is really happening here. Borisov, can you do this."

He meant you will do this. "Yes sir."

"Good. Take the armoured company and find them. In the mean time dispatch your Cavalry platoons to search for them. If they are quick they still may be able to follow its tracks. I will

be heading back to Pasewalk this afternoon. I shall place three platoons at your disposal. The 132nd will hold their position at Neubrandenburg until further notice."

"What about my troops? What are their orders?" Borisov asked.

"They are to remain here until ordered to do otherwise. You have a second in command?"

"Yes sir." Borisov lied. He'd only just become commander himself. "I'll see to it right away."

"Good!" Solvac turned and strode back to the M-557.

Borisov watch him until he'd vanished inside. "This man is mad." He uttered. "How can we achieve our final objective if he splits our army up to chase this British unit?" His attention was drawn to one of his cavalry platoon returning from patrol with a large number of riderless horses. "A bad one sergeant?" He shouted at they draw closer.

The cavalry sergeant stopped his horse in front of him and dismounted. "On the contra Major. We had a good one." He waved his arm and one of his men led a riderless horses forward. Across it's back lay a body. Borisov walked up to it and lifted his head. "British?" He asked.

"Yes Major." The sergeant replied. "But the horses are from the 94th Cavalry. And this scum." He dragged Garret body head first off the horse. "Is one of the bastards that attacked us here."

"Where did you find him?"

"Near Rossow. He was trying to raise someone on his radio. I think he was left with the horses while the others attacked us and they were supposed to meet up with him later. But they didn't turn up, did they." He kicked Garret. "I left a squad back there just in case they do turn up, but I don't think they will."

Borisov nodded in agreement. "You have done well Sergeant."

"That's Sergeant Platov, Major."

"Yes of course. I shall remember that." He crouched next to Garret. "Has he anything to say for himself?"

"Only a name, Mackenzie?"

"Mackenzie eh?" He lifted Garrets head.

Fitzwilliams lit his pipe with purpose, listening to the crackle of rough tobacco ignited from the flame of his trench lighter. He sucked on the pipe making the tobacco ball glow red before puffing out a cloud of smoke. He repeated this several times until he was satisfied the pipe was lit. Then he sat back and savoured the aromatic smoke. Jenny Blake tried to muffle

a cough but only succeeded in emphasising it. She knew Bridgewater wouldn't appreciate his office smelling like a brothel, but she was in no position to prevent it.

The Commander of the 1st Armoured Division - BAEUR - had arrived five minutes earlier determined to see him. She'd explained he was out and was due back sometime in the next hour.

"I'll wait," he told her relaxing into one of the office's easy chairs.

She stood looking at him for a while. She knew Bridgewater didn't like people waiting in his office, no matter who they were. "Excuse me sir. Would you -"

"Yes, tea would be lovely."

No, get you've arse out of here. "Certainly, it will take a minute," she smiled enigmatically, returned a moment later after switching on the kettle in her office. She carried a file of papers across to Bridgewater's oak desk. Fitzwilliams watched her through his man-made smoke screen. She pulled the high-backed chair forward and sat behind the desk. Fitzwilliams rose a curious eye brow and started to say something about it, but decided this time not too. Jenny opened the file and started reading and making notes. After two minutes she heard the kettle click off. She closing the file and returned to her office. Again he watched her in silence.

When she returned carrying a tray with a small pot, jug of milk and one cup and saucer she found him studying the map on the office wall. Bridgewater hadn't cleaned it since Jones' visit and for a moment she feared it was something she should have done.

"Why are these towns marked?" He asked.

She placed the tray on the coffee table. "I don't know sir. Something General Bridgewater was discussing."

"Oh." He returned to the table and lifted the lid of the pot and stirred the tea with the spoon. Jenny walked back to the desk and resumed her work. Fitzwilliams pored himself a cup, added milk and stirred it. "Do you usually work at the General's desk while he's out?"

"Only when someone's waiting for me in my office." Bridgewater answered entered briskly, removing his wet parker and hanging it on the coat stand. "Get me a coffee please Jenny."

"Yes sir, she collected up the file and left the office, grateful to be way from the smoke.

"What are you after Richard?" He asked sniffing the air.

He returned to the map. "Interesting situation you have here. How would you counter it?"

"If I wished people to smoke in my office I'd have provide ashtrays."

Fitzwilliams looked around and as expected didn't find one. Bridgewater produced a blue stonecast ashtray from a draw and handed it to him. He took it and tapped out his pipe before placing it in his tunic pocket. "So how would you do it?"

"You're the armoured tactics specialist, I'm just intelligence gathering."

Fitzwilliams chuckled. "Hypothetically."

Bridgewater looked at the red grease pencil marks. "I'd probable try to hold them along the E55 autobahn. Now what are you after?"

Kubrick checked the empty corridor before entering Vonnegut's darkened office. He closed the door behind and scanned the room by the light of his torch. Once satisfied he was alone he walked over to the desk and turned on the reading lamp. Vonnegut had to have the combination to Hauer's safe, it was security policy for one over minister to hold the combination of each safe. Vonnegut was a systematic person who wrote every thing down, he know he'd have it written somewhere. He pulled open the unlocked desk draws and rummaged through the papers and half dozen books, but found nothing. Next he tried the locked draws with a bunch of assorted keys he kept. On the forth try he found one that fitted and the draws slide open. In the bottom draw he found a two year old diary. On a back page he found the combination to Vonnegut's on safe but not Hauer's. He copied it down into a note book. Then flicked through the rest of the diary. On 9th May he found another entry.

CITADEL RED FOX UNITS - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 -

Beneath each number was written a list of places and dates. Kubrick settled into the chair and studied the list. Hauer had mentioned the name RED FOX before, it had been on that radio message he'd heard them talking about yesterday. He tore he page out of the diary and placed it inside his note book, then replaced the diary in the draw and locked it. He then returned the room to darkness and left, to return to his own office. Here he sat for a while, studying the list. These were movement dates, he established. Date out and destination followed by return date and pick up location; half of which were Templin. Each entry covered a two weeks period. The last entrees were under 2 and 3, Klein Plasten and Muncheberg dated 10th January. These must be the British Reconnaissance units. But what is Vonnegut doing with their movement schedules? He had to get a look inside Hauer's safe.

Hauer's office was also in darkness when he entered, but it wasn't empty. "Yes. What is it?" Hauer demanded on hearing someone enter.

Kubrick nearly bolted at the sound of his voice but forced himself to stand his ground. "I'm sorry Bernard, I was looking for Joseph Vonnegut."

Hauer turned on the desk lamp. "He's getting some sleep. And so was I till you disturbed me."

"I wanted to tell him I won't be able to get that report finished until tomorrow lunch time. I'm having some difficulty understanding Eurika's filing system. I think she's fixed it so only she could understand it." He laughed.

"Maybe you should go and ask her." Hauer joked.

"Yeah, she's really gonna help." He glanced down at the dark stain on the carpet. "That where she got it?"

Hauer grunted as he stretched his stiff limbs. "Straight in the back."

"They should have got her in the head and finished her for good."

"Yes, at least she's out of the way now." He walked to the door. "But I think I going to get my head down too. You should get some sleep as well." He ushered Kubrick out of the office and locked the door.

"Give it another hour and I will."

They walked in silence along the corridor to Kubrick's office. "I'll give it another bash at her system." He said, leaving Hauer to continue to his bed.

He sat at his desk for the hour, pondering, until finally he decided Hauer may have been right.

Eurika opened her eyes, sensing someone approach. She was surprised to see Kubrick stood over her. "What do you want? Come to gloat?" She muttered.

He pulled a chair up. "No, I've come for some advice."

She laughed. "What, you? Can't you get into the filing cabinets? I hear you've already discredited my work. Manipulating the figures to support Hauer's devises."

"It was no more then you were doing. All I did was highlight the anomalies in your figures. Your own manipulations became apparent once that was done."

"No doubt Hauer and Vonnegut relished in that."

"No doubt." He said with a thin smile.

Eurika pulled herself up in bed. "Well come on then, what is it you want?"

Kubrick lowered his voice and checked behind him to make sure no-one was listening. "Something is going on and I'm not sure I know how to handle it." He pulled a beige folder from under his jacket. "Ten days ago 360,000 litres of fuel was moved from our refinery to Pasewalk, Prenzlau and Munchenburg. That is almost ten time what the three garrisons would normally receive. So I check the requisitions -"

"And they didn't relate to fuel."

"Oh they did. But not for the amount delivered. The garrisons have no more than ten or so vehicles. There is no way they need this amount of fuel."

"Maybe it's just a paper error."

"No way. I checked. The movement orders are all signed by Hauer, and all the fuel bowsers left the refinery for the garrisons."

Eurika sat in silence for a moment, reading. "I had you down as being so far up Hauer's ass you could brush his teeth. So what made you look at this?"

"A friend in the British Intelligence let me know they'd found one of our fuel bowsers near Mirow. I checked out the vehicle's number to find out where it was going and what it was carrying."

"And that led you to -"

"Yep." Kubrick nodded. "I've snooped around Vonnegut's office a few hours ago looking for Hauer's safe combination."

"Did you find it?"

"No. What I did find are the code names of the British Long Range Reconnaissance units." He handed her the page from the diary. "As far as I can make out the lists of locations and dates relate area out going and return trips."

"Half the return journeys are from Templin."

"The last two returning units were attacked by mortars at Templin as the helicopters picked them up. And Vonnegut just happens to have the dates and location of the pick up written in his diary."

"That doesn't mean anything. He could have filled that in after the event."

"Dam it Eurika!" He nearly shouted, then lowered his voice again. "Hauer is involved in something. Yesterday I heard him talking to Vonnegut about this RED FOX TWO unit not being where it should be. I think Vonnegut's involved as well."

Eurika stuffed the pages back into the folder. "So this is all you've got. It's not much."

He took the folder from her. "I know."

She slumped back down into her bed and for a moment he thought she'd drifted off to sleep. "What you must do," she said opening her eyes. "Is find out what Hauer is keeping in his safe. If this is one of his operations, he'll at least be one file on it."

"But I don't where Vonnegut keeps the combination."

"It is written on the bookmark inside 'Death on the Nile', on the bookshelf in my office."

Kubrick cursed to himself, it had been right under his nose. "Right. I'll let you know what I find." He placed the chair back and left.

Eurika lay there for a while wondering whether she was doing the right thing by trusting Kubrick, or was this an elaborate plot to trap her. But she posed no danger to Hauer or Vonnegut. She was all but useless to anyone now. She cursed herself before settling down to continue her sleep before the painkillers wore off.

CHAPTER NINE

Jones met Bridgewater in the corridors of the BAEUR building. "What's going on Sir?" He asked, falling into step along side him.

"C in C's called a divisional heads meeting." He told him. "Everyone's gonna be there, and he specifically asked for you to be present."

They stopped at the check point and showed the officer their I.D. cards. "Why's he asked for me?"

"Fitzwilliams was in my office this morning. He was took great interest in the scribbling on the map. He was very interested in where the information had come from." Jones remained silent, unsure whether this was a warning. Bridgewater sensed it. "I'd just sit there and keep my mouth shut until asked." He put his card back into his pocket and continued down the corridor. Then stopped as he realised Jones wasn't with him. "Look, you're the one who first came up with this thing."

Jones put his card away and followed Bridgewater into the conference room with out saying another word.

They were the last to arrive. Around the table sat the other Generals and Brigadiers of the British Army, he knew them all by name, some as friends and some as colleges. Brigadier Byron, the 2nd Armoured Divisions commander, nodded to him as he took his seat opposite. General Rose of the 4th leaned across to him. "Alan, didn't expect to see you here."

"Me neither." He replied glancing over the report on the table in front of him. Seeing all these high ranking officers he felt uncomfortable in his tatty combats, he wished he'd known of the meeting and dressed in his No.2's.

"Gentlemen." Collins finally spoke and the murmured conversations died away. "As you are all aware, we appear to have a situation developing. Each of you should have received a copy of the report giving all the information we have available to us at this time. I trust you all have read it. Colonel Jones, sorry we haven't been able to provide you with one prior to this meeting. There is a copy before you now." Collins turned back to the rest of the table. "What I require gentlemen, are your opinions."

General Fitzwilliams spoke up first. "All the evidence so far points to this being a concentrated assault by Russian forces at the containment zone. The speed of the advance is consistent with standard Shock Army tactics. As are the methods used to overcome the German garrisons. At present they've covered some hundred Kilometres in six days. At that rate of advance they could potentially be sat on our doorstep by the 16th or sooner. The German Government has already placed the 1st and 27th Panzer Divisions on full combat alert to defend Lubeck. They have also notified their garrisons at Stendal, Schwerin and Gustrow." That's the 1st Panzer Grenadier Division, 3rd Panzer Division and the... 2nd Panzer Grenadier Division respectively sir. None of these Divisions have any substantial numbers of armour at their disposal. If the Russians do decide to assault these garrisons, they at best will hold out for 24 hours, and that's a very optimistic estimate. However the speed of the advance and the light resistance being put up by the outer laying garrisons, indicate they may have been infiltrated prior to the attack or simply by-passed."

A mutter emulated from around the table.

"With this in mind I urgently recommend a revision of all orders our Divisions are acting under." He took a two page report from his document folder and handed it across to Collins. "I propose we halt all withdrawal plans for the time being. Place the 2nd and 4th Armoured Division on full combat alert and have them take up defensive positions along the eastern side of the containment zone. Mobilise the 1st Armoured Division and 24th Infantry Battalion to defend Hamburg. Recall the 5th Mech. to bolster the Germans at Hanover along with the 3rd Mech. and 19th Infantry Battalion."

The Divisional Commanders exchanged muttered comments while Collins read through the report.

"The Germans are already at full combat readiness. The longer we delay the less chance we will have of stopping them." Fitzwilliams added.

"Richard, we have over 200 Kilometres of front line to defend. Where would you suggest we put our tanks?" General Rose asked.

"As of yet we have no firm answers to what their final objective is. Our main forces will be held at staging post where they can react to an attack from a number of areas."

Collins turned to Bridgewater. "Jim, what do our intelligence sources in Poland say about this?"

"As far as we can tell there is not Eastern Alliance involvement in this offensive. All indications so far limit this to just the three army groups."

"What about the Russian 20th Cavalry?" Fitzwilliams pointed out. "They were reported heading towards Munchenberg on the 8th."

"How the hell does he know that?" Jones whispered to Bridgewater.

"Current strength of the 20th Cavalry is no more than 500 men." Bridgewater replied sternly. "They hardly constitute the same threat as these army groups."

"Nevertheless the sighting was confirmed." Fitzwilliams replied before turning back to the C in C. "On the morning of the 7th Russian Western Command at Pila recalled one of its top Generals from Slovakia. He was flow into Germany the next day. Where too, we don't know."

"Do we know who this General is?"

"Major General Straczynski, he's one of their best. He's Spetsnaz trained and seen active duty in Afghanistan, Georgia, the Baltic States and Poland. He's trained most of their Divisional commanders at one time or another. We believe he may be in overall command of the offensive."

"You're working on assumptions, General." Jones spoke up. "You're talking about a possible resumption of hostilities based on assumption. Decisions of this severity cannot be made on that."

Fitzwilliams turned to Jones. As did every head at the table. "The reliable facts we acting on were provided by your department, Colonel."

"It was you who first brought this to our attention Alan." Collins continued.

"And the information I had at the time, sir, seemed to support the assumption General Fitzwilliams is coming too. However subsequent information does not comply with what Bonn is telling us."

"I don't suppose you would care to enlighten us." Collins replied.

Jones glanced quickly around the table realising the situation he'd just talked himself into. "Do we have a map of North East Germany?" He asked the attach,'. Without a word the young girl found the slide and it was projected onto the wall. Jones walked over to it twisting

his ring and wondering why Bridgewater hadn't told anyone about the errors in the information being given by the German Government. Maybe he thought they wouldn't buy it. He'd have to sell it to them now.

They listened to Jones summary.

"They could have rebuilt the bridge over the Zarow." Byron interrupted. "That would have put the 132nd Cavalry Division at Neubrandenburg by the 10th."

"Highly unlikely. The last logistical lists we have on the 20th Army Group showed no heavy engineering capabilities."

"Logistical listings have been known to be wrong." Commented Brigadier Wyman, 24th Infantry Division.

"Then why go to Friedland?" Jones answered. "Friedland is held by the 117th M.R.D. that was confirmed yesterday, numbering between 200 to 400 cavalry troops and four wheeled personnel carriers, with two tank companies. Why put that amount of stuff into the place if it's not important."

"And where does this information come from?" Fitzwilliams again.

"One of my recon squads entered Friedland yesterday."

"And they confirmed the troop numbers?" Collins asked.

"Yes sir."

"And the helicopter you sent out earlier today. What was that for?" asked Fitzwilliams.

"I've fielded a recon platoon to gather more data."

"A platoon?" Fitzwilliams was pushing him.

Jones could see this wasn't going the way it was meant too. "Because of the seriousness of the situation, and the large numbers they could be facing -"

"So you are saying there is a sufficient threat for you to put four squads into the area. Yet increasing the readiness of the Hamburg garrison is not necessary."

"No sir, that is not what I said. The data so far indicates a large Russian force consisting of three Army Groups crossed the Oder River on the 7th. It does not tell us what their intentions are."

"Well what else could their intentions be. They are threatening the security of the containment zone."

"What about a mass defection?" Rose commented.

Fitzwilliams shot him a side ways glance before returning to Jones. "And what do you propose we do, walk up to them and ask?"

"That is exactly what Colonel Jones' recon squads are trying to do." Bridgewater finally came to his aid. Silence followed. "Without more information of the extent and location of the threat we will be acting blindly."

The room fell into disorders conversation while Jones remained silent. Finally Collins brought things to order again. "So Gentlemen, what you are trying to tell me is, we lack the information we need to act."

"Yes sir." Bridgewater answered before Fitzwilliams could.

"Thank you for you time Gentlemen. I wish to be kept informed of further developments as they occur. Brigadier Bridgewater and Colonel Jones will you both remain behind for a few minutes."

Rose leaned across to Jones as he shuffled his papers into his briefcase. "Christ Alan, you certainly put your foot in it this time."

"Thanks Pat. Hey any chance I can borrow a company of your men. Sticking those two squads out east has left me a bit short back at the Citadel."

Rose closed his briefcase. "A company eh? I can spare a platoon, that any good? Can't let you have anymore, not the way things are looking round here at the moment."

"Yeah thank Pat. That's great."

"They'll be there at 09.00 tomorrow." Rose slapped him on the shoulder. "See you around."

Collins waited until the everyone else had left before speaking again. "Colonel, I take it you are not as convinced as General Fitzwilliams about this whole thing."

"No sir, I am not. I think General Fitzwilliams is blowing this up out of all proportions. All the evidence so far only identifies three army groups. There is no evidence of any other division being mobilised. I believe a mass defection is still the most likely explanation."

"What about this Russian General?"

Jones glances across at Bridgewater. "I don't believe he is there to command the offensive. I think they sent him to stop it."

"Oh yes?"

"Major General Straczynski is a GRU officer, he has been for the past six years."

"So why does this rise him above suspicion?"

"I'll agree that Straczynski is probable the best officer they have to take command of such an offensive. But I don't believe that is why he was sent in. His usual line of work is tracking down and eliminating rouge Russian units. That is what he was doing in Slovakia."

"There is something you're not telling me about this man, Colonel."

Jones glanced across at Bridgewater again. Bridgewater returned his stare for a moment then slowly nodded. Jones looked back at the C in C. "Sir, Major General Mikhail Straczynski is one of my men. He is MAJOR."

Collins leaned back in his chair. "Why have you not mentioned this before?"

"I felt it best to keep it quiet Sir, believing that the fewer people who were aware of his true identity, the longer he would remain a valid informer."

"How trust worthy do you consider him to be?"

"Very."

"How long has he been on our pay-roll?"

Bridgewater leaned forward. "A long time."

"Is he reliable?"

"Yes sir." Jones answered. "Very reliable."

"Then tell me what you know." He listened as Jones told him what he know of the offensive and of Straczynski's intentions. Then after a few minutes deliberations he looked straight at Jones. "Okay. we'll run with your operation for the moment. In the mean time I will have all Divisions proceeds with current orders apart from the 2nd and 4th Armoured Divisions, I am placing them on stand-by with the prelude to going to full war footing at first notice. The 5th Mech. will continue on route to Hamburg. The rest of the army within the Hamburg area will carry on as planned." He leaned forward in his chair and peered over the top of his glasses at Jones. "But if someone so much as farts out there when they shouldn't the whole army goes full war footing. Is that clear?"

"Yes sir."

"Good because It's your neck on the chopping block son, and there's plenty of people holding the axe. You've got three days to come up with some definite facts. By then the 3rd will be out of Hanover and it will be the Germans problem. Good day Colonel."

Jones took that as his cue to leave. Picking up his papers and nodding to Bridgewater, he left as quickly as possible, grateful that his opinion had not fallen on stone ground.

Collins got up and poured himself a drink from a cut glass decanter. "You want one Jim?"

"Please." He replied, tiding his own papers.

"What's your opinion on Jones?" He asked, returning to the table with two glasses.

"Personally, or professionally."

"Both. I'm putting a lot on the line purely on that man say so. I want to know why you think he's worth listening to."

Bridgewater took a gulp of brandy before speaking. "While Afghanistan was happening he came to us with information that one of Russia's top Colonels was ready to defect. He was Alan's first, fresh out of Northern Ireland and straight in at the deep end. At the time the ministry was extremely interested in this Colonel. The chance to obtain the services of such a high ranking Soviet Divisional Commander was almost to good an opportunity to miss. Alan was ordered to deal with it and an operation was put into motion. Unfortunately there was complications. The man had a baby girl of about six months. His wife was dead and the girl was in Moscow, and he wouldn't leave without her. Several attempts were made to get them both out. But it never came together. Then you remember when the States and Russia tried started this blood war early over some new stealth bomber Kublinka had built."

"Caron?"

"Yeah. Right in the middle of it all someone handed the Americans over all the data they wanted on the plane for a guarantee they'd backed down and it stopped."

Collins rose an eyebrow. "Jones?"

"Yes sir, with this Colonel." Bridgewater drained his glass and stood up to leave. "If he's got something to say, I tend to listen to him."

"Jim, this Russian Colonel. Did he ever get him out?"

"No sir. The Americans said he was unreliable."

"Anyone we know?"

Bridgewater looked down at his shoes, dirty and unpolished with white salt marks from the snow outside. "Yes sir, we mentioned him several minutes ago."

General Rutowski looked down on the shanty town from the low hill to the east. His anger was clear for all to see and Major Downski knew he'd face the brunt of it, even though he was innocent of the cause. Major Lampkowski had disobeyed orders. Rutowski had specifically stated that any small settlements should be bypassed and all unnecessary confrontation

avoided. Lampkowski had disobeyed these by attacking Hardenbeck. The town only had a small defensive forces. The heaviest equipment they had was a battered Luchs armoured car.

Hardenbeck would have left him alone if he'd just driven past. But no, the obstinate oaf had to go storming in as if he had something to prove. And all he ended up doing was losing the lot; his vehicles, his men and his life. Losing Lampkowski wasn't such a great deal, he was a bad officer who only reached his rank by bribery and corruption. But the loss of his three BMP's did matter, it reduced the armoured reconnaissance capacity of the 2nd Army by a third. And that would slow them up even more. They were already two days behind plan, due to the fuel bowsers not turning up at Greiffenberg until yesterday. Then instead of the seven he'd been promised, only six arrived. That meant there was insufficient fuel for all the vehicles in the Army Group. And now this.

Jack Clancy wiped his sunglasses clean between the fingers of his soft leather gloves, then he pushed them back onto his nose before pulling the leather tight across the back of his hand, flexing his fingers as he did. The gloves were a good fit on his hands, snug and comfortable to wear, handmade for him by his wife.

He was board. The giant CH-53E Super Stallion was on autopilot. The onboard computer was navigating through the inertial and doppler-radar system, interrogating the ground before them and automatically adjusted the aircraft's height. Not that it was doing much of that. They were flying at transit height 400 feet above the ground. High enough not to be bothered by trees and pylons. The computer was keeping the aircraft level while the ground rose and fell beneath then, within acceptable limits.

He checked the map in the knee pocket of his flying suit against the circular display screen on the centre console by his right knee. They were exactly where they should be. There was nothing for him to do. His mind had recovering from the haze of the previous night and was demanding stimulation. The soft rock tape blasting out over chopper's p.a. system failed to help. The beat of the music drowned out the whine of the engines and seemed to make the time pass quicker but it didn't give his mind anything to focus on.

To his right sat Kim Sanders, the pilot; although officially she was only the co-pilot. She'd occupied the right-hand seat for over a year, handling most of the flying while he dealt with the navigation. She was also in the same predicament as him, nothing to do. She just handled it better.

He pushed the glasses up the bridge of his nose he turned to her. "Hey Kim, makes a change to be doing some real work for a change." He spoke in a heavy East Coast accent.

She looked across at him. "We're still nothing more than a flying truck. Only difference is we're ferrying grunts around instead supplies." She replied chewing on her gum. "You look rough, bad night?"

"These pills the Doc gave me don't seem to be doing much good."

"Y'know, you shouldn't be mixing pills and grog."

"Doc only gave me a week's supply to last the month. I've got to use something to get some rest."

"But drinking y'self under the table ain't the way to do it."

"Enough of the lecture Kim, I've already had it off the CO. Just get on with flying my Babe."

She glanced across at him again. Clancy always referred to the giant Sikorsky as his Babe. It was the name he'd christened her with when he took command of the aircraft years earlier and the semi-naked woman painted beneath the pilot's window was supposed to be his wife - his ex-wife, she reminded herself. She'd left him a year into the war, taking his only son with her.

Most people and official records referred to the chopper as Stallion due to it being the only CH-53 still flying in the European theatre. The name made for easy and instant recognition by all. However, Clancy, as well as being the aircraft commander, was the only original member of the crew left, so he was allowed this indulgence.

"This town shouldn't be too far off, should it?" Clancy asked

Sanders checked the map in her flight suit pocket against the computer display. "Yeah, five miles. My aircraft." She killed the auto pilot and took the giant lower, levelling out at 200 feet, relieved for something to do at last.

From being nothing but a noisy and uncomfortable flying machine, she'd grown to love and respect this aircraft. The CH-53E was the big brother of the Sea Stallion family, with three General Electric T64-GE-419 turbo shafts supplying over 13500 SHP to the seven bladed hub, it was almost as big as a chopper could get and as impressive. The U.S. Marines had been using them since the 80's in an amphibious assaults/load workhorse's role. Clancy's Babe had been flying since she rolled out of the Sikorsky's Connecticut plant in 1990, but had been converted to 'Pave Low III' spec during the first year of the war while aboard the USS Tarawa.

The Tarawa group had been in the Mediterranean supporting the Israeli invasion of Syria when her last surviving Spec-Ops MH-53J got mauled by a gunboat on the way inbound to extraction and had to abort. Clancy's Babe; which was in the air after delivering a platoon of marines to the beach head, was diverted in for the extraction. The Spec-Ops force of 32 men had been 'in-country' for six weeks, preparing the ground for the Israelis and had been hunted to near extinction by a Presidential Guard Division.

Despite only being armed with only two heavy machine guns, Clancy brought the chopper straight into the LZ, coming in low and fast. It took twenty-five seconds for the surviving 12 members of the platoon to scrambled aboard. Twenty-five seconds which the Babe was a sitting target to all incoming fire. Not just small arms fire, but heavy 125mm HE rounds from Imperial Guard T72s. Several rounds got close, some too close. Sanders remembered the aircraft shudder from the HE blasts and sound of shrapnel bouncing through the fuselage as she lay on the floor with her hands inside her Lieutenant's stomach, holding his guts together.

She didn't remember the flight back to the Tarawa, nor what happened once they landed. But she remembered walking down to the hanger deck the next day and seeing the carcass of their MH-53J, stripped down to the airframe. The chief had condemned it the instant it had landed, ordering it below deck to be stripped down for spares. The Babe was sat next to her, untouched since she landed. The glassfibre/epoxy cockpit cowling was smashed and twisted, and hung from the steel and alloy frame, every piece of Plexiglas shattered. The in-flight refuelling probe was bent up dangerously close to the rotor blades. The flight instruments were smashed and like the seats and bulkhead behind it, were covered with dried blood. At first, she thought she'd got the wrong helicopter, unable to believe it was the same aircraft that had brought them back. The Chief put her right. The co-pilot, he told her, had been killed outright and only the grace of God stopped the pilot from joining him. They were the luckiest bastards around to have made it back alive.

When she asked what was to come of the two aircraft, he told her the MH-53J would be heading for a watery grave while the Babe would be blessed with a new lease of life due to the shortage of replacement aircraft coming out of the States.

She also met Clancy for the first time that day. He was laying in the Med Centre, hooked up to a vast array drips and monitors and looked over by Death. She couldn't image him flying them back. The doctors said his chances had improved overnight and he was due to be transferred to the Saratoga the next day.

Three days later, the stripped carcass of the MH-53J was unceremoniously buried, pushed over the edge of the flight deck and into the clear blue waters of the Med. Sanders watched that too. Saying goodbye to the aircraft as if it represented the souls of those who didn't make it back.

Although she looked in a worse state than the MH-53J, the Babe had gotten off lightly. Most of her damage was panelling and electrical, the airframe was still healthy with a lot of hours left in it. The MH-53J 'Pave Low III' was the Babe's two engined little brother and they shared the same parentage with over 90% of the same components.

The transformation from work horse to Pave Low III spec was easy. Clancy's Babe was flying again before he was out of the hospital. With new nose bulges hiding radar, infrared and UV lasers and low light TV, a trio of miniguns; one each side of the airframe behind the cockpit and a third on the tail ramp, she'd turned into a monster. By the time Clancy returned to flight duty, she'd replaced the MH-53J as the Spec-Ops transport.

"Shit Kim! That tree got a little close." Clancy's voice snapped her back.

"Sorry S'gar. I was miles away."

She cleared the rise at under 100 feet and at 150 knots, crossing the deserted road and past the carcass of Hardenbeck village towards the shanty town.

The main threat they faced these days was from small arms fire, but missiles were always a worry when approaching settlements. In addition to chaff and flares, she also had an array sensors and suppressors to distract incoming missiles, and two AIM-5 Sidewinders to deal with the rare occurrence of an overly curious aircraft.

"Pilot to crew. We're going in hot - guns." Clancy spoke into the intercom. The rush of cold air told him they'd heard.

Sanders banked the giant chopper round over the lake to come at the town from the south. "Two AFVs." She pointed out ahead of them. "Looks like a Luchs and maybe a BMP."

"And both knackered." Clancy observed.

She dropped the Stallion down low over the two burnt out hulks and fast across the roofs of the town, expecting fire to come up at them. None did. Banking her steeply round, she brought her back over the huts. This time much slower. She could see people looking up at them, most appeared to be civvies, a couple were carrying guns but didn't look hostile.

"Two more BMP inside the place." Clancy peer out of the cockpit window. "This one's dead, but that one by the side of that bus still looks intact."

"Looks like they've recently seen some action." March, one of the gunners, commented over the intercom.

"No sign of any hostiles." Master Sergeant Hardwood, the flight engineer added. "No wait; four armed men at 7 o'clock."

Clancy twisted round in his seat to see. The men dressed in various uniforms were watching them, but none of them seemed to be showing hostile intent.

"More, this side." March added, swinging his gun round onto them.

Clancy twisted the other way. "What they doing?"

"Nothin' just watching us."

"Well Kim, your call."

"Looks friendly enough. I'm taking her in."

She slipped the Stallion sideways and pulled her into a hover over the snow-covered fields just beyond the ditches. The whine of the engines became overwhelmed by the thump of the huge rotor blades beating the air. Sanders scanned the field for a reference point in the field to land on, found one, and slowly the chopper descended onto it. The small crowd of onlookers had gathered on the edge of the ditches, turned their backs against the blizzard of snow and

ice thrown up by her down draught, whipping their coats, shawls and cloaks around their necks. The Babe touched down and sunk up to her belly in the deep snow.

Rutowski lifted his head up from the snow drift as the monstrous helicopter landed alongside the town. It had appeared over the top of the hills, moving low and fast. The wind had kept the sound away from them until it was upon them. It turned over the lake and came back virtually right over head. The roar of the engines had scared the horses. Two of them had bolted, while the third was rearing and bucking at its reins.

Rutowski looked back at Sergeant Krivda, who was doing his best to calm the lone animal down, then in the direction his tanks were waiting. They were parked up less than a mile away amongst the bare trees of the forest.

"Downski." He said quietly. "Relay orders to all vehicle commanders to disperse throughout the forest and camouflage their vehicles as best they can. No more than two vehicles at any one location, but all vehicles are to maintain visual contact with at least three others. I want no fires or visible light showing of any kind. Once you've done that, take Major Kowalski and see if you can find a route from here to Feldberg. You got that?"

"Yes sir." Downski replied.

"Sergeant." Rutowski continued. "I want three men here to watch that helicopter. I want to know the instant it takes off. Okay, let's go and find these horses."

Carter glanced sideways at Sims. "Big mother isn't it." He yelled over the roar of the engines.

Sims grunted in agreement.

The engines shut down and the haze of snow and ice died away along with the noise. The Stallion's long faded U.S. Marine markings were still visible under the hurriedly painted winter whitewash. Sims figured it had been abandoned by them when they pulled out last year. He stepped down into the field with Carter and Campbell behind him, wondering what it brought with it.

Clancy stepped out of the side door, zipping up his parka. "Which one of you guys is this MAJOR?" He asked as they approached.

"Who?" Sims asked.

"He's not here at the moment." Campbell answered.

"So, where the hell is he?" Clancy asked.

"I'm Lieutenant Sims." Sims replied. "This is Sergeant Campbell and Corporal Carter."

"Sir." Campbell saluted casually, whilst Carter kept his hands in his pocket seemingly unimpressed.

"Captain Clancy, British Army Air Corps." He replied buckling his gun belt round the waist of his parker, ignoring them both. "So, where is he then?"

Before Sims could answer they were interrupted by the reconnaissance platoon disembarking from the Stallion's rear door. "Hey, it's the LT." One shouted when they saw Sims, and Kneale and the remains of RED FOX 4 crowded round, greeting him with hearty claps on the back and ritual handshakes. Kneale spoke for them all. "Good to see you again, Simmie."

"Where is this damned MAJOR?" Clancy asked again, his temper becoming a little short.

"Campbell!" Sims shouted across to him. "Where is he?"

"In the hospital, I think," Campbell replied. "I can take you Captain."

"I'm to see him and Lieutenant Sims together," Clancy informed them.

"Oh right," Sims didn't look impressed. "Kneale, get your men out. Talk to Carter, he'll tell you where to go." Then he turned to Clancy and Campbell. "This way?" And started towards the defensive ditch.

Clancy looked back at Sanders stood behind him in the doorway. "Hey, Kim. Gonna find this MAJOR. Look after my Babe."

Sims led Clancy through the defensive dykes and into the shanty town. On top of one dyke, a group of children watched them. Experience had taught them that the arrival of a helicopters and troops usually meant one of two things, food or death. They'd watched the newcomers from the safety of half closed doors, only crawling out once it was clear which they'd brought with them. This one had food. One of them stepped up to Clancy and tugged at his sleeve. He looked at the boy, stood motionless looking back at him. Staring with eyes bulging from his gaunt face, saliva dribbling from the corner of his grinning mouth.

Clancy pulled his arm away from the kid's hand and followed Sims off the dyke. "Shit! Somebody's made a mess of this place." He said noticing the flattened huts.

"You're not kidding," Sims replied, continuing through the shacks.

An old woman hobbled up to them, babbling in German. Clancy recognised a few words, the swear words. She spat on the snow in front of him in disgust, swearing and cursing again at him as she hobbled away.

"What's up with her?" Clancy asked.

"What do you think?" He nodded towards the burned out hull of the BMP. "They've already had the Russians come storming through here, and it's a good guess more ain't that far away. What do you think they'll do when they see your bird sat out there?"

"Hey, it 'ant my fault. I'm only delivering the troops."

"But these people don't see it that way. They just see you turn up in that monster to steal their food."

The smell of the hospital struck Clancy as he entered. The stench of stale antiseptic and damp linen clung to everything. The place had calmed down a lot. No longer were the staff indulged in mere firefighting action to stem the flow of casualties, now they were engrossed in the long-term treatment of them.

Most of the minor casualties that had swelled the place to nearly bursting point, had been patched up and gone back to their units leaving only the worst ones behind, and most of them shared their beds with the children from the wrecked ward. Sims pushed open the door to Jane's office and looked in. She'd been used it as sleeping quarters and clothes and other personal effects lay scattered about the place.

Clancy pushed his way passed him and looked round. A couple of Jane's dresses hung on the back of a chair, her underwear on the floor beneath it. Straczynski's backpack and webbing heaped in a corner. But no Straczynski.

"This MAJOR a woman?" Clancy asked picking up a dress.

"No, they belong to the girl he's bedding down with," He motioned Clancy out and closed the door behind him.

"Well, where the hell will he be?" Clancy looked peeved. "I don't want to hang around here for too long. If things are as bad as you say, the sooner we get out the way, the better."

Gill pushed her way between them both, carrying an armful of soiled linen.

"Nurse, where is Straczynski?" Sims asked her.

"He's outside at Jane's bus." She said, briefly looking Clancy up and down, before continuing on her way.

"Hey, who's the blonde?" He quietly asked Sims once she was gone.

"One of the nurses. Her name's Gill I think."

Clancy smiled, "Tasty piece." He didn't seem to be in as much of a hurry now. Sims started out towards the main entrance. Clancy stood for a while watching Gill. "Very tasty."

Gill glanced back at him.

"Who's the creep?" Helen asked her as they meet.

"I don't know. Pilot from the helicopter I guess." Gill looked at her. "And I think he's pretty cute."

"Captain, are you coming?" Sims stopped halfway to the doors.

"Yeah, sure,"

He glanced back at the two nurses, then followed Sims.

Outside, the wind was starting to pick up, blowing the loose snow round the wrecked BMP and across the opening. On the far side stood the crumpled remains of Jane's bus. The BMP still lodged in its' side, back door swinging in the wind.

"Straczynski!" Sims shouted through the buses open door.

"Yes." Came the reply from the gloomy interior.

"Someone here to see you."

He appeared at the door.

"This is Captain Clancy." Sims introduced him. "He's been sent here by Colonel Jones."

"Christ, you are a God dam Russkie!" Clancy stepped back warily at the sight of his uniform.

"Yes, that's right." Straczynski replied stepping onto the snow.

Clancy pulled two envelopes out of his flying suit pocket. "Er, the Colonel asked me to give you both these." He handed them both a sealed envelope.

Straczynski took his. "Thank you Captain."

He read the front of it while Sims tore his envelope open and read the single sheet inside.

Z160013ZJAN

FM: KINGFISHER.

TO: RED FOX 4

1. Situation.

a, Large Russian offensive into Eastern Germany confirmed.

b, British Armoured Division taking up defensive positions along the eastern edge of the containment zone.

c, RED FOX 2 gone to ground. Believed to be in the area close to Friedland, possibly heading towards Pasewalk.

d, RED FOX 4 at platoon strength. Use Campbell as section sergeant.

2. Orders.

a, Proceed by helicopter to LZ. at Jatznick.

b, Locate RED FOX 2, last contact at Friedland, at Z070013ZJAN.

c, On contact being made Radio for immediate dust-off.

Jones.

Sims folded the orders. "We're bugging out at 0800hrs tomorrow. Your chopper is at my disposal. Have it prepped and ready to go by 0700. RF-2 has gone to ground and Jones want's 'em found. Looks like you are stopping the night, Captain."

"No problem." Clancy shuffled uneasily. He wasn't quiet sure what to make of Straczynski yet. All his life he'd been brainwashed into believing he was the boogie man sent to reap chaos on the civilised world. And now he'd come face to face a real live Russian, he'd found he wasn't a three headed monster but a white haired old man wearing a tatty Russian uniform. Just like any old man he'd met.

"I erm, managed to scrounge up a few medical supplies and a bit of food for this place." Clancy continued. "The Colonel said you might need it."

"Talk to Sergeant Campbell or Corporal Carter, they'll tell you were to put it." Straczynski told them.

Sims grunted and started to leave.

Clancy saluted. "Sir." He learnt enough about Russians to know Straczynski was wearing Major General pips.

Straczynski held out his hand, after a seconds hesitation Clancy reluctantly shook it. "I don't think he likes you." He said quietly.

Straczynski glanced after Sims. "I know. What are you opinions?"

Clancy hesitated. "I'm not sure, yet. Sir." He saluted again and left.

Straczynski watched him go before looking round at the wrecked bus. He stepped back inside and picked up the bundle of blankets he'd dropped just inside and carrying it out. The wind whipped a cloud of snow a into his face as he crossed the open ground between the hospital and the bus. It looked like they we're in for a blizzard.

The wind was getting up back at the Stallion. The rotor blades were flapping by two to three feet and the crowd of onlookers had gone, seeking shelter. Sanders and Carter watched as the two squads unloaded the last box of supplies and carried it into the town. Carter had been flattering her since he'd laid eyes on her. It had been a long time since someone had treated her as anything more then a special forces pilot. Woody; Hardwood, had made sure of that, warning off any potential takers. The big man acted like a brother to her, but sometimes she was glad he wasn't around. Hardwood was the only other survivor from the Palestine mission, and he and Kim shared the sort of kindred bond that only came through baptisms of fire. Fortunately he was busy with the unloading, and Carter was treating her like a woman. She'd originally resisted his advances, but now she was starting to weaken.

Carter looked across as Clancy returned with Sims. "Well, Do you reckon you staying or not?" He asked her.

"Don't know, that's up to the Captain." She was hoping they would because she was thinking she might let him. She walked out to meet Clancy.

"We getting out of here, or what?" She held the hood of her parker half across her face.

"No. We're staying over night. Get my Babe sheeted down before this blizzard gets up." He walked passed her and climbed aboard.

Sanders smiled inwardly, maybe there was a God after all. Sims walked past her without saying a word.

She turned back to Carter. "Looks like you're in luck." She smiled at him then turned to the grunts. "Okay, you four morons came with me."

Straczynski dumped the bundle down on the couch before sitting down behind the desk and pulled the letter out of his jacket. He looked at the envelope again before opening it.

Z160013ZJAN

FM: KINGFISHER.

TO: MAJOR.

1. Situation.

a, Confirm large Russian activity in East Germany.

b, British Armoured Division being mobilised, seeing this as a threat to security of the containment zone.

2. Orders.

a, C in C sees this as a new offensive by Russian Western Command. Information I have points toward small independent actions by several divisions that use to make up the Russian 1st, 2nd and 20th Armies. Believe you know more about this than you are telling. Please return to Hamburg aboard Stallion.

Jones.

Jane walked into the room. He looked up at her expecting to see her smiling face. Instead he found her close to tears. "What's up?" He asked.

"Cas Redbridge." She muttered. "I've just lost her on the table."

"I'm sorry."

She tore off her smock then wrapped her arms around his shoulders and burring her face in his neck. After a few minutes she pulled away. "What's that?" She asked pointing at the envelope.

"Orders."

"Does that mean you're leaving again?" She asked walking round the desk. He looked up into her dark eyes but didn't answer. She read that as yes. "When? Tonight."

"Tomorrow." He folded the orders and pushed them back inside his jacket.

"Kurt going with you too?"

"Yes."

"What's going on Misha? You're going back to Poland aren't you."

"No."

"Yes you are, you lying bastard, you're going back to fucking Poland." She said firmly, leaning over the desk, looking at him. "Aren't you!"

"No."

"Then I'm coming with this time."

"No. Jane you can't." He stood up. "For God sake, your eight months pregnant. I cannot drag you around the countryside in that condition. Especially now -"

"Especially now what?" She snapped. "What? Why now?"

"God sake girl. Have you seen what's going on out there?" He snapped back at her. "One of our Motorised Rifle Division have just nearly flattened your hospital. They did not do it for no reason. Now what do you thinks happening?"

"And that's it? That's the only reason?"

He hesitated.

"That's not it is it. What else is there? You're not leaving me here." She hammered her fists on the top of it in anger. "Not this time! Not this bloody time. Not without you telling me why!"

"Jane, I can't take you." He replied gently, stepping round the desk to her.

She wiped a tears of anger away from her eyes. "You're not leaving me here again! You can't!" She snatched up an ornament from the desk and slung it across the room. It hit the far wall and shattering. "Not this time!"

He placed his hands on her shoulders. "I am not leaving you here, I am going to arrange for you to be flown back to Hamburg." He voice was still calmly.

She pulled away and walked over to the shattered ornament. "That's not what I mean." She slowly knelt down and started picking it up. Straczynski joined her. Carefully collecting the pieces of broken pottery.

"I can't take you with me. It's too dangerous. If I do, I've got to assign a man to look after you. I've already lost all my men, I've only Kurt left. I've lost a lot of friends already and I'm not going to loose you as well. Come on Jane, please start thinking with you head. You are over eight months pregnant. You could go into labour at any moment. I can't risk that happening out there." He picked the last piece up and stood up. He held out his arm to help her up. She took hold of it to steady herself as she rose. "You will be safe in Hamburg." He continued. "This mission won't take more then two or three days. As soon as we find McKenzie's unit -"

"McKENZIE!" She slung the handful of pieces across the room as her temper broke again. "THAT BITCH! It's always her." She thumped him, pushing him away from her. "You're always thinking about her. She's always more important then me."

He was taken back by her reaction to that name. He opened his mouth to say something, but the right words didn't come. "It will only take two or three days to find her. Then I'll be back with you."

Jane walked away from him. "I love you, can't you see that, are you so blind? I've always loved you Misha, we could be so happy together. Please Misha, don't leave me."

He didn't know what to say, the words failed him totally. He knew that no matter what he said Jane wouldn't hear anything she didn't want to hear, still he had to try and make her understand. "Jane -" He began "It's not -" He began again. Jane turned round and starred back at him, her eyes full of tears. He couldn't lie to her. "I'm sorry." He moved quickly to the door. "I've got to see Sims." He spoke softly but uneasily to her. "I won't be long."

He left her again. He always left her just when she needs him the most.

CHAPTER TEN

Goodman gashed his hand against the bulkhead as the spanner slipped from the nut. His temper finally broke and he hurled the spanner as far as he could, accompanied by a stream of abuse. McKenzie dragged her hair from her eyes, smearing grease across her forehead, not saying anything. She looked up as he wiped his bleeding knuckles on his trousers. "I've got to

find the bastard thing now, haven't I!" He dropped down off the BTR and started of in the direction the spanner had gone, cursing the extra work he'd just created for himself.

McKenzie breathed a sigh of despair. She wasn't surprised he'd got so angry, she was surprised he'd remained as calm for as long as he did. It had been the same with every vehicles they'd stolen, lack of maintenance on behalf of the previous owner. Wrong tools for the job, rounded nuts, stripped threads.... The list was endless.

The gearbox had started playing up earlier that day. Second gear went first, closely followed by the others, until all they had left was third. Daark did the best he could to keep them rolling until the deep snow and wooded terrain proved to much and it stalled. Daark tried to get them moving again, over revving the engines and slipping the clutch until the strain of moving the 14 ton armoured personnel carrier proved to much. She blamed herself, if she'd been a bit steadier in Friedland this might not have happened, well not for a few more miles anyway.

Leaning forward and resting her chin on the hull and reflected on their situation. They were fairly well hidden at the moment, the trees gave reasonable cover from all sides and that was something to be thankful for. All they needed now was a fresh fall of snow to cover their tracks and they'd be safe again.

She rolled over, sat up and watched Goodman. He was kicking about in the snow looking for the spanner. Landers emerged from the trees behind him, returning from scouting out the surrounding woods. Goodman looked across at her as she walked past and waved half hearted. She wave back and headed towards the fire. McKenzie slid off the hull and joined her. "Anything?" She asked.

Landers shuck her head as she crouched by the fire and warmed her hands. "Nothing so far. Matt's setting a few snares to see if we can catch something to eat." She glanced over her shoulder at Goodman. "What's he looking for?"

"Spanner."

"No luck then."

McKenzie shuck her head. "Nah. It looks terminal."

Landers stuck her cold hands into her pockets and walked over to the BTR. "Did you find out what's wrong?"

"Yeah, the gearbox crankcase has cracked. It's not even the proper gearbox for this thing. It's one out of a truck and has been fitted in the field. They didn't do a bad job really, it just not up to the torque from the twin engines or the pounding we gave it."

"How much oil we lost?" She looked down at the black/brown slurry in the hull bottom.

"Most of it. It's all sitting down there."

"Can we safe any of it?"

McKenzie shrugged.

"Guess not." She looked back at Goodman. He was still scratching around in the snow searching for the spanner. She nudged McKenzie who turned round and also looked at him.

"What is it?"

"Matt." She pointed at Daark as he crept up on Goodman through the trees. They lent back against the BTR and watched.

Goodman kicked the snow off a bush he was stood next to and looked back at them. "Typical." He muttered. "Trust them to be stood around talking while I'm did all the work." His foot kicked the spanner deeper into the snow and bent down to pick it up.

At that moment Daark pounced, leaping onto his back and thrusting a handful of snow into his face. Both McKenzie and Landers burst into hoots of laughing as Goodman lashing out, but Daark was well out of reach and joined in their laughter.

"What the fuck you playing at?" he spat, dragging the snow from his collar. "You thick or something?"

Daark backed away chuckling to himself. "You looked a bit hot under the collar."

"Fuck-off Matt!" He scooped up a handful of snow and chucked it at him. He ducked away and the snowball passed harmlessly over head. Daark glanced round at McKenzie and Goodman's second snowball court him on the side of his head. He scooped up more snow and hurled it at him, before stumbled over a hidden root and fell. Goodman lunged forward, pinning him down and thrusting a handful of snow into his face. Daark spat out a mouthful of snow and glanced across at the BTR. Goodman saw him and a mischievous smile formed on their lips as the same idea formed in both their minds. Discreetly picking up a hand full of snow each, he stood up and helped Daark up. They both turned towards the two women.

McKenzie stopped laughing first, the innocent expression on Daark's face warning her they were up to something. Landers stopped a few seconds later. "Matt." She said warily.

He smiled.

"I'm warning you Matt." McKenzie continued. "It's a court-martial offence."

Daark and Goodman glanced across at each other. Then, letting out a load battle cry, they lunged forward onto them, showering them both with handfuls of snow. They relapsed into screeches and yells of delight as they indulged in the childish fun of a snowball fight, momentarily forgetting their worries.

"Check point." Harris slowed as they approached the two Saxons. A soldier flagged them down and they stopped beside him to show their ID cards.

"We've got a disturbance ahead." The soldier said. "It's not big yet, but there's nothin' to stop it heading that way. It's up to you whether you want to risk it."

"We'll chance it." Jones answered.

"Very well sir. Our lads will escort you through." The soldier saluted them.

Harris pulled away and one of the Saxons fell in behind them following them.

Despite being after curfew, they caught the occasional glimpse of people scurrying through the dark streets heading towards the demonstration before disappearing into nearby alley ways or buildings as soon as they saw the two vehicles.

As they draw nearer the noise grew louder. Like a football match, it was a chant. A single word repeated in unison, shouted by thousands of voices.

They turned another corner and were confronted by a barricade. Not a strong one; it had been hastily constructed from old car bodies with furniture and doors piled around them. The Saxon could have cleared the flimsy structure in one go. But never the less it was a barricade that was denying them access. They stopped, the Saxon doors flew open and its squad charged out onto the barricade, their Lieutenant barking orders at them. Jones opened his door and was hit by the full force of the chant. It was deafening. The word they were shouting was incoherent but made the ground itself reverberate with its intensity. He stepped out of the car, picking up his Colt Commando and followed the troop.

On the far side a large bonfire illuminated the surrounding building. The crowd that milled around it was larger than he'd expected, a moving sea of people.

"What do you reckon." The squad's lieutenant shouted at him. "Two or three thousand?"

"At least." Jones replied. They were civilians. Ordinary people, standing, chanting, clad in ragged clothes and carrying home-made weapons; knife, pikes and crude firearms. He studied them looking for the ringleader. This wasn't a demonstration. This was going to be a riot. It had that feeling about it. "Lieutenant, get on the radio and call up some back up before this thing escalates!" He yelled at him over the roar of the crowd.

The Lieutenant climbed down off the barricade, towards the Saxon. Then he stopped, turned and shouted something back at him, but it was lost in the noise. Something small and fast moving hit the barricade close to Jones' feet. He looked down momentarily, but not being able to see anything, looked back at the lieutenant to see him fall to his knees and keel over, a gapping hole in the side of his head. "SNIPER!" Jones bellowed.

The warning came too late. A short burst of automatic fire tore across the top of the barricade before turning on the crowd. Several longer bursts followed, cutting down men, women and children where they stood. The chants turned to screams of panic as the crowd scattered. Running for cover.

The firing stopped.

Jones looked up at the surrounding high-rise buildings, searching for the sniper. "One weapon?"

"Yes sir. I think so." The soldier next to him replied, scanning the buildings through the sights of his rifle. "MURDERERS!" A shout rang out in the silence.

The both looked in the direction of the shout. One man stood among the dead and dying, pointing at them.

"MURDERING BASTARDS!" He yanked the body of a little girl up and held it above his head. "See what they do to our children. First they try to starve us, THEN THEY MURDER THEM."

The crowds stirred back into life. Shock turned to anger and anger into rage.

"Sergeant, get your wounded men back into the Saxon." Jones ordered. "And lets get us some back-up out here."

His men didn't need telling. They were already heading for the Saxon, two carrying the lieutenant between them. A third followed with a wounded mate and two more with a dead one.

The man staggered towards the barricade, the child still in his arms. The crowd milling angrily behind him.

"Warning shots sir?" the Sergeant asked.

"Not yet, let's try and keep this as calm as we can." He looked back at the high-rises. The sniper could be in any one of them.

The Saxon had backed up and turned round. Harris had already had the car facing the opposite direction and was waiting by his door with his Colt in his hands.

The ringleader stop twenty feet from the foot of the barricade and held out the child to them. "See what you've done to our children!" His voice choked with emotion. He was almost pleading with them.

Behind him the crowd started chanting again, 'Murderers, murderers.' It started quietly, no more then a murmur. Then it grew louder and louder until it became a roar.

"Get ready men." The sergeant shouted to his few remaining men. "Lay down covering fire as you fall back. And let's not leave anyone behind today."

The ringleader stepped forward again. "Do you see!" He screamed.

A single shot rang out, killing the chant dead. The man tottered backwards, dropping the girl as he fell.

"MOVE IT!"

They turned and ran from the barricade as the crowd surged forward.

Harris and the Saxon's gunner laid down a burst of fire across the top of the barricade, suppressing the first rank of the crowd just long enough for Jones to get clear. He scrambled round the front of the car and in through the open door. Harris' door was already shut and the car moving before Jones was fully in. He yanked the door closed but found it jammed, a heavily set youth hung in the door way. He grabbed Jones round the throat with one hand, while hanging on with his other hand. The car lunged round a corners, following the Saxon and Jones nearly tumbled out of the door under the youths weight. He hit the youth in the stomach with the butt of the Colt and the grip loosened slightly. He clawed at the hand on his throat, prising each finger away and hit him again. This time the youth tumbled from the door and he slammed it shut, cocooning them both in steel and mesh.

Harris braked sharply as he found the road blocked by the lumbering Saxon. More youths clung to the outside, trying to prise open it's hatches.

Two youth leapt from it on the cars bonnet and grabbed the mesh covered windscreen. The big black youth with mad white eyes, yanked at the brackets that held the mesh to the body like a wild animal. While the white girl with beaded dreadlocks and multicoloured poncho, tore at the mesh with her fingers.

Harris swung the wheel right and left to try and shake them off, to try and see past them. He hit some debris that littered the road and nearly lost control. The black youth lost his footing as the car bucked and slide from the bonnet. He hung for a second by his finger tips, then was gone. With out a moments hesitation the girl swung her legs round she kicked at the mesh, cracking the glass.

A third youth leapt from the Saxon onto the bonnet, but mis-judged the distance and nearly impaling himself on the nudge bars and bouncing forward into the road. The car bucked again as it hit him and this time the girl lost her grip. She clawed at the bonnet as she started slip forward. Then from beneath her poncho she pulled a screwdriver and slammed the blade through the sheet steel bonnet, it gave her just enough grip to thrust herself back against the mesh. She gripped it with bloody fingers and plunging the screwdriver through the windscreen. Jones leapt back in his seat as the blade stopping inches away from his face.

The Saxon swung off the road, careering towards a row of houses. Harris nearly followed it until he realised the driver must have lost control. He swung back on to the road and booted the accelerator. The girls poncho billowed up across the windscreen as she plunged the screwdriver again.

The Saxon straightened up and hit the wall with a glancing blow before careering back across the road and dealing the opposite side a similar blow. Some of the rioters saw the danger coming and leapt clear. Others didn't and found themselves crushed between brick wall and Saxon body. Their broken and bloody bodies then fell away along with pieces of loose bodywork. The few remaining rioters leapt off, disheartened by their friends demise.

The girl plunged the screwdriver in a third time and Jones grabbed it with his bare hands; gashing his palm. He pulled it from her grasp. Instantly she swung her legs round and dealt the cracked screen another kick. Harris turned away as it threatened to cave in on top of him, looking back just in time to see the wall loom up in front of them. He hit the brakes, swung the wheel and prayed.

The wall caught the car on a front nearside corner, flicking them into a violent spin, scattering rubble across the frozen road surface. The girl disappeared as they hit more debris.

They came to a sudden halt.

Harris gunned the engine just keeping it from stalling. It was sounding lumpy and he feared the worst. Jones sat still in the passenger seat, his head throbbing from hitting the door and pillar and was bleeding. His eyes fell on the girl laying in front of the them. The one surviving headlight picking out the bright red of her poncho. Jones opened his door and stepped out.

"COLONEL!" Harris yelled after him. But he was already running across to her. He grabbed his Colt and stepped out of his door, scanning the surrounding ruins. The Barmbek District, Harris cursed. "Shit Colonel, this isn't a good place." Barmbek had seen the brunt of the previous years rioting and most of the buildings were no more than burnt out shells roamed by gun totting youth gangs.

Jones crouched down next to her. He could see her trembling, trying to cry out, but the effort only produced more pain. The left side of her face, her ear and scalp had been torn off right down to the bone.

He gently touched her cheek and her eyes shot round onto him, locking onto his eyes.

"Colonel, for God sake!" Harris yelled.

"She's still alive Karl." He yelled back at him. "We can't leave her." He glanced down at her body. It was then he realised the red in her poncho was not part of the pattern, but blood. He lifted the sodden material. Underneath she was soaked with blood. Her arm lay across her chest, the fractured end of a bone stuck out through the flesh, and a leg lay twisted under her.

Harris scanned the buildings again, conscious they were being watched. "This is fuckin' stupid." Illuminated by the one surviving headlight, they were an ideal target for a sniper. "Sir, we've got to go!" He reached his side.

"We can't leave her here. She's still alive."

Harris looked at her. "She's gonna be dead by dawn, we have to leave, now!"

Her hand touched Jones' and he took it in his and squeezed it gently. She was trying to say something, but could only manage a gargled moan. Yet her eyes remained fixed on his with such strength and determination that he couldn't turn away.

"Christ sake Colonel, she'll be dead before long. We've got to get going!" Harris' voice was tense.

"I'm not leaving her. I can't leave her out here on her own. She could take hours to bleed to death."

The headlight of the Saxon caught Harris' attention as it making it's way towards them. He hadn't expected to see it again. He looked back at the car, then around at the surrounding buildings, still aware of being watched.

"Karl. Haven't we all suffered enough? Hasn't she?" Jones looked at him. "Doesn't she deserve a little pity."

"Christ sake Colonel, she tried to kill you."

"KARL!"

Harris starred back at him for what seemed like several minutes, then he turned back to the girl and gently stroked the right side of her face. He pulling his pistol out of it's holster and cocking it and placed it close to the side of her head. Jones felt her hand tightened in his and she closed her eyes. Harris pulled the trigger and the deed was done.

Drew watched the two vehicles disappeared from sight before he climbing down from his vantage point in a half demolished house. The girl now lay at the side of the road were the old man had laid her. The unshaven soldier had drag a blanket from the rubble and lay it over her before they left. He lent down beside her, taking hold of one corner of the blanket and pulled it away. Her head lay to one side as if sleeping except for a neat bullet hole just in front of her right ear. He looked at the blood soaked poncho, it was heavy and warm, yet it didn't seem right taking it from her. The two soldiers had treated her body with such respect considering she'd just tried to kill them. He wondered if she would have done the same for them. He looked up as a dozen former rioters trudged wearily towards him. One of them carried a machine gun while four others supported a friend on a make shift stretcher.

"There she is!" Galloway, the one with the gun, hollered. He ran forward, pushing Drew away from the body. "Mary!" He shuck her. "MARY!"

"She's dead." Drew told him.

Her head rolled over and Galloway saw the gapping wound.

"Oh my god!" One of the girls uttered from behind him.

"Jesus!" mumbled another.

Galloway threw her back down, visible angered.

"It was the two soldiers, in the car." Drew blurted out fearing he would turn on him.

"I saw her on the car." Said the girl.

"She was with Smit." Said another.

Galloway ripped the blanket out of Drew's hand and laid it back over her face. "We'll bury her." He told them.

"Where?" Someone asked.

"In there." Galloway said pointing at the house.

They moved her inside and laid bricks over her until she was covered. Then they left in silence. Drew walked with them.

He walked beside the girl holding one corner of the stretcher. "What happened to him?" He asked.

"He was ran over him." He'd been crushed under the Saxon wheels as he leapt off it. Poor bastard, he wouldn't live for more than a couple of days.

Daark slumped down next to the fire, brushing off the loose snow from his hair and jacket. Landers joined him, crouching close to him, warming her hands over the fire. He put his arms round her and she slumped back against him.

Goodman knelt down opposite them, holding his hands inches from the flames. "Who's stupid idea was it to have a friggin' snowball fight?" He asked the world in general. McKenzie glanced across at Daark, who shrugged innocently at her.

"What we doing about the BTR?" Landers eventually asked her.

"It's fucked." Goodman told them.

"No kidding." Daark sniggered.

Landers nudged him in the ribs. "We're being serious."

"Yeah." McKenzie said. "She's defiantly a no go-er. We'll dump the thing and head out on foot -"

"For Pasewalk?" Landers interrupted.

McKenzie nodded. "Yeah, Pasewalk. Find out what's going on out here, then piss off home."

"I'm in for that." Landers commented. "God, just think of it, clean underwear, clothes that don't smell. Christ, it's almost too good to be true."

McKenzie lent forward. "You know what I'm gonna do when we get back? Have a long hot shower, I'm gonna strip off and stand under the thing for a whole friggin' hour. And I don't give a shit what else is going on."

"Yeah, then crawl into that bunk of mine and sleep." Landers added.

Daark glanced across at Goodman. "Guess we don't figure in their plans."

Goodman gave him a half smile. "Guess not." He stood and walked over to the BTR. "I'm gonna get me head down. I'm knackered." He clambered inside and crawled forward to his sleeping bag. He'd had enough of sitting about in the cold, since he'd got shot he seemed to feel it more than he used to. He pulled the sleeping bag around him and slumped down against the hull and closed his eyes.

Almost before sleep had taken him he was woken by Landers climbing through the hatch. He tried to ignore her as she moved about, seemingly deliberately noisily. He pulled the edge of his sleeping bag higher.

"Did I wake you?" she enquired.

"Not yet," he muttered, shuffling to get comfortable.

"Good, 'cos there's something I've been meaning to ask you."

"What is it?"

"Last year, during the push, you were on the Central flank weren't you."

"Yeah, we were with the 5th Division at Kalisz. My unit were the advance group who held the river crossing at Scinawa until the Russians whipped us out."

"Not many of you made it out, did you."

"Me, a few others. They pretty well wasted us."

"So I don't get it. Why'd you stay with us when we reached Berlin? Surely they could have found a space for a colonel of your experience."

"I didn't want one. I lost every last man in my unit and after that I didn't want another."

"So you stayed with us, a third rate recon unit under the command of a washed out captain."

"She's the boss, she runs the unit."

"Come on Goodman, a US Army colonel taking orders off a British captain."

"What's your point Landers?"

"Why you kicking around with us."

"You know why, my unit got wasted."

"That's bullshit, I got talking to Staff sergeant Coombs last year. He was also at Scinawa. The name mean anything to you? It should, he was Colonel Richard Goodman's driver."

"What you trying to say Landers." He pushed his sleeping bag away. "Come on what you trying to say?"

"He told me Colonel Goodman took a bullet in the head. He said it blow his brains all over the windscreen of his Hummer. Now I know you ain't got any brains, but I don't see any bullet hole." She hit him across the side of the head.

He swiped her hand away. "I am Colonel Rik Goodman. My unit, the 6th Light Infantry, stood to the last man at Scinawa, we held the river crossing to the last fuckin' man!"

"And you weren't one of them. Richard Goodman's dead. So how the fuck are you?"

"Colonel Rik Goodman!"

"He's dead. His fuckin' head was blown off holding Scinawa. He left a wife and three kids. I know, I checked. I spoke to Coombs and the seven others survivors. They don't know you. They've never even seen you."

"What's the problem?" McKenzie demanded from the hatch.

"It's nothing!" Goodman snapped.

"Bullshit!" Landers protested. "He ain't Goodman. Colonel Richard Goodman is dead. He was killed -"

"Shut the fuck up Landers. Just shut the fuck up!"

"It's bullshit, all this colonel crap -"

"Get outside, Goodman." McKenzie ordered.

"You know fuck all Landers, so just shut the fuck up!"

"Goodman piss off out of here." McKenzie turned to him. "NOW!" He throw his sleeping bag aside and forced his way past them. Then she turned back to Landers. "I already know." She told her.

"What do you mean you know. You let some fucked up wacko into the unit. Christ captain, I've been checking up on him. He ain't no Colonel, he wasn't at Scinawa. No-one knows who the hell is he?"

"So what. So fuckin' what, Fran. So he's screwed up and living in his own fantasy world. Jesus Christ, who isn't screwed up these days. What matters is he can handle a rifle and he'll do what I tell him too."

Landers kicked his sleeping bag across the carrier. "So who is he?"

"His real name's Bill Nash, he's a private in the US 50th Armoured Division. He was assigned to the German 3rd Army with you lot."

"How come we picked him up at Swiebodzin."

"I don't know, how come we ended up there? Maybe he got scared and ran. I don't know and I don't care. I checked his name out, he's down as missing presumed dead." She saw the expression Landers gave her. "Come on Fran, you know how quickly we go through people in this unit. I need all I can get."

"So what about the real Goodman? How do he got hold of his dog-tags and papers."

"It doesn't matter."

"And what about his wife and kids? Doesn't it matter to them."

"I don't know Fran. They're six million mile away from here. They could be dead for all we know. So what's it matter?"

"It matters!"

"Yes Fran, it should matter, and maybe next year it will. But not here and not now. I don't know. I don't have all the answers."

Harris nursed the car through the Citadel's gate and into one of the big transit sheds, stopping next to the Blackhawk Heartless. He killed the clattering engine and sat in silence for a few seconds reflecting on what he'd just done. Her blood still stained his hands, somehow he felt no matter how many time he washed them they would never be clean again. He felt knotted inside, it was the hardest thing he had ever done, yet it had come so easy, so dam easy.

Opened his door and stepped out to inspect the damage to the car. They'd lost a headlight and the nudge bars were wrecked, and the rear bumper had been ripped off revealing dented and scared bodywork.

"How bad is it?" Jones joined him.

Harris popped the bonnet catch, but it remained fast. "Knackered." He took a steel bar from across the shed and prised the bodywork apart.

"Can you fix it." Jones wasn't a mechanic, he wouldn't know the starter motor from the alternator.

He held the bonnet open, steam spurted out of the split radiator, oil dripped from a crack in the sump and buckled body panels intruded into the engine compartment. "Yeah, it'll take a bit of time though." He dropped the bonnet and bits of broken steel and glass fell off. "The headlight and windscreen are going to take some finding. But providing I 'ant done too much damage to the engine or the suspension, I should have her up and running by late tomorrow. I'll take one of the Land Rovers and see what I can scrounge up for her."

Jones nodded in agreement. "Okay, but watch yourself." He picked up his briefcase from behind the front seat and started towards the office doors.

Harris watched him for short while. Then kicked his door closed and followed him, trying to whistling cheerfully to himself.

Jones held the fire door open for him and held out his briefcase. "Dump this in the office. I'll sign us in and get this hand looked at."

Harris continued down the corridor and up the stairs towards Louise's office. He looked in, but she wasn't there. A cup of coffee stood on her desk and he picked it up and took a sip, it was still warm. Taking another sip as he continued towards Jones' office. Pushed the half opened door out of his way and - "Shit!" He dropped the cup and case onto a cabinet and pulled out his Beretta pistol. His eyes scanning the ransacked office for intruders. Louise laying in the middle of the floor, unconscious or dead he couldn't tell, cabinets drawers hung open and the plastic window covering flapped in the wind that blow papers all over the floor. "Louise!" He moved to her, scanned the room again. He rolled her over, touching her warm face. "Come on girl, talk to me." He grabbed the phone from the desk above him. A woman answered at the other end. "Security, the Colonel's office, now! We've got intruders."

Jones appeared at the door seconds later, pistol in hand.

"They're gone I think."

"How is she?" He asked scanning the office. Once happy that on-one was lurking in any dark corners, he holstered his pistol.

"She's okay I think." He lifted her to her feet and lent her against the map table as she started to come round.

"Did they come through the window?" Jones asked walking towards the torn plastic.

"I don't know sir." Harris answered gave the window a quick glance. "But this isn't someone on the scrounge. She all right?"

Her eyes flickered as she started to come round. "What's happened?" She murmured.

"We were hoping you could tell us."

"Karl, over here." Jones called from the window.

"Lay still, I'll be back in a minute." He joined him at the window. "Over there, by the warehouse." He pointed out.

Harris studied the burnt out shell of the warehouse lit up by the Citadel's arc lights. "The three men stood just inside it?"

"Yes. The one on the left, isn't that Polmer."

"What, the DIA man?" Louise uttered from behind.

"Yes." Jones turned to her, stood against the map table cradling her head in her arms. "You all right?"

"Yeah, my head hurts."

Looked back at the men. "That looks like him. Hard to tell in this light." Jones continued watching them while Harris turned his attention to the slashed plastic. "This stuff was cut from inside and in a hurry as well." He pointed out the knife marks on the inside of the window frame. Jones agreed.

The three men in the warehouse turned up their collars and stepped out into the open. The last man, Polmer, stopped for a second and looked across at The Citadel and held his hand up for a moment to shield his eyes from the lights, then followed the other two.

Jones watched him until he was out of sight. There actions didn't make any sense to him. If Polmer had just turned over his office, why had he hung around and why did they walk out to be seen from the Citadel? He studied the tracks leading away from beneath the window. Karl was right. Two men had leapt from the window and ran for the security fence, through a hole they'd cut in it. Then over to the warehouse. One of them had landed awkwardly in the snow by the look of the uneven stride. He made a mental note to step up the fence patrols. He turned back to Louise. "What happened?"

She rubbed the back of her head, gentle touching the lump that was forming. "I don't really know. I walked in here and they both jumped me."

"There was two of them?" He asked her.

"Yeah, just two. They were rummaging through your desk, and the filing cabinets."

Sergeant Anderson entered the office, followed by three of the Citadels guards.

"It's all secure here." Harris told him.

"What the hell kept you." Jones snapped.

"Sorry sir." Anderson glanced round the office. "They come in though the window?"

"No. That's the way they went out." Jones answered. "Get a section to secure the fence before we get any more unwanted visitors." Anderson snapped the order to one of the guards who promptly disappeared out of the door. "Then I want to know how they got in here without anyone seeing them."

Jones walked over to the desk and rummaged through the mass of paper scattered over it and the surrounding floor. It was impossible to tell what had been taken.

"What were they after?" He looked across at Louise. "Where's McKenzie's telex?"

"It's on your desk." She replied. "In a brown file along with the choppers fuel receipts."

"Receipts are here, but no telex." He held them up to show her.

"It must be." She started rummaging through the desk.

Harris started rummaging through one of the open cabinets. "Couple of her files are gone as well."

"Which one?"

Harris flicked through the files again. "Malbork, and Regensburg."

"What else is missing?" Jones looked round the office again. "You two check to see what else they took. I'm going to see what our DIA friends were so interested in. Sergeant Anderson, bring a section and come with me." Jones headed out of the office, the sergeant following.

It wasn't hard to find. Palmer hadn't even bothered to hide his handy work. Two men, dressed in civvies, lay on the ground inside the warehouse for them to find. "Secure the area." Anderson ordered his men. The section obeyed. Anderson rolled one of the bodies over. "Shot through the back of the head."

"Any I.D.?" Jones asked, not recognising the face.

The Sergeant rifled through his pockets. "An automatic, knife and plan of The Citadel. No I.D." Anderson handed the plans to Jones. They had been hand drawn but were very detailed, showing the location of Jones' office, Ops and the radio room. as well as how to get there avoiding the sentries. "This one's still alive." Anderson rolled the other body over onto his back. This man had a large knife wound in the chest.

Jones knew his face but couldn't place it; though the man did seem to recognise him, he could see it in his eyes. Anderson rifled his pockets as well, pulling out another automatic. But again, no I.D.

"That it?" Jones asked.

Anderson nodded. "Yes sir. Except this." He picked up a blood-soaked photo that lay on the ground next to the man.

Jones took it. It was from McKenzie's file and showed her and Straczynski, taken by an SIS operative during her stay in Moscow.

The man garbled something and tried to grab it. Jones tucked the photo into a pocket then grabbed him by his collar and hauled him up, slamming him back against a wall. "Okay, who are you working for?"

The impact knocked the wind out of him, spluttering out a mouth full of blood, he swore at Jones in German.

"Don't get cocky with me sonny." Jones hit him against the wall again. His name was starting to form in the back of his mind.

The man's eyes flicked across the warehouse as the section made their way back.

"Area's clean, sir." One of the soldiers said as he joined them. "Nothing to report."

"Sergeant, I think we're finished here. Take your men and secure the compound." Jones glanced at Anderson. "I'll finish off here by myself."

Anderson hesitated for a moment. "Yes sir." He saluted. "You heard the man, let's go." The section shouldered their rifles and started back to the Citadel, leaving Jones alone with the man.

Jones waited until the section was out of sight, then threw the man to the floor. "Okay, let's stop pissing about. Tell me who you are working for?"

"Get fucked!" The man croaked.

Jones smiled. "Your American." That's right, the name was coming, Hof... Hofman, no. "Hofler. That's it, CIA. You still working for them?"

"I don't know what you're on about." Hofler coughed up another mouthful of blood.

"You're CIA. McKenzie blew your C.O. away five months ago. Is that why you pulled her files? You after the pay-out on her head?" Jones dragged him up to his feet again. "Don't mess me about or I might just do the same to you."

"You know fuck all Jones. You're getting into a whole lot of shit you know fuck all about, and it's starting to piss a few people off." He coughed again. "Just pull your people out before they come looking for you next."

Jones looked at him thoughtfully. "Who? The Russians?"

Hofler didn't answer.

"Who?"

"Work it out for yourself."

"Okay, let us start with a simple question. Who's the new CIA chief?"

"Keep out of it, Jones. Go back home, go back to England and leave it alone."

Jones pulled out his automatic and cocked it. "Tell me."

"No."

Jones pointed the pistol at Hofler's foot and pulled the trigger. He let out a cry and dropped to the floor, rolling about with his hands on his foot. "Bastard, you've fuckin' shot my foot!"

"Tell me!"

"Renzetti, It's Renzetti." He yelled. "Joe Renzetti."

Jones smiled, he knew this man. They'd had dealing before. "And the interest in McKenzie?"

"I don't. I was only following orders."

"WHY MCKENZIE?" Jones levelled the pistol at Hofler head.

"I don't know. GODS TRUTH, I DON'T KNOW."

Anderson stepped out of the shadows. "Everything all right, sir?"

He startled Jones who swung round and nearly put a bullet in him as well. "I told you to go back to the compound, Anderson."

"I heard the shot and came back."

Jones holstered his pistol and pulled Hofler up by the arm. "Give me a hand to get him back to the Med Unit."

"No sir. Leave him were he is." Hofler and Jones found themselves looking down the barrel of Anderson's SA-80.

The surprise was clear on Jones' face. "Anderson, what the hell you playing at?"

"I'm sorry sir. It's just obeying orders." He actually did look sorry. "Just put him down and throw your weapons over here."

"I did warn you." Hofler muttered.

As Jones started to lower him down, Hofler snatched the pistol from Jones' hip holster and pushed him away. Anderson fired, but not before Hofler got off two shots. Anderson fell, still firing wildly into the air. He hit the floor and then firing stopped. Jones stumbled over to him, kicking the SA-80 out of his hand but Anderson was already dead with two bullets in his chest. If nothing else, Hofler was a good shot. He picked up the rifle and returned to his side.

"I did - try and warn you." He let the pistol drop from his hand.

Jones picked it up. "One of your guys?" He nodded towards Anderson's body.

"No - DIA." Hofler grabbed Jones hand. "Just watch your back."

Then the grip loosened and his hand fell away. Jones looked at his body. "Anderson. Shit!" Jones uttered sitting on the warehouse floor next to him. "Fuckin' DIA. inside the Citadel. FUCKIN' BASTARD!"

He dragged Anderson's body to the edge of the warehouse, then he paused to scan the open ground between him and the compound. He'd send someone back for Hofler later but now he had to get himself and Anderson's body across the two hundred yards of open ground between here and the Citadel. It was a lot darker than he'd thought and the city wasn't the best place to be after curfew. The Gun Gangs didn't acknowledge curfew and they'd been getting more adventurous recently. Then there were the wild dog packs to avoid. Like the gangs, they'd also drifted in from the countryside looking for shelter and food. And as always, there was still the constant threat of snipers.

Somewhere in the distance the sound of a barking dog was cut short by a burst of automatic followed by silence.

"Well, nothing ventured." He uttered to himself, getting a good grip on the back of Anderson's body. He took one final look round and went for it. Running, stumbling as best he could over the rubble, under Anderson's dead weight. He caught a glimpse of someone moving among the rubble off to his left. More figures appeared, some viably armed, silhouetted against the Citadel's floodlights. It was impossible to tell if they were an army patrol or a gun gang. Gun fire again, this time closer. He leapt into a crater. The firing stopped and he listened, wishing he hadn't sent the section back earlier. It was only last week one of the gangs had a go at the Citadel's boundary fence. Best not take any chances. He dragged Anderson's body in after him. A shout went up from the warehouse. Was that Polish? No German. They must have found Hofler's body, and it wouldn't be hard to follow his tracks to him. Best get moving. He rolled Anderson's body onto his shoulders again and struggling up to the lip of the crater. He peered over into the darkness. The bright lights of the Citadel making looking at it difficult. There was another shout. English. Yes, defiantly English and someone moved between him and the Citadel. He was armed and carrying a large backpack. A second person joined him. They spoke to each other. Jones could see their breath condensing in the cold air. Then the man shouted out an order to someone else in the darkness. Jones rolled Anderson's body off his shoulders, letting him roll to the bottom of the crater.

A third person appeared at the edge of the crater, his rifle trained on him. "Sir, I've found him!"

Kubrick knew the Minister for Internal Security would be briefing Chancellor Hellor on the recent developments west of the Oder. Which meant his office would be empty. He'd briefed Hauer earlier that morning and had reassured him that as far as he could see, maintaining BAEUR within Germany's borders would result in an increase in productivity due to the increased security they provide to the population. Hauer was satisfied at that and he read the twelve page report with interest. "You've done well, Han." He had said. "Joe told me you wouldn't have it ready until this afternoon."

"I finally managed to decipher Eurika's filing system." He laughed.

"Good." Hauer placed the report into his document case. "The way things are going, Hamburg will be the first city to return to normality. Over 25% of the city already has power and I understand water supplies will be returned once the frost lifts. There are voices saying we should relocate our government there once the British question has been settled."

"And you're suggesting I should vote for the relocation. How will the British operate if they are allowed to stay?"

"They will be integrated into the Internal Security Force and deployed on policing action, releasing our army to defend our borders."

"Which way is the chancellor going to vote?"

"For. All we have to do is convince the British it is to their advantage for them to stay."

"Do you think that can be done?"

Hauer smiled. "We're working on it."

The office was in half light, a defused glow crept through the cracks in the boarded up windows. It was enough to see what he was doing so Kubrick left the light off. Hauer's safe was in the corner behind his desk, it was an old free standing cast iron safe with a single combination dial locking mechanism. He pulled the bookmark from a pocket and dialled in the five numbers and twisted the handle. He was rewarded with a satisfying click as the door swung open.

Inside were several piles of brown and pink paper files, more than he expected. Some were thin with only half a dozen pages inside, others were a couple of inches thick, held together with an elastic band. He took the first pile out and started. At best, the morning briefing would last for three hours, at worst a little over an hour. That hardly gave him enough time to read the first page of all the files. He'd have to hope he'd either find what he was looking for soon or engineer another visit to his office. He scanned through the files, discarding the thin files after a brief glance. The files he was looking for would be a thicker one. The paperwork for an operation of this size would have consumed half a forest. After twenty minutes he'd placed the first pile back into the safe and took out the second, thicker pile. The third folder down caught his attention.

OPERATION - RESTORE

The first page was a typed written memo dated the 23rd December from Vonnegut to Hauer:

Preliminary discussions have proved fruitful, however I noted an amount of resistance from several of our garrison commanders, mainly those at Pasewalk and Friedland. Friedland is not a problem, they can be overcome. However the Pasewalk Garrison is a key part of the proposed operation and Major Korrell needs to be brought round.

Hauer had penned in a comment. 'Is assassination an option?' He scanned through a few more pages.

There is a sympathetic body within BAEUR who believe the British Army's best interest lie with them remaining within Germany. At present this body is small and does not hold much sway on the decision of Field Marshal Collins. However it does include General Fitzwilliams. Other members of the Combined Chiefs may support his views. The Russian units involved in the operation now number eleven divisions organised into three separate Army Groups. This is approximately a total of 142 armoured vehicles of one description or another. Discussions are progressing with the Pasewalk, Prenzlau and Munchenburg garrisons to establish refuelling points for the three Army Groups. It has been suggested that in a number of cases, the Russians should be allowed to exchange some of the less reliable vehicles with the garrisons for horses. This I am in favour of, as it will reduce the amount of fuel required for the operation and allow the Russians to field the additional cavalry units.

Major Korrell has been persuaded round to our point of view. Major Snider of Friedland has still to be persuaded round but I feel this will happen in the next week.

I am reluctant to discuss the details of the operation with him until we are guaranteed of his support.

The recent death of the commanding officer of the Russian 2nd Tank Army is a point of concern. He has been replaced by Lieutenant General Rutowski. He is unknown to me, but has been vouched for. I feel he should be watched.

This was also signed by Vonnegut and dated the 29th December. So that's what he was doing over the new year. He read on.

Fuel requirements for this operations is estimated at 360,000 litre. Each garrison has established refuelling areas. In all cases, except Pasewalk, the fuel will have to be stored in the fuel bowlers. Pasewalk has a rake of twenty 50 ton liquid petroleum carriers marshalled in the railroad yard. Efforts are underway to clear these out in preparation for the fuel. These wagons have been idle for a year, so fuel contamination is a possibility but is considered to be an acceptable risk. This will reduce the number of bowlers required for the operation by a third. Arrangement to start moving the fuel to Pasewalk will begin in two days.

Joseph Vonnegut, 2nd January.

Kubrick looked up at the sound of someone outside the office. Panic took him for a moment and he froze with the files spread out before him. If he was discovered, his guilt would be clear to see. The voices outside the door moved away and he breathed again. He closed the file, it was all the evidence he needed to convince Eurika there is a conspiracy. But how to get it to her? He couldn't photocopy the file. It was over three hundred pages thick. The machine was in the records store three floors away and all copies had to be recorded and signed for.

He collected up the other files to place them back into the safe. Another folder caught his attention. TURMOIL. That had been mentioned in the Restore file. DIA. operations with the British Containment Zone. He took this one as well before closing the safe door and locking it, then he left.

Returning to his own office, he sat at his desk and continued reading the Restore file.

All elements are now in place. The operating schedule of the British Long Range Reconnaissance units is known and steps are being taken to eliminate all four units. However this will require several Russian units to cross the Oder before the 7th to be

in place to receive the British units. It is imperative these units are in place as the Long Range Reconnaissance units the British Army's eyes in North East Germany.

He sat in silence for a while, pondering whether this could be an elaborate ploy by Hauer to trap him. Dare he trust Eurika? Could she be in on it? He had to trust someone.

He found her sitting upright in her bed, reading a tatty paperback. "Catherine Cookson, The Glass Virgin." She told him after he'd enquired, placing it down beside her. "It's one of my favourites. Did you find the bookmark?"

"Yeah, and the safe." He handed across the two files. "The fuel is going to an operation called Restore. It's going the engines of Russian tanks that are invading Germany." He whispered.

"But why." She opened the files and started reading. "And to do what?"

"I don't know yet. I didn't have time to read it all. But there's-"

"This is the original file!" She looked alarmed.

"Well yes. I had to take it." He replied. "There was no way I could have copies it all."

"No. You right. Does Hauer know it's missing?"

"Not yet. But I don't know how long that will last for. That's why we've got to act quickly."

She thought for a while. "Does he suspect you?"

"Not as far as I know."

Eurika turned some more pages. "Take this to Hellor. Show him it -"

"Hellor's involved. He has to be. An operation of this size couldn't possible be set up without his knowledge."

"Surly -" She stopped and thought. He would have had to been involve from the start. He's the only person who could sanction such a large quantity of fuel. "Leave this here with me. I'll read through it. You keep up with Hauer and Vonnegut and watch their every move. But watch yourself as well." She looked back up at him. "Have you got anywhere to run to if this gets out of hand?"

"No, not yet."

"Find somewhere."

"What about you."

She laughed. "I'm not going anywhere nowadays."

"Yeah, you right." He left both files with her.

The briefing had just finished when Kubrick returned to the Government building. He encountered Hauer talking to Vonnegut in the corridor outside his office. Kubrick tried to suppress his fears as he approached them.

"Han." Vonnegut called him over.

"Yes Joe." He dug his nails into his palms.

"The Chancellor was pleased at your report. Keep this up and you'll have the post permanently.

His mouth dried. "Good. I er -" He nearly choked. "- still got some bits to clear up. Would you excuse me." He almost bolted through his office door and slammed to shut behind him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE EIGHTH DAY. Saturday 14th January.

Sanders woke slowly, reluctantly coming round to the real world. Despite a small paraffin heater slogging it's heart out the inside of Carter's cargo container home was still chilly. She swung her legs out of bed and stepped on to the rug covered floor and looked at her watch through sleepy eyes. "Christ, 5:30." She uttered cancelling the beeping alarm. Clancy wanted the Stallion prepped and ready to go by 7:30. Carter was still sound on in the bed beside her. She decided not to wake him and started dressing; bra, tee shirt, knickers. No, she smiled smugly too herself and took them off, laying them on the bed next to him. It had been a good night and he deserved something to remember her by. She finished dressing and quietly stepped out of the shack.

It was still dark, but the morning felt fresh and clear. The sky was unusually clear. There had been a heavy fall of snow over night which meant the chopper would need digging out. She'd need the two hours to do that and carry out the pre-flights. She pulled her parker tighter against the cold air and started towards it.

Carter woke much later as the whining noise grow louder. He was alone and that surprised him; the only sign of that night encounter lay on the pillow beside him. The noise stepped up a key, turning from a whine to a thump that shuck the container. Snatching up the knickers, he wrapping a blanket around him and he stepping out of the container to see the giant chopper rise into sight above the roof tops and climb slowly into the paling sky.

Gill walked up to him. "Ran off and left you did she?" She said cheerfully. Even at this early hour, she was always unbearable cheerful. "In a hurry was she?"

Carter glanced at her garment. "Yeah, You know these flyers. Can't even get dressed properly without help." He shrugged watching the Giant turning east wards.

"Jane's gone."

"With them?"

"Yes. I don't think she's coming back."

"No, me neither."

Polmer checked the street behind him before waving his two companions through the open doors of the office block and out of the early morning light. It had taken them several hours to walk the three miles to the Tonndorf District of Hamburg. On the four occasions they'd ducked out of sight of army patrols in their Landrovers and Saxon. Once a gun gang nearly discovered them as they waited in a railway station.

They picked their way through the abandoned building and down a debris covered stair well into the four story basement. An armed guard stepped out onto the bottom landing and levelled a M-16 at them. Recognising Polmer and the other two, he waved them through the heavy blast door he guarded. The three walked along a short corridor past second blast door and into an old local government fall out shelter.

"Jack!" Rees, Hamburg's DIA section head waved Polmer across to him as they entered.

"What's up?" Polmer replied clipping his AKM into the weapons rack and walking over to him.

"We got a message from Bonn while you were out."

Pulling the files from under his jacket, Polmer dropped them down in front of him then walked back across the shelter and took a hot cup of coffee from Liddel.

"They've got conformation that RED FOX TWO defiantly didn't land near Klein Plasten." Rees continued. "They found a platoons cut into pieces near Neukalen and there's evidence of someone staying the night at Dargun. They also think it may have been them who probed the 132nd at Neubrandenburg." He picked up one of the file and slowly flicked through it's pages. "What did you get?"

"Anderson's checked the flight logs, it says the helicopter defiantly did dropped the section off at Klein Plasten." Polmer told him. "Could the 94th have missed them."

"No. They had the whole area covered. No chopper put down anywhere within 5 kilometres of the place. You still think she knew about the operation?"

"I'm beginning to think so. They changed the LZ and drew more than the usual amount of supplies. I think she planned to stay out a lot longer than normal."

"But if the logs say they dropped off at -"

"The logs can lie." Polmer snapped.

Rees picked up the other file. "What are these?"

"I was right about the CIA as well. They've an interest in McKenzie. A couple of Renzetti's men ransacked Jones' office for those. Two are about McKenzie. One's on Malbork, the other's about that SS-21 operation. The third's on some Russian General, I don't know what they wanted that for."

Rees picked up the third file. "What about the CIA guys?"

"Dead. Left them for Anderson to find." Polmer walked across to a small heater.

"Good. Did anyone see you?"

"No." Polmer replied between blowing on his hands and rubbing them together.

Rees scanned through Straczynski's file. "Jesus, have you read this?"

"No, why?"

"The guy's some God damn cold war hero. Born and bred Commie. Both parents high ranking party members. Educated at the Frunze Military Academy. Went straight into the Red Army as a Lieutenant. Promoted to Captain within two years. Served as a tactical adviser to the V-C during Vietnam. Transferred to the 3rd Shock Army on returning to Moscow, and took the 80th Motorised Rifle Division into Afghanistan. Decorated 12 times. Christ, this list is endless. Nearly every current Russian Armoured Division commander has served with him at one time or another. And a close personnel friend of the Western TDV Supreme Commander, General Chorski." He handed the file to Polmer.

"What's he up to now?" Polmer asked as he quickly read it

"GRU has been for six years ago. Christ, this guys fifty-two and still runs G.R.U/Spetsnaz operations."

"Sounds like some kind of Messier." Liddel commented.

"Yeah, I bet the Pentagons got a whole filing cabinet on him." Polmer dropped the file back down on Rees' desk unimpressed. "Next time we talk to Bonn, find out from Hauer what he know about him. Renzetti wanted it for something."

"Why are the CIA so interested in this Captain McKenzie anyway?" Rees asked.

"Are you serious? She's the one who blew away their top man." Liddel informed him.

"That was her!"

"Yeah. She walked straight into their bunker and blow him his head off as well as six of there top guys on the way out."

"Why'd she do it. What happened?" Rees asked him.

"They borrowed her for a job; assassination of a rouge artillery commander with a shit load of chemical warheads he was threatening to use. She did the job then they pulled the plug on her. Instead of picking her unit up as they agreed to do, they just tipped off a local marauders outfit on her location and left her for dead. She lost most of her men and barely got back alive herself. "

"No wonder she was pissed." Polmer muttered.

Rees still looked bemused. He'd never heard of this Captain McKenzie prior to this operation and couldn't understand why Polmer worried about her so much.

"When she made it back, she walked straight back into their bunker and blow the sons of bitches away, no messing. She is one ice cold bitch. The CIAs got a contract on her head, but no-one's collected yet." Polmer warmed his hands over the stove again. "Did Bonn say anything else?"

"No." Liddel replied.

"What's the news from Hanover?"

"The 5th Mech. handed control over to the Germans noon yesterday. The place is now under an indefinite curfew following increased civilian disturbances, and the Germans are asking for assistance in suppressing the rioting."

Polmer smiled, "Good. And the 5th?"

"In transit back here."

"And what about this place. How did last night go?"

"Like a dream. It doesn't take much to whip up a riot these day. As soon as the Brits turned up, we put a couple of shots into them, then a burst across the crowd. It were beautiful. There was this one guy, God knows who he was, but he picked this kid up and held it out to the Brits. He really know how to physic the crowd up. It was a shame we had to waste him, could have really used someone like him again. Put a bullet in his head and crowd went wild. It turned real nasty."

"How'd they handle it?"

"Real messy at first. Then they pulled the troops out of the area and contained it, letting the riot burn itself out. Must have tied up at least two companies." She seemed quiet pleased with herself. "I'm planning the same again for tonight. But bigger and more scattered across the city. This time I want to supply the rioters with some fire arms. What can you let me have?"

"What do you want?"

"Assault rifles, shotguns. Nothing too big."

"No problem. I'll have 'em for you this afternoon. I want this to get big enough to force them to re-deploy the 5th on riot duty as soon as they get here. Don't even give them time to get into their barracks. So aim for the BAEUR building, the refinery or the food stores."

"Yeah, no problem." Liddel answered.

"What are we doing about McKenzie?" Rees asked.

"If she's active and still loyal to Jones, she could be trouble." Polmer told him. "Next time she radios in, I'll have Anderson pass on her position and we can tell the Rusksies were to look for her."

"And there's that chopper Jones sent out."

"What's that?" Polmer asked.

"The CH-53, with a full fuel load."

Polmer whistled. "That baby nearly got the range to reach Moscow. Anderson said nothing about that. Where were they heading?"

"Don't know. The info came through the Air Corp. not the Citadel. And you know what the Brits are like for talking to each other." Rees shrugged. "The pilot had sealed orders."

"Who's the pilot. Anyone we know?"

"Captain Clancy. Ex U.S Marine pilot from the USS Tarawa. Reassigned to the 2nd Marine Division after she was sunk. The guy's wanted by our military for desertion. He was the one who disappeared from Bremerhaven during the withdrawal. You remember the two choppers that were meant to evacuate the perimeter guards from Bremerhaven after the U.S Army withdrew. His was the one that disappeared."

"Anyone of any interest amongst them?"

"Co-pilot and one of the gunners. They're both Ex Special Forces. The girl by the name of Sanders, Kim Sanders. Loads of combat experience. A real beauty and the beast by all accounts."

"Okay, as soon as we hear anything on them, we pass it on also."

Biderbeck had done pretty well for himself out of the war. With no close family to tie him down or worry about, life had turned into one big game for him. While other lay maimed and dying around him, he'd found it a great adventure, a chance to live out the fantasy lives of his screen idols. Sometimes he really believed he was the Errol Flynn or John Wayne he pretended to be. Fate had been kind, presenting him with a fit body, a handsome face and a tongue to charm with. He had the sort of charismatic personality that could talk his way into and out of anything. If he'd wanted to he could have been someone, but Biderbeck wasn't interested in that, he was too busy being the last great crusader, a self proclaimed leader of a rag-tag band of marauders. They weren't bad for a bunch made up of deserters and misfits from half a dozen different armies. He was really quiet proud of them.

Shelly was only thirteen and shadowed his every move, and had done for nearly three months now. She scrambling her way through the trees, clinging to her SLR like an oversized toy, her

girlish features smeared with grime. An oversized Polish combat jacket nearly drowning her petite figure.

"Well?" He asked as she slide down next to him.

"There's just the six cavalry and the armoured car. No-one on the other side or down the track." She told him. "Hassell says the BTR looks like it's been abandoned."

"That what I thought." He whistled to Hassell and indicated he wanted the Cavalry dead.

Hassell waved back in acknowledgement and passed the orders to his group of men. Biderbeck lined his rifle on one of the cavalry officers, he knew his men were all doing likewise, waiting for him to fire the first shot.

The fight was short and the outcome inevitable. The last cavalry officer fell to the ground as his horse bolted and after a moments silence the first of Biderbeck's men crawled out of his positions and started moving forward. Shelly started to get up too, but Biderbeck pulled her back down. If there was more cavalry out there waiting for them, there was no sense in getting caught in the open. He'd let his men do it, they were expendable, he wasn't and nether was she. He let them all moved out into the open before standing up. Shelly followed him. Hassell reached the BTR.

Biderbeck stopped and crouched, his rifle ready, just in case. Shelly stopped behind him looking over his shoulder. Hassell signalled that it was clear and he started towards the BTR again. "What you got?" He asked as he approached Hassell.

"It's empty, like I told Shelly. Looks abandoned."

"Stripped?"

"No, pretty well intact. Except for the engine. Someone had a go at the gearbox. There's oil all over the place. It looks like they went that way." He pointed to the four sets of tracks leading away to the south.

Biderbeck peered into the engine compartment. "Can you fix it?"

He shrugged. "Can't say without taking a good look."

Biderbeck glanced round at the dead cavalry section. "Secure the area. Post two men along that track, get two others to follow those tracks."

Hassell relayed the orders to his men while he clambered through the BTR's hatch.

Inside was an untidy mess but not ransacked. He picked up a handful of papers from the deck. Orders, Russian orders? He looked round at the multitude of radio equipment and remembered the ring aerial around the hull roof. This didn't make sense, Why would anyone abandon a command BTR-90 out here for? Could this be another marauder band muscling in on his ground? No, there was only four sets of track lead away. Then it must be deserters,

they got this far and broken down. But why leave all the personnel kit behind? He pondered, picking up a Russian backpack.

Shelly clambered in after him. "What's up?" She asked.

"Don't know, something don't feel right." He sat down at the map table and fingered though the scattered orders.

She moved across to him and wrapped her arms around him. "Are we stopping here?" She kissed the side of his face, rubbing her smooth cheek against his stubble.

He turning his head away. "Leave it out will you. And no we're not."

She continued to nibble his ear. "They're all busy outside. No-one's watching us." She whispered.

He twisted his head out of the way again, too intrigued by the radio messages to take much notice of what she was saying.

She slid round him and sat on his lap, kissing him. "Come on, please."

"Leave it out will you. I'm trying to read these."

"They can wait." She kissed him fully on the mouth. "Please, I want it now."

"No." He feebly protested.

"Come on." She swung her leg over his, sitting astride him. "On-one's watching. Please." She pleaded, fumbling at the front of his belt.

He kissed her back. "Not now, wait until we camp for the night." Conscious that someone may look in on them.

"That could be hours away, I want it now." She persisted.

Biderbeck kissed her back equally passionately. He pushed his hand up her skirt, caressing her naked thigh about her leggings. She pushing her groan onto his hand, still fumbling with the front of his trousers. He gabbbed the back of her neck with his free hand, pressing her face into his. She let out a muffled gasp and bit his lip from pleasure and pain as he forced his hand into her crutch. Then he pushed her away, throwing her onto the floor. She lay still glaring back up at him. Biderbeck wiped the blood away from his lip. "Horny little twat ain't you. I told you to wait 'til later." He fastened up his belt and trousers and left, leaving her on the edge of frustration.

He stepped out of the BTR and watched his small group of men. His men were happy rounding up the horses and stripping the uniforms off the dead men. Russian uniforms, he hadn't noticed until now. The BTR also had a pale pink star painted onto it's side underneath the arctic whitewash. None of the others seemed to notice this, they were too busy gathering

their booty. He clambered back into the BTR and looked round again. Shelly picked herself off the floor and pulled her skirt down. She deliberately elbowed her way past him as she left. Ignoring her he pulled more of the maps and orders from under the small desk. These were Russian maps, old one of the old East Germany, with resent troop movement scribbled across it from the Oder river to the Rostock autobahn.

The sound of cannon fire tore through the clearing conformed his fears. A second burst followed as he stumbling to the BTR's hatch.

Outside his men had stopped what they were doing and were watching the trees. More cannon fire, still some way off, but getting closer. Then the sound of heavy diesel engines and the squeak of tank tracks.

"How many?" Asked one of his men.

"Three, maybe four." Said another.

"How far away?" Asked a third.

"Half a mile." Said someone else. "Any idea who they are?"

Biderbeck glanced down at the map. Russian troop movements into Eastern Germany.

Then the first tank appeared in the track leading up to the BTR and stuck a shell into the middle of the marauder band.

"Christ, T-74's." Biderbeck uttered to himself. "GET INTO COVER!" He hollered.

Most of them had, those that didn't were cut down by the 74's co-axle.

To Biderbeck's left, a RPG let fly at the tank. It hit it low down on the left hand side of the hull. The '74 threw a track and slew round, blocking the track. The RPGer ducked back into cover and reloaded. He stuck his head up 30 seconds later to line up another shot and found the '74 waiting to removed his head with a 125mm canister round.

Shelly scrambled across the open ground towards Biderbeck, pushed on by Hassell, heading for better cover, the co-axle following them across. Hassell fell inches from the BTR. Before Shelly had even reached it, Biderbeck grabbed her and pulled her back out into the open, making a run for it as a second '74 pushed it's way passed it's crippled comrade.

They ran headlong into the woods, heading for the denser parts, knowing the tanks couldn't follow them there. He dived into a ditch dragging in Shelly behind him as another shell shredded the vegetation. Canister rounds were a vile weapon. A cannon launched nail bomb, it had become the standard tank weapon for dealing with infantry, and it was devastating at close range.

Biderbeck looked round at her, seeing her for the first time as the scared child she really was. He stuff the map into her free hand as three more of his men slid into the ditch beside them. The '74 drew closer. They could hear the crashing through the trees. It's 125mm thudded as the three men scrambled out the far side of the ditch and vanished into a mist of red carnage.

Biderbeck dragged the petrified Shelly along the ditch for several hundred yards, then scrambled out and ran head long through the forest again. Unexpectedly they burst out into another track, right in front of a T-80. They turned and ran. Biderbeck tripped and fell. "RUN!" He screamed at Shelly before she could stop.

She let go of his hand and ran as hard as she could. She knew the tank gun was aimed at her, she know she was only a second away from death. But she still ran for all she was worth.

The canister round lifted her off her feet. A thousand pieces of white hot metal sliced through her the fabric of her jacket and into her flesh. She felt every single one burn through her body as they carried her forward with there combined mass. She hit the ground a bloody mess. Her body trembled uncontrollably as the last embers of life faded from her.

The map, now torn and burning, blew away unnoticed onto a bare branch.

"That's tank fire!" Goodman stopped and looked back west. "Sounds like someone's getting wasted."

"Yeah." Landers answered also looking. "It's about eight or ten miles back."

McKenzie walked past them. "Guess they've found the BTR. Anyway it's not our problem. Someone else is on the receiving end this time. Now keep moving. It won't take those tanks long to catch us up. Rik, get up front. You're on point."

Goodman glanced across at Landers. "Great. Shittiest job in the fuckin' army." He grumbled jogging forward.

"Stop griping and get on with it!" McKenzie shouted after him.

The Stallion flew over the snow covered country side on auto-pilot and ground avoidance radar. "Beautiful isn't it." Sander said taking a minute to look out the side window.

"Yes, it is." Straczynski replied, steadying himself in the doorway behind her.

Clancy was in the co-pilot seat, his eyes closed, head tilted back and mouth open. If he was snoring the engines were drowning it out.

"Heavy night." She guessed that he'd had a few drinks. She know that wasn't strictly true. Clancy had been using a mixture of pain killers and alcohol to knock him out for the night. Although she'd become more concerned recently as the supply of pain-killers had dried up and he'd become more reliant on the alcohol. "Mind if I ask you something?"

"You can. Whether you get an answer you require is another thing."

She twisted round in her seat to face him. "What is an active Russian Major General doing fifty miles inside Germany with the remains of one of our long range units? I mean you are a real Russian officer."

"What you mean to ask is, am I a deserter."

"No. Deserters have a different attitude. They're like Mel Carter, out for what they can get. You, you strike me more as something - more sinister." She watched him for a reaction, but found none.

"May I ask you something." He simple said, which only proved to confirmed her suspicions. "Why did you stay here instead of going back to the United States?"

She starred at him, wondering if he knew what they'd done at Bremerhaven. "Nothing to go home too." She answered. "As soon as we'd get States side, they'd de-commission us. It's no fun being a civvies in toady's world."

"But you're Special Forces, you'd have been kept on."

"Yeah, me and Woody would, but Clanc wouldn't. He'd be out as soon as we'd reach Norfolk." She settled back into her seat and checked the map display. "Pasewalk's over there, about 10 miles north-east of us."

"Good, I want to take a look at it."

"Okay, you're the boss." She punched the course change into the key-pad and the Sikorsky turned slightly east. "You reckon it could be in Russian hands."

Straczynski nodded. "It's the biggest garrison in the area. It's the obvious target for an attacking army."

She sat in silence for a few minutes before adjusted the mouth piece of her head set. "Heads up you two. Pasewalk, two minutes. We're going in hot-guns." Then she reached across and thumped Clancy on the arm. He stirred and grunted, but didn't wake. "Bastard!" She uttered.

Major Korrell, commanding officer of the Pasewalk Garrison, stepped out of the Garrison Headquarters and walked past the two Russian sentries huddled out of the wind smoking roll-ups. They eyed each other suspiciously. There was very little trust between Germans and Russians despite all the reassurances from Bonn. Korrell found their presents here frustrating. The courtyard before him was jammed full of Russian hardware; tanks, trucks and PCs, all here under orders that had came straight from the Internal Security Minister. Although he didn't like the orders, he was a soldier and he'd been taught to accept them without questioning the motivation behind them, even if those orders told him to welcome his former enemies as friends. All this he accepted like a soldier, but he didn't like it and neither did

most of his men. There had already been several incidents between the two armies, thankfully none had been too serious. But fear and prejudice die slowly in this cold climate.

What really rattled him the most were the two Leopard II's Solvac's forces had brought with them. Both were painted drab green and carried red stars in place of the Maltese crosses. They were German tanks, taken from German troops. His countrymen had died in these tanks and he had to let them drive into his town. He had to offer this 'enemy' the use of his garrison facilities and they flouted these tanks before them.

He stopped next to one, looking up at the straight lines of its turret. The outline of the Maltese Cross still visible beneath the drab paint partly covered by the star.

Solvac watched him from the window of the radio operators, overlooking the courtyard. The mention of Borisov's name caught his attention. - He'd found the BTR, abandoned with the gear box knackered - Skirmished with marauder band and eliminated them - One T-74 disabled - Dam! - A second one damaged - "How long will it take Borisov to get the '74 mobile again?" He shouted across at the operator.

He relayed the question.

"Eighteen hours."

Too long. "Tell him he's got eight!" He turned away from the window and stared at the radio operator. "Where is he?"

"Ten Kilometres south east of Friedland at grid 24-15."

Solvac checked the map. They were heading this way, but why? Why this way? "How long ago was the BTR abandoned?"

"Four to six hours ago. The occupants appeared to be heading east on foot."

East, towards us, towards Pasewalk. He turned back to the window, watching Korrell stood by the two Leopards. "East, why not north or west back towards their own lines? Why continue to come this way?" He muttered to himself before speaking up. "Who were the marauders with the BTR?"

"Germans. Some military, some civilian."

General Annopol approached Korrell and offered him one of his cigarettes. "Do you like them?" He said nodding towards the tanks.

Korrell accepted the cigarette and lighter. "Yes. I used to command a company of them." He'd found an understanding with Annopol, one of the few Russians he didn't mistrust. They'd both come up through the ranks of the armoured divisions and had a mutual respect for each other.

"Ever take them into battle?"

"No." Korrell shook his head. "No, I was promoted out before I had chance."

"They're fine tanks, I prefer them over our own. They have superb optics and fire control system. And contra to what our tacticians tell us, the 120mm smoothbore gun out performs our 125mm in both range and penetration." He stopped and stared up at the sky. "Do you hear that?"

"What?" Korrell looked around not sure what Annopol meant.

Annopol climbed up onto the engine deck of the leopard. "There's a helicopter somewhere." He held out his hand to him and helped him up.

Korrell listened, peering at the southern horizon. He could hear it now; the soft patter of rotor blades in the cold morning air, slow and deep like a heart beat.

"There it is." Annopol pointed at a small black dot in the pale sky.

Slowly it grew into the recognisable shape. Korrell cursed under his breath. It had to be Clancy's.

"An American Sikorsky I think." Annopol jumped down from the tank and headed away blowing a whistle, shouting orders and calling his men to action.

Pasewalk loomed up a head of them, dark and forbidding against the white landscape. "It's occupied." Sanders said on seeing the columns of thin smoke rising straight up into the still cold air. As they crossed over the Prenzlau road, she disengaged the autopilot and banked the Stallion round to the south of the town.

March opened the side hatch and swung his minigun outboard. "Shit it's cold." He mumbled, locking the gun in position and powered up the electronics. "Hey Woody, I thought this place was friendly."

Hardwood dabbed the trigger on his gun and a stream of bullets burst from the end of the gun like liquid fire. A similar burst a second later from March's gun told Sanders they were ready. "Guns-hot." Woody confirmed.

Korrell saw the two flashes of fire light up the underside of the Stallion. Good, at least that meant they were coming in prepared. But are they prepared for this? On the far end of the courtyard he saw one of the three Shilkas fire up its engine. "Oh Christ they're not gonna expect that." He looked round for something he could do. He stepped onto the turret, pulled open the commanders hatch and reached inside. His hand went automatically to the flare pistol clipped to the side of the turret.

Sanders reached across and thumped Clancy again. He stirred, waving his arm in protest before settling down again.

"Kim." March called over the intercom. "This place was clean last month, what we going in hot-guns for?"

"Yeah, is there something going on we should know about?" Hardwood added.

"Shut up and keep your eyes open." She replied. Reaching across, she thumped Clancy a third time, this time harder. "Wake up you arsehole!"

He stirred again, raising from his drug and alcohol induced sleep. He rubbed his hands over his face. "God I feel rough."

"You don't look much better." She grinned.

"Where are we?" He peered out of the cockpit through blood shot eyes.

"Coming up on Pasewalk. MAJOR wants to take a look."

"What for? It's -" A red star flare arched into the sky before them. "What the hell?" Clancy's words were cut short by stream of tracer bullets cutting across their bow.

"In coming!" March yelled. He aimed his Minigun onto the point the tracer had come from and pulled the trigger. A line of fire tore down from his gun and he walked it across the area until the incoming fell silent.

Clancy sobered suddenly. "Get us out of here!"

Sanders headed for the deck followed by more tracer. The Stallion shuck violently. "We're taking hits." Hardwood yelled, ducking splinters of metal that flew past him. "Get us out of here man!"

Sanders pushed them lower, flying nap of the earth. Collision warning lights danced across the console and klaxons screamed as they skimming within feet of the snow covered fields. Her massive down draft picking up the loose snow and twisting it into vortex that streamed off the rotor tips. The Stallion shuddered and vibrated. "Shit! This is hard." She muttered, the concentration straining her face. Flying at nap of earth wasn't the easiest thing to do in a smaller more nibble choppers like the Lynx or Blackhawk. But in a lumbering CH-53E flying over undulating snow drifts with nearly no points of reference, it was nearly impossible. One misjudgement and she could bury them all into a field at over 350 miles per hour.

Clancy's hand slammed up hard against the cockpit glass. "WATCH THAT TREE!"

Sanders banked over hard. March's target dropped away from sight and he grabbed hold of the edge of the hatch as the deck almost came vertical. More tracer tore into the underside,

thumping against the armoured plated deck beneath his feet. Sanders throw the chopper back over and instead of sky, March found himself starring at snow, bracing himself against the frame to keep himself in. The tracer followed them, ripping into the kevlar covered fuselage. "WE'RE HIT!" The mechanical scream was audible above everything else. "SOMETHING'S WRONG!" Sanders felt the power drop. She twisted the throttle grip. "They've hit something. Woody, what they got?"

Clancy looked down at console at the dancing needle on the gauges. "WOODY!"

The gunner slammed his hand against the engineers panel as his gauges echoed the fault. "Oil pressures going on No 3 engine. I'm shutting her down."

"NO! Leave it." Sanders protested.

"You're gonna burn the shaft out."

"LEAVE IT!" She screamed.

"Then get us the fuck out of here. I don't know how long it'll last."

"TREEEEE!" Clancy screamed.

Sanders reacted quickly, pulling back on the cyclic and twisting the throttle to the stop, but the fifteen ton giant didn't wasn't that nimble. They struck the frozen tree, shattering the radar dome, look-down radar and IR. sensors. Branches shot through the cockpit cowlings, scattering fragments of Plexiglas across the cockpit. Clancy, wide eyed in terror, staid at his seat harness to escape the pieces of smashed tree and metal. Electrical instruments shorted out and sparked then ignited.

The Stallion gained attitude rapidly and almost out of control. Sanders kicked away the branch that had almost severed her ankle and stuck her foot back on the peddle, correcting the yaw. "GET THAT FIRE OUT!" She shouted at her white faced Captain, looked over her right shoulder for the horizon. She found it lower then she expected. Even on two and a half engines they had climbed quickly.

Clancy grabbed the extinguisher from behind his seat and pointed it at the fire, filling the cockpit with a blinding cloud of white extinguisher foam.

"SHILKA!" March's words almost went unnoticed. "Shilka, 10 o'clock."

The quad gunned turret traversed round onto them, following them as they gained height. It's 23mm shells adding a deadlier element to the barrage of 50 calibre and small arms fire that was already tearing chunks out off there side. March caught one in the chest. Letting go of his minigun he stumbled backwards.

"MARCH IS HIT!" Hardwood grabbed him as he fell.

March gulped for air, his eyes darting wildly over the inside of the chopper, not seeing Hardwood.

"It's okay man, it's okay." Woody tried to calm him. "MEDIC!" March started convulsing. He held him tight to try and hold him.

Campbell and Kneale scramble down the violently swaying cabin, closely followed by Jane. They grabbed a thrashing arm each and held him down onto the deck while she pulled open his tattered flak jacket to reveal a hole the size of her fist. A stream of blood spurted out at her soaking the front of her dress. "Get him on the bench."

The three men half dragged, half threw March onto the bench seat while he lashed out blindly at them.

"HOLD HIM!" Jane yelled at them tearing open his tunic.

The chopper shuck again as the quad found it's mark. Kneale glanced round at March's gun position. "Someone get on them guns!" Kneale ordered two of his men.

Sanders pulled the stick hard over, throw them into a tight turn and presenting the heavily armoured belly to the guns. The floor fell away beneath their feet. Jane screamed as she felt herself tumble. One of Kneale's men snatched at her sleeve as more bullet tore into them. He caught one and when down beneath her. Dead.

Sanders rolled the Stallion over, banking her round and headed for the deck once more. The floor came rushing back beneath Jane and she reached out at anything she could get to steady herself. Campbell snatched her arm and kept her up right until she found her footing again. Pulled a field dressing from her pack, she ripped it open and pressed it into place over March's chest.

His eyes rolled and glazed over. She checked his pulse in his neck. He whole body spasmed, lashing out wildly at her. "He's convulsing." He grabbing Hardwood's arm in an iron fast grip. Agony ripped across his face with every breath he tried to gulp down. Then he stopped breathing. Hardwood starred at his silence motionless body. Then Jane brought her fist down hard on his chest and his eyes juddered.

"He's stopped breathing." She hit him again. "Give him mouth to mouth. QUICKLY!"

Hardwood looked at her in disbelief. "It's no good man, he's gone."

She hit him again.

"Leave it, he's gone!" He grabbed her hand. "He's gone."

She looked at him. The Stallion banking slightly again, manoeuvring for cover. She lost her balance again and he held her steady. Campbell took her other arm and helped her up. The gunfire had stopped.

Hardwood looked down the cabin at the carnage. "Shit!" He uttered then adjusted his head set. "Skipper. March's dead." There came a long silence in reply. "I've got oil pissing through the roof and there's holes in the side of this baby I could put my dick through." He sighed. "What the fucks going on?"

Sanders glanced across at Clancy. "Can you fly this thing now?"

He took the controls. "Yeah, on problem. Pilot's aircraft."

"I'm on my way back Woody. Just hold it together a little longer." She unplugged her headset and clambered out of her seat.

Straczynski stepped away from Hardwood's minigun to let her pass, then stepped into the cockpit. "Head north to Jatznick." He told Clancy.

"Are you kidding." Clancy objected. "The only place we're going is home before this babe packs in on us."

"That's not a request captain. It's an order!" Straczynski paused for a second. "And besides, with us lot off your hands, you'll stand a better chance of getting back."

Clancy had to agree.

Korrell dropped the flare pistol onto the turret and climbed down off the tank. Around him Annopol's men were cheering and waving their guns in the air. Despite his attempt, the warning had failed to save the helicopter of his friend. He know now his doubts about this alliance were right and he had been foolish to agree to it. Annopol walked towards him, grinning. "I told you we were good." He said once in ear shot.

Solvac also watched the Sikorsky depart. "That was an American helicopter." He informed Colonel Golodkin.

"Yes." His second in command agreed.

"A CH-53, I think. The Americans call them Sea Stallion?"

"No. Super Stallion."

"Ah, yes. That helicopter should not have been here, Yuri." He took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one to the old man. "First the British reconnaissance unit used a different landing site to Klien Plasten. Then the German garrison at Friedland turn against our troops just before the British arrived. And now they're heading in this direction. What are the odds that all these events are connected to that helicopter?"

Golodkin lit his cigarette between his lips. "I don't know."

"Someone is giving us false information. Bonn mentioned nothing about a helicopter coming this way."

"They might not have known."

"They also gave us the landing sites for the British unit, which also proved wrong."

"What do we know about this reconnaissance unit?"

"The individual captured at Friedland has identified them. Their commanding officer is a woman by the name of McKenzie."

"It means nothing to me, I don't know her."

"We have encountered her before. According to the captive, she has only been in command of the unit for seven months, prior to that she was an agent for the SIS operating within our own command structure under the name of Yasmin Zarudin."

"Do we have any information on her?"

"Olsztyn was the only place he would come up with, and he only knows this from other people."

"Could he be making this up?"

"I don't think so. Not unless he's cleverer than he looked."

Matusiak entered the room and walked across to them. "The helicopter's heading north. We received no casualties. One of the Shilka took a little damage, but nothing that can't be fixed." She pouted herself on the edge of the table beside Solvac. "Let's have a drag."

Solvac handed her his cigarette. "I've never heard of Yasmin Zarudin."

"I know that name." Matusiak interrupted. "She was the woman who helped Nina Wiste escape from Olsztyn."

"Who?"

"The Israeli Mosad agent who blew up the satellite up-link station."

Solvac took the cigarette back from her. "I thought -"

"She's also the person responsible for the artillery barrage on your division at Malbork."

Solvac drew the glowing tip of the cigarette to within a fraction of his fingers before blowing out a long steady stream of smoke. "The enquiry laid the responsibility on the artillery commander." He dropped the tab end onto the floor and crushed it under his foot. "I had heard the rumours -"

"There is always rumours about these sort of things."

"So which do you believe the rumours or the enquiry?"

Golodkin shrugged.

Solvac grunted. "I will talk to this man again. He may know some more about this... McKenzie." He looked back out the window at Annopol and Korrell who were still stood by the Leopards. "How many Germans are there here?"

"About two thousand soldiers, about the same number of civilians." Matusiak answered.

"That man, Major Korrell, he fired a flare into the air just before the helicopter attacked."

"Are you thinking we may be facing a similar incident to Friedland."

"Yes. I want all of the German garrison rounded up and held. There's a sports hall a few streets from here. I want them held there."

"What about the officers?" Golodkin asked.

"Anyone above captain bring here for interrogation. We have been betrayed Yuri, the German Government has tempted us into their country and now they are preparing to close the trap shut behind us. If we act fast we may still be able to salvage our position. The British know we are here. They are acting to counter us at this very moment. So we must act quickly before we lose the initiative." He walked away from them, towards his office. "See that it is done Yuri, quickly."

Matusiak stood with Golodkin until he'd left. She became conscious of the dull ache in her side and aware she'd been rubbing the scare left by the bullet for the past few minutes. A bullet fired at her by McKenzie/Zarudin while rescuing the Israeli.

It had been pure chance she'd discovered them; walking into the brig at Olsztyn at that late hour only because she was passing. She found the guard holding orders releasing Wiste, the Israeli woman, into McKenzie/Zarudin's custody. She became suspicious when the guard looked at her oddly when she inquired what was going on.

"Releasing the prisoner like you orders, mam." He replied.

"No who's orders?" She demanded.

The guard became wary. "Yours, mam. Signed and authorised by you."

"I never signed any such thing. Show me."

He handed her the paper. It was signed by her, or a very good forgery of her signature. It would have fooled most people. "Put her back inside. These orders are forgeries." She ordered him. "Captain Zarudin were did you -" She saw the muscle flash of a round discharging from the gun in McKenzie/Zarudin's hand. It hit the guard in the centre of his chest, throwing him back against the wall. He looking down at the tattered red hole between the second and third button of his uniform blouse as he him slide down the wall. There had been little sound from the hand gun. Matusiak turned to McKenzie/Zarudin and saw the matt black six inch cylinder screwed onto the front of her Czech CZ-75 automatic. She reached for her own sidearm. A second mussel flash lit up the half lit room and she felt the burning sensation in her stomach, just below her ribs. She fumbled with her revolver, dropping it as

she first staggered then fell. As the last glimmers of consciousness faded from her she saw McKenzie/Zarudin release Wiste from her bindings and hand her the revolver.

Sanders stepped carefully over the spent cartridges that rolled about the deck. Hardwood stood up as she approached. "Christ! What a mess." She uttered glancing down at March's body. "You all right Woody?"

He grabbed a roof strap. "Yeah, they got March, and half dozen of that lot." He pointed down the cabin.

She looked. Large chunks were missing from the fuselage. It was a miracle they were still flying. She picked her way along the cabin.

Jane rose as she stepped past her, the front of her dress smeared with blood. "We lost five." She uttered, running a blood stained hand through her hair, pushing it back out of her eyes.

Sanders looked down at the white knuckled soldier laying on the seat. He clenched the sides, his ice cold eyes stared back at her, a bloody stump now where his left foot once was.

"John, give us a hand." Jane yelled across the cabin.

Campbell joined them. "Come on laddie." He said lifting the soldier onto his remaining foot and they both shuffled towards the front of the chopper.

Sanders continued on to the back and plugged in her headset by the rear door. "Clanc. God only knows how, but they missed the important stuff."

"What about the passengers?"

"March's dead, along with five of the platoon, there's four others in bad shape."

"Bad?"

"Yeah. Don't hold out much chance for the poor bastards."

Clancy muttered something under his breath.

"What's that Clanc?"

"Nothing. The LZ's coming up in a couple of minutes. MAJOR's on his way back."

"We're not heading back home?"

"Once we've delivered this lot."

"Yeah, sure." She replied unenthusiastically.

Straczynski stepped over the debris towards her. He spoke to Sims as he passed. Then stopped next to her. "We are putting down at the landing zone as planned. Then get yourselves and the wounded back to Hamburg."

"That all depends if the this ramp's still working." She pushed a button on a panel and waited. Behind her the huge rear ramp door cracked open. "Okay you pussies, it looks like you're leaving us, so get you asses into gear. L.Z's in two minutes!"

Straczynski headed forward again, past the assembled soldiers. Jane finished giving the footless soldier a shot of painkillers before looking up at him. He could see she was back in her element again. He held out his hand to help her up.

"Just like old times, eh." She joked.

"Yes." He was pleased to see her smile.

She sat back down, her smile now gone, her head lowered. Straczynski started fastening up his jacket, but stopped half way and pulled out an envelope. "Will you give this to Colonel Jones. It explains what I know." He said holding it out to her.

She didn't look back at him.

"I'll see he gets it." Hardwood took it.

Straczynski waited for a reaction from her, but when he didn't get one he swung his webbing up onto his shoulder and fastened the buckle. "I'll be fine. I promise."

"I hope she's dead!" Jane uttered.

He kissed her on the forehead not hearing what she'd said, then he picked up his rifle and checked the magazine.

"I hope she's laying in a ditch somewhere, dead." She spoke louder to him, but Straczynski still didn't hear. He didn't need to, he could read her words in her eyes. He joined the platoon as they congregated at the ramp door without another word.

"One minute." Sanders shouted over the clatter.

"Right you pillocks." Kneale hollered. "When we hit the ground, head left to the railway cutting."

"Give 'em hell, lads." The one legged soldier yelled. Several looked back. The soldier, fag hanging from the corner of his mouth waved a fist in the air.

Jane sat beside him, still looking down at the deck.

"STAND BY!" Sanders shouted at the platoon.

The Stallion whipped the snow whipped up beneath her as it dropped lower. Clancy juggled with the temperamental engines, trying to steady their decent. The ground came up far too quickly. The wheels touched down and bounced, violently shaking the fuselage before sliding to a halt.

Campbell and Kneale ushered the platoon out, shouting abusively at them. Straczynski stepped out last.

"You know you lot are fuckin' mad." Sanders said to him as he passed.

"Maybe." He answered.

"You wouldn't catch me out there anymore."

He stopped at the foot of the ramp and looked at her. "I would prefer not to be. Just get her back to Hamburg." He turned away.

"Hey, MAJOR."

He turned back again. She'd had pulled a camera from somewhere, pointed it at him and took a photo. "For your lady." She grinned. Then into her headset. "Okay Clanc, their clear. Lets go home."

The Stallion powered up and cleared the snow. Jane appeared at the ramp beside Sanders. They watched Straczynski walk slowly away towards the cutting. He stopped and looked up at them as they climbed away. Jane waved to him but she had no idea if he could see him.

"Stand clear." Sanders told her, pushing a button on the control panel. The door juddered but didn't move. She stamped on it and thumped the button again. The ramp juddered gain then freed itself and whined shut. "Jesus Christ." She sighed. "This crate ain't gonna get us back this time."

CHAPTER TWELVE

"MISHA!" Campbell yelled from the edge of the cutting. "What the hell are you waiting for?"

Straczynski gave the helicopter one last look, then turned back to Campbell.

"Come on!" He yelled again.

He headed towards him, breaking into a jog and slithering down the cutting to the rest of the section. Sims was already organising them into a patrol. "We're moving south along this railway line towards Pasewalk." He told them, "that's about 15 K's and should take us about six hours." He looked up from the map. Every one was watching him. "We'll hold there and assess the situation again. Any questions?" There was none. "Good, Kneale, your squad take the lead. Campbell, you've got the back. Right lets move!"

"You heard the man." Kneale ordered. "Rice, Goldie. Your on point. Let's shag it!"

The two men moved out ahead of the platoon; the first 25 metres in front of the second, the platoon followed in squad order 25 metre behind him, each man 10 metres apart. Except Straczynski and Campbell, they hesitated.

"Why did you still with us?" Campbell asked once the last of his men was out of ear shot.

He looked at him. "Do you think they'll make it?"

"Yeah sure. Sanders is a good pilot, she'll get 'em back." He looked round nervously.

"Anyway, thought you were meant to be heading back with 'em."

"Jane's got the information Jones needs."

"So why the hell you here?"

Straczynski looked him in the eye. "Charlotte."

"Jesus Misha. God knows where she is. Probably in the middle on all this shit." Campbell glanced at the departing troops. "Lets get a move on before someone comes looking for us."

Eurika read though the files during the course of the day. She was surprised how much time she had to read since she'd become bedridden. She hadn't minded at first as she slept for most of the time. But later her mind had craved for more stimulation then a Barbara Cartland novel could provide. The files from Hauer's safe provided this.

She was surprised at the efforts Hauer had taken to disguise his activities. She remembered Vonnegut had been on an information gathering tour of the eastern garrisons during December and early January which meant he'd spent a lot of his time away from Bonn. In reality he'd been recruiting support for the operation, as well as making a number of unauthorised visits to several Russian division within Poland. She read on. The helicopter crew used by Vonnegut had been carefully selected, picked for their anti-British feelings. As had the helicopter, an old East German Hind-A. She recalled seeing it sat outside the parliament building, with it's weapons wing removed and large glass house cockpit, it looked

radically different from the more common tandem cockpit Hind-D. Far enough removed not to be instantly recognisable, yet not odd enough to raise the curiosity of a second glance.

Intelligence reports from the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the German Intelligence Service, the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV), as well as the British had been used to identify the Russian divisions that were most likely to indulge in this operation. They used information gathered by British Intelligence against them. The selection had been made on several factors; moral, supply and equipment status, location to Oder, and the attitude of their commanding officer to the orders of TDV. A month was spent identifying the three Army Groups before the first formal approach was made.

"Eureka." Hellor startled her.

"Kurt." She closed the file and calmly slipped it out of sight. His face looked hollow and drawn.

"How are you today?" He asked falsely.

"Getting better." She smiled, equally as falsely. "How business is it at the top?"

He sat down on the chair next to her bed. "It's bad, Joseph's demanding I place our force on full alert."

"Why? I thought we had conflicting information on this. How could Joe demand that?"

"He's got the support of Bernard Hauer. If I don't agree to his demands I know he will lodge a sanction to remove me as Chancellor."

Eureka paused. Vonnegut and Hauer were pressurising Hellor into this action. "Are you going to sanction the action?"

"I'm not left with much choice, am I."

"No. I suppose not." She said cautiously.

Hellor left without waiting to hear more. Eureka waited for several minutes before retrieving the file. Hellor was an intelligent man, but not an overtly devious man. The uncertainty in his face was genuine, that she was certain of. They'd been intimate enough with each other over the past years for her to recognise true emotions in him. Vonnegut and Hauer were manipulating him, forcing him into a corner until his only option was to sanction their action. And he'd done nothing to hinder them. Two years of indecisiveness had ruined this country, ruined its population's faith in its Government and his ability to govern them. Damn that man!

Kubrick touched her hand and woke her. "What did he want?" He asked.

"Reassurance, I think." She pulled herself up against the pillows. "Vonnegut and Hauer are manipulating him into restarting the war." She whispered not wanting to be overheard by one of their spies. "And the fool's going to let them."

"They've got the support of the cabinet. I can't -"

There's a Colonel Jones in British Intelligence."

"Mm, I know him."

"I need to talk to him. Contact him and ask him to come here."

"You want him to come here?"

"Yes. And do it quickly or we might not be able to stop this madness."

The point man's fist went up. The second man repeated the signal and the patrol instantly halted and merged into the nearest piece of cover. Kneale checked around to see the signal being repeated through his squad and into the next. Once all movement had ceased he crept forward. "What we got?"

"Enemy sighted ahead."

Kneale checked his map for their location. They were just west of Ferdinandshof. The rail line passed within half a mile of the town, crossing the river and Ferdinandshof/Wilhelmsburg road on a steep sided embankment. Sims and Campbell jointed them, crawling the last 10 metres on their bellies. "What's up?" Sims whispered.

"Looks like a patrol up ahead close to Ferdinandshof."

"Local militia?"

"No, the town's only got a population of around 3000. They're under the protection of the Pasewalk garrison."

"It could be a patrol out of Pasewalk looking for us." Campbell added.

Sims raised his head and looked round. "I'm going forward to have a look. Rice you stay put. Do nothing unless we're spotted." He told Goldie the same thing though hand signal. Once he acknowledged they moved forward, crawling along the track bed between the rail on their bellies.

"How many we got son?" Kneale asked as they reached him.

"A platoon, maybe more." He handed Kneale the binoculars. "There's a Shilka and PC parked just under the bridge. Looks like a '113."

Kneale studied the two tracks.

"Well?" Sims asked.

"I don't know. Two tracks, plus accompanying troops. Lightly kitted out. They're out on patrol from somewhere all right." Kneale handed the binoculars back to Goldie. "They've got the engine hatches up on the Shilka. Looks like they've got some trouble."

Sims rolled his eyes. "Jesus Christ, two Shilkas in one day. Someone's got it in for us today."

"What do you want us to do, sit here 'til they've gone, go round 'em or through 'em?"

Sims stuck his head up again and studied the lay of the land. They were committed to the railway line to cross the river as crossing on foot was not a viable option in these extreme conditions. They could approach the bridge along the foot of the embankment were the cover was better, then cross over one at a time. But that would put them almost right onto of the patrol. The alternative crossing points were eight miles away, both to the east and west of them., both too far out their way. "Okay, we go through 'em. The PC could be useful so lets not waste it if we can. I want the GPMG's and M-60's set up on this side of the river on either side of the railway for give support fire. The rest of the platoon form up into four man fireteams. We'll approach along the foot of the embankment. Campbell, you cross first and put down suppressing fire. Kneale, you follow him and go wide onto their flank. Let's get in as close as we can before the fun starts. And lets keep it tight."

Campbell paused beside the steel gantry of the railway bridge, the first of his four man fireteam waited on the embankment behind him. He studied the rail bed before him along with the bridge structure. The snow was crisp and unbroken with no sign of trip wires or booby traps. He waved his men forward and the first four scurried across the bridge, merging into the cover on the far side. The second fireteam formed up behind him. Campbell waited for a moment until he was certain the last man of the first team was in cover, then he waved the second team across and followed.

He slid into cover behind a sparse hedgerows at the foot of the embankment were he waited again. The two tracks were less then 50 metres ahead of them, just to the east of the railway line. The Shilka was closes to the bridge with it's turret pointing away from then with and it's engine covers up. Three men stood on top of it holding spanners and other tools. The M-113 was parked close by, it's engine idling.

Straczynski slid down the embankment and went prone beside Campbell. "So far so good." He whispered.

"What the hell you doing here? You should be back with Sims."

"What, and miss all this fun." Straczynski replied dryly.

"Where's Kneale?"

"Gone right along the other side of the embankment."

"Oh, okay." Campbell started to move forward to his first fireteam. He didn't get more than two steps before he ducked back into the hedge again as a platoon of cavalry cantered under the rail bridge and stopped next to the two tracks.

The cavalry commander dismounted and walked up to the Shilka crew. They spoke at some length then one of the crew pointed at the river ridge. The commander turned and looked. After a few seconds he put his binoculars to his eyes and studied the horizon. The crewman spoke to him again. The commander glanced round at him then back through the binoculars. After a minute he walked over to his sergeant who lent down from his horse as they spoke. The sergeant then called up one of his sections and pointed them towards the bridge, straight towards Campbell's fireteams.

He slowly brought his SLR up to his shoulder, but Straczynski touched his arm. "Not yet. Wait until they get closer." He whispered

Campbell glanced into his deadly calm face. "Hold you fire." He whispered to his men.

As the cavalry section approached them at a slow trot Campbell strained to make himself as small as he could behind the hedgerow. The corporal waved his hand in the air and they halted. He himself rode on a few more steps, straight up to the hedge where Campbell lay. Campbell starred up at him, sat on top of his horse, he looked over nine foot tall. Campbell hand felt clammy. The horse was almost near enough for him to touch. He tightened his grip of his rifle and despite the cold, he was sweating. He must have seen us how could he not?

The corporal looked at the bridge, rusty and grey, then at the disturbed snow on the embankment. Animal tracks he thought and turned his horse back towards the platoon. Then stopped, turning back and looking at the snow, the tracks leading down the embankment to the hedgerow, straight at Campbell. Campbell's heart stopped. The corporal went for his rifle. Straczynski beat him and a single shot cracked out.

All hell broke loose. Campbell's fireteams opened up on the close in cavalry. The tank troops and cavalry platoon replied within a second. Caught between their own guns and those of the fireteams, the cavalry section quickly fell as the machine guns joined in from the far side of the river. The last man dropped, his horse cut down from under him and the guns turned onto the track and their troops. Campbell's men moved forward into the field, closing the range on the tracks and using the dead cavalry section for cover. As soon as he had, he know it was a mistake. The fire coming back at them was fiercer then he anticipated. He slapped another mag into his SLR and looked round. Two of his men were already down. One was crying out, he's chest torn open. The other out cold, or dead. Campbell laced off a few bursts into the hedge row in front of the '113 as Straczynski scrambled across to him. "Blake is dead." He panted.

"No shit!" Campbell laced off another burst. Then stopped, starring at the ZSU4-23. "Christ, they've got the Shilka working." He watched as the turret traversed slowly round to bring it's quad 23mm cannons to bear on them. Both Campbell and Straczynski ducked back behind cover as it opened up. The quad cannons tore into the field. Cutting through the cavalry section and fireteams without any regard. The screaming man fell silent, now unrecognisable as a man. Campbell laced off a burst into the Shilka side but it just bounced off it's armour.

It opened up again with another sort burst, tearing chunks out of the corporals dead horse and rapidly reducing Campbell's cover. "BLACKIE!" He yelled. "Where's that LAW?"

Blackie scrambled up to them. "Here Serge."

"Waste that Shilka." He ordered.

The young soldier took a look. "Yeah, but I'm gonna have to get closer."

"Head along that hedge row. We'll give you some covering fire."

Straczynski slapped a fresh mag in his AK. "I'm coming with you."

"Misha, no!" Campbell protested. But the two had already gone.

The Shilka opened up again taking more of the horse away. "Come on Blackie, take the bastard out!" He yelled.

They got as close as they could. Crouched in a shallow ditch at the foot of the railway embankment, behind a spares hedge, Blackie primed the LAW.

Straczynski peered through the hedge. "The Shilka's about 30 metres ahead of us. This is as close as we can get."

Blackie took a look. "No problem." He knelt up to take the shot. Two of the cavalry troops spotted them and swung their rifle round onto him, but Straczynski was waiting. He laid a burst of fire at them, taking one out, forcing the second to go wide, missing Blackie by a mile. Blackie remain undeterred, his aim remaining true on the Shilka. "You're toast pal." And pulled the trigger. The LAW hit the Shilka under the turret ring, detonating against the armour. Molten slab of metal exploded inwards, igniting the ammunition. The explosion lifted the turret from the hull, sending it spinning through the air and into the field. The cavalry platoon dove for cover as the hull was ripped apart by secondary explosions. Campbell seized the opportunity and with a loud battle cry, broke cover and closed the range on them. His teams followed.

The Cavalry officer reacted equally as quickly, with the Shilka gone and the attackers closing in he knew the fruitlessness of the situation was. Withdrawal was the only option. He grabbed his horse and gave the order. Campbell's teams moved forward again, up to the road. As the cavalry retreated back under the railway bridge. Despite their dwindling strength, they still putting up a good resistance. Campbell followed one of his men through a hedge row onto the road. A short burst of gunfire sent them both diving for the ground before scrambling back to their feet and headed for the cover of the burning Shilka. Campbell quickly checked the two bodies laid on the ground next to it. Both were dead. Reed checked the body next to him. "This one's still alive." He shouted.

He rolled the soldier over to find him holding a long knife in his hand which he lunged it into Reed's side. Reed cried out as the blade punctured his skin. The soldier pulled the knife out and lunged it back in. Campbell grabbed Reed and pulled him clear as the soldier lunged at Reed a third time, slashing him across the chest. Campbell kicked at him as he pulled back

for another strike. Rolling Reed out of the way, he brought his SLR to bear and hit the soldier with a short burst. Campbell checked Reed, but he was dead too. He cursed.

"Kneale!" Sims hollered over the gun fire. He scrambled across to where his sergeant crouched, dodging the hail of bullets. "Take your team together and get after them." He shouted, pointing under the bridge. "I don't want them 'em to get back to their H.Q."

Kneale moved off, calling his team to order.

Campbell pushing Reed's body aside and peered round the side of the Shilka. Several more bodies lay scattered across the road. Beyond them, huddled against the side of the road, cowered three more soldiers. Sims appeared above on the far side of the hedgerow. Campbell waved a hand at him and hollered. Sims spotted him and acknowledged. Campbell pointed to the three soldiers. He understood and called up two other members of his platoon before bursting through the hedgerow on top of them. They let out cries of panic and threw down their rifles and held their hands up, making clear their intention to surrender.

"Kids." Sims commented. "They're just kids. This one's on more than 15. Fuckin' kids."

Campbell joined them. "Blackie, see to our guys. Allen, get me a body count."

Sims looked round at the carnage. "Kay, Singer. See if that '113s still working." Then he spotted Kneale standing in the middle of the field. "Kneale, why the fuck aren't you after them yet?"

"On my way now sir." He shouted back.

"Well get moving before they get back to their H.Q." Sims turned back to the three boys. "Deal with them, somebody."

Campbell walked back into the field towards Kneale who stood waiting for a horse. "Got a problem?"

"No!" He replied, taking the reins of a horse from one of his men.

"I'll see you later then."

Kneale swung himself up onto the animal's back. "Maybe."

Campbell stopped next to a crippled horse struggling to stand. He looked down at the poor animal.

"KNEALE! Get your ass into gear and get after them bastards." Sims hollered at him from across the field.

Campbell knelt down next to the horse, put his pistol to the side of its head and blew its brains out. Kneale's horse reared. He calmed it with a gentle pat on the side of its neck.

"KNEALE!" Sims bellowed again.

He turned his horse and headed after the Russian cavalry with out a second glance.

Sims joined Campbell. "What's that all about."

"Nothing."

Clancy looked across at Sanders and broke the silence that had fallen over the chopper's occupants since they'd left the LZ. "We're not going to make it. Are we?"

"No shit Sherlock." She snapped. "How long did it take y' to work that out?"

He ignored the dig. He knew it was the situation she was angry with, not him. "Any idea where we are?"

"Somewhere short of Lake Muritz." She tapped the broken fuel gauge in a pathetic attempt to get a reading. "Wish some of this stuff still worked." Most of the flight instruments were either burnt out or smashed. Clancy had plugged blankets into the gapping hole at their feet to stem the howling gale, but it still found its way in to chill their legs. "I think we're almost out of fuel," the sarcasm dropped from her voice. "We're going to have to put her down somewhere."

"Great, are you sure?"

"NO I'M NOT! I'm just taking a wild guess."

"Fuck you Kim, I'm not the one who flew into that tree."

"You don't fly us anywhere any more. You're always too drunk."

"I fuckin' flew you out of Jordan when your ass was on the line."

"Hey people!" Hardwood shouted over the intercom. "This is not the time."

"You keep out of this Woody. You're as bad as her, fuckin' Spec-Ops pucks. This is my bird and if I say she'll make Hamburg, she'll make it." Clancy stared out at heavily forested countryside beneath them. Up ahead he could see the wide expanse of Lake Muritz, five icy miles wide. "Do you think we can make it to the Rostock Autobahn?" He asked quietly.

She shook her head. "I don't know. You know as much as me!"

"You've flown us out of worse messes than this."

"And I've always had some instruments to fly us with. Last time she was in this state you were flying." She looked across at him. "Do y' want to take a chance on putting down on water? There's so many holes in her -"

"No. You best find somewhere to land then." He pulled himself up in his seat and turned on the radio, flicking quickly through the channels until he found the one he wanted. "Citadel, Citadel. This is Alpha One. Do you read, over."

The radio crackled back at him.

"Citadel, Citadel. This is Alpha One. Do you read, over."

Still nothing.

Sanders looked across at him and shrugged. She flicked to an open channel. "Mayday, mayday. This is Alpha One. We are 20 K east of Malchow and going down. We have wounded and dying aboard and need assistance. Do you read, over."

Again nothing.

"Mayday, mayday...." She repeated the message.

The radio crackled into life. "ALPHA ONE - THIS IS HAMBURG - YOUR SIGNAL IS WEAK AND UNCLEAR - WHAT IS YOU MAYDAY - OVER."

Clancy punched the radio set. "Can't we get any more power out of this thing?"

"I don't fuckin' know. I'm just the co-pilot!"

Clancy looked at her, there was no point in starting an argument again.

"Hamburg. We are going down east of Malchow at grid -" He grabbed the map from beside his seat. "- 128-535. We have wounded on board and need help immediately, over."

"ROGER ALPHA ONE - PLEASE AUTHENTICATE C-8 - OVER."

"What!" Clancy exclaimed before turning to Sanders. "What is it Kim?"

"I'm looking." Both of them had forgotten about the authentication procedures. She pulled the charred log book from it's locker.

"ALPHA ONE - PLEASE GIVE AUTHENTICATION NUMBER - OVER." The radio crackled.

"Hang on Hamburg, we're looking." Clancy replied. Then to Sanders. "Come on they're waiting."

"Oh shit, it's all burnt up." She said flicking through the partly destroyed pages. "The bloody codes are gone."

"Hamburg. We cannot authenticate." Clancy said into the radio. "Our codes have been destroyed, over."

"PLEASE STAND BY ALPHA ONE - I'LL HAVE INSTRUCTIONS IN A MOMENT - OVER."

"STAND BY!" Clancy's temper flared. "What the fuck do you think we're gonna do? Listen pal, I've had every friggin piece of triple A this side of Moscow taking shots at us. I've got ten wounded guys on board, one pregnant woman and no fucking fuel. This baby ain't gonna be flying in a minutes time, so get your finger out of your arse and get this message through to Jones at the Citadel. RIGHT NOW!" There was a short silence from the over end of the radio link. "DID YOU FUCKING HEAR ME? Over."

"ROGER THAT ALPHA ONE - TRY AND RADIO IN AFTER YOU HAVE LANDED - GOOD LUCK - OVER."

"Thanks for nothing Hamburg. Alpha One out." Clancy flicked off the radio link and turned to Sanders. "Useless wankers. You ready?" But she was too busy looking for a landing site to say much. "What about you lot back there?" He spoke into the inter comm.

"We're fine. Just land this baby." Hardwood replied.

"That's in Kim's hands." Clancy told him.

"Isn't it always." She uttered to herself.

"Hey Kim." Hardwood encouraged. "It's just a walk in the park, girl."

"Yeah, sure Woody." She replied. "If it's so easy why don't you come up here and I'll sit back there." She'd already selected the site, the only possible one open to her. A small clearing half a mile from the lake edge. It was flat and level, and big enough for the Stallion's giant rotors. She slued them sideways, scrubbing off the forward speed and crabbing into the site. She constantly juggled with the controls, trying to pre-empt the erratic power fluctuations of the third engine, praying it wouldn't fail her at the critical moment. She edged them lower and closer to the tree tops, the Stallion's massive down draught wiping and twisted them around beneath them. They slowed almost to a halt over the clearing. She watched the trees flapping about beneath her and wondered if she'd misjudged the size of the clearing; it now looked to small for the 80 foot rotor. She hesitated. The third engine waned and the power dropped. Before she could compensate the Stallion dropped into the clearing. She brought the collective up, increasing the angle of attack on the blades and stalling there fall. Fait had committed her to the clearing. She increased the power to hold them steady so she could check the rotor tips stayed clear of any branches that could spell disaster, then lowered the collective. The Stallion dropped slowly, her rear wheels touched the snow and sank deep into it until they came to rest against the frozen earth. She wrenched the throttle shut, fearing the screaming engines might seize at any moment and pushed the collective to the floor. The nose dropped, thumping hard into the frozen ground.

She killed the ignition switches and thumped the emergency fuel cut off switch. The last thing she wanted was an engine fire to destroy her aircraft. Clancy immediately unbuckled himself and headed back into the cabin, leaving her alone in the cockpit. She pulled off her

helmet and breathed a sigh of relief. She let the helmet drop out of her hands onto the deck and leaning back in her seat, she close her eyes and listened to the engines die.

Clancy stumbled into the cabin. "Jesus Christ!" He uttered looking at the damage. Hardwood, Jane and the one legged soldier sat together on one side. A row of bodies lay on the empty benches "How many?" He asked.

"Eight." Jane answered.

He pulled a fag out of is flying suit pocket and stuck it in his mouth. "Anyone got a light?"

"I wouldn't." Hardwood pointed at the fuel trickling into the cabin from a ruptured fuel line. Clancy pushed the fag back into his pocket without another word.

Sanders opened her eyes again. Above her the huge rotor blades were slowly turned, grinding gradually to a halt as the last embers of life faded from the engines. She unbuckled herself and looked through the cracked cockpit glass at the forest outside. The clearing looked bigger now they were in it. She know now her hesitations had been foundless. Behind her, she could hear Clancy and the others talking. The conversation sounded forced, disjointed. Shocked.

She flicked on the radio back on. "Hamburg, this is Alpha One. Do you read, over." She listened for a reply. But none came, not even static. She flicked across all the channels listening for any signs of life. "Mayday, mayday. Alpha One calling Hamburg. Do you read, over." Nothing. She turned it off. "Not surprising." She uttered to herself as she scanned the instrument panels. A thin ribbon of black cellos hung down from the tape machine. She pushed the eject button and half of her favourite rock tape dropped into her hand. She looked disappointedly at it then tossed it aside. The ribbon unravelling as it bounded along the deck, the other end still stuck in the machine. She got up and followed Clancy.

"Radio's fucked." She announced as she stepped past Clancy and walking down the cabin. She stopped next to the first body. "A mess isn't it." She trying to sound cheerful. She failed. After the constant whine from the engines, the silence was deathly. Black oil dropped through the roof, splashing onto the deck and mixed in with the leaking fuel. She stopped and watched the oil/fuel mixture draining out onto the snow through a shell hole in the deck. "Shouldn't we be trying to save that stuff?"

"What for? This baby ain't going anywhere for a while." Clancy slumped himself down next to Hardwood. He pulled off his helmet. He dropped it onto the seat next to him. "I'm shagged."

Jones burst through the doors into the Operations room. "Have you got them back yet?" He demanded.

"No Sir." The senior duty officer answered. "They gave the grid reference 128-535. That's here, I don't think they'll have got much further. They sounded in a bad way."

Jones pondered over the map. "Any word on who was aboard?"

"Eight wounded, and a pregnant woman." He sounded surprised at that.

Jones read the scribbled radio communication. Was Straczynski one of the wounded? And what the hell's a pregnant woman doing on board? "Yes, I know about her." He bluffed. "Get me the Citadel."

The duty officer passed on the order to one of his men.

Bridgewater entered the room at a steadier pace and walked across towards Jones.

"Alan. What's the story." Bridgewater asked him.

"We've had another chopper go down close to Lake Muritz."

"Which one?"

"ALPHA ONE. The CH-53."

"Was MAJOR on board?"

"I don't know Sir." Jones could see he didn't look happy.

"Any word on casualties?"

"Only that she was carrying eight wounded." Jones informed him.

"And a pregnant woman, Sir." The duty officer added.

Bridgewater raised an eye brow.

"As soon as they patch me through to the Citadel, I'll scramble one of my choppers to search for them."

Bridgewater lowered his voice. "You do know you're meant to be running a data gathering operation not a bloody pre-natal clinic."

"She's one of MAJOR's contacts."

"You don't expect me to believe that. Do you?" The tone in Bridgewater's voice became harsh. "I don't want to risk another helicopter unless we can guarantee MAJOR is on it. You've already lost two this week and people are starting to ask questions."

"It is the quickest way to locate ALPHA ONE, retrieve it's crew, and find out what's happened."

"No Alan, I can't risk another helicopter. Collins will have my balls." He's voice returned back to normal. "Who is this woman anyway?"

"I don't know at the moment. I presume MAJOR placed her on the chopper at Hardenbeck. I think she may be involved with one of the other intelligence services and could be important." Jones tried to push his point again.

"No. That's final."

Bridgewater and Jones looked at each other in silence.

"Sir, I've got the Citadel." The duty officer interrupted.

Jones walked over to him and picked up the handset. Bridgewater watched him for a few seconds, then left.

Kneale's section were still on a high from the fire fight when they hit Wilhelmsburg. Short tempered and fired up, they were eager for another go, but almost a mile behind them, they'd lost sight of the platoon when they entered the village. Kneale slowed his section to a cantered as they followed then in. A dishevelled barricade blocked the road before them, behind which a dozen Militia men confronted them, poorly equipped and looking ruffled.

Kneale brought his section to a halt. "We want the Russian Cavalry."

"They are not here." A middle aged, balding man spoke up. "They left."

"Where are they?" Kneale demanded.

"They are not here. They rode through, heading north." He waved his shotgun in that direction.

Kneale glanced across the barren fields. That didn't seem to make sense. That would take them away from Pasewalk and their support, south would have been a more logical chose. It was obvious the cavalry had come through the village, the tracks in the snow made that clear. Cutting across the field would mean losing the trail and the possibility of not being able to pick it up again. "Ryan, take two men and check out the north side of the village. Parson, the south." He ordered.

"No!" The man protested. "We don't want any trouble. The Russian's came through here, but they left. Like I said, they were heading north."

"In that case you have nothing to hide. Ryan, Parson, move out. The rest of you follow me." He urged his horse forward.

"NO!" But the man blocked his path. "There is nothing for you here. You can ride round are village. But you can not going through it."

"Seez who?" Kneale demanded.

"We will not allow you into our village. NOW LEAVE!"

Kneale draw his pistol out and aimed it at the man. "You shut your mouth! Ryan, Parson. MOVE!"

"NO!" The militia leader snatched up his shotgun and aimed it at Kneale.

Both the section and militia responded, bringing all their weapons to bear at once. The old man glanced between the two groups of aimed men, a smug grin playing across his face. "It appears we have a stand off."

"No we haven't." Kneale pulled the trigger and the old man jerked back and fell to the ground. "Now put down your fuckin' weapons before the next one gets it!"

"NO!" A woman let out a shrill scream and ran forward. Half the guns from the section swung round onto her, but again only Kneale fired. She fell to the ground, clutching a stomach wound.

Kneale swung his aim onto one to the militia. "Are you next?" The man quickly dropped his shotgun and placed his hands on his head. The rest of them followed. "Ryan, Parson." Kneale barked out the order. "Jump to it. Now!"

The section split up and moved off as ordered. The four moving round the edge of the village while the rest of Kneale's men herded the militia and villagers, like cattle, towards the centre of the village. They showed no respect for anyone, not being in the mood for niceties. Men, women, children, no distinction was made between either. Bolted doors were kicked down and cowering occupants dragged out and beaten. Rooms were ransacked, belongings smashed, life-stock and pets bayoneted.

Several tried to runaway, some were court and beaten to near unconsciousness before being dragged back, others that were to far away to chase where shot and left to be collected later. Finally a shout went up summoning Kneale to one of the houses.

Inside he found Parson forcibly restraining a teenage girl by the throat. "Up stairs." He shouted over her protests. "Got one of them pinned."

Kneale sprinted up the stairs two at a time and into the front bedroom to find one of his men stood in the middle of the room with his foot pressed against the back of a young Russian soldier. The boy was crying, begging for him to let him go, but that only sought to increase his torment.

"Found this little shit up here. The bitch down stairs was hiding him." he soldier told Kneale ignoring the pleas of the boy.

"What about the rest of the platoon?"

"Not here. Reckon they're long gone by now. This one took a bullet to the back. They probably dumped him 'coz he was slowing them up."

Kneale knelt down next to him, pulling his head up and looked into his face. He found only the expression of a frightened child. He smacked his head back down onto the floorboards. "Get him outside."

He was dragged to his feet and bundled through the doorway. He collapsing at the top of the stairs in tears and agony from the bullet wound.

"GET UP, ASS HOLE!" He shouted, kicking him over the top step.

The boy tumbled down the stairs and he walked down after him. "GET UP!" He repeated, kicking him again from the third step. The boy made a vain attempt to grab his foot, but he was expecting it. Dropping down the last few steps, he grabbed him round the neck. "Clever little shit ain't you?" He sneered into his face before smashing it into the wall.

"Get him outside." Kneale ordered following him down the stairs.

"Right Boss." He hauled the boy up and pushed him through the front door.

Kneale looked into the front room, Parson had pulled the girl on the floor and was trying to wrestle her coat from her. "Save that for later." He told him walking over to her and grabbing her by her hair. He dragged her out of the house, ignoring her screaming and struggling. Parson followed him out.

There were less people in Wilhelmsburg then Kneale expected, a couple of hundred at the most. The majority of them were either old or young children, only a few of middle age and they were mostly women, but not many. Most of the men had left to join the fighting. Or run away from it. They huddled together in the centre of the main street flanked on all sides by the Kneale's men. Some looked frightened, some angry and few of them looked complacent having lived through such things before. But all were helpless to the ruthlessness of the section. Kneale studied them for a while, looking for anyone who might cause him trouble. His eyes settled on one women stood in the middle of them, she was in her late thirties and rather ordinary with a thin body and straight hair but starred back at him in a way he didn't like. He pushed the girl into Ryan's arms and walked over to the villagers. "Bring that kid over here," he ordered without taking his eyes off the woman.

Parson dragged the boy across the street and throw him to the ground at Kneale's feet.

"Speak English?" Kneale demanded. The boy just looked blankly up at him. "Speak English!" This time giving him a kick. The boys cried out. Kneale shrugged. "Guess not. Parson translate. Ask him what he was doing here."

Parson did and the boy muttered something back. "Just name, rank and number."

"Ask him again."

"The same."

Kneale kicked him hard in the stomach "Listen you little twat..." He looked across at Parson. "Well tell him!" Parson translated. "Start talking, or I'm gonna blow your balls off."

The boy glanced quickly between Parson and Kneale. Stammering as he spoke.

"Same again," Parson answered.

Then the boy's eyes shot momentarily across to the girl. Kneale noticed. Yes, cracked him. He crouched next to him. "Listen here you little bastard. If you don't start co-operating I'm gonna kill her."

The boy looked back towards her as Parson translated. Kneale pointed his pistol at her.

"NOOO!" A shrill shout went up from the villagers. A small child; no more than 10 or 11, ran from them, ducking under the soldiers arms. "Leave my sister alone," he screamed, running headlong at Kneale to land a feeble punch into his stomach that wasn't even felt through the body armour. Kneale grabbed him and yanked him round, tossing him to the ground and bringing his pistol to bear, firing once. Quick, smooth. Almost one graceful action.

"NOOOOO!" the girl screamed.

Kneale brought the pistol back onto her. "TALK OR SHE'S NEXT!"

Campbell's fist went up at the sound of the shot. His section had followed up Kneale's on foot, leaving Sims to follow them up with the 113 once they'd cleared up the area.

They'd found the bodies of the Militia leader and his wife beside the barricade, but no sign of the cavalry or Kneale. Fearing the worst, Campbell ordered his section to move forward with caution. They checked each house they encountered, finding doors forced open and the rooms ransacked and smashed, fresh blood on the snow and against the walls. In one house they found an old man with his skull smashed open, a dismembered dog lay on the floor of another. Campbell looked at the dead animal, the Russians couldn't have done this, they didn't have the time. He stepped out of the house and waved his section on to the next house when they heard the shot, crisp and clear in the silence.

"That was bloody close," Blackie said, crouching beside him.

"Next street?" Campbell asked. Blackie nodded. "MOOVE!" he yelled, waving them forward.

They entered the main street at the run, instant going prone and bringing their rifles to bear as they saw the crowd. Kneale's men reacted equally as quickly and the two sections stared at each other down the sights of the rifles for a few tense second, then slowly they lowered them

as recognition occurred. All except for Campbell. He kept his SLR trained on Kneale for a second longer before dropping his aim and standing up.

"Sergeant Campbell," Kneale shouted across. "Your just in time. We got one of the cavalry troopers here and he's just about to tell us what they were up too."

Campbell walked across to him. "Kneale, what you doing?"

"Just as the LT said. Catching up with the Russians and gathering information. You got a problem with that?"

Campbell looked down at the boy. "Were are the rest of them?"

"Ah, they're long gone. But we got twat-face here. He knows where they are and he's gonna tell us."

"Who is he?"

"Some kid. He got hit in the fire-fight and they dumped him here intending to pick him up later. But we got to the twat first."

Campbell crouched down next to him and lifted the edge of his field dressing. "He's going to bleed to death if this isn't treated."

"He's getting fuck all 'til he's finished talking."

"Ryan, where's your medic?"

"You stay put!" Kneale countermanded him.

Campbell glanced up at Kneale, then across the sections. None of them were moving, not Kneale section or his own. "Came on lad, I'm getting you out of here."

"He.... he shot him." The Russian stammered in broken English.

"What?"

"The little boy.... That sergeant shot him."

Campbell looked at Kneale.

"He's lying." Kneale casually butted off the accusation. "He's a Russkie, what do you expect him to say."

"It's true." The girl choked before Ryan tightened his grip on her throat.

"It is true. He shot him." The Russian spoke out more boldly.

Kneale made a grab for him, but Campbell blocked his path. "You're treading a thin line Kneale. Sims is gonna hear of this when he gets here."

"You're talking a load of bollocks. He's a fuckin Russian, he knows were the others are."

"Back off Kneale," Campbell pushed him away. "Get him a medic, then he talks."

"Bollocks. He talks now or I blow his fuckin brains out."

Campbell shoved him back again. Kneale's temper flared and he swung for him, landing a punch before he got his guard up. Campbell blocked his next punch before letting fly and grappling him to the ground. Kneale dragged him over. They both rolled across the snow, each dealing out as much as they got, brawling and fighting dirty while both sections cheering and heckling around them, ignoring the villagers. And not noticing the middle aged woman slip away.

"LT!" A shout went up from someone and both men were forcibly dragged off each other and restrained.

It took Kneale a moment or two to realise why they'd intervened then calm down. He glanced across at the PC as it rolled up the street. "We'll finish this later," he span at Campbell.

"Let's finish it now. Just you and me, right now," Campbell barked back, strained to brake his restraints.

"Later!" Kneale snapped, rubbing his jaw as he walked toward the PC.

Sims leapt from the M-113 as it slide to a halt. "Sergeant Kneale. What's going on here?" He demanded.

"Sergeant Campbell was getting a little over zealous with the interrogation of the prisoner. We had to restrain him."

"You fuckin' liar, Kneale!" Campbell hollered, trying again to brake free.

"Is this true Blackie?" Sims asked.

"Yes sir." The soldier replied without hesitation.

"We also had a shooting incident." Kneale continued. "A weapon was discharged during a struggle, killing one of the civilian."

"How's weapon?"

"Mine sir. I take full responsibility for he death."

Sims glanced from the Russian to the girl. "And how's she?"

"She was hiding the Ruskie." Ryan answered.

"How else was involved in this incident?"

"No-one sir. Just myself and Sergeant Campbell." Kneale replied.

Sims walked over to him. "Have you anything to add Sergeant?"

"Jesus Christ LT. The kid was dead when we got here. We found Kneale denying medical attention to the Russian and attempting to interrogate him by torture. Your platoon sergeant has flipped. He's gone over the edge."

"Watch your mouth soldier." Sims snapped back. "You're in my platoon now. If you've got a problem, you see me and I'll sort it. But from what I've seen so far, the only problem we have here is you. You should have stayed with Hamilton."

Campbell starred back. It was obvious Sims would back Kneale because he was the outsider. Hamilton would have done the same for him had the situation been reversed.

Straczynski, who'd been watching from the back of the PC, walked over to the boy and spoke to him quickly. Kneale glanced uneasily at Parson. "What's he saying?"

"Don't know. I can't hear."

After a moment Straczynski stood up. "Get this boy medical help," he ordered. "And release her."

Kneale looked across at Sims for conformation before snapping the order to his men. Ryan removed his arm from the girl's neck and she fell to the ground, cuddling him and sob over her brothers body.

"Release him as well." Straczynski pointed at Campbell.

Campbell snatched his arms away from his captors and returned to the Russians side.

Sims pulled Kneale to one side. "Will you calm down while this MAJOR is around," he said quietly.

"Why. What's so special about him?"

"He's dangerous. If what O'Brian's told me is right. He could be very dangerous to you and me. So just watch your step while he's around. Now get this place secured. We'll be stopping here for the night."

"He ain't nothing."

"He got you out here again, didn't he? If his word can do that, he can do far more."

The middle aged woman stumbled blindly through the woods, too busy looking over her shoulder to see where she was going. If she had she might have the cavalry platoon hiding among the trees. But as it was the first she knew was when a hand grabbed her leg and pulled her down onto the snow and a white clad soldier leapt on top of her, his ice cold knife pressed against her throat. "No. No, don't!" She blurted out. The soldier hesitated. "British soldiers, back there." She pointed towards the village.

"We know." He snarled.

"I know.... I know how many. I know where they are."

The soldier stared at her. His stale breath blowing onto her face as he breathed slowly compared to her panting. He moved the knife away and pulled her to her feet. After a few steps he forced her down onto the snow again. "She's from the village." He seemed to say to no-one.

The snow before her moved and the face of an officer appeared from under the hood of his parker. "What's she doing out here?" Captain Chapayev asked.

"Running from the British." The corporal replied.

The officer smiled to himself. "Good Kosov, so they are British. What else does she know?"

"They fight among themselves." She told them. "There is two of them with.... with three strips on their jackets. They fight."

"Platoon sergeants?" Kosov suggested.

The officer shook his head. "No there's not enough of them. Fireteam leaders most likely." He turned back to the woman. "What was the shot?"

The woman glanced round nervously. One by one more faces were appearing from beneath the snow, seven she counted, eight now.

"What was the shot?" Chapayev grabbed her jaw with his cold hand.

"One of the sergeants shot someone."

"Pavel?" Kosov asked.

"They have him, but it was not him they shot. It was a boy from the village." She answered. "They question your man to find out where you are."

"Pavel's a good lad." Chapayev answered. "He'll stay quiet."

"They'll torture him. We must try to rescue him."

"No. We sit tight for now and wait until dark." He turned back to the woman. "And if you want to live that long you'd better tell me all you know. How many British are they?"

She glanced across the snow covering the ground, now she know what to look for, she could make out more of them. Over twenty she now counted. Kosov's knife came back to her throat. "How many?"

"Erm, eighteen maybe."

"A platoon." Kosov uttered.

"What about officers? Did you see any?"

"No. Just the two sergeants."

"Vehicles, personnel carriers."

"No, I didn't see any."

Kosov lessened the pressure on the knife. "What do you think. Is it the one's we're looking for? The BTR was abandoned not far from here."

Chapayev nodded. "Kochenski, where's the radio?"

"On the way." From under another snowy mound a woman appeared and ran across to them. She throw himself flat on the ground next to them.

"Get hold of Pasewalk." He ordered. Kochenski keyed the handset and within a second Pasewalk replied. She handed it to him who relayed the information to them. After a few minutes he handed the hand-set back to her. "We sit tight until 2200 hours."

"What about her?" Kosov asked.

Chapayev looked at his watch. "We've got six hours to waste."

"Rank privilege?" Kochenski's asked.

Chapayev nodded. The woman glanced between them and the dark reality of her situation dawned on he. Kosov's hand came across her mouth and she was pulled flat onto the snow, his knife pressed hard against her throat.

"Wilhelmsburg." Solvac thumped the map. "We have them. Annopol, I want two platoon in position and ready to strike tonight."

"Is it this Red Fox Two Reconnaissance section?"

"I don't know, it might be. It's either them or the troops from the helicopter. Either way they need taking out before they can do any more damage to us. Who do we have?"

"My company is free." Matusiak interrupted.

Solvac ignored her. "Well Annopol?"

He studied the deployment board. "Borisov has two cavalry companies at Friedland and his Mech. company within fifteen kilometres of the village. We also have six cavalry platoons within twenty kilometres. And there is three companies here."

"Iamskov, find out the status of Borisov's Mech. company." Solvac ordered. Then he turned back to the map. "We can put his on the west side of the village, it should take him no more than an hour to get there. Then move two of the cavalry platoon into a frontal assault on the village. That will draw the British to the east side of the village leaving the way clear for Borisov to advance in from the west."

Matusiak pushed her way between them. "The nearest cavalry platoon is twenty five kilometres east of Wilhelmsburg, not twenty. It will take them almost three hours to get into positions. That means Borisov will have a two hour wait before the attack started. Two hours in which he risks discovery. I can have my company there in a little over an hour and rendezvous with Chapayev's cavalry. Borisov can rally just to the west of the village, coordinate with my company, manoeuvre straight into position and attack before the British know we are there. If the British decide to run they will run north-east. Straight into the two cavalry platoon coming in from the east."

Annopol studied the distances and the terrain on the map. "That's a better plan. The sooner we move the greater the opportunity we have of catching the British unprepared."

Solvac agreed, they must move quickly to catch them. But not Ivana, someone else. "Who else is available?"

"Leonid!" She snapped.

Annopol glanced between the two of them. "There isn't. Everything else is committed. Major Matusiak's company is the only free one we have available."

"Come on Leonid, I've got the best trained and best equipped company in the Division." Matusiak persisted.

"She is right."

Solvac knew that. He had no doubts over her ability as company commander. In fact she was one of his best. But why Ivana? Why her? He couldn't accept the fact that he may be placing her in mortal danger.

"Dam it Leonid, I'm not going to beg you over this!" She snapped.

Iamskov interrupted. "Sir. Major Borisov reports his Mech. company is now mobile."

"Good. Order his to proceed east towards Wilhelmsburg at best speed." He ordered. "He's too contact Major Matusiak once within three kilometres of the villages." He added reluctantly.

"Proceed at best speed to Wilhelmsburg. Contact Major Matusiak once within three clicks." Borisov confirmed. "Copy that Pasewalk. Out." He dug his map out from the leather document case and spread it out on across the turret of his BMP-3. He checked there position in relation to Wilhelmsburg, studying the ground between them. He keyed in the company net. "All unit, this is SIX. Status. over."

"FIVE -" The T-74 at the rear of the group. "- READY."

"THREE -" The lead BMP-3. "- RUNNING."

"ONE -" The BMP-2. "- READY."

From just behind him he heard the engine of the newly repaired TWO fire up. He looked round at the T-74 to see it's commander wave to him. "TWO - CLEAR AND READY." His voice crackled. Borisov returned to the map. The ground west of the village was heavily wooded criss-crossed with tracks like the one them and the T-80 where sat on. "FOUR, status. Over." He looked up from the map, realising the T-80 hadn't called in. He could just see the tank sat on the other track. The movement of a figure on the turret caught his attention. "FOUR. Status. Now. Over." There was a momentary flicker of flame that disappeared with the man. "FOUR!" A thin haze of black smoke rose up from the turret. "RYBIN. ANSWER ME!" He ripped the radio wires from his helmet and scrambled from the turret, landing on the snow and running headlong towards it. A black smoke billowing up from the hatch and Borisov could hear the screams of his comrade and friend burning inside the steel carcass. An explosion ripped through the tank, blowing open the crew hatches and engine covers. The turret lifted, twisting it on the sluing ring. Yellow flames leapt from every hole.

Borisov scrambled onto the burning tank. The screaming had stopped, he could still see Rybin's blackened body sat inside the turret amid the flames. He tried to reach him, scorching his hands on the hot metal before the intense heat beat him back. He forced himself forward again, ignoring the scalding metal. He thrust his hand into the flames and grabbing his friend by the lapels of his burning tunic and tried to pull him out, but he wouldn't move. He grabbed his other shoulder and pulled. But Rybin just sat there with his skin peeling and his hair burning off like tiny strand of thin wire. The flames leapt up Borisov's arms, blistering his hands and melting the polyester lining of his tunic to his skin. He pulled with all his might.

Borisov's driver grabbed him around the neck. "Let him go, sir!" He yelled trying to break his grip on Rybin. "He's dead sir. Let go!"

"NOOOOO, HE'S STILL ALIVE!"

"HE'S DEAD!"

The pain finally became too intense for Borisov to bear and he was forced to let go and they tumbled from the tank. His driver rolled him over, smothering out the flames and burying his arms deep into the snow.

Unseen by them both, Biderbeck landed on the snow behind him. He grabbed the driver's head by his hair, and yanked it back before drove his long knife into his throat.

The commander of FIVE looked towards the head of the column at the sound of the explosion. "SIX, this FIVE. What's happening. Over." But before he had chance to receive a reply a man stepped onto the turret behind him, placed the muzzle of a revolver against the back of his head.

The gunner felt it splatter of blood across the back of his tunic and he saw his commander slump forward against the machine gun. He turned to see why. Straight into the barrel of the revolver. A third shot a moment later marked the end for the driver.

Hassell pushed the commander off the machine gun, swung the gun round onto the nearest BMP and pulled back the cocking lever. He fired at the eight man section stood to its rear. The commander of THREE heard the gun fire and saw ONE get hit. He grabbed his pinion mounted 50 cal. and swung it round looking for the unseen enemy. He saw FIVE's HMG pointing at the foliage beyond ONE. He swung his gun round onto the same piece of shrubbery, not realising his mistake until it was too late.

Kravets dropped down inside the turret of TWO at the same instant Hassell turned the gun onto his tank. He slammed the hatch shut and punched the round select button. "GUNNER, LOADING HESH!" Beneath his feet the giant carousel rotated to the nearest HESH round. "DRIVER. MOVE FORWARD. BRING UP ALONG SIDE THE CO!" He ordered, traversing his cupola around, looking for the attackers.

The gunner lifted the round into the breach and slammed it shut. "HESH UP!"

Kravets stopped on FIVE, seeing several figures moving about on top. He doubled the magnification on his episcopes. One man stood with the 50 cal. while two others dragged out the dead crew. "GUNNER. RELOAD CANISTER." He dabbed the button and the carousel rotated again. The gunner opened the breach and grabbed the shell that slide out, stowing it into an empty rack by his knee and lifted the new round in.

The breach clucked shut. "CANISTER UP!" He shouted as the turret came round onto Kravets' mark.

"TARGET. TURRET OF FIVE. RANGE 500 METRES."

The gunner placed his eye to the sight and saw FIVE. He automatically hit the laser button and FIVE's turret was lit up by the beam. The fire control computer rechecked the range and adjusted the gun lay. A green light lit up in his sights to tell him it was ready. "TARGET UP!"

"FIRE!"

The massive 125mm smoothbore gun shook the tank with its recoil as it launched the 50lb nail bomb at over 150 metres per second towards FIVE. It hitting the mark and stripping the tank clean of all living things. "GUNNER, LOAD CANISTER!" Kravets ordered, traversing

the whole turret left, looking for more targets. He felt the tank stop. "ALONG SIDE SIX!" the driver report. He saw more figures moving up through the darkening woods.

"CANISTER UP!"

"TARGET. INFANTRY ADVANCING 200 METRES!"

An explosion almost on top of them rocked the 42 ton monster. Tank fire, was Kravets first thought. They were being fire on by tanks. He traversed the cupola round to find SIX burning along side them. It's rear hull ripped open. He turned further left, looking behind SIX for the gun. All he found was a single man stood among the undergrowth, a spent RPG-18 in his hands. He saw him pull a new rocket from his backpack and slide it down the barrel of the weapon.

"TARGET UP!" The gunner yelled.

"FIRE. THEN RELOAD AND ENGAGE AT YOUR DISCRETION!" He reached for the 50 cal. controls, bringing it down from it's vertical position. He know the RPG was a threat to them. He was stood on the seven O'clock position, a clear shot at their rear quarter, the only place of the T-74 that could be penetrated by the rocket. He saw he host the rocket launcher onto his shoulder as the gun come level with his. He squeezed the trigger at the same instant the main gun fired. The 50 cal. tore into the dead ground before him, knocked off its aim by the main guns recoil. The RPGer remained unflustered, taking a fraction of a second longer to aim and fire. Kravets watched in horror as the second RPG-18 of that day snaked towards his tank. He closed his eye and waited for the impact, knowing he wouldn't be lucky twice. The detonation lifted the tank almost onto it's side before dropping his back onto it's tracks. Kravets head smacked against the side of the turret and everything went black.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Kravets was convinced they were dead. He had no other explanation for it. He couldn't see anything, hear anything or feel anything. What other explanation was there? Only the acidic smell of shell propellant persisted in telling him otherwise. 'Fire control is down.' The words came from inside his head. "What?"

"All internal electrics are out and fire control is down." The gunner's voice was clearer.

He'd survived. A RPG-18 in the rear and they had survived. "Go to auxiliary power. Driver get us moving. Anywhere, just move." Jesus Christ, we've survived.

"Auxiliary is down, we have no internal power." The gunner replied in the darkness.

The engine thump into gear and the tank shuddered. "GOD DAM IT DRIVER, GET US MOVING!" He knew the RPGer would be reloading and luck would not smile on them a third time.

The whole tank was vibrating from the over revving engine, but they weren't moving. "SHE WON'T MOVE. I CAN'T GET ANY TRANSMISSION!" The driver yelled.

Kravets strained to see through the cracked cupola periscope, trying to see the twisted fender and sideskirt, just beyond his sight. Black smoke billowed from the broken exhaust. The tank jerked forward a foot before the broken track lashed through the twisted metalwork.

"Driver stop, we've thrown a track."

"What now, sir" The gunner again.

Out of commission, become an pillbox. The words of the old Red Army philosophy sprang into his mind. He heart sank.

"Sir, what now?"

He traversing the cupola back in lining up with the main gun and the marauders closing in on them. "GUNNER, LOAD CANISTER!" Automatically punched the round select button.

"CAROUSEL IS IN-OPERABLE!" The gunner replied grabbing the hand cranking handle. He turned the handle as fast as he could. Beneath them the carousel turned unbelievably slowly, bringing the canister round to the breach. Then the carousel stopped. Seizing suddenly and ripping his hand from the handle with such force it sliced his palm open.

Kravets looked across to were he know the gunner was sat. "What happened?"

The gunner grabbed the handle again and tried to move it. "It's jammed solid!"

"Load anything!"

He grabbed the unseen HESH round from beside his knee and slide it into the empty breach, snapping it shut behind it. "HESH UP!"

Kravets eyes remained fixed on the closing marauders. "TARGET INFANTRY. RANGE 150 METRES AND CLOSING. FIRE WHEN READY."

"FIRE CONTROL IS DOWN. CANNOT BRING GUN TO BEAR."

"SHIT!" He'd forgotten. "ADJUST TO MY MARK. COME RIGHT FIVE DEGREES." The turret move. "DOWN, DOWN." Kravets watched the end of the barrel drop through his episcopes and judging the lay of the gun. "FIRE!"

Nothing happened.

"FIRE!" He repeated.

"MIS-FIRE!" The gunner yelled.

"GO TO AUXILIARY!"

"MIS-FIRE!"

"GO TO MANUAL!" He yelled seeing the marauders looming large before him. Nothing except the crisp click from the breach - out of ammunition, become a bunker. "RETRIEVE ROUND AND RELOAD. ANYTHING, I DON'T GIVE A FUCK WHAT!"

In the darkness, the unseen gunners hand reached for the breach release. A metallic clump against the side of the turret stopped him in mid action. He looked up at Kravets' dark shadow sat above him. They both knew what the noise was, and they both knew what the magnetic mine would do to the inside of the turret - out of time.... become Heroes.

The explosion was notably unspectacular. A two pound slab of plastic explosive held tight against the turret side by magnetic clamps detonated ten seconds after been set. It sent a shock wave through the armour, blowing a molten scab nearly twice the size of the charge off the inside wall of the turret.

Biderbeck rolled Borisov over and almost drove the knife into his chest before he saw his rank epaulets. He held the point an inch from his chest for a moment while the helpless major lay beneath him before hauling him up onto his feet and pushing him into the track ahead of the T-80. He stopped twenty metres in front of it, where the snow had turned red and forcing him down to his knees. Before him were the remains that were only just recognisable as human. "Do you see her?" He snarled forcing him to look.

He stared at her, no more then a bloody pulp of flesh and fabric. A single boot, with a foot inside lay within his reach. A hand, still bearing a ring lay beyond it. Borisov's stomach wrenched.

"You will die for that." Biderbeck hissed.

The sound of radio chatter coming from the back of the M-113 arose Sims curiosity. Inside he found Straczynski and Campbell sat beside the radio set. "What's going on?" He asked.

"Listening in on the Russian units in the area." Campbell told him. "We've had a sudden burst of activity from Pasewalk about ten minutes ago and this is the response."

Sims watched then distrustfully through the '113s rear door. "What's he saying?"

"This is the cavalry platoon we caught at Ferdinandshof. They're moving his platoons south of the river. Probably to prevent us crossing back onto the north side."

"What do you mean, they're trying to trap us here?" Sims became concerned.

"Didn't you think they'd radio in. Kneale should have stopped them when he had the chance. They know we're here and they'll come looking for us."

Straczynski keyed the handset and spoke into it. Sims became suddenly anxious as he mimicked one of the cavalry units. Despite all of Jones' and O'Brian's reassurance he still didn't trust him. It was the way he so easily slipped from one side to the other, the way he was so convincing he didn't like. But he was GRU first and foremost and if he could deceive the Russians so convincingly, how did he know he wasn't deceiving them. "What's he doing?" He asked Campbell.

"Trying to keep some of them off our back for a bit longer."

"So what is Pasewalk planning for us?" Sims waited for them to tell him more. "Well?"

Straczynski looked across at him. "What?" He asked having not been listening.

"What is happening at Pasewalk?" He didn't replay, choosing to listen to the radio chatter. "Mr Straczynski, what is happening at Pasewalk?"

"A company of the 12th Motorised Rifles is on the way here. Now be quiet." He snapped before keying the mike and responding to a radio call.

"What the hell!" Sims recognised some of the words and his doubts returned. He backed away from the rear door and brought his rifle to bear on him. "Put down the radio and get out of the PC." He ordered.

Straczynski release the handset. "Be quiet lieutenant!" He snapped before opening the channel and continuing his conversation.

Sims glanced at the street around him. "Parson, get some men over here!" He ordered before returning his attention back to Straczynski. "Sergeant Campbell, get out of the PC."

Campbell nudged Straczynski and pointed towards Sims. Straczynski looked but kept talking into the radio.

"I AM ORDERING YOU!" Sims barked.

Straczynski threw down the handset and stormed out of the PC. "What the hell is wrong with you?" He demanded. "I am trying to establish the locations of as many Russian units as possible and prevent them from attacking us."

"Who the hell were you talking too?"

"The 117th Motor Rifles at Friedland."

Parsons joined Sims with Kneale in tow. "Everything all right sir?"

"Put your rifle down, lieutenant." Straczynski ordered.

"You tell me what's going on first." Sims demanded.

"Read your orders Lieutenant."

"My orders instruct me to find McKenzie and bring her home."

"The 117th had their command BTR-90 stolen from them. It was taken by a British reconnaissance unit and has been abandoned fifteen kilometres to the west of here."

Sims eyed him with suspicion. "How do you know it's McKenzie?"

"They have a positive ID on one of her unit."

"How do you know?"

"By listening to the radio and talking to them." He turned back to the PC and returned to the radio.

"Sir?" Kneale asked unsure whether to stop him.

Sims looked across at him. "It's okay for now. Are we secure here? I don't want any surprise tonight."

"We're secure. Got a six man watch, rotating every four hours. Campbell's on the 2 to 6 stint."

"That figures." Campbell replied waiting by the '113s rear door.

Sims stared at him with equal distrust to the Russian then finally turned away. "Let's see our defences, Kneale."

They walked off and Campbell stepped back inside the PC. "Where is the satellite radio?" Straczynski asked him.

"One of Sims' lot will have it. You want it?"

"Yes. I don't think this set has the range to reach Hamburg."

"I'll get it." Campbell clambered back out.

Kneale glanced back at PC. "I don't like those too." he muttered to Sims.

"Me neither, especially that Russian. I still reckon he's working for the GRU, despite what Jones says."

"We should get rid of them."

"Yeah."

"Waste 'em?"

"No, not yet."

"Why not. No-one will know back home. No-one knows what happens out here ."

"I know. But not yet."

The satellite link was as clear as ever. Within two minutes the Citadel answered and Jones came through a minute later. "MAJOR - KINGFISHER - WHERE ARE YOU, WITH THE HELICOPTER?"

"No, with RED FOX FIVE. Why? What has happened to it?"

"IT DIDN'T MAKE IT BACK - SHE'S DOWN SOMEWHERE CLOSE TO LAKE MURITZ - WE THOUGHT YOU WERE ON BOARD."

"No, I considered I would be more help out here. All the information I had at the time is with someone on board the helicopter."

"I DON'T HAVE IT."

"Is the helicopter in one piece? Do you know if there is any survivors?"

"AS FAR AS WE KNOW SHE IS IN ONE PIECE AND THERE ARE SURVIVORS - I'VE GOT GROUND TROOPS OUT LOOKING FOR THEM NOW - AS SOON AS THEY FIND THEM, I'LL SCRAMBLE A CHOPPER TO PICK THEM UP - BUT IT'S GOING TO TAKE TIME."

"Put another helicopter up. It will take half the time find it as ground troops."

"I CAN'T - I DON'T HAVE ANY AVAILABLE AT THE MOMENT."

"You must!"

"JOINT CHIEFS HAVE GROUNDED ALL FLIGHTS OUTSIDE THE SECURITY ZONE - I CAN'T PUT A CHOPPER UP."

"Find that helicopter!"

"WHY? - WHAT'S IS ON BOARD THAT'S SO IMPORTANT?"

"That's not your concern. Find it!"

Campbell took the handset from him. "KINGFISHER, This is Campbell, RED FOX ONE. Sir, find that copper. It's important to us, I can't explain why at the moment. You'll just have to take our word, sir." He paused for a moment looking at Straczynski for a moment before continuing. "The situation out here is as follows. We are facing an offensive by three Army Groups. These have been identified as the 1st Shock Army under the command of General Kobiechi, the 2nd under General Rutowski. And the 20th under General Solvac. The 1st of no longer a threat, we believe they've halted in the Munchenburg area."

"WASN'T IT ELEMENTS OF THE 1ST THAT ATTACKED RED FOX ONE?"

"Bad luck on our behalf. If we'd left them alone, they wouldn't have attacked us."

"WHAT OF THE OTHER TWO GROUPS."

"We've no idea were the 2nd are. Since the attack on the Choppers and the incident at Hardenbeck, they've disappeared from sight. The 20th is a different story. The Stallion over flow Pasewalk this morning and were fired on. Strasburg, Friedland and Neubrandenburg are under Russian control. We've identified these as the 117th, 94th AND 157th. The main armour is split between the 12th at Pasewalk and 117th at Friedland. Only light stuff hold the other places."

"WHY'S THAT?"

"We don't know. That's the way they seem to be organised. The interesting part is they've pulled back all their Armoured recon stuff back to find McKenzie."

"YOU KNOW WHERE SHE IS?"

"No we don't, but we do have a confirmed sighting of the BTR she took fifteen miles west of us. So she's somewhere close."

"WHAT IS YOU'RE SITUATION?"

"Not good. We've picked up radio traffic from several Cavalry units and we're expecting an attack sometime tonight or tomorrow."

"UNDERSTOOD SERGEANT."

"What about that helicopter?"

"WHO IS SHE? WHO'S ABOARD THAT CHOPPER THAT SO IMPORTANT."

"We put her on to get her out of the area."

"DON'T BULL SHIT ME SERGEANT - WHO IS SHE?"

Straczynski took the handset back. "Her name is Jane Bayard. I put her on board because I want her safe."

"I CAN'T PUT ANOTHER CHOPPER UP."

"I don't give a dam what you say you can or cannot do, I heard it too many times before over Nattasha. Now get that helicopter found!" He killed the link.

He sat for a moment in silence staring at the set. "They'll find her." Campbell tried to reassure him. Straczynski looked at him for a moment then left him alone in the PC.

"Somebody want's that chopper found badly," Louise said looking across at Jones from the radio room door.

"Yeah," he muttered placing the headset down on the table. "So who do you reckon this Bayard is."

"I don't know," she walked out of the radio room into the office.

Jones scooped up his scribbled notes and re-read them. "Who the hell's Jane Bayard?" He followed Louise into his office. Despite Straczynski's denials, he felt sure she was involved with one of the intelligence services. She had to be, or why else would Straczynski have placed her on the chopper? In that case is her real name Bayard? He pondered over the scribbled notes, recalling what Campbell had told him. He started to re-write the notes but became distracted by Straczynski's words. The concern he'd shown for this woman was very unlike him. He rarely stuck his neck out for anyone, he'd even walked out on McKenzie in the past.

He gave up on the notes, letting his mind work over the conversation. If she was another agent it is likely Bayard wasn't her real name. In that case he needed to know who she was and who she worked for.

Yet the outburst had emotionally based. And that disturbed Jones. He'd never known Straczynski become emotional about business. This woman has to be linked to him in some way. But why would he put her on the chopper and stay behind to look for McKenzie? She couldn't be too intimately a link to him, not a lover. A relation maybe. That was possible. Both his parents were will placed in the old communist regime. His father worked in the Kremlin, not Politburo, but not far from it. Good breeding for an army officer of his standing. But both of them died over thirty years ago.

Not a brother or sister as he was an only child.

Wife then? He was married, to a daughter of a Politburo chief. But she was also dead, died when he was serving in Afghanistan.

But children. Nattasha, his daughter. But he hadn't been mentioned for years. So why now? Jones remembered he had a photo of her somewhere, it had been taken just before the war started. She would have been fifteen at the time. Straczynski had given it to him one evening while they had been drinking. She was the spitting image of her mother. A very beautiful young woman, with her mothers looks and his pure blue eyes. Jones rummaged through his desk draws, looking for the photo. Nattasha was the reason why Straczynski wouldn't come

all the way across to their side in the cold years. The SIS had kept telling him they couldn't guarantee her safety, and he wouldn't leave her behind to the mercy of the KGB or GRU.

Straczynski was right, they didn't really try. Every time he prepared her to come across it got called off, claims that the extraction was too risky. But Jones knew the reason. The big wigs in SIS didn't believe she was worth the risk. She was born and bred communist, just like her father. But where as he had something they wanted, she was just a child who had nothing and therefore not worth the risk. What they failed to understand was if they'd brought her out he would so easily followed.

He found the photo in the bottom of a filing cabinet.

The real reason she never got out was because he'd failed her. He could have argued a lot stronger for her, but he didn't. And all this time Straczynski knew that and yet had never said anything. Until now.

"Now what?" Louise startling him, not realising he'd been speaking out loud. He wondered how much she'd heard.

She walked across to him and took the photo from him. "Who is she?"

"Nattasha Straczynski, MAJOR's daughter."

"I didn't know he had any children. There's nothing in his file. How old is she?"

"She would be in her twenties now."

"Could she be Jane Bayard?"

"I don't know Louise. She's reported to be dead. But I don't know. It could be her."

A distance scream woke Campbell from his half sleep. He listened intently to the silence, unsure whether he had heard it. Unable to hear anything else he got up and walked to the glassless window. Outside the street was dark and quiet. Nothing was out of place. A brisk gust of wind whipped up the snow and blew it along the street, covering the M-113 in a fine layer.

The PC rested across the road tight against the wall of the house the rest of the platoon billeted in. Campbell had decided not to bed down with them. After the incident with Kneale both he and Straczynski had noticed an increasing air of distrust between them and the platoon.

He heard the sound again. Not so much a scream, more a muffled cry, heavily tinged with fright. He walked back to his bedding and picked up his SLR before stepped out into the street. He scanned it through his starlight scope but again nothing was move, nothing was out of place, not even the sentries were visible. Lowering the rifle he walked along the street,

stopping occasionally to look and listen. Then he heard it again. This time a word. "No!" a definite 'no'. It came from the house behind him. He crouched beside the doorway and listened again. "Hold her!" This time it was a harsh order, excited authoritative, masculine.

Campbell froze, recognising Kneale's voice.

"Come on serge. Let's get on with it." Another voice, Parson's.

What the hell are they doing? They're meant to be on watch. He stepped through the door, taking great care not to tread on anything that would betray his presence. The whispering came from the back room. Three male voices and one frightened female. He crept up to it and peered through the crack. Inside he could see them eliminated but three touches. Kneale was stood in the centre of the room with a girl cowering before him. Parsons stood with his back to the door while the third man, Ryan stood at the far side, holding his M-60.

Kneale slapped the girl across her face and she slumped backwards out of sight. "This'll teach you, you bitch!" He hissed. They'd gagged her to stop her crying out loud. "Hold her!" Kneale ordered as Parsons moved forward.

Campbell moved for a clearer view. Parsons had his arm tight around her neck, holding the girl, the teenager from earlier, upright before him; the side of her face bruised and her lip bleeding. She kicked out at Kneale in a last defiant effort to fight him off, but he was out of her reach. Kneale stepped forward and hit her, this time with his fist. She slumped down. "Ryan, get her legs." He instructed.

Parsons grappled her to the floor while Ryan laid down his M-60 and took her legs. They pulled her flat with her arm stretched out above her head. The girl lay still, stunned from the punch. Kneale unfastened her belt and trousers and pulled them down. It took her a moment to realise and she started struggling, but Kneale slapped her again, bloodying her nose. "Fuck sake. Hold her will you!" He barked, wrestling her trousers off.

She let out a long gagged cry, her eyes wide with terror. Parsons' grip tightened around her throat, choking the cry out. "Shut up bitch!" He snarled.

Kneale yanked her legs apart and sat astride her, ribbing the coarse material of his combats against her bare legs. He tore open her jacket revealing her breasts.

Campbell couldn't watch any longer. He kicked the door wide open and stepped in, his SLR at the ready. Ryan let go of her feet and rolled across the floor to his M-60. But Kneale remained on the girl. "Sergeant Campbell." He grinned sarcastically. "Come to join us at last?"

"Get off her Kneale." He replied, keeping the SLR trained on him. "You bastards are meant to be on watch."

Kneale pushed his hand down on the girl's breasts, pinning the girl down to allow Parson to pick up his AK. "Don't you want a piece of her, aye Campbell?" Kneale asked, caressing her breasts.

"Let her go!"

Kneale ran his rough hands down her breasts, over her stomach and through her pubic hair. "Don't you want her fanny?" he pulled the course hair through his fingers, grabbing a bigger hand full with each stroke. "Well DON'T YOU!" He yanked out a handful. The girl cried out, biting deep into the gag. Kneale opened his fist and let the hair fall to the floor. "Well don't you want her?"

"Get off her Kneale, NOW!"

"Okay then Campbell, We'll finish this now. Right now."

"Let her go first."

"Just you and me Campbell. That's what you said, just you and me. Winner gets her pretty little ass."

"And the loser?"

"The loser.... He won't have anything to worry about, ever again." Kneale grinned menacingly at him.

Campbell hesitated for a second. "No deals Kneale. You're screwed up. NOW GET THE FUCK OFF HER!" He saw Ryan move with his M-60 and snapped round onto him. "Just drop it fuck-face!"

Ryan shook his head. "I don't think so." His grip remained firm on the gun.

"So what you gonna do?" Kneale asked. "Shoot us all?"

Campbell shuffled uncomfortably. "May be."

"Well go on then!" Kneale shouted, standing up and stepping over to him. "Come on, I'm waiting for it. Fuckin shoot me right here. Right now!" He pulled open his flak jacket and thumped his chest. "Come on!"

Campbell's hands tensed on the grip of the rifle.

"Come on do it!" Kneale grabbed the end of the barrel, pulling it into his chest. "DO IT. NOW!"

Campbell stared into his wide, wild eyes, but couldn't pull the trigger. Kneale knocked the rifle out of his hand. "You're a faggot Campbell." He tossed it to the floor. "You're a fucking wanker. You haven't got it in you. You couldn't even give her a good fucking." Campbell glanced across at her. "Pretty isn't she." Kneale nearly whispered to him. "Pretty little virgin crouching on the floor, pulling her jacket around her to protect herself."

"It's rape."

"She's a collaborator. She was hiding one of the Ruskie bastards." His voice was quiet and harsh. "She deserves it."

"It's still rape."

"No it isn't, she wants it." Grabbing her by the hair, he dragged her across to him. "Don't you." He said in her ear. "Tell him you want it." He pulled the gag from her mouth. "Go on, tell him." Tears ran down her face. "Tell him he can have you, he can screw you. TELL HIM!"

"Yes!" She cried, but her eyes said no.

"You see it's not rape. It's her penance." He pushed her into him. His cold hands touched her smooth belly. Such a young body, such old eyes.

Kneale pushed her back to Parsons who pulled her onto the floor again. She lay still, waiting for him, defenceless. Her eyes fixed on him, tears running down the sides of her face. So defenceless.

"Go on." Kneale whispered. "She's waiting for you. Take her!" He pushed her down between her legs. "Take her." He echoed.

Gun fire tore through the silence. Large calibre cannon fire. Campbell snapped back to his senses.

"Ryan, take a look!" Kneale ordered.

He disappeared out of the door to the sound of more gun fire. This time a combination of auto cannon and automatic fire.

"What are you waiting for?" Kneale barked at Campbell. "Take her!"

"It's rape."

"Take her!"

"It's rape, I'll have nothing of it." He snatched up his SLR. She looked up at him, a glimmer of hope visible in her eyes. She was almost safe.

Ryan reappeared at the door. "LT wants you now. We've got Reds all over the place."

She almost smiled. She was almost safe. They wouldn't rape her now, not now they were under attack.

"Let's go then." Kneale ordered Ryan and Parsons out of the room. Then he turned to her, grabbing her by the jaw. "We'll come back and see to you later. So don't go away sweetie." He kissed her forcefully then proceeded to follow the other two.

"They're gonna hear about this." Campbell shouted after him.

Kneale reappeared. "Who's gonna tell 'em?"

"I will."

"And who's gonna believe you?"

"They'll believe her."

Kneale looked across at her crouched against the wall, naked except for her jacket. An explosion rocked the house, showing them with plaster and dust. "She's not gonna say a thing are you."

"No." She croaked.

"See I told you no-one would know." He smiled at her, then brought his AK up and emptied a full mag into her. Campbell stood rooted to the spot, unable to turn away as the bullets tore through her young flesh, ripping open her chest and stomach, dismembering her ribs and internal organs. The automatic rifle fell silent and movement returned to Campbell's body. He turned to where Kneale had stood and stared at the empty doorway. Then he turned back to her, laid against the wall, her eyes open and staring blankly at him. He felt only pity at that time, no anger towards Kneale. Just pity for the totally unnecessary waste of her young life. In one single second it was all gone. All the potential she had, all she might have achieved. All that her children might have achieved. All wasted.

Another explosion shock the house again, covering her body in dust. Campbell looked towards the sound. A second one followed and fire lit up the hallway. He walked to the front door and checked the street. The house opposite was burning. That was one of the houses the platoon had billeted in. He saw two men come running out. The lead one leapt onto the hull of the M-113, clambering through the drivers hatch. The other went for the rear door. A third man appeared, his clothes a lit. He threw himself onto the ground and rolled out the flames. Two more followed him; one was Sims, helping a third. He helped the man through the PC's rear door, then turned to help the burning man. At that moment an RPG passed over his head, hitting the PC and blowing it apart. Campbell turned away as the heat wave swept across the street. He turned back a second later to watch the aluminium hull burning.

A Bradley rolled into the street flanked on either side by soldiers. "Americans? What the hell.....!" Then Campbell realised the soldiers were Russians.

Backing away from the house, moving down the street away from the advancing Bradley. It's 25mm cannons opened up, he ran as the it strafed the street, diving behind the cover of a wall just before they reached him. He rolled over and came face to face with Parsons. For a moment he forgot about the Bradley and lunged at him, only seeing the face of a rapist and murderer. He grabbed him around the neck and shoved him to the ground before he was pulled of by two others.

Campbell pulled himself free. "We're not finished Parsons, not by a long shot!" He shouted at him. "I'm gonna see you hang for what you did. You hear me Parsons?" Parsons looked back at him in silence.

More cannon fire tore across the wall, diverting their attention from each other to the task of surviving. Campbell threw himself flat on the ground as chunks of the wall gave way. Parsons dead body slumped down on top of him. He looked into at his lifeless face and

couldn't help but feel he'd come to a just end. One of the other two with him tried to make a run for it, scrambling from the cover of the wall into a hail of bullets.

Campbell pushed the body off him. "COME ON!" He yelled at the other man. "THIS WAY!" He scrambled along the wall and into a house where he waited for the man to join him. "They've got round behind us." He told the young soldier.

"We've got to get out of here."

"Yeah, too right. What's your name son?"

"Thompson serge."

"Well Thompson. We're going out the back of this house and into the next street. Where's your gun?"

"Don't know Serge, dropped it."

"It's all right lad. Now come on."

They dived out the house, heading through the dark streets away from the gun fire. After several minutes Campbell stopped, lost and disorientated by the devastated streets. The gunfire although distant, seemed to be surrounding them.

"Which way?" Thompson yelled.

Campbell thought for a moment. "This way." They scrambled onwards again, around a corner, across a street and straight into the path of the Russian assault. Thompson turned back, but Campbell stumbled onwards as bullets ricocheted off the ground around him. He leapt for cover, falling short of it by a few feet. He lay flat on the ground as a hail of bullets passed over head. Then a hand grabbed him and hauled him clear. He lay still, panting for a few seconds before rolling over. Kneale stood above him, grinning like the Cheshire Cat. His uniform and face blackened and bloody. He picked up the M-60, that stood against the wall. He looked back at him "Well Campbell. Do we die scurrying away like rats?"

Campbell slowly stood up, glancing momentarily down at his SLR before returning Kneale's stare.

Kneale's grin broadened. "Then we go together." He edged to the corner.

Campbell checked his SLR, then brought it up to Kneale's back.

"Ready?" Kneale turned back to him and saw the rifle. "Are you ready?" He asked again.

More automatic fire strafed the street cutting down two more of Kneale's men as they tried to reach cover. Kneale didn't wait for Campbell's answer. He stepped out into the street and laid a burst down it. Campbell followed him out, firing short bursts at individual targets.

"Move it!" A voice yelled from a short distance away and Campbell quickly glanced towards it. Ryan ran from another house, supporting one of his men, two more followed him, scrambling over the debris under the cover of Kneale's and Campbell's fire.

Campbell ducked back into cover as the last man, Straczynski, got across. He stopped next to him. "Looks like we've all that's left."

Campbell glanced round. What a sorry lot they looked. Kneale was still in the middle of the street, firing wildly and shouting at the top of his voice. Campbell peered round the corner. The street was already littered with bodies. Two more of his men scrambled clear.

Straczynski pulled Campbell back. "We've got to get out of here." He shouted over the gun fire.

"Too fuckin' right. Ryan, what state are your men in?"

Ryan shot him a look. "Get fucked Jock!"

Straczynski pulled Ryan up. "Get you're men organised soldier."

"What the fuck gives you the right -"

"Ryan!" Kneale shouted across at him as he stepped back into cover. "Do as the General tells you." He ordered before stepping back into the street.

Campbell followed him out again, crouching close to the wall, picking the Russians off one by one, while Kneale swept the street.

"Serge!" Ryan yelled across at him.

Kneale glanced across before diving back into cover. "We're gonna make a run for the forest." He continued.

Campbell joined them. "It's the only way. We're pinned down here."

Kneale looked round at his men.

Campbell slapped a fresh mag into his SLR. "Okay, we'll give you covering fire."

Kneale's head snapped round at him. "No. I'll do it. You get to the woods then cover me."

"How do I know you'll come?" Campbell asked.

Kneale stared at him. "I'll be there Campbell, 'cos we ain't finished."

Before Campbell could say anything else Kneale had stepped back into the open.

They broke from the cover of the houses, under his covering fire. They ran and stumbled as best they could through the deep snow. 10 yards, 20 yards out. Ryan mentally measured the distance he'd covered. 30 yards, and they still hadn't been spotted. 40 yards, nearly half way to the tree line. Then it happened, they were seen. Gun fire reaped the snow around them. Someone to his right went down. But he didn't stop, he didn't even look round to see who it was, he just kept running. 50, 60 yards. Yes, nearly there. More gun fire tore across them. The man just in front of him got hit and stumbled. Ryan leaped over him. He was almost there. Then he too was hit. He stopped, unable to believe it. The tree line was less than 20 yards away. Christ! He could almost spit that distance. What a bastard! He fell forward, face down on to the snow.

Campbell nearly collapsed as he reached the tree line, scrambling the last few feet on all fours. Straczynski slid in a few seconds behind him and they lay panting on the snow. Campbell looked at him. For an old man he could run.

"Jesus fuckin' Christ!" Campbell cried, happy just to have made it.

Straczynski laughed. "I should say so."

They looked round for the others. Only six had made it safely across, the remainder lay in the snow.

Campbell glanced over his shoulder to look at them. "Cavalry!" He hollered. "Fuckin' cavalry!"

They scrambled to their feet again and headed deeper into the forest as the cavalry closed in.

Campbell didn't dare to look behind him. He could hear the sound of each hoof strike the snow, the jangle of the reins and he could almost feel the breath of the horses on his neck. Hot, humid and stale.

Instinct made him throw himself to the ground. The hooves struck the snow only inches from his head as the horse sailed over him. Campbell raised his head to look at the beast as his rider pulled him to a halt. The animal reared up, filling the air with a cloud of hot, steamy breath. Then it turned back towards Campbell. The rider stared down at him. Blood dripped off the end of his Cossack sabre, staining the snow red. The snow around Campbell was also red, as was the sleeve of his jacket. The rider let out a wild cry and slashed at Campbell again. Campbell rolled away, holding his bleeding arm close to his chest in an effort to protect it from further damage, whilst grappling for his 'Desert Eagle' with the other hand. The rider slashed at him again, before his horse turned and bucked. As he pulled the animal round, Campbell fired the automatic at him. The horse reared up, but this time it fell, trapping the rider underneath it. Campbell dropped the empty mag and slapped in a full one, before pumping two more rounds into the rider.

He shuffled backwards, eyes firmly fixed on the rider until his back rested against a tree. Then he sat for a while, still looking at the body of the rider. The only sound he could hear

was that of the horse as it struggled to move. Campbell looked round for his pack before remembering he'd left it back in the village. It was with the rest of his stuff, including his field dressings. He cursed. The gash in his arm was long but not too deep. He pulled his Arabic scarf from around his neck and tied it round his arm as best he could.

After he was satisfied with the bandage, he cautiously pulled himself to his feet and approached the horse. It had settled realising its efforts to stand were fruitless. Campbell pulled an AKM from the dead man and checked the mag. It was half empty. He rummaged through the saddle bags, taking care not to unsettle the horse too much. He found two full mags, which he stuffed in his jacket pockets. Then to his left another horse brayed. He froze then slowly crouched down behind the horse as two cavalry men rode by. Neither of them noticing the horse or Campbell. As they became lost among the trees Campbell turned to move away and the sabre caught his eye. He reached out and picked it up. The blade was immaculate. It was the sort of weapon he'd have expected to find in a museum display, not on a battle field. But what good would it be to him out here.

He looked around at the forest. "Where the hell is everyone?" He uttered. He slung his newly acquired AKM over his shoulder. He knew that with his left arm out of action, he'd be a better shot with his 'Desert Eagle'. He knew that some of his group had made it this far, but then he also saw a good dozen cavalry head this way. But now he could neither see or hear anyone. He was alone. He moved off deeper into the forest.

Close by another horse brayed and Campbell froze again. A lone rider halted a short way off. The rider stood up in the saddle, looking around before pulling a tatty map from his inside jacket pocket. As he sat studying the map, Campbell levelled his pistol at the rider's head. His hand started to tremor, as the rider rose again. He started shaking uncontrollably, until aiming the shot was impossible. He had to lower his aim. Sitting back against the tree, he tried to control his breathing away from erratic gasps. He dropped the pistol and clenched his trembling hand in an effort to steady it. He began forcing himself to breathe deeply, remembering something Clare had told him about child birth.

After a few moments it seemed to work and within several minutes the panic attack had gone. But as he looked up, so too had the rider. He scoured the area frantically, trying to find some sign of life. But the forest was dark and silent. "Come on John, get a grip." He uttered to himself. "Think what you're doing." He picked up his 'Desert Eagle' and walked towards the spot where the rider had been.

The horse had turned and gone back in the direction it came from. Campbell had no idea which way he should go. He was forced to admit he was lost. He looked around again in the hope that there might be something to indicate which way he should go. "Dam it! Where the hell is everyone?" This was ridiculous. Five minutes ago he'd been in the middle of a fire-fight with half a platoon around him. Now he was alone in a silent forest. He chose a direction and set off. He didn't know where he was heading, he just kept walking.

After an hour or so, he stopped. He hadn't walked back into Wilhelmsburg, which was one good sign. But then he hadn't heard or seen anyone either, which was a bit of a two edged sword. He had become aware that his concentration was lapsing and his drifting into the fatigue driven dream-state he'd suffered from earlier. Several times he had found himself

traipsing along. This was no good, he stopped next to a large tree. He still hadn't fully recovered from his trek to Hardenbeck. He had to stop for a while and rest. He slumped down into a hollow by the tree and pulled his poncho round him. Sleep quickly took over him.

THE NINTH DAY. Saturday 15th January.

Campbell woke suddenly in the early hours of the morning very aware that he was being watched. He studied the cold forest in front of him, not daring to move anything, but his eyes. Yet there was nothing to see or hear. He closed his eyes again only to open them a few seconds later. Something was different. Something had moved. A shadow that had not been there before. His eyes dropped to the AKM laying at his feet, just out of reach. The shadow moved and his eyes snapped back to it, only slightly, but it had moved. He stared at it, letting his eyes adjust to the half-light of the forest. And slowly Campbell could pick him out, watching him from the edge of a tree. breath condensing in the cold air. Campbell traced out his dark coat against the frost covered tree. The question was had he been seen him or not? The man moved, cautiously creeping out from the tree and walked to another. Campbell looked behind the man, searching for others. Was he a lone cavalry officer? Or maybe one of the platoon. He rubbed his stinging eyes and look back for the man, but he'd vanished. Campbell couldn't believe it. He was there a moment ago, straight in front of him, less then twenty yards away. Doubts flooded his mind. Had he been there at all or had he dreamt it? He closed his eyes and tried to think why he might have had a vision of a soldier, as something close by went crack. Campbell leapt forward and grabbed his rifle and throwing himself flat on the snow, levelled the AKM at the soldier. He starred along the battlesight at the man, less then ten yards away, peering down the sights of an SLR at him.

"John?" The soldier asked.

Campbell looked up. "Misha?"

Straczynski stepped out from behind the tree.

Campbell lowered the AKM. "Any idea where we are?"

"No. The sun's not up. I hope we're somewhere west of Rothemuhl."

"That the right way is it?"

"Yes. Did any one else make it?"

"I'm not really sure. All I've see since I got into this forest is cavalry."

"I got two of them but I've seen anyone since." Straczynski held out the SLR. "By the way, this is yours."

Campbell took it from him. "I don't even remember dropping it."

Straczynski looked around at the silent forest. "Come on. Let's get moving."

"Which way?"

"Back east. Towards Pasewalk."

"What! Are you kiddin'. We've just come from there. Why do we have to go back?"

"That's where Solvac is and the answer to what's going on."

Campbell stood still for a while and watched him set off east. Then, reluctantly, he followed.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The cold bite at Hardwood's hands. He rubbed them together to ease the pain. It was cold inside the Stallion. Frost clung to the fuselage, and despite their best efforts, snow had blown in through every bullet hole. The heaters had done the best to keep the cold at bay, but by the dark morning the batteries had been bleed dry and the temperature plummeted. He checked on Jane for the third time within an hour. Only her face was visible from beneath the layers of blankets and coats, finally sleeping soundly. He'd watched her stir all night, sometimes muttering a word. For a time he'd sat holding her hand and for a short while she'd slept soundly before returning to her nightmare. He looked over the rest of the crew, all still sleeping. The growing light outside told his they should up and moving, but there seemed

little point. He stepped from the gloom of the cabin into the white glare of the cockpit. Frost crazed glass covered in a layer of snow surrounded him. He settled into the pilots seat and ran his fingers over the cold glistening controls. Everything was dead, not an ounce of life was left in the batteries. From the cabin him he heard Clancy stur. Barking out a cough from deep within his chest. He wheezed, sucking in cold air before barking again almost to the point of wrenching. He repeated this three times until final clearing the black/red flem from his lungs. "We're not paid enough for this." He wheezed.

"We ain't paid at all." Sanders muttered from under her blankets.

"Oh yeah, I forgot." He coughed again and spitting another mouthful of flem onto the deck. "Who's bright idea was it to stay here then?"

"Yours remember. You didn't want to pay alimony to your ex-wife."

"Yeah, but why'd you have to agree with me?"

She sat up, the blanket still rapped tight around her. "Shit, it's cold."

Hardwood rubbed the ice away from the glass and looked out into the dull morning light, starring at the grey trees and dead foliage. Something caught his eye. He looked longer and saw it move again. "Skipper!" He yelled back into the cabin.

"You still with us Woody, though you'd done a 'Scott of the Antarctic' the way you were wondering around last night."

"Yeah right, come and look at this."

Clancy pulled himself up and joined him.

"Out there." He pointed

At first Clancy couldn't see anything other them trees. Then a movement caught his eye. Two figures were crouched on the edge of the clearing watching them. "How long they been there?"

"Only just seen them. They could have been out there all night."

"Do you think they know we're in here?"

"What do you think?"

"We're in the middle of bad country, either way it's not good news. Look, they're moving."

They watched as first one, then the other disappeared into the trees.

"I bet they'd be back, and with friends no doubt."

Clancy clambered back into the cabin and picked up his rifle. "How many of these have we got?"

"About half a dozen." The one legged soldier replied. "Why?"

"We've got company." He picked up a backpack and started stuffing some of the chopper survival rations into it. "Marauders, I think. Grab what you can carry. We're getting out of here."

"What! How far do you think we'll get?" Sanders objected.

"You know the chopper's here. I don't think they know we're in it. If we move now we might be able to slip away before they come back. With any luck they'll be satisfied stripping out this thing and leave us alone Or would you rather sit around here and wait for them?"

"No, but -"

"Right, so jump to it. They could be back here any minute." He slung another backpack at her. "Woody, can we rig up some sort of stretcher?"

"Yeah no problem." He wasn't over keen on Clancy's plan either, but what else was there? He emptied a tool-box out onto the deck, picked up a spanner and started unbolting on of the bench seats from the deck.

Well, get to it, Kim!" Clancy snapped. "Now!"

She started stuffing the pack with rations and medical gear. Clancy grabbed another spanner and helped Hardwood with the seat. Stripping the back and legs off it.

"Sod that, I can walk." The soldier protested, attempting to get up.

"Your not walking anywhere." Jane replied.

"Then leave me here. I'll slow you up to much."

"I'm not leaving anyone behind." Clancy replied. "You getting on this stretcher. Wood, help him across."

Sanders caught Jane fastened up a backpack. "Are you gonna' be all right?" She asked.

"Yes." She handed her an M-16. "I'll be fine."

"Everyone ready?" Clancy interrupted.

Hardwood slung his pack onto his back. "Just one other thing." He started unlashng his Minigun from it's firing port.

"Leave it. It's too heavy." Clancy ordered.

"We need some fire power."

"Get real Woody. How much ammo do you think you can carry for it?"

"Fine. Then I'll take the 'pig'." He dropped the Minigun on the bench and picked up the M-60.

"Okay, but your carrying the ammo for that as well."

Hardwood looked at the machine gun, then weighed it up against the SA-80 Jane held out for him. Decided Clancy was right and opted for the lighter weapon. He took the rifle from her and slung it over his back. Then he picked up one end of the stretcher while Sanders took the other.

Clancy pushed open the choppers side door. Outside looked clear. He cocked his AKM and stepped out into the knee deep drift. He checking the tree line for signs of movement. There were none. "It's clear, come on."

Sanders stepped out carrying one end of the stretcher. "Which way?" She asked.

"That way. Then south." He pointed back towards the tail.

Jane followed them out, hesitating at the door. The forest looked bleak and cold and for the first time she became aware of her own vulnerability and the specific problems she could cause Clancy. He stepped back towards her. "Come on Doc, we ain't got all day." She stepped out of the way as he stuck his head back inside the chopper. He was leaving her, abandoning his 'Babe'. He grabbed another AKM from inside and pushed it into Jane's hands. "You know how to use it?"

"Yes." She automatically replied still feeling unsure of herself.

"Good." He glanced round at the nose-art and pressed his hand against her. "See y' Kathy", then taking Jane's arm and pushed her onwards. "Keep up with the others."

Sanders stopped after several miles.

"What's up?" Hardwood asked from the other end of the stretcher.

"You hear that?" She panted.

"What?"

"Listen."

Hardwood strained. "Engines?"

Clancy and Jane caught up with them. "What's wrong?" He asked, scanning the area ahead for anything hostile.

"Tank engines, you hear?" Hardwood told him.

"Yeah, sounds like their running them up. And not too far away either."

Sanders laid the stretcher down on the snow. "I'm knackered. Can we take a rest?"

"Yeah, just a few minutes." Hardwood added as she slumped down next to it. The knee deep snow was making the trek hard work.

Clancy agreed. "Okay, ten minutes while I work out where we are and who's engines they're likely to be." He pulled out his map. They had been heading South-ish, but with no compass and being in the middle of a forest, it wasn't easy to be precise. Jane stood by them for a while before she sat down beside Sanders.

"Are you all right?" Sanders asked her.

Jane nodded. "Just a bit cold."

Sanders was forced to agree. "You and that Russian an item?"

"Him! No." She hissed.

"He thinks allot of you, you know."

"No he doesn't. All he cares about is that bitch McKenzie."

"There's nothin' wrong with Mac, she's all right." Hardwood commented.

"Shut up Woody, no one's talking to you." She turned back to Jane. "He told me to look after you, get you safely back to Hamburg."

"And that's meant to show he cares. Then why's he gone looking for McKenzie?"

Sanders glanced up at the canopy of bare branches. "You're not very old, are you."

"Twenty seven. What's that to do with anything?"

"How'd you get here?"

"I was a junior doctor in London until the TA drafted me into this."

"Never been to London. Always wanted too, but I never gone the chance."

"I doubt it's the same anymore. After this, I don't think anywhere's gonna be the same."

The tank engine faded away and silence returned.

"How'd you meet him?"

"Who?"

"Straczynski."

"McKenzie's unit, before she was in charge, pulled me out the rubble at Malbork. My Red Cross Landrover hit a mine. Next thing I know this bloke Daark was dragging me clear. Misha and McKenzie turned up a few days later as we moved south.

Close by a branch snapped.

Clancy snatching his AKM off his shoulder and pointing it towards the sound. "Quickly, move." He grabbed Jane's arm and pulled her up.

Sanders and Hardwood snatched up the stretcher and started moving away as they caught a glimpse of people moving among the trees.

"That way, quickly." Clancy pushed Jane after them.

She ploughed on through the snow. Clancy followed close behind her, watching the trees behind them. She stumbled and fell, and he fell over her. He pulled her up again as two men broke from the cover. "DAM IT GIRL, RUN!" Clancy shouted at her. He swung round and fired at burst at their two pursuers, kicking up the snow in front of them. He scrambling on, half on all fours as the two pursuers returned fire.

They struggled on through the snow until mounted figures appeared in front of them. Sanders and Hardwood turned and headed westwards. Shouts followed them, followed by gunfire. A bullet caught Hardwood in the leg. He lost his footing and dropping the stretcher, fell. Sanders, now forced to stop as well, dropped her end as well and pulled the M-16 off her shoulder. She aimed at the lead horse and laced off a short bursts, before the rifle jammed. She cleared the round only to have the next one do the same. Before she could clear it, they were on them.

"Lay down." One of them shouted, waving a rifle at them.

Sanders chucked her M-16 to the ground in disgust, then reluctantly knelt down on the snow with her hand on her head. Another man removed the SA-80 from Hardwood as six more appeared pushing Jane and Clancy before them. Sanders concern arose as Jane forced down onto the snow next to her. "You all right?" Sanders asked.

"Yes." Jane nodded. "Who are they?"

"Shut it!" Another snapped dismounting from his horse.

More appeared pushing Clancy and Jane ahead of them. One, a tall man walk up to them. "You from that helicopter?" Monroe asked

"What's it to you?" Clancy asked.

His eyes narrowed. "What are you here for?"

"Easter." He replied without a hint of sarcasm.

A rifle butt thumped down hard on Clancy's shoulder. "Okay, okay. No more I'll tell you. Just no more."

"Good. That's what I like, a bit of co-operation."

"It was Christmas, we were late." He grinned.

Clancy curled up on the ground as Monroe laid into him, kicking him several times, while the other man brought his rifle butt down on his back and side. "Cocky little Bastard ain't you." Monroe pulled his Makarov and stuck it into the back of Clancy's head, cocking the hammer.

"NO!" Sanders yelled. "No don't. We ran out of fuel. We had to put down."

Monroe smiled. "Well at least one of you has some sense." He put the Makarov away and stepped over to her, pulling her to her feet. "My, what a pretty one you are too." He stroked her face gently. Sanders made no reaction. "Now what else are you going to tell me?" He unfastened her parka and ran his fingers across her name patch. "Well? Kim Sanders. That's a nice name for a woman as pretty as you."

"What do you want to know?" She replied quietly, trying not to show her repulsion at his advances.

Slowly he unzipped the front of her flying-suit and slipped his hand inside. She felt the cold air bite through the cotton of her tee-shirt and into her skin. With his ice cold fingers he caressed her naked stomach. "What was your mission?"

"To pick up wounded from a recon unit." She nodded towards the stretcher. "He's the only one. The rest are dead back in the chopper." She clenched her fists as his hands worked upwards, raising her tee-shirt until he revealed the delicate lace of her bra and the curve of her breasts. He smiled, pleased at his discovery; like he'd found some long lost treasure. Then gently he ran his finger tips down, over her navel, pushing the zip on her flying-suit lower. Sanders flinched and pushing his hand away. He grabbed her arm. "No you don't. You don't do anything unless I tell you." She brought her knee up sharply between his legs. Monroe went down, hands grabbing his groin, to meet her foot as it came up. The crack of his nose filled the silent forest, before being drowned out by his cry.

Two of his men moved in to confront her. She stepped back out of their reach. The nearest one went for his sidearm, momentarily glanced away. Sanders knew this was her moment. She kicked him, jumped and kicked him in the head; instantly breaking his neck, then before landing back on her feet and taking the other man's legs away before dropping down across his throat.

Monroe staggered onto his knees, blood and mucus streamed from his nose, one hand clutching his groin while his other reached for his Makarov.

Both her attackers lay at her feet. One had died instantly, the other gasping like a fish out of water. Monroe's vision was blurred by the thumping pain. His eyes were streaming and he could feel the swelling starting. He'd seen how fast she could move and he knew it could have been him laying there. Next time it might be. He reached out and grabbed Jane, hauling her across to him, holding the pistol at her side.

"No!" Hardwood lunged at him, only to be struck from behind by the butt of a rifle.

"I'll kill her!" Monroe spat at Sanders.

From the corner of her eye Sanders saw Clancy move. "No, it's okay." She dropped her guard and stepped forward. "Just don't hurt her."

Monroe pushed Jane to one side and grabbed Sanders by her arm, pulling her away from the others. "Your gonna' pay girl!" He snarled, dragging her towards the horses.

"What shall we do with them?" One of his men asked.

"Get rid of them."

"No!" Sanders protested, pulling away from him. But he'd anticipated her move and had a solid grip on her arm and his pistol in his hand. He struck the side of her head with the butt and she slumped down. "Kill them." He repeated. Then pulling the stunned Sanders towards the horses again.

Something stirred them as they approached. Some sound missed by human ears, but caught by theirs. They snorted and shuffled uneasily, their ears twitched and eyes darting. Two of them reared up and kicked, trying to break free from the reins. Monroe stopped and listened, slowly turning and watching the trees. He let Sanders slump down onto the ground.

"What is it?" Hardwood whispered to Clancy.

He shrugged.

One of the horses broke free and bolted.

"Get after it." Someone yelled.

Clancy stared through the trees at something that caught his eye as it twitched 300 metres away from them. "There." He nodded towards it.

"What is it." Hardwood asked.

"A tank."

"Who's?"

"I don't know. Not this lots."

"Carling's?"

A heavy thud dislodged the snow from the trees around them and was shortly followed by a loud explosion half way across the clearing. A dense cloud of white smoke erupted from the impact. Another shell followed from a different direction.

Monroe picked himself up from where he'd thrown himself. White phosphorous smoke billowed around him, marring his vision, and all around him, from every direction, he could hear more shells exploding.

One of his men appeared in front of him.

"Where's the Milan?" Monroe demanded.

"It's still on the horses." The man answered.

"Well get it!"

More smoke rounds landed across the clearing, thickening the cloud of white smoke. Amidst the explosions the sounds of tank engines firing up. They seem to surround them, close in every direction.

Remembering Sanders, Monroe yanked her to her feet. He'd still had this pretty little thing and he wasn't about to let her go. Sanders resisted him and twisting out of his grip. She turned to run but found the shadow long before her. She ducked away, catching the back of his arm and pulled his legs away from under him. He landed on his back and she kicked him across the face. He rolled over to protect himself as she kicked again, breaking his jaw. Before she could land a third kick, Monroe arms rapped around her waist and forced her to the ground. They rolled across the snow as he tried to pin her down. Feeling the Makarov slap against her leg, she grabbed it and pulled it from it's holster. He attempted to stop her, trying to turn the mussel away from him. The automatic went off. Monroe cried out and rolled off her, clutching his leg. She came up to her knees and levelled the pistol at his head and put a single shot into him.

Another shadow emerged from out of the smoke and she dispatched him as quickly, only then considering that it could have been Clancy or Woody.

Heavy machine gun fire tore through the trees, cutting through bodies and shrubs alike. A few of Monroe's men had made it to their horses and were try run. From out of the smoke the awesome silhouette of a T-80 appeared before them. They turned their horses and headed deeper into the smoke, out of sight of the monster. The T-80's thermal imager followed them, unhindered by it. It's co-axle opened up, picking them off one by one, cutting both horses and riders in half.

Sanders picked herself up and scrambled for better cover, looking for Clancy and the others. She stumbled into someone, crouched behind a fallen tree. She slid in next to him.

"Where are they coming from?" The man asked.

She sticking the Makarov into his ear and blowing it off.

Gun fire from a second T-80 cut across the tree. She ducked down behind it and pulled the M-16 away from the dead man as someone else joined her.

"Any idea how many there are?" He asked, also not recognising her.

She pulled the belt of grenades from the dead man. She slapped a grenade into the launcher and looked up again. The smoke was beginning to clear, but there was still no sign of Clancy.

Two more joined them, dragging a Milan behind them. they frantically set it up as a third tank, a T-74, emerged from the smoke. It halted a hundred yards away and it's turret traversed right, firing it's co-axle. She ducked as the line of HE and tracer shells past several feet above their heads. The main gun fired and the tree was rocked by a thousand splinters of white hot metal. She glanced up as a peppered helmet fell on her followed by the bloody body of one of the Milaners. The surviving man fired the weapon. It's missile punched it's way through the T-74's hull, igniting fuel and ammunition. It blow apart, showering the ground with fragments of molten debris. The second T-80 swung it's gun round on to the Milaner as he reloaded the launcher. He pulled the spare round out of the dead mans hand. "Help me!" He shouted at her.

Sanders scrambled away towards more cover. Seconds later the 80's shell struck home on the tree. The blast lifted her off her feet and dropped her head long into a snow drift and it went black momentarily.

Someone dragged her up and pulled her clear. Half dazed by the blast she struck out blindly at them. Struggling violently she broke from his grasp.

"God's sake Kim." Clancy pushed her back down onto the snow. "It's me. Clanc."

She lay still for a moment. "Where are the others?"

"Over there." He pointed along a small ridge.

More smoke rounds landed around them, cutting off visibility again.

"I didn't think they had armour this far west."

"Me neither. This must have been what that Russian General was on about."

They ducked as another shell landed close by.

"Come on." He pulled her up and half running, half crawling they made their way along the bottom of the ridge.

A T-72 rode up over it in front of them, firing it's 50 cal. into the smoke. Clancy and Sanders threw themselves flat on the snow, hoping not to be seen. Troops followed the '72, moving up behind it, using it as cover. Monroe's men found themselves surrounded. Some tried to run and got cut down by the Russian guns. Others tried to hide. The rest flung down their weapons and put their hands up.

Clancy glanced at Sanders.

"No!" She shouted. "I'm not giving in."

More soldiers appeared before them.

"Okay. Which way?" He asked

She looked. "This way."

They broke cover and bolted for the trees, but were seen. Bullets tore across the snow at their feet. Clancy lost his footing and stumbled. He dragged himself up only to be met by the butt of a rifle. He slumped down again with a rifle in his back. He was disarmed, then dragged to his feet. Still in a dazed state from the rifle butt, he looked round for Sanders. She was nowhere to be seen.

He found himself being herded together with the surviving marauders. Less than a dozen of them were left. He looked around for Woody and Jane, but couldn't see them. "Where are they?" He asked himself. "Got away with a little luck, I hope."

The smoke steadily cleared to reveal the full strength of the Russians. Clancy stood in awe at their numbers. Twelve tanks were visible, with twice as many armoured carriers behind them.

Another bunch of prisoners were herded in. Two men carried the stretcher and a third supported Hardwood. Clancy moved to them as the two groups were pushed together.

"Where's the Doc?"

"Lost her in the smoke. You find Kim?"

"Yeah, but I lost her too." He looked around at the Russian armour. "Do you think she might have got away?"

Close by, a Russian soldier rolled over a wounded marauder. The man begged him for help. The soldier levelled his AKRM at him and fired a single shot into him.

"God I hope so." Hardwood muttered.

Jane lay dazed and confused, half buried in the snow, under the weight of someone. She had no recollection of how she got there or who it was laid across her. The deafening thud of a near miss still echoed through her ears and the acidic stench of burning flesh filled her nostrils and reached the back of her throat. She opening her eyes, but only saw dark formless shadows against the bright background. the smoke stung the back of her eyes. She felt nauseous, swallowing down the vomit before she choked on it. She tried to move to see who was laid across her, but she couldn't. Out the corner of her eye she could see the body she was trapped under, but not who it was. Then she heard the sound of someone approached. He pulled the body from off her legs, spoke three words in Russian. Then a single shot rang out

and the body slumped back down on her legs again. Jane closed her eyes tightly, waiting for the next shot.

McKenzie walked along Wilhelmsburg's deserted street. A burnt out M-113 stood against the side of a house, now a blackened hulk. The flames had spread to two near by houses and lingered among the roof beams. Along the opposite side of the street lay four of Sims men. Each stripped naked with their hands tied behind their backs and a bullet hole in their heads. Above them a single word had been written across a wall. 'Mackenze'.

"Fran," she said quietly. "Find something to cover them bodies with. The rest of you spread out and look for survivors. Goodman. Any chance of you putting that fire out?" She looked back at the bodies. "And get me a body count. And watch out for booby traps."

"Right Boss."

She looked around the street. There had been one hell of a fight by the looks of the place. Who ever attacked the village had taken their dead with them when they left, leaving just Sims men behind. Daark shouted her across to the house a few doors on.

"Inside," he said as they got nearer. "It's not pleasant."

She stepped past him and entered the house. He sat down on the steps and waited for her to come back out.

Inside, suspended from the ceiling joist, hung the body of Lieutenant Sims. Like his men, naked. His bore the marks of torture, with numerous burns, slashes and stab wounds all over his body. None of which looked severe enough to have caused death, just pain. His skin was blackened from bruising, several of his fingers were missing and his legs hung unnaturally. And again on the wall behind him, her name. 'McKenzie'.

She walked up to him and cut him down. He fell to the floor with a resounding thud. There was no cry or sound to indicate the possibility of life. He was dead. Thank God.

She stepped back into the hallway, visibly shaken. "Matt. Get him outside with the others."

He stood up. "I think someone doesn't like you," he said as she stepped past him.

"Yeah, wish I knew who." She uttered. "Goodman, you got that body count yet?"

The American jogged across to her. "Yeah, 8 of our guys so far."

"And civvies?"

"Few, I haven't been counting."

"Why not!" She snapped. "I want a body count, not a bloody estimate."

"Okay, I'll see to it."

"Good. Make sure you do." He shrugged at Landers before walking back the way he'd came.

This place was worse than Friedland. There everyone had just vanished, shot and dumped in a field 2 miles away. Here they'd been left were they fell, for her to find. McKenzie took a deep breath. For her to find. But why? Behind her Daark carried Sims' body out and laid it with his men.

"Charlotte!" Landers called from down the street. "We've got company. Civvies coming this way."

"How many?"

"A few dozen so far, could be more." She said as she got nearer.

The first of the civvies appeared amongst the debris of the houses. He crouched, watching them for a short while then started down the street towards them. Landers pulled her rifle off her shoulder, studying him through her five power starlight scope. The young boy stopped at the foot of a mound of rubble and watched her again. A middle aged woman carrying a AK-74 joined him. She crouched next to him and brought the AK up to her shoulder and aimed it at her.

"No sudden moves." McKenzie ordered.

Landers lowered her rifle and the middle aged woman lowered her's too, before moving forward once more. Two more civvies joined them, followed by three more, then seven, then more.

"Hold your fire." McKenzie shouted, then repeated her order in German for their benefit. But before it could do any good, Goodman burst out of a side street. "Captain, we've got company!" He yelled before he spotted the civvies.

"Goodman hold your fire!" She ordered him as he snapped his M-16 into his shoulder.

"GOODMAAAN!"

He dropped to his knees and laced a burst over the civvies heads, sending them scattering for cover. McKenzie stormed over to him as he laid another burst across them. She struck him across the back of his helmet with the butt of her SA-80. He slumped forward, dropping his M-16. McKenzie pushed him to the ground and grabbing him by the back of his neck, held him face down in the snow. "I told you to hold your fire!" She snarled, before letting him go and allowing him to roll over. "How much fuckin' ammo you got left?"

"Two or three mags."

"And you've just wasted half of one. Good friggin' move soldier. What you gonna do for an encore?" Goodman picked up his M-16 and stood up, not saying a word. "Start using your pissing brain, your meant to have one. Or don't they issue them in the U.S. Army?"

"I thought -"

"You thought nothing. From now on you don't even fart unless I tell you to. You got that?" Goodman didn't answer. McKenzie grabbed his webbing strap and pulled him down to her level. "I said have you got that?"

"Yes Captain."

She pushed him away and turned back to the rest of the section. "Fran, which way did they go?"

"Scattered all over the place." She shouted back, still watching Goodman.

McKenzie turned back to where she'd last seen them. "They'll be back." She uttered, half to herself. "Be ready for them when they do. We don't know what reception we'll get now."

Goodman glanced nervously at her. She pretended not to notice. "Okay people, let's keep looking for the rest of Sims' squad. They'll be back and with any luck they'll still be friendly." She glared at Goodman.

He lowered his head and turned away.

After several minutes Landers emerged from a house. "Charlotte, you best see this." She said in a shaken voice, pointing back into the house. McKenzie followed her back in.

The young girl was still laid against the wall where she fell, she hadn't been moved since she was shot. "Looks like someone was trying to rape her."

"Our guys or there's I wonder?"

"If it's there's, why is she the only one we've found?"

"Our guys!"

"Looks that way."

McKenzie knelt down next to her. "Raped and then shot in cold blood. The fucking bastards have emptied a whole friggin' magazine into her." She turned to leave the room, stopping in the doorway. She looked back at the girl. "Get her tagged and outside with the others."

The middle aged woman was the first to reappear, scuttling across the debris, her AK held tight in her hand. Daark pointed her out as she ran between two houses. Then Landers spotted more, moving from a different direction. "They're surrounding us." She announced.

McKenzie picked her rifle up and peered through the sights, looking for the woman. The light was going fast and it wouldn't be long before it was dark. She found the woman laid amongst the rubble, peering down the sights of her AK-74 at her. McKenzie lowered her rifle, still watching the spot the woman occupied. She hoped this would be read as a friendly gesture.

Daark stepped close to her. "There's four more over there." He pointed down a side street.

McKenzie glanced in that direction. They weren't hard to spot, untrained civvies stood out a mile. She looked back to where the woman was and found her stood in the middle of the street. Daark instinctively pulled his rifle up, but she stopped him. "I'm Captain McKenzie, part of British forces in Europe." She said in German, as she stepped towards her.

The woman hesitated for a few seconds before walking slowly forward, her AK held at her hip. "Are you with those?" She asked in English. The side of her face was swollen and bruised.

McKenzie glanced at the bodies. "We're part of the same division, but not the same unit."

"Where are the rest of you?"

"This is it. There are just four of us."

Several more civvies crawled out of the rubble and walked forward.

"You are this McKenzie?" The woman pointed to the writing.

"Yes I think so."

"Then you are the person the Russian officer was looking for."

"Looks that way who was it."

"She told us to tell you 'she did all this for you'." The woman stepped up to her and lowered her rifle. "She killed and tortured them. But they wouldn't tell her where you were."

"They didn't know." She muttered, looking at the bodies. "It was a woman who did this?"

"I brought them here, I thought they might help us after your people came here." The woman pointed to Sims. "The Sergeant started to interrogate us about the Russian cavalry we saw. Shooting the animals, beating us. I...I went to get help. He shot Schmid and his wife. Then he found the cavalry boy and he started to interrogate him. I ran to get help. I ran into the Russians. All I wanted was to stop the soldiers. We...we don't want any more fighting."

"It's okay." McKenzie stopped the woman before she broke down. "They do this to you?" She asked looking at the bruises.

"Yes, while I waited in the woods for the tanks."

"How many of you are there?"

"About 50. There might be more still hiding."

"Unlikely." Daark uttered to Landers. "They're long gone."

Landers grunted in agreement. "Captain, are we gonna secure the area?"

She looked around at the darkening shadows. "Yeah, just the immediate area. This part of the street and those houses. You and Matt got that? Goodman, take a couple of the better civvies and check the streets beyond. Keep it quiet, no firing and no using radios. If no-one knows we're here we might get away with a quiet night."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Jane opened her eyes again to find herself in a dark and silent world. Eerie shadows danced around her like demons and the stench of burning diesel, ammunition and bodies singed her nostrils. Then the cold struck her. And oh it was so cold. It welled up from the snow beneath her and ate through her flesh into her bones, turning them to ice. She tried moving but couldn't. There was no feeling, no sensation of movement from her numbed limbs. She let out a disheartened gasp and closed her eyes cursing the soldier who spared her a quick death.

The crisp crunch of snow under foot brought her back. She tensed, holding her breath, now dreading the shot she had wished for. Instead a warm hand touched her neck.

"This one's alive!" An English voice shouted. "Bridie, get over here." He knelt beside her and touched her face. "Can you hear me, love?" He spoke softly.

She opened her eyes again and looked up into his concerned face. She studied it, taking in his blue eyes, neatly trimmed tash, clean shaven chin, and back to his pure blue eyes. He seemed to possess an angelic glow around him that softened his edges and made him look beautiful,

until she remembered angles don't wear combats. She opened her mouth to say something, but the words choked in her throat.

"Can you hear me?" He gently brushed her hair away from her eyes. "What's your name." Two more people joined him, both panting, one dropping something heavy next to them. "Get that body off her." The blue eyed man told them.

She felt the dead weight move and tried to move her legs again. But the effort failed. A hands touched each leg in turn, their warmth burnt her skin as if scalding water, slowly moving up each leg, then along her back, neck and down each arm. "Nothing seems broken." An Irish woman told the blue eyed man. "I think she pregnant though."

His face reappeared in front of her again. "Does it hurt anywhere?"

"Cold." She finally got the word out.

"Yes, I know. But does anywhere hurt?"

"No.... So cold."

"Okay, we're going to roll you onto your back. Then we'll get you inside. If it hurts shout up and we'll stop." He turned to his colleges. "Ready, after three." Three pairs of hands rolled her over, letting her see more of the blue eyed man crouched next to her. Well built and handsome. He smiled reassuringly at her. "What's you name, love?"

"Bayard. Jane, Bayard." She answered.

She looked round at the other two.

"How far gone are you." Bridie, the red haired Irish woman in a khaki tanksuit asked.

"Thirty two weeks, thirty three." She looked back at the blue eyed man.

"Any discomfort?" She continued.

"No. Just cold."

She gentle felt Jane's stomach. "Active little bugger, isn't it."

Jane tried a half smile. "Probably cold as well."

Bridie looked up from her. "She seems okay. Lets get her out of here." She looked back at Jane. "Right we're going to lift you onto a stretcher." Without waiting for her to answer. Jane found herself being lifted up into the air and onto the stretcher. The blue eyed man wrapped a blanket round her. "It's all right, We've got you." He reassured her.

She looked round, trying to find Sanders but it was too dark to see far and the lights if the tank hurt her eyes. She saw bodies lay across the small clearing as she was carried past, and the remains of a tanks still smouldering. "Who are you?" She asked the blue eyed man.

"It's okay. We're British." He answered.

"No, name."

"Matthews, Gavin Matthews." He replied cheerily. "Gav to me mates. What do I call you. Mrs Bayard?"

She smiled thinly back at him. "Jane. Miss."

From atop a solitary British Warrior APC, half hidden by the wrecked T-74, Major Carling watched them approach with the only survivor they'd found. "Who is she?" She shouted across at Matthews. "Marauder or Ruskie?"

"Neither, I think." He replied.

The answer arose her interest and she swung herself out of the turret and dropped onto the snow beside them. She was a pretty woman with soft brown eyes and a pink ribbon tied back her roguish black hair. "Who is she then?"

"Her name Bayard." Matthews told her, leaving Bridie to carry her to the back of the battered white tracked carrier. "She's not Russian and she doesn't look like a marauder. Wrong sort of clothes, no side arm. You know what I mean."

Carling glanced back at her. "How is she?"

"Nothing broken. Suffering from exposure and exhaustion." He lowered his voice as if betraying a secret. "She is eight months pregnant though."

"Great, that's all we need." She turned to look at her again. "Where's she come from?"

He shrugged. "Could be from that helicopter. The tracks leading this way."

Carling nodded looking at the battlefield. "Who are this lot?" She pointed towards the bodies.

"Monroe's lot. His body's over there."

"Good." Carling smiled. "Couldn't happen to a nicer person." Then she turned to the smouldering T-74. Oily smoke still drifted up from the blackened and charred engine covers. From a hatch hung the blackened body of its commander caught in mid action as he tried to escape. She walked up to the tank, Matthews followed a step behind her. The hull was still warm to the touch. She clambered up the glacis plate past the hole made by the Milan missile and crouched down over the drivers hatch. Inside sat his remains. He was the lucky one. The missile had passed right through him, killing him instantly and spearing him the fire that engulfed the other two. The commander and gunner, had burnt to death by the fire the missile started as it past through the crew compartment before exploding in the engine. She stepped onto the turret.

"Watch the ammo." Matthews warned her. "It still could be hot enough to cook off."

She squatted down between the hatches. The commander was half way out, frozen in mid action, his flesh and uniform had melted together into one black mass welded to the steel. The upper part of his body was less singed than the rest of him, his face showed the agony which he died in. She grabbed him by the lapels of his uniform and pulled him out the hatch and let him fall onto the snow, then looked into the cramped interior of the turret. As she did the stench of reached her nostrils, shell propellant, roasted flesh and soot. Everything was blackened with soot. She squeezed inside. Even for her five foot four statute it was a tight fit. The massive 125mm gun and auto loader took up most of the space. The rest was cluttered with radios and episcopes. The heat coming back at her from the hull started to make her sweat in her thick combat and thermals. She pulled herself forward, touching a loose shell with her hand. It was hot and burnt her. She pulled it sharply away and cursed. Beside the shell lay three ammo boxes. She cautiously touched them, checking their temperature. Pulling on her gloves she picked them up one by one and pushed them out through the hatch.

Twisting round the front of the gun, she came face to face with the charred remains of the gunner. He hung from the handles of his hatch, his hand welded to it. She squeezed past, not daring to touch him. Behind him she found what she wanted. A large leather clad document folder. It had been scorched by the fire, but not burnt. She pulled it free and started back towards the commanders hatch and pushed it out before pull herself up into the open air, stopping momentarily to rubbing the soot away from the radio frequency dial then clambered out and dropped down onto the snow.

Matthews helped her up to her feet. She bent forward for a while, taking deep breaths in order to clear her lungs of the stale air. He handed her a flask and she gulped down a few mouthful of liquor. Other members of her crew had already opened the ammo boxes and were laying the belt of 50 cal. ammunition onto the Warrior's cold hull. Carling straightened up and breathed in, taking a lung full of cold fresh air.

"You all right?" Matthews asked.

"Yeah." She coughed. "Alison, turn the radio to 85.78 and tell us what you hear." The young girl sat in the Warrior's turret pulled on her headset and disappeared inside. Carling turned back to Matthews. "What's in the pouch?"

Matthews opened it, spreading it's contents out onto the Warriors hull. "Maps, orders. Most of it looks like it's for the 12th Motor Rifles directing them to Robel."

"Robel!" She took another swig from the flask. "There's nothing at Robel. The place has been abandoned for nearly a year. What the hell are they going there for?"

"Doesn't say."

She coughed again and took another mouthful from the flask, letting the liquid run slowly down her throat. "Where're they from?"

"They kicked off from Gorzow Wielkopolski on the 7th, crossing the Oder the same night."

"What about the orders. How high up do they go? Are they from Russian Western Command."

Matthews scanned through the papers. "Nothing higher here than Army group."

"Any from Pila?"

"No, nothing."

"And what about the other divisions in the army?"

"I haven't looked yet."

Bridie appeared from behind the Warrior.

"Let me know." She told Matthews then walked across to her. "How is she?"

She shrugged. "Okay I suppose. I don't know how long she's gonna hold onto that baby though."

"Great!"

"She keeps asking about the chopper crew, want's to know if you've found them."

"Any idea how many we're looking for?"

"Two pilots, a gunner and a grunt with one leg."

"Well they're not here. Tell her we're still looking. They're either with the Russians or got away." Carling glanced round at the bodies. "What the hell's a pregnant woman and a one legged grunt doing on a chopper of that size? Stay with her and keep her calm, and lets hope she keeps hold of that baby until we can find somewhere to dump her." Bridie left, heading back to Jane and Carling turned back to Matthews. "Well?" She asked.

"No, nothing higher then Army Group. These look like duplicated documents given to the Divisional commanders. And these are radio communiqué,s."

"Maps?"

"Yeah, a couple." Matthews showed her. "One shows staging points near Prenzlau and the river crossing."

Alison reappeared on top of the Warrior's turret. "Kate, I think you should hear this." She waved another headset at her.

Carling clambered up the hull and took the headset. But all she could hear was static. "What?"

"Listen." Alison told her.

She did, at first she still couldn't hear anything, but then as she listened she heard voices. It was impossible to understand what was being said at first, but as the conversation continued she began to pick up odd words, Russian words, then sentences. She listened intently for a

name or something that would tell her who they were or where they were. Then it came. "Rutowski." She repeated.

"21st Motor Rifles Commanding Officer." Matthews told her.

Carling pulled off the headset. "Sound like they're in a fire-fight. Who's west of us?"

"A German outfit." Matthews answered as he clambered onto the turret with the two women. He showed her the map again. "This shows the route they're taking. The chance are they're at this road junction. That's where the Germans are based."

"Sounds like we've just found our Russian friends." She handed the headset back to Alison.

Heartless touched down beside the wingless Hind A outside the German Parliamentary building at Bonn. Jones unbuckled himself and stepped out of the side-door behind Rodregus onto the recently cleared helicopter pad. Kubrick walked out to meet him. "Colonel Jones?" He asked having never met him in person. "I'm Han Kubrick, Agricultural Minister. I'm glad you can make it," he said shaking his hand.

"How is Eurika?" Jones asked as he was lead them from the parliament building.

"Better than she was. Improving slowly. I've got a car up here." He lead him around the side of the building to where a 4X4 waited for them. They climbed in and Kubrick drove out of the parliament, pausing only for the check point, to the City Hospital. "I'm sorry my message was a bit vague. I didn't want to say too much because you never know who else is listening." He continued.

"It said enough to arouse our curiosity." Jones replied, noticing Kubrick's hands were sweating on the steering wheel. "You got that information of the fuel bowser we found?"

"Yes, yes I did."

Hauer paused at the window over looking the helicopter pad and stared at the new arrival. "Joe," he called Vonnegut across to him. "When did that British Blackhawk get here?"

"I don't know. Not that long ago, It's only been ten minutes since I was last here and it wasn't there then. I'll get hold of Rees and get him to find out who's on it. It shouldn't take him too long. You think we may have problems?"

Hauer nodded slowly, leaning against the glass and studying the markings on the Blackhawk door. "Especially if that had who I think it had aboard."

From a hundred yards away Sanders watched the Warrior. She had Carling lined up through the sights of the SLR for more than ten minutes. She'd snatched the rifle out of the hands of a dead soldier as she ran, only to find it's magazine held three rounds. She could have taken her out at any time she wished, but she knew she could only get a couple more before they'd had got her. Carling was speak to Matthews and Alison again, while Bridie sat inside the Warrior with Jane. Two others were stripping the 50 cal from the T-74 cupola.

Sanders lowered the rifle. The ground between her and the Warrior was pretty open, but it was gently undulating, and it was dark. She waited a while longer before crawling out of the hollow towards it. She stopped once as Carling looked round again, looking almost straight at her for a few seconds, then turned back. Sanders continued forward until she reached the back of the Warrior.

In the illuminated interior she could see Jane laid along one side of the Warrior covered with a blanket, while Bridie sat opposite her, talking. Jane caught sight of Sanders as she peered in. "What's up?" Bridie asked, noticing her and looked out the door as well. "Someone out there?"

"No." Jane replied.

But Bridie wasn't convinced. She got up and looked out the door. Sanders knife went straight to her throat. Not with enough pressure to break the skin, but for Bridie to know one wrong move and it would. She backed away slowly as Sanders followed her in through the rear door, closing it after her.

"Sit down." She snarled.

Bridie did. Sanders took the revolver from her and handed it to Jane. She took it and sat up against the rear bulkhead, aiming it at Bridie. Sanders pulled the knife away and held a finger over her lips. "Not a word."

She moved forward under the turret. Above her Alison sat in the hatchway with one foot resting on the back of a seat, the other swinging idly beneath her. Sanders glanced round the inside of the Warrior, assessing their situation. Above her were two open hatches and at the front was the drivers hatch, all of which would need closing to secure the carrier. She glanced back at Jane who nodded reassuringly.

Sanders reached up and took a firm hold on the back of Alison's skirt. Waiting a second to proper herself, she knocked her foot away from the seat, she yanked down hard. Alison tumbled into the Warrior. Before anyone had time to realise she hadn't slipped, Sanders had reached up and pulled both hatches shut and locked. Then she dived across the Warrior to the drivers hatch, reaching it at the same time as Matthews. She grabbed the hatch and went to heaved it shut as he threw a joist into the opening, jamming it slightly open. Sanders put all her weight on the hatch, but he was slowly easing it open. She grabbed her automatic, she stuck it through the opening and laced of a few rounds. Matthews let go of the joist; whether she'd hit him or not, she didn't know. She just kicked the joist free and slammed the hatch firmly closed.

She turned back to find Alison waiting with her hands up, waiting for Jane to momentarily drop her guard as she switched her aim quickly between her and Bridie. Sanders levelled his pistol at her. "Don't even think it honey."

Alison backed down and sat opposite Bridie.

Sanders glanced down at Jane. "You okay?"

"Yeah, just bloody cold. Where are the others?"

"Don't know, lost sight of them all."

"And where you been?"

"Around, staying out the way."

"Well thanks for you help. What we gonna do now?"

Sanders settled back against the front bulkhead, her automatic still aimed at Alison while Jane covered Bridie. "I don't know. Let me think."

The Warriors engine coughed, spluttered and died. Jane and Sanders exchanged a silent looks. "What now?" Jane asked.

"Give up." Bridie replied half to herself.

"Y' know what. I haven't come this far to give in to a bunch of deserters who are -" Before she could react to her someone hammered on the outside of the hull.

"WE HAVE DISABLED THE WARRIOR." A muffled voice shouted from outside. "WE ARE ALL ARMED OUT HERE. THERE IS NOWHERE FOR YOU TO GO. UN-BOLT THE HATCHES AND COME OUT. YOU WILL NOT BE HARMED."

"No shit." Sanders muttered. "Who's that?"

"The CO." Alison replied.

"YOU WILL NOT HARM MY CREW IN ANY WAY." The voice continued.

Sanders nodded to Bridie. "Tell her to back off."

Bridie leaned close to the hull and shouted. "KATE. WE'RE FINE IN HERE. I THINK SHE'S FROM THE HELICOPTER. PILOT I THINK. SHE'S ARMED BUT I DON'T THINK WE'RE IN ANY IMMEDIATE DANGER. JUST BACK OFF FOR A WHILE."

"BRIDIE!"

"LEAVE IT KATE. I'LL SORT IT!" She turned back to Sanders and spoke normally. "That all right?"

Sanders didn't reply, she was looking round the inside of the Warrior planning her next move. Her eyes fell on the radio and she remembered the two whip aerials on top of the turret. "You." She pointed to Alison. "Can you reach Hamburg on that thing?"

"Yes."

"Do it!"

Alison moved forward to the radio and switch it on.

Bridie nodded towards Jane. "She's thirty two weeks pregnant you know." She said to Sanders.

"No shit!"

"This amount of stress isn't good for her or the baby."

"Neither being shot at by triple A, she'll survived."

"Look why don't you let her out..."

Jane's temper rose. "SHUT THE FUCK UP!" She snapped. "You too Kim. I'm pregnant not fuckin' dying. So just shut the fuck up!"

Alison broke the brief silence. "I've got Hamburg. But they want your identification."

Sanders shot Jane a hard look before taking the headset. "Get down there!" She waited until she was safe before answering. "Hamburg. This is ALPHA ONE. We are down and disabled just east of Lake Muritz. I have information for Colonel Jones, so patch me through."

"PLEASE STAND BY." Came the reply.

Stand by. What? This can't be the same pillock she spoke to last time.

"ALPHA ONE - THIS IS CITADEL - DO YOU READ - OVER." The radio finally cracked.

"Roger Citadel. Chopper is down and disabled about 3 K's east of Lake Muritz at approximately grid 128-545. Three crew plus two passengers survived. All but myself and one passenger have been picked up by a Russian Armoured division at grid 126-530. Now heading west. They are still believed to be alive. Now where's KINGFISHER? Over."

"COPY THAT ALPHA ONE -KINGFISHER IS UNAVAILABLE AT THIS TIME - I HAVE WALLFLOWER FOR YOU - STAND BY."

Louise took the head set off the radio operator. "ALPHA ONE, WALLFLOWER. What's states the chopper in? Over."

"IT'S KNACKERED - DOWN IN ONE PIECE AT GRID 128-545 BUT SHOT TO HELL."

"Will it still fly?"

"YEAH I SUPPOSE SHE WILL BUT SHE'S OUT OF FUEL AND THE BATTERIES ARE DEAD."

"That's no problem Lieutenant. Who's with you?"

"JUST THE DOC - DOC BAYARD AND MYSELF - I DON'T KNOW WHERE THE OTHERS ARE - WE GOT JUMPED BY MARAUDERS AND SEPARATED."

"Who was an board?"

"ME, CLANC, WOODY, THE DOC AND A GRUNT WITH ONE BOOT MISSING - MARCH COPPED IT OVER PASEWALK ALONG WITH EIGHT OF YOUR GUYS."

"Okay Lieutenant, where are you now?"

"AT GRID 126-135 - WITH ANOTHER MARAUDER UNIT RUNNING ABOUT IN A WARRIOR - ME AND THE DOC ARE INSIDE WITH TWO HOSTAGES - BUT THEY'VE DISABLED THE ENGINE SO WE CAN'T GO ANYWHERE - I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE CAN HOLD OUT 'TIL THEY TRY AND GET US OUT."

"Do you know who they are?"

"THEY'RE UNDER THE COMMAND OF SOME MAJOR CARLING."

"Kate Carling?"

"YEAH - I THINK SO."

"Put her on."

"WHAT?"

"Put her on Lieutenant. That's an order. Put her on right now."

There was a long silence that seemed to last for ever and Louise started to wonder if the link had been broken when. "WALLFLOWER - ROGUE - OVER." A female voice said on the other end.

"ROGUE. The pilots one of ours, she's safe so go easy. Now what you got out there?"

"FROM THE MESS THEY'VE MADE I'D SAY SOMETHING LIKE TWENTY TO THIRTY TANKS JUST TRUNDLED WEST THROUGH HERE - THEY HAD A LITTLE SCUFFLE WITH A THIRD RATE MARAUDER BAND - ALL THE BODIES AROUND HERE ARE FROM THEM - THE ONLY DEAD RUSSIANS ARE IN A T-74 THAT GOT WASTED - WE'VE MANAGED TO SALVAGE THE PAPERS FROM THE TANK - IT IDENTIFIES THEM AS PART OF THE 12TH MRD WITH ORDERS DIRECTING THE DIVISION TO ROBEL."

"Robel? Robel's as good as a ghost town."

"YEAH, I KNOW - THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE THAT DOESN'T ADD UP - A DIVISION OF THIS SIZE SHOULD HAVE A SUPPLY LINE STRETCHING HALF THE WAY BACK TO MOSCOW - BUT THERE'S NOTHING - NO REAR GUARD, NO BACK-UP AND DEFIANTLY NO SUPPLY LINE."

There was a longer pause.

"ROGUE, we've been getting sporadic reports of a large scale offensive force moving west towards the containment zone. The German Government has already placed their forces on full alert after losing contact with their garrisons east of the Greifswald autobahn and we've lost all our Recon unit in the area. The helicopter was carrying an additional platoon to replace them. So far we've had very little in the way of firm contacts. It sounds like you've had the only definite sighting. The C in C's being pressurised by the German Government to commit the 1st and 2nd Armoured Divisions into the field. Which totally buggers up the withdrawal plans. We need to know what's happening out there."

"SO WHY SHOULD I HELP?"

"Because we need you. We've lost all but one of our recon unit. The rest of our men are running round this place trying to keep the civvies in order -"

"SO WHY SHOULD I HELP? - WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME AND MY LOT?"

"Because you're the best Armoured Division commander we've got."

"AFTER THE LAST TIME - OH NO, I'M NOT HAVING THAT BASTARD -"

"I'll talk to them. We'll sort something out this time." There was another long silence. "Well?" Still nothing. "ROGUE?"

"YEAH OKAY - ON ONE CONDITION - I WANT A FULL ENQUIRY INTO MALBORK." She eventually said. "I WANT THE BASTARD WHO GAVE THE ORDER TO BLOW THE BRIDGE STRUNG UP - I WILL NOT BE MADE A SCAPEGOAT."

"I'll see to it. Now talk to me."

"THERE'S DEFIANTLY A TANK DIVISION OUT HERE - THE TRACKS AND THE T-74 PROVE THAT."

"And MAJOR had three BMP's at Hardenbeck and McKenzie four BTR's at Friedland. But these are small isolated units that could be operating independently from their High Command."

"I WOULDN'T CALL THIRTY ODD TANKS A SMALL UNIT."

"You said the division is operating without support and heading towards a ghost town."

"YES - WE PICKED UP SOME RADIO CHATTER ABOUT HALF HOUR AGO - SOUNDED LIKE OUR RED FRIENDS HAD RUN INTO A GERMAN OUTFIT TO THE WEST OF US - LOOK, I KNOW THIS SOUNDS A BIT OF AN OFF THE WALL IDEA,

BUT WE CAN'T FIND ANY ORDERS ABOVE ARMY LEVEL - COULD THIS BE A MASS DEFECTION - IT'S HAPPENED BEFORE WITH THE 10TH AND 27TH TANK DEVIATIONS."

"It's possible and we are considering it, but until someone get to talk to them, we want know."

"AND YOU WANT ME TO BE THAT SOMEONE."

"I don't care how you do it, just talk to them. How far behind them do you think you are?"

"I RECKON THEY CAME THEY CAME THROUGH HERE ABOUT FOUR HOURS AGO - I CAN BE UP BEHIND THEM BY FIRST LIGHT - BUT WHAT ABOUT THE HELICOPTER CREW? - I'VE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHERE THE OTHERS MAY BE - THEY COULD STILL BE WITH THE DIVISION OR OUT HERE SOMEWHERE."

"They'll have to take their chances. Catch up with the Division and finds out their intentions. But watch yourselves. I don't want this thing to restart this bloody war if I can help it."

"RIGHT, NO PROBLEM - WHAT ABOUT THESE TWO?"

"What about them?"

"THIS JANE BAYARD - SHE'S NEARLY NINE MONTHS PREGNANT - I'M NOT DRAGGING HER AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE IN THAT CONDITION."

"With ALPHA ONE going down, all chopper flights outside the containment zone have been suspended. Can't you drop her somewhere?"

"WHERE? - THE WHOLE PLACE IS OVER RUN WITH MARAUDERS AND THEY'RE NOT ALL AS FRIENDLY AS US - THERE ISN'T A SAFE SETTLEMENT FOR MILES.."

"Then you'll have to take her with you."

"GET REAL WALLFLOWER - SHE'S NINE MONTHS GONE, SUFFERING FROM EXHAUSTION, EXPOSURE AND PROBABLY SHOCK - MY MEDIC RECKON IT'S ONLY LUCK THAT'S STOPPING HER HAVING IT NOW."

"It's not my decision, ROGUE."

"I DON'T GIVE A FUCK - IF YOU WANT ME TO GO LOOKING FOR YOU RUSSIAN, YOU GET HER OFF MY HANDS AND BACK TO HAMBURG."

Louise glanced uncomfortably at Harris stood in the doorway.

"YOU CAN'T LEAVE HER OUT HERE, WALLFLOWER"

"It's not my decision." Louise replied.

"Since when has that bothered you?" Harris muttered.

She looked at him again. "What we got on the pad?"

"Just the Puma." Harris said from the doorway.

"Get it prepped for medical evac. Then get hold of the Air Corp and get me a Gunship. We're can't afford to loose another one."

Harris disappeared out of the door.

"Okay ROGUE. There's a chopper on it's way to pick her up."

"GREAT - IT WON'T BE ABLE TO GET IN HERE - TOO MANY TREES - WE'LL HEAD SOUTH TO THE MIROW ROAD AND MEET IT THERE - HAVE THE CHOPPER CONTACT US WHEN HE GETS CLOSE FOR THE GRID REF - GIVE US AN HOUR"

"Got that, is there anything else you need. Fuel, ammo?"

"WE'RE ALRIGHT FOR FUEL SINCE THAT BOWSER TURNED UP - WE COULD DO WITH SOME AMMO THROUGH."

"Okay, what do you need?"

"120, ENOUGH FOE THREE TANKS - 50 CAL. 7.62 - WHAT EVER YOU CAN GET - AND SOME 30MM RARDEN WOULDN'T GO A MISS EITHER."

"Right I'll see what I can do."

"UNDERSTOOD WALLFLOWER - ROGUE OUT."

She placed the headset down onto the table and started to leave

"I hope she's worth it." Meg muttered.

Louise glanced back at her. "I hope so too. See if you can get the Colonel."

She waited for her to raise Heartless, but Jones wasn't aboard. They were still waiting for him to return. She left a message for him to call in as soon as he did. Then she walked back into his office. "She's either Nattasha Straczynski or Nina Wiste." She muttered to herself. "Why else would MAJOR want her back here so desperately. If she Nattasha his reasons were understandable. But what would Wiste know that makes her so important?" McKenzie had dealt with Wiste and the Israeli secret service during the 90's, when the Israeli Airforce bombed a nuclear plant in Syria they believed was producing weapons grade plutonium. And again last year at Olsztyn in Poland, over that satellite crap. But what if it wasn't crap. What if the Russians had reactivated a satellite and were using it to control this offensive. She might have the data they needed to jam the satellite and stop it. She starred Jones' desk, her mind occupied with Nattasha. Jones had left the photo of her on it and she picked it up.

Harris entered the office. "The Puma being prepped, and they'll be an Apache here in 40 minutes."

"Thanks Karl." She held the photo out to him. "Pretty isn't she."

He took it. "Yeah she is. Who is she?"

"I hope that's the person we're gonna pick up."

"We're going?"

"Yeah. Get your kit ready, we're both flying out with the Puma."

"Jones is not gonna like that."

"He's going to have to lump it. Have a look round and see if you can scrounge up some ammo for Major Carling. Here's a list of what she wants."

He exchanged the photo for the list and left the office.

Kubrick pulled into the hospital entrance and stopped at another check point. He showed his ID card to the sentry. "This are Colonel Jones of the British Army. We're here to see Mrs Koch." He told him. Jones handed across his ID card.

The sentry took them both and studied them for a moment. "Please wait here." He said and returned to his cabin.

"Something wrong?"

"No. He'll be checking she's expecting us."

The sentry returned a minute later and handed back the cards. "She is expecting you. Park to the right of the main doors. She's on the fifth floor." He saluted and they pulled away.

Jones found the hospital surprisingly clean and orderly in comparison to those in Hamburg. Kubrick explained on the way up that the City Hospital was purely for Governmental employees and the armed forces. Bonn's civilian population had to use the less well staffed and equipped out lying hospitals. It was one of the benefits of governmental employment and he seemed surprised that the British Army didn't extend similar privileges to it's personnel.

Eurika had been moved into a single room in the once private wing of the hospital. She was awake and reading when the entered. She looked up at Jones from over the top of her reading glasses as he stood at the foot of her bed. She'd despised him in the past, saw him as one of the main protagonists to the return of peace within Germany's borders. Hauer had often spoke highly of him but her opinions of him were much less. He was the one who

antagonised the French late last year resulting in several skirmishes between their two armies. "I didn't think you would come." She said.

"Your message aroused my curiosity." He answered. "Especially since it came from you."

She placed the book down on the bedside table and pulled out the two files. "These are from Bernard Hauer's office. He knows they are missing and he's looking for them. I think you should take them away and read them in detail." She handed him the RESTORE and TURMOIL files.

Hauer waited in his office for Vonnegut to return. He thought he knew who was aboard the Blackhawk, but not why he was here. Had he missed something? Overlooked some tiny little detail that had led him here? Jones was a dangerous man, far more dangerous than most gave him credit for. Knowing this he opened his safe to retrieve the operation files, but they weren't there. Of course they were, he was getting paranoid. He looked again. "Dam!" His guts knotted as the fear of exposure gripped him. "DAM!"

But how, and who? Eurika Koch was the obvious suspect but how could she have got them without a cohort. But who could that be, Vonnegut? A moment of doubt took him. Vonnegut was too perfect a conspirator. He had too many of the right answers at the right time. He knew enough to betray him.

Vonnegut entered the office. "It was Jones in the Helicopter. He left Hamburg an hour ago and came straight here. Kubrick met him and they left in one of the 4x4s."

"Where'd they go?"

"To see Eurika I think."

"Of course Kubrick. I never thought of him."

"What do you mean?"

"The RESTORE and TURMOIL files are missing. They've been taken from my safe. Eurika has them, I'm sure of that. And Han must have got them for her."

"But how, he hasn't know the combination to your safe."

"Eurika does, as well as yours. And she would know what to look for."

"Han and Eurika aren't exactly the best of friends."

"And neither are she and Jones."

Vonnegut walked uncomfortably around the office. "If she's got the files, she show them to him. Why else would he be here. And if she does that he'll know about our involvement."

"Only in RESTORE and TURMOIL. He may not know about INFLUENCE. Fitzwilliams should be able to shut him up." Hauer smiled to himself. "Yes, Fitzwilliams can deal with him. Now what about that boat?"

"The Arctic Voyager, last report from Rees said she was in dry dock undergoing repairs."

"I want her taken out of action. Take the boat out and they may be force to cancel their plans regardless of what ever Jones may have turned up."

"What should I tell him, blow the boat up."

"No, they'll just finds another. Blow the dry dock. That will put both boat and dock out of action. See that Rees does it, soon."

Vonnegut hesitated uncomfortably. "What about Jones, should we take the chopper out after he takes off or get Rees to do it at Hamburg?"

"No. Leave Jones for now. Let's visit Eurika first and find out how much she's told him."

Harris was back forty five minutes later in a 4 Tonner. From a window over looking the pad Louise watched him and two other men unload six crates of 120mm ammunition from the back and with the help of the ground crew, load them aboard the Puma. A dozen small crates followed, holding the 30mm Rarden rounds and the small stuff followed. Once they'd finished, both Harris and one of the men walked over to one of the 1/4 ton Land Rovers, spoke for a minute and shook hands. The man then climbed into the Rover and drove off, followed by the 4 Tonner out the gate.

"How much did that lot cost us." She asked as Harris returned to the office.

"Scrounged it out of the 15th/19th. They wanted one of the Landrovers for it all."

Carling's old Regiment, she thought. "Which one?"

"One of the old lightweights."

"I hope she's worth all this." She straightened the file on the desk and picked up parker and rifle. "Carling will be close to Lake Muritz." She continued on the way out of the office. "Somewhere on the southern edge. She's contact us with the grid ref. for the LZ when you reach the 198 river bridge." She pursed at Ops and signed them out. "We're off Meg. Brief the Colonel when he gets back. I've left a file on his desk he may find interesting." Then she headed out to the pad.

The Apache was sat on the far side. It's engines idle while it waited for the Puma. Harris walked over to it and spoke to it's pilot. The pilot gave him a thumbs up and he headed back

towards the Puma, stopping half across to speak to another ground crewmen. Wilson fired up Black Jack's engines and the rotor blade started to turn. Louise walked across the pad towards him, fastening up her parker.

"I hope you know what you're doing." Harris shouted to her. "If we lose either of these two, your life ain't gonna be worth living."

"Let's just hope we don't then. Now are we ready or not." They headed across to Black Jack and clambered aboard. Louise sat well inside and fastened up her lap belt. Harris perched on the edge of the doorway next to Morse. He pulled on a flight helmet and plugged the intercom in.

Meg watched Black Jack powered up and lifted clear of the ground from a second floor window. As it turned over the pad, Harris saw her watching him and waved. She waved back. Black Jack then climbed clear the Citadel into the heavy night sky. The Apache flying slightly behind and below it. She watched them vanish into the darkness until only their navigation lights betrayed their position. But these too were turned off as they flew beyond the boundary of the secure area.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Galloway watched the Landrover race past, two soldiers watching the surrounding buildings from the roof hatches while a third sat in the back doorway. None of them saw him, not that they were travelling slow enough too. It come down the street at a hell of a speed, waddling under the weight of it's heavy armoured body weaving past the remains of a barracked and around the corner at the end of the street. It lifted one wheel clear off the road as it did and Galloway held his breath hoping it would roll over. But it didn't, the wheel came back down and it were gone.

Hazel joined him. "Where we going?" She asked.

"That way." He pointed in the direction the Landrover had disappeared. "There's a food distribution warehouse over that way. That's were we are going." He clambered from the debris and walked onto the road.

"Hey look at that." Spaatz said from behind them. He pointed at a house across the road at thin column of smoke drifted up though the roof of a house. Light was just visible though the boarded up windows. "There's someone living there."

"And were there's people -" Galloway started.

"- there's food." Hazel finished.

They smiled at each other.

"Go get the others." He told Spaatz.

In a minute they were there. Galloway was already across at the house. "HEY IN THERE," he shouted through the boards. "GIVE US SOME FOOD MATE."

"Get out of here, you hooligans." Came the cry back. "I've got a gun in here, and I'll use it."

"Come on old man. All we want is a little bit of food." Galloway answered.

"I haven't got any food in here."

"Just a little bit. A couple of cans or packets of something for the children." He pointed Spaatz towards the door. "See if it's locked," he whispered.

Spaatz moved off, followed by Hazel.

"I've told you, I've got a gun." The old man continued.

"Please mister, just one." Galloway turned to Gerta. "Show him your girl," he told her.

"No." She protested. "He'll shoot her."

"Show him." He whispered before shouting. "We've got a baby out here, she's starving." He grabbed the child and held her up in front of the window, lifting her like a rag doll. Gerta hollered in protest, but Drew pulled her away.

There was a long silence from inside. Then the old man answered. "Okay, I'll give you one can. But it's for the child. Just the child."

"Yeah, Okay mister, just for her." Galloway answered smiling broadly, handing the baby back to Gerta.

Above him one of the boards moved a side and a hand passed a battered can out. Galloway reached up and grabbed the frail hand and pulled it through until he felt the old man thump against the boards. The old man bellowed in protest and tried to pull back, but Galloway's strength was no match for his old body. Drew stuck the arm with a long, heavy stick, breaking the brittle bones instantly. Galloway let go and it shot back inside to howls of anguish. Then they started at the boards with his bare hands, prising them away from the window frame, Drew using the stick as a lever.

"YOU BASTARD!" The old man hollered as Spaatz and Hazel laid into the door. "YOU FILTHY LYING BASTARD. I'LL GET YOU FOR THAT, I REALLY WILL!" Shot gun pellets rattled through the window from a badly aimed gun.

The door gave way and Hazel tumbled in. The old man spun round to face her. She looked up at him and saw the old grandad hurriedly reloading his shotgun. He snapped the barrel shut, but hesitating as he saw her young face looking back at him, a face that could have been his niece. The window gave way, and frame and boards crashed to the floor followed by Galloway. The old man turned to him and fired as he lie stunned on the floor. Hazel snatched up a half brick and hurled it at the man. It hit him on the side of his head, making him stumble. She scrambled to her feet, grabbing a second brick and leapt at him. He turn to see her again as she landed on top of him struck the blow with the brick. He was nothing more than a frail old grandad with only half a dozen cans of food to his name. It could have been her grandad for all she know, but that meant little to her. His brittle skull cracked easily and he died shortly after. The food was hers now.

Heartless touched down half an hour later and was met by Meg Riley. "Captain Robertson and Corporal Harris have taken Black Jack to pick up the crew from Stallion." She shouted to Jones over the noise. "They've got an Apache from the Air Coup as escort. You can reach them on the usual band. ROUGE picked them up somewhere close to the east side of Lake Muritz."

Jones signed in. "As soon as they get back I want to see Captain Robertson straight away, no matter what time it is."

Jones stepped back into his quiet and deserted office. Louise's absence was instantly noticeable. It made the office feel cold and unwelcome. He hung his parker up and his eyes instantly being drawn to the lone cabinet. The dead spider plant was gone, replaced by a framed photo. He walked over to it and picked it up. Nattasha, young and laughing. A smile cracked across his face and he placed it back. "Not tonight my old friend." He told the cabinet. "You're not going to get any of them tonight." He returned to his desk and opened the files from Eurika and re-read what he'd scanned over in the chopper. unconscious he picked up his mug and took a sip of coffee. "Cold." He muttered, then downed it all the same.

"Sir." Meg startled him after an hour. "Captain Robertson asked me to find you this." She handed him the loose leaf folder and turned to leave. "Is there anything else sir?"

Jones picked up his mug and looked into it. "I could do with a hot mug of coffee."

"I'll get it right away." She walked across and took his empty mug from him.

Jones opened the folder once she'd left - Operation SLEEPING SATELLITE - It was a thin file containing only a few brief notes and preliminary reports. Most of it had come from McKenzie. But a few bits had found their way from the CIA and the Israeli's Nina Wiste.

This was one of the last thing McKenzie had been involved with before she pulled out and joined RED FOX TWO.

He walked across the office to pick up RED FOX TWO's personnel file and opened it expecting to see McKenzie's papers on top. Instead he found Captain Forrester. Forrester had been in command of the unit until he was killed during the fall of Malbork. Jones returned to his desk and continued to read, scanning through the personal record of every man and woman who had served as part of RED FOX TWO. In the three months between Forrester's death and McKenzie taking official command, there had been fifteen people assigned to them. With the exception of McKenzie, only four were still alive. John Campbell, Matt Daark, Richard Goodman and Marie Taylor. Campbell had voluntarily transferred to RF-3 after that unit got a mauling and needed rebuilding. Goodman and Daark had stayed with the RF-2, as did Taylor, though she hadn't flown out with them this time. She'd taken a wound on the SS-22 op which had become infected. Jones closed the file and headed out of the office.

"Sir." Meg called from Louise's office. "Your coffee."

"I'll be back in a minute. Keep it warm." He shouted back as he hurried down the corridor.

"Where are you going Sir?" She called after him.

"The barrack block." He shouted, leaping down the stairs.

The Citadel's barrack block were one of the more comfortable barracks within Hamburg. It had running water and heating and was often seen as a cushy posting by the regular the army. The normal rotor worked around two weeks in the Citadel on light duties broken up by two weeks in the field. Yet it had the lowest life expectancy of any assignment of the British Army, so had few volunteers to fill the vacancies.

The stale odour of worn clothes struck Jones as he entered RED FOX TWO's rooms, it hung in the warm air like a veil, reminding him of rugby changing rooms. RED FOX TWO were roomed on the first floor, in two large interconnecting rooms. They weren't the cleanest of rooms; unmade bunks line the walls and discarded clothes littered them. Garrett's bunk was pushed away from the others, into the corner where the walls around it were covered with pictures cut from the countless tatty porn mags piled under his bunk. Goodman's was behind the door; soiled combats lay across the foot of his bunk and the wall above it was covered in a mixture of more porn, photos of colleges and friends, and crude drawings of seductive women. Daark's bunk was much the same, except there were more photos of his wife and kids and the drawings were of a better quality.

The only tidy bunks stood either side of Daark's. Both had clean lining folded at the foot and empty lockers. Solomon and Kingston had been killed chasing the SS-21. They were both good soldiers, sorely missed and harder to replace. With Solomon and Kingston dead, and Taylor wounded, McKenzie had gone out undermanned. She didn't need to do this job, she should have been taken it easy, resting up before her U.K. job.

The rooms were silent apart from the sound of shower running in the next room. Jones took a last glance round before stepping under the curtain into the second room. It was much the

same as the first, apart from the feminine feel to it; the picture were different and there was notably more clean clothes hanging from make shift washing lines. The only sound was the faint sound of singing drifted out from the shower room.

The shower stopped running and suddenly Jones felt intrusive. Taylor's combats lay on her bunk and a trail of her underwear stretched from it to the shower room. He coughed loudly to draw attention to himself and the singing stopped. Taylor's head and naked shoulders appeared above the shower curtain. "Colonel!"

"How are you feeling, Marie?" He picked a piece of underwear from the floor and dropped it on top of her combats.

"Fine." She pulled the curtain back and stepped into the room, wrapping a towel round her wet body. "The Doc says I'll be fit for duty by the end of the week."

"Good. Captain McKenzie will be glad to hear that."

She walked across the room towards him, drying her hair on a corner of her towel. "What's the latest on them?"

"They're somewhere in the thick of thing. Just like always."

She sat on the edge of her bunk, letting the towel drop around her waist, revealing the long slash wound stretching from just under her right breast to her appendix; now healed, it had almost killed her.

"You were in Malbork, weren't you." He enquired, knowing the question was pretty irrelevant as he already knew the answer.

"Yeah. Why?" She dried off her upper body, dabbing carefully at the red scare.

"Do you remember anyone by the name Jane Bayard?"

"Christ that's a name I haven't heard for a while. She was the civvie we picked on our way out."

"Who was she, were did she come from?" Taylor shrugged. "Don't know really, she was just this civvie. Things got hairy after Forrester brought it. We stumble into her while trying to get out the place, about six hours after the bridge had been blown. We were heading south with some of Carling's lot when we ran into a bunch of civvies who thought we were Ruskies. There was an exchange of fire and when they backed off they left her behind. She'd been hit and Goodman insisted we took her with us." Taylor got up, letting the towel fall away and walked naked across the room to Landers bunk. She pulled a photo off the wall before returned to him. "This is her in the photo." She handed him a group photo of the unit, a rare one that included Straczynski. "That's her, sat between Daark and Campbell." She pointed to an attractive woman.

So Jane Bayard wasn't Nattasha. He felt a mixture sadness and joy at that discovery. "What happened to her? She wasn't with you when you made it back here." He picked up the towel

and held it out to her. She turned her back to him and lifted her hair inviting him to dry her back.

"She disappeared with Misha when we crossed the Oder. They never made it across and we presumed they were dead."

He lightly brushed the towel over her neck and shoulders, she was obviously enjoying this it. "Who was she?"

"A doctor, and a good one at that. Why the interest?" She turned to face him, stepping close and pushing her large breasts against his chest. Her eyes were dilated and he could feel she was aroused.

He ran a finger along the length of her spin.

"Eh, excuse me Colonel." Meg voice was level and emotionless. "General Bridgewater wishes to see you in his immediately."

Taylor shot her a look that could have killed before taking the towel from Jones and walking back across the room, wrapping it round her again.

"I'll be there in a minute." He replied not looking away from Marie, but the moment had gone. "I'm going to need a driver Harris is away at the moment. You fit enough?"

"Yeah. Give me two minutes to get dressed." She gave a brief smile before dropping the towel onto her bunk and pulled a tee shirt over her wet hair.

Jones stepped past Meg and walked down the corridor.

Riley stared at Taylor for a moment longer. "Slut!" Jones heard her uttered before following him in stony silence.

"Did he say what he wanted?" Jones asked her as they walked into his office.

"No sir." She snapped.

He had a good idea what this was about. He picked up the SLEEPING SATELLITE file for his desk and dropped it into his briefcase along with the two from Eurika Koch.

Taylor bounced through the door a minutes later, her hair was still wet. "Ready, sir?"

He closed his case. "Yes. Time to face the music I think." He cracked a brief smile and headed out. "Let him know I'm on my way." He told Meg as they left.

She didn't reply, just glared at Taylor; who grinned back.

Taylor bounded down the stairs ahead of Jones like an existed child. "Did Harris get the car fixed?" She asked as she paused at the door to the transit shed. She pushed the door open and

found the car sitting next to a stripped down 4 Tonner. It didn't look much better then it did; the headlight was still smashed and the windscreen cracked. There was little evidence of the days work Harris had spent patching it up; working on the engine and securing the front end. She still looked a mess.

Taylor lifted the bonnet and gave the engine a quick look over; everything was were it should be. She checked the oil and water. Then dropped the bonnet. "Keys?"

"Inside." Jones told her, catching up after signing out.

She climb in and turned the ignition. After a couple turns the engine fired, purring like it used too.

Hamburg's streets were dark and almost deserted. It was after curfew and most people retreated into the safety of their homes during these hours. Though some still ventured out, risking life and limb for what ever reason they had. Curfew Hamburg was in some ways safer then during the daylight. Gone were the markets, the street politicians and religious nut that generated the crowds were the sniper and mugger prayed; replaced by street gangs, vigilantes and the ever present army patrols. It was a shooting offence to be court out after curfew. Anyone see would got one challenge only, then shot if they didn't stop.

Jones got a glimpse of a body laying in a side street. Whether they'd been shot, mugged or just died of cold, he just didn't care anymore. He knew he should, but no one else cared about them, so why the hell should he. Taylor glanced across at him as the sound of automatic fire tore through the night. "Gunfire!" she said.

Jones nodded. "Yeah, keep going," he told her, he didn't care who was firing that gun either, just as long as it wasn't at him. "If it's our guys, we'll hear if they need help. If not, we don't want to know. Tell me more about Jane Bayard."

"What do you want to know?" She glanced across at him. "Goodman fell in love with her the minute he saw her. Probably 'cos he thought he was in with a chance."

"Did she?" He asked, starring out the side window into the darkness.

"Did she what?"

"Fall in love with him?"

She laughed out loud. "Who in their right mind would fall in love with Goodman. I mean he's all right I suppose, not bad to look at, but.... what a dick-head. The problem was only had eyes for Misha."

Jones glanced over his shoulder at the set of headlights that had just pulled out behind them from a side street.

"Matt got pretty close to her," Taylor continued. "I don't know if they got up to anything because she always seemed besotted with Misha. I think she used Matt more as a confidant when he wasn't around."

They drove over the Osterbek Canal. And unnoticed by them both, the headlights draw steadily nearer. "What about you?" Jones asked.

"What." She glanced across at him. "Get anywhere With Misha?" She smiled. "Tried. Never got anywhere though. Just like someone else I know. He had something going on with the Captain. How long have them two known each other?"

"A long time."

"She never told us much about her life before the war. I heard she was married and had a daughter. Get divorced didn't she?"

Jones glanced over his shoulder at the headlight again. They were a lot closer now.

"I heard a rumour that Misha had something to do with it." She waited for a while hoping he'd tell her more.

"What was Straczynski's relationship with Bayard?"

"I don't know. She was always close to him, but I got the impression he was a bit distant. But he was like that with us all." She looked across at him. "You know what I mean, always there when we needed him. Matt called him our Guardian Angel. As far as I know the only person who ever really got close to Misha, was Mac."

"Did Bayard ever sleep with anyone?"

"She bedded down with him a few times when Mac wasn't around. But most of the time she slept on her own." She glanced at him again. "Or do you mean, 'sleep'? If she did. I'd put my money on the Misha or Matt." She swung the car round a barricade. "Why, is she pregnant?"

"Yes, about eight months." He looked back at the headlights again. They were close and starting to worry him.

"That would put it sometime around May." She glanced at the headlights dazzling her in the mirror. "We didn't pick her until June."

The headlights pulled out from behind them and shot recklessly past.

"Watch it!" Jones shouted out as a MUTT pulled across in front of them, braking heavily.

Taylor hit the brakes. Pulling the Mondeo up sharply. The MUTT's gunner swung his M-60 round onto them. She banged the car into reverse and floored the accelerator. Its four wheel drive bit into the loose roadway and shot the car backwards away from the stationary jeep. She guided it along the debris covered road, her view out the back window obscured by the spare tyres, jerry cans and tools carried in the car. "That's far enough." Jones said, watching the MUTT turning round and start after them. "Pull off here and stop."

Taylor did as she was told. Braked sharply again and sliding the Mondeo round the corner and stopping. Jones snatched up one of the Colt Commandos and stepped out of the car as the MUTT bounced round the corner, braking as it saw Jones waiting for them. It stopped with one wheel off the road. It's gunner training the M-60 on him, then on switching to Taylor as she stepped out with the other Colt.

The MUTT's passenger, dressed in an American combat jacket, stepped out. "Colonel Jones?" He asked.

"Who wants to know?" Jones replied, keeping his rifle levelled at him.

"My names Donavon." He waved his hand at the gunner, who lowered the M-60. "My boss want to speak to you."

"Fine, where is he?"

Donavon chuckled. "He not here. I've been sent to fetch you."

"Who are you? CIA or DIA?"

"I'm not at liberty to say at the moment."

"Then there's no meeting."

"Okay." Donavon held up his hands. "CIA."

"Renzetti." Jones uttered.

"You know!" Donavon surprise showed his lack of field experience.

"Why did you turn my office over?" Jones seemed to ignore it.

"We never touched your place."

"Hofler was one of my men." Jones played on his naivety. "Why did you turn my office over?"

"No he wasn't." Donavon shuffled uncomfortably.

"Ask him. Oh, I forgot, he's dead." He pulled he's rifle close his shoulder. "Now if you don't want to join him, you'd better stop pissing me about!"

"Okay, okay Renzetti want to talk to you in private."

"What about?" Jones spat another question at him.

"I don't know. I was only sent to get you."

Jones lowered the rifle. "You'd better lead the way then."

"No, he wants to see you alone. You come with us. She stays behind."

"Then the meeting's off." Jones stepped back to the car.

"Okay." Donavon sounded nervous. "But no funny business. You follow us and there's no funny stuff."

"As if I would." Jones muttered getting back into the car.

"What about the Collins?" Taylor asked Jones as he got in.

"He'll wait." He clipped the rifle back into the holder. "And besides, it gives me a bit more time to think up a story about Bayard."

Donavon returned to the MUTT and it pulled away. Taylor followed as it led them across the city, skirting round the no-go areas and avoiding the army check points.

Galloway rubbed his hands together over the small fire they'd lit in the corner of a derelict house. Around him huddled the rest of his followers, each of them trying to get as near to the fire as they could. Greta was trying to feed her baby but she wouldn't take the mashed carrots from the tin. Drew sat by a window watching the street and whittling away the wooden pole he'd picked up from the house, while Hazel watched him. He'd already carved the top into something that seemed to resemble a bird's head while they'd been there, and was now working on its body. From the open window, she looked out onto the street leading up to the warehouse, less than a hundred yards away. A sign on the high fences identified the building as Food distribution warehouse 23. Harvestehude District, and it was protected by armed guards and three armoured cars. Several other groups had had the same idea as them. Some were already here when they arrived, others turned up later. She'd counted twelve so far. They'd occupied other houses around the warehouse, waiting and hoping to get some of the food that was rumoured to be stacked from floor to ceiling inside the building.

"Do you think they'll let us have some?" she asked everyone in general.

"They must do." Uttered Spaatz. "They can't leave us out here to starve."

"And if they don't feed us?"

"Then we take it." Galloway stated. He leapt up and snatched the tin of carrots from Greta. Angry to see her wasting it on the child. Greta protested, struggling to get up and retrieve the tin. But he pushed back. "She doesn't want it. You've been trying to stuff it down her throat for an hour and she doesn't want it."

"Give it back it's hers, that old man give it to her."

He stuck his fingers into the tin and scooped out some of the mush and licked it. "Aeh!" he exclaimed. "No wonder she want eat it. It's rotten." He chucked the tin back at her and wiped his hand on her bedding.

"No don't!" She protested. "You'll make it dirty."

"Look." Hazel pointed out the window. "There's more coming."

Galloway joined her, not wishing to argue with Greta. This group was larger than the others. And more open about its presence. They didn't skulk in the shadows, running from the slightest side of someone else. They walked openly in the middle of the street. Several of the girls were dancing in front of them, spinning around until they were quite dizzy. While the others chanted and cheered.

"They've got guns as well." Hazel pointed.

Galloway saw them being waved above their heads in time to the chanting. "That's what we need." He whispered. "More guns. With guns, the soldiers will have to let us have the food."

"But were are we gonna get guns from?" Greta asked. "All we have is your machine gun and the shotgun we got from that old man."

"They got 'em from somewhere. So will we."

Sergeant 'Sammo' Samson watched them gathering before him.

"Jesus Sammo, I don't like the look of this." Private Roberts muttered.

"Just shut your mouth soldier and keep your eyes open." Rumours about last night's riot in Barmbek were rampant throughout the city. It had taken eight hours to burn out and resulting in 24 military and over 200 civvies deaths. Tensions on both sides were high and all the security troops and barrack had been placed on alert for the first signs of trouble. It was looking like their warehouse would be facing it tonight. He patted Roberts on the shoulder. "Just watch 'em. If they start owt, shout up. I'm gonna see if we can get some help out here." He climbed out the fox hole and walked back through the gates into the compound and towards the warehouse.

His Lieutenant was stood just inside the door. "Well what do you think. Are we going to have trouble here or not?" He asked him.

Sammo walked past him and took a cup of soup from off the stove. "I'd say so. Can we get another platoon down here. The extra fire power might make 'em think again."

"Yes, good idea. I'll get on to it straight away." The Lieutenant shuffled away, keeping clear of the windows.

Sammo walked back outside. "Phillis, take four men and set up a fire zone twenty yards in front of the foxholes." He shouted to one of his corporal before finishing of his soup.

The corporal moved off, calling four men to follow him through the gates and into the slit trench that were the distribution centres first line defences.

Sammo turned as the Lieutenant shouted him from the doorway. Satisfied his men were still safe he walked back inside. "What about those men Lieutenant."

The officer stepped back out of sight from the doorway. "We're on our own. They've got spasmodic rioting springing up all over the city."

"That's great. Another twenty men and this lot will backed down." He walked back outside and looked at the growing crowd. "Okay Lieutenant. Take two Gimpies and set 'em up in the first floor windows. It'll give 'em a good field of fire. Then get three others round the back of the building encase they start at us from that side. Chances are they'll stick to the gate. But we can't be too careful"

The Lieutenant started to protest at being ordered about, but his sergeant had already walked out of the building shouting more orders. "Jobson, get the Saxons and Pig round here. If we've got to run I want to be ready."

"Sergeant Samson!" The Lieutenant shouted after him.

Sammo ignored him, still shouting orders to his men. The Lieutenant crept out of the shelter of the building. "Sergeant Samson, I am the senior officer here. I WILL GIVE THE ORDERS!"

Sammo turned to him. "Fine, while you thinking of one that won't get us killed, I'll carry on, SIR!" He saluted and carried on.

Hazel was first to slip out the house into the swelling crowd. She almost went unnoticed except Drew caught a last glimpse of her as she was swallowed up by their mass.

"HAZEL!" He dived after her, forcing his way through the surging crowd towards the point were he'd last seen her. When he got there she was gone, swept away. He tried keep still, fighting against the flow of the crowd, until became to difficult and let himself be carried along with them. Finally he struggled onto a mound of debris on the opposite side of the street. He clambered on top and stood looking over the sea of heads. "THERE SHE IS!" He pointed. "HAZEL!" He saw her turn and wave. He dived into the crowd again.

The mass stopped twenty yards from the first slit trenches; those at the front realising they weren't as brave as they thought they were now they faced real dug in resistance. However, the ones further back kept moving forward unaware of the halt, they crushed up against those in front, several slipped on the icy road, fell and were trampled under foot. Others were crushed to the point were breathing was impossible.

Drew reached Hazel just as she went down, catching her hand and pulling her back up as they were crushed into the backs of the people in front of them. The crush rippled though the crowd like a wave rushing to a beach, surging forward until it burst out through the front rank.

Nervous and unsettled by the previous nights rioting, one of Sammo's men opened fire; spraying the front rank with bullets. Sammo nearly crucified the man where he stood, having just destroyed any chance he had of negotiating a peaceful way out come to this incident. But there was little point now, he would see to the man if they both came out of this alive.

Drew and Hazel found themselves being propelled forward, carried along towards the soldier guns by the weight of crowd. Drew lashed out at those around them, fighting for space so they could move towards the edge of the crowd. Gunfire swept clear a space before them and they dived through it as the gap closed around them.

"FALL BACK TO THE GATES!" Sammo bellowed above the noise. It would be suicide to try and hold them at the trenches. But he was too late, the mob were already upon them. "FALL BACK!"

A man with a goatee beard confronted him as he gave the order. A middle aged woman carrying a kitchen knife was just behind him. The man lunged at him, slashing open the front of flak jacket with an unseen weapon. Sammo smacked him in the face with the butt of his rifle then turned as the woman lurched past him and put a single shot into her head, but not before she'd plunged the knife into the young soldiers side. The gimpies laid down a burst of fire into the mob immediately before him, before turning and scrambling out of the trench. He got half way out before they over overwhelmed him again. He caught a last glimpse of one of his men as someone drove a knife into his back. He could do little to help. The mob was already around them, spilling over the trench towards the gate. He grabbed the arm of the young soldier and fought his way back.

Drew and Hazel were buffeted through the mass of people until they eventually spilled out to the edge. There they clung to a wall and watched the mob surge past. At one point she thought she glimpsed Galloway or Spaatz and would have dived back into the crowd if Drew hadn't have stopped her. A stray bullet took a chunks out of the wall above his head and they ducked. He know they couldn't stay there, they had to get away from this. He pushed Hazel forward along the wall moving with the crowd until they found an opening. She stumbled through it and fell. Drew onto her. They lay still starring at each other. For a split second he found himself wanting to kiss her and he know she would let him. She would have, but he hesitated to long.

She pushed him off her and scrambled to her feet. He let her and moved deeper into the dark building, leaving her starring at the mass of people surging past the opening. Then she followed him.

"Drew!" Her whisper drowned out but the gunfire outside. "Drew, where are you?"

"Up here."

She found the stairs and stated to climb.

He grabbed her and pulled her into a dark room. She almost screamed, tensing, readying herself to fight. Instead she found herself staring into his face again. He kissed her quickly on her open mouth, sensing the moment his time. For a instant she did nothing, taking that time to realise she wanted him too. His grabbed her arms loosened and she pushed herself forward to meet his lips again. His hands moved from her arms, to her back then round to her breasts. He caressed them though her thick coat before he fumbled for the buttons. She pulled slightly away to allow him. He unfastened two, tore the third off, only to find three more layers beneath. Forcing her back against a wall, his hands moved down to the fastening on her trousers, tugging at the combination of belt buckle and knots around her waist. Hazel protested as he yanked at the fastening. She broke the kiss and forced him away from her. He stumbled backward, breathless. His pulse still raced; whether because of the noise outside or her, he didn't know. He looked at her dark silhouette by the fires outside, unable to see what expression was on her face. Gunfire rattled outside and the smell of burning tinged cold air. She took a step towards him. "Let me." She panted, untying the knot.

Drew watched her as she slowly pulled the rope away from waist and started on the belt. She was teasing him, making him wait. He couldn't wait the emotions of the moment pushed him on. Another moment might be too late. He pulled her down onto the cold floor and climbed on top of her, forced a kiss on her lips while his hands pulled at her trousers. She protested, braking the kiss and pushed him off her before rolling onto her knees. Drew scrambled to his feet as quickly as he could, fearful that she might turn on him. He expected to hear her scream and came lunging at her with a knife. Instead she stood quietly and pulled her trouser off her hips.

The MUTT skirted round the Harvestehude district before pulling into a deserted shopping arcade just inside it's eastern edge. Donavon walked across to the car as they pulled up behind them. "He's inside. She waits here." He told Jones.

Jones followed him into a supermarket. Long abandoned, it had ransacked several times. Bare shelves and broken glass littered the floor. They picked their way across it to the store room where a short bald headed, smartly dressed man stepped out of the darkness. "Sir." Donavon said to him. "I've brought Colonel Jones."

The man had aged a lot since Jones had last met him. He'd put on weight too. "Colonel." Renzetti holding out his hand to Jones. They shuck hand briefly. Renzetti's grip was still strong. "I've heard a lot about you. I somehow expected a bigger man than you." He sounded sarcastic.

"And I was expecting an Italian." Jones replied.

Renzetti laughed out loud. "Italian by marriage." He turned to Donavon. "You can leave us now."

Jones waited until he'd left before speaking again. "Sending rookies out as messengers nowadays."

"They've all got to start somewhere. What he lacks in experience, he makes up for in enthusiasm."

"And naivety. You want to watch him before he gets himself killed." He turned serious. "Now, why did you turn over my office?"

"We never touched your place." Renzetti immediately went on the defensive.

"I pulled two of your men out of a warehouse not that many yards away from the Citadel. One of them, Hofler was still alive and told me you ordered them to take several files out of my office."

"I needed to know some information about your operations and there was no point on asking you for it."

"Did you get it?"

"No. Rees' guys jumped my men before they could hand it on. I don't know how they found out we were going in, but they were waiting. I think I might have one of their operatives inside my organisation."

Jones nodded. Renzetti didn't seem to be aware of Anderson's DIA connection. "What were you after?"

"Info on your Captain McKenzie and her unit."

"Why?"

"Because she's gone AWOL." He watched Jones, looking for a reaction. "She's pulled more than the usual stores for the type of mission she's on. She didn't use the designated LZ. And now she's missing."

"May be so. How do you know this?"

"We intercepted a radio transmission from part of the Russian 94th Cavalry saying she didn't land within 5 K's of Klein Plasten."

Jones was running through his personnel in his head, trying to work out who Renzetti was getting his information from. "I changed the LZ just before she took off." He called his bluff. "Who's your man inside the Citadel?"

Renzetti laughed. "You don't expect me to tell you that do you." He laughed again. "Jesus man, I have to protect my sources."

Jones didn't laugh. Renzetti had brought the bluff, that narrowed things down a little. "So what do you want to know about McKenzie?" He asked.

"We know she was down south the other week over this SS-21 business -"

"So were your guys." Jones cut in.

"Yes I know." Renzetti had sent men after the missile too, but they fared worse than McKenzie's unit. He'd lost all of them and had even less to show for it. He wasn't even sure whether the missile even existed. "We also know when her unit got back here they was due for three weeks R & R and light duties before flying out to the UK. I want to know why she take this recon operation. Did she knew this offensive was going to happen and decided to get out the way? The rumours have it that she almost begged you for this op. Fresh back from one op and volunteering for another? That's not the sort of thing someone does unless they've got a reason for it."

"Rumours are almost always 90% fabrication, 10% truth. I asked her, she took it." Jones was still trying to place the informer. He was getting lax. Since McKenzie had killed Renzetti's former chief, he'd virtually ignored the CIA as a realistic threat to his operations, figuring that with their influence on the German Government destroyed and most of their European operations blown open they'd take a lot longer than five month to rebuild themselves. He'd greatly underestimated this man. "I had some business that needed finishing in the area and McKenzie was, in my opinion, the best person for the job." He bluffed him again.

"Business like what?"

"That's not your concern."

"And the extra stores?"

"Part of the business."

"Will she be coming back?" Jones shot him a hard look. "We've had dealings with her before. She's worked C.I.A Ops and we know how she likes to play things."

"Relax Renzetti, she'll be back. I'm well aware of the contract you have on her and if this nonsense is nothing more than that, then you're wasting my time. But just remember what happened to the last man who tried to get rid of her." He watched Renzetti as he walked uneasily around the storeroom. "And what about the other files? Your men were after more the just McKenzie's."

"We were also looking for something on a Russian officer. Major General Mikhail Straczynski, he's G.R.U/Spetsnaz. The word is he's the guy running this offensive. And we know you've had some dealings with him in the past."

"And what else?"

Renzetti straightened. "Nina Wiste."

Jones raised an eye brow, it was the third time her name had cropped up. "What makes you think I know anything about Wiste?"

"McKenzie pulled her out of Olsztyn last year after one of our jobs went wrong."

"Wiste is Mossad."

"It was a joint op. CIA provided the muscle, Mossad lead us in. She disappeared along with McKenzie when we got over ran. When your girl turned up, Wiste wasn't with her. Rumour had it she'd gone to ground. Then other day you sent a chopper out to Hardenbeck to pick up a woman, and now that one's gone down you've just sent another one to locate it. This woman must be someone very important."

Jones stood in silence. The Puma was less than two hours out, maybe it was someone from Ops? And what about Wiste, dare he drag an innocent person into this game of deception and counter deception. "You reckon she Nina Wiste?"

"Yes."

"Why are you so concerned about a Mossad agent?"

Renzetti looked momentarily uncomfortable, obviously desperate not to tell Jones anymore than he had too. "She has information from Operation SLEEPING SATELLITE we desperately need."

Jones tried not to frown. He was beginning to realise he'd miss an important one there. Most of the communication and spy satellites had been destroyed before the first year of the war was over. Those few that survived were stuck in useless orbits having used up all their manoeuvring fuel but still operational. Then some bright spark set off two nucs, high up in the atmosphere, one over North America, the other over Western Europe. The resulting electro magnetic pulse burnt out all the computers that controlled the surviving satellites, rendering them totally useless.

The E.M.P. from these two nucs did more actual damage than all the others rolled together. It crashed every non-hardened piece of electrical equipment it touched. Even some of the hardened stuff went down. In an instance everything was lost, all the radios, televisions, telephone networks, radar equipment, computers, power supplies. The lot. All gone, all rendered useless. The core of modern society destroyed.

Jones watched Renzetti as he walked slowly round the store room.

He looked straight at Jones. "Last winter one of my men heard a rumour that the Reds had a hard wired computer which they believed could get the satellites working again. According to our sources it was the size of a truck and had the power of a pocket calculator, but they reckoned it would work. We put it down as a bit of bullshit, but told our man to keep an eye on it. Just as you did."

Jones smiled inwardly, taking comfort from the knowledge that Renzetti wasn't as well informed about his operations as he made out. "So where does Nina Wiste fit in to this?"

"In May we found out they'd used this computer to put one of their satellites into an orbit over Northern Poland. The source come from the Israelis."

"Wiste and Mossad?"

"Yes. They didn't have the resources available in this theatre to mount an operation, so they approached us and proposed a joint operation to snatch both the computer and the blueprints. Wiste would get us in, we'd provide the heavy support."

"Sounds like she had inside help." Jones walked over to the door and looked out through the shop. Taylor was sat on the Mondeo's bonnet with Donavon talking to her. "So what happened?" Jones enquired.

"Wiste doubled crossed us. She used my men to get in, then she lead 'em straight into a trap."

Jones turned back to him. "And the computer?"

"We blew it. It went up like the fourth of July, fireworks everywhere."

"And the blueprints?"

"Wiste got em. And McKenzie help her."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I was there. I was the section leader, it was my men she had killed. We hit the place, blew the computer, grabbed the plans and got out without even a scratch. Then the bitch led us straight into an ambush. She disappears and I nearly got my ass cooked. Next thing the Russian kick off the summer offensive, McKenzie drops a load of artillery on the 45th Motorised Division, then she and Wiste vanished."

"So you think McKenzie or Wiste have the plans?"

"I want the blueprints, Jones. I've been authorised by my superior to accept any reasonable deal you wish to make."

He studied Renzetti's face for a while. It wasn't just the satellites they wanted this for, it was everything else it could do. A working computer network would give the CIA the upper hand over their DIA rivals; both here and back in the States. "How do you know DIA don't have it?"

"Because they wouldn't be scratching around in the dirt like the rest of us if they had."

Jones nodded. "Okay, say I can get my hands on these blueprints. What have you got to offer?"

Renzetti walked over to the door. "See that." He pointed to the reddish glow that hung over the roof tops. "It isn't coincidence that this rioting blown up at the same time as you lot started pulling out. Look at what's happening in Hanover."

"So who's behind it?" Jones asked.

Renzetti walked out through the door. Jones followed him into the cold night. The smell of bonfires filled the air and roof tops glowed from their light.

"Colonel!" Taylor shouted from the Mondeo. She ran across to him. "We've got rioting about half a mile from here." She looked worried. "H.Q.'s declared this district a no-go area."

"Renzetti, you hear that?" Jones shouted back to him as he left the shop.

"Yes." He climbed into the MUTT. "Do you see what I mean. Someone's trying to keep you lot busy. Think about it Jones."

"Renzetti. One more thing." Jones called after him. "The DIA. Where is their HQ?"

He glanced between Jones and Taylor. "Get the plans first." The MUTT pulled away, heading down the deserted streets. Jones watched them, mulling Renzetti's words over in his mind.

"Colonel, can we go?" Taylor voice showed her concern.

"Yes. Of course."

They got back into the Mondeo and headed after the MUTT. But it was long gone by now. They could have taken any one of a dozen difference routes.

The mob pounded at the wire fence rocking the posts at their foundations, shouting and chanting at the soldiers inside. Sammo wiped the blood away from his eye with his sleeve. The young soldier he'd dragged back through the gates just before they closed lay dead at his feet. Five others hadn't made it, no doubt being stripped this very minute. He cursed.

"WHERE'S THE FUCKING LIEUTENANT?" On cue he appeared around the side of the warehouse door. Sammo strode across to him. "YOU GOT ANY BRIGHT IDEAS YET?"

The Lieutenant looked round at the angry mob. "Will that hold?" He pointed at the fence.

"Cause it fuckin' won't. Have you got hold of H.Q. and told them what's happening down here yet?"

"No -"

Sammo felt like strangling the little shit. "I've got dead and wounded out there. Get me some support." He pushed him away before turning back to the fence.

The post were moving by three foot at the top and the foundations were starting to crack. Hundreds of rioters clung to the wire fence, some near the top. Only the razor wire prevented them from clambering over.

The Lieutenant reappeared at the door and shouted to Sammo, beckoning him to across. "Sergeant Samson, H.Q are unable to help us at the moment. They've got sporadic rioting flaring up all over the city. Most barrack blocks and stores, even the BAEUR building itself is under attack."

The first shower of bricks and rubble landed inside the fence. One caught Sammo on the back of his neck and he slumped to his knees while the Lieutenant watched from the safety of the building. Without riot shields to protect them, the rain of debris forced the soldiers back from the gates towards the relative shelter of the building. Sammo struggled to his feet to see them starting to clump together. "NO. SPREAD OUT!" He bellowed, but it came too late.

The first of three fuel bombs exploded against the wall over their heads, showering them with burning jellied fuel. Almost before anyone could react the building was sprayed with gunfire from within the crowd; using guns taken from his own men.

He grabbed one burning man just as he got hit, pushing him down into the snow and rolling him over until the flames went out. Only then did he realise he was dead. Half of his men were either burning or helping them, the others were returning fire on the mob, slicing the fences clear of rioters, only to see them replaced a second later. But the ones with the guns were further back, deep in the crowd where the bullets couldn't touch them. Two more fuel bombs exploded on the side of the building, setting off more fires. "Shit! We're losing this." Sammo uttered.

The platoons three armoured cars drove out of the burning building, pulling up in front of the soldiers to protect them from the stones. Two of them were the familiar Saxon used by most infantry units in the British Army, the third was an ageing Pig; built back in the 50's by Humber, most that remained in service were in Northern Ireland or England with the UK Defence Force. Even so a handful had found their way into Europe.

As the three slid to a halt, the wounded and dead were lifted inside.

Sammo found the Lieutenant cowering against the side of the Pig. "Taking a chance coming out here ain't you?" He shouted at him.

"It's all alright in there." He screamed back.

Sammo looked up at the sound of a window being smashed. A GPMG was thrown out followed by its owner, he hung from the window ledge for a second before dropping the 10 feet to the ground, crying out as his leg snapped.

"Fuck it, we're getting out of here." Sammo announced to no-one. Then turned to the Lieutenant. "What we got round the back?"

"It's the same, they're all around us." One of his men shouted.

Sammo stuck his head over the bonnet of the Pig and looked round. Most of the mob were pounding the gates, other smaller groups were attacking various points of the high wire fence, some only a couple deep.

Then the worst happened, the two gate posts finally gave way from the relentless pounding. The two 12 foot high 6x6 RSJ crashed to the ground, spilling the mob into the breach. The mass rushed forward trampling over those caught on the gates. "MOVE OUT!" He bellowed at his corporal who moved off calling the remains of his squad to one of the Saxons as suppressing fire was laid down by Sammo's squad. The Saxon was moving almost before the last man was in, swinging round inside the fence towards the downed gates. The mob parted,

forgetting the gunfire for an instant and scrambled clear of the charging Saxon. Most made it, but some, mainly those trapped by the fallen gates didn't. The Saxon swung hard right after it cleared the gates and headed away followed by a hail of bricks and debris.

Sammo ordered his remaining men into the other Saxon and Pig. He pushed the Lieutenant through the rear door ahead of the last five of the platoon. The Saxon was soon moving, following the first. Sammo slammed the Pig's rear door shut behind the last man and shouted the order to go. The driver revved the Pig's engine and let out the clutch. The battered armoured car lurched forward before the engine died. The driver cursed and swore as he tried to restart the ancient 4.25 litre Rolls Royce engine. But it had done too many miles without the care and attention it demanded. Then mob was then on them, pounding the body with their bare fists.

The second Saxon would have gone back to help the floundering Pig if it wasn't for their own problems. A handful of rioters had leapt onto it's armoured body. Two of them were pulling at the badly fitted side door. After several pulls the door sprung open, one rioter lost his grip and fell away. The other one held on for a while longer until a shotgun blast from a soldier sent him tumbling off and the door was heaved shut. But not before fuel bomb struck the Saxon, coating the top and side with burning jelly. Some splashed in through the door setting the insides alight.

The Pigs engine coughed into life for one last time. The driver crunched the gears and slipped the clutch to get it moving. The mob swarmed around and over them like ants on a bird. The driver, blinded by the mob clambering over the bonnet, aimed as best he could towards the gate. He revved the engine, jabbing the clutch in and out, trying to shake them off. Someone slipped and he caught a glimpse of the gate. He let the clutch all the way out and followed the Saxons over the flattened gate. He turned the wheel right hard left to follow them, not knowing the left front tyre had been punctured, not seeing the ice or the mound of debris. The left front dipped as the weight shifted. The Pig hit the ice and it started to slide. The driver tried to correct, but he was going too fast, turning too sharp and there was too much inertia in it's seven ton body. He spun the wheel the opposite way and dabbed the brakes to no avail. The Pig hit the debris, climbing up it until the wheels lost grip, then it started slipping back. It's weight shifted again, this time taking it's centre of gravity outside it's wheel base. The Pig teetered for a moment then rolled over, crushing the rioters who clung to it, before ending up on it's roof. The roll distorted the body, popping welds and braking hinges. Almost before it had settled the mob was on it again, tearing open the doors and grabbing at those inside. Bursts of gunfire fought them off until the armed rioters arrived and sprayed the inside of the Pig with several long bursts. Then the bodies were dragged out and stripped.

Two soldiers stepped out of the Saxon into the road in front of Jones' Mondeo, one waved them down while the other covered him. They were kitted out in full combats, helmet, body armour and both looked really pissed off. As he walked up the them Taylor could see blood trickling down his face from a gash under his left eye. Jones pressed their ID cards against the wire mesh and he read them. "The district ahead a no-go area Sir. We're just pulled out."

"We're trying to get to HQ." Jones told him.

"You'll have to go round the bottom of Aubenalster. The bastards have got control of Hoheluft Ost and Harvestehude."

Another battered Saxon drove unsteadily up the street towards them. A punctured rear tyre made it waddle unsteadily and black smoke drifted up from the smouldering paint work. It pulled across the road in front of the Mondeo. The doors flew open and it's section fell out of the smoke filled interior, coughing and spluttering. They also looked in a bad way with blackened faces and bloody uniforms. The corporal walked across to the soldier. He lent against the side of the Mondeo and dropped his helmet onto the bonnet.

"Evening Sir." He spoke to Jones, he's short cropped hair and heavy set body not fitted well with his Oxford accent. "Thing are in a bit of a mess down there."

"Where's Sammo?" The soldier asked.

"Didn't make it son." He straightened. No emotion tainted his voice. "They got turned over just outside the gates. Bet they took a few of the bastards with 'em." He looked distant for a second. "They set fire to the grain store. I don't get it. The sods are rioting for food and they set fire to the bloody grain store. It's madness down there, sheer bloody madness." He thumped the side of the car, then picked up his helmet and walked back towards his boys, shaking his head.

"If you want to get through Harvestehude you'd best get going. There rioting all over the city." The soldier turned back to Jones. "Good luck Sir."

Taylor pulled off. Swinging round the smoking Saxon, passed it's tattered section, and then turning off the main road onto a side street.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Taylor wasn't in the mood to hang around. She kept the power on, driving the car hard. Bouncing through ice covered pot holes and around debris mounds. Down the side streets Jones caught glimpses of burning buildings and angry crowds. A barricade loomed up before them. Taylor braked, dropped a cog and booted the Mondeo around it onto a paved shopping area. They slid sideways, the tyres fought for grip on the icy surface as she put her foot down again. They shot through the deserted precinct, past boarded up shops, uprooted tree stumps and burnt out cars; the street ahead illuminated by one surviving headlight. Then a woman was in front of them. Taylor stamped on the brakes, locking all four wheels up and sliding the Mondeo sideways. The back end freed up and whipped round, putting them into a spin that brought them to rest facing back up the street. The engine stalled. The woman, her face white with terror, lay on the ground looking at them. The small bundle of food she was carrying lay scattered around her. She scooped what she could then scrambled to her feet and disappeared back into the darkness.

Taylor turned the ignition. The engine turned over but didn't fire. She tried again. A small crowd started gathering, attracted by the sound. They emerging from doorways and side streets, armed with clubs and other home made weapons. A few of them carried rifles they'd taken from British soldiers.

"Come on, start!" Taylor spat at the car.

The crowd began to move closer.

"Marie." The concern was clear in Jones' voice.

"I know." Taylor was starting to panic. "Come on you bastard." She now shouted.

Someone in the crowd threw a brick at the Mondeo. It landed harmlessly close by. A second followed it, bouncing off the wire mesh covering the windscreen. A third struck the bonnet.

"COME ON!"

The engine fired. She snapped it into gear and span the Mondeo round scattering loose rubble across the pavement, but found the crowd had surrounded them. "Down there." Jones pointed at a side road blocked by a dozen people. "And don't stop." Taylor did as she was told without question and floored the accelerator.

They both instinctively ducked as someone bounced off the windscreen, half shattering it, before hitting the ground behind them. A hail of bricks followed them but fell short as they sped away.

Taylor backed off slightly, struggling to see through the glass.

"No, keep going." Jones ordered her.

"I can't see."

"I can. Just keep going. We're nearly clear."

Taylor felt her hands started to shake as she gripped the steering wheel tightly.

"It's okay, We're nearly there." Jones reassured her.

She cursed at herself under her breath and sniffed away the tears.

A second check point came up. Jones flashed the ID cards and they were waved through. She drove steadily round the concrete barricades of the HQ building and stopped.

"Bastard!" She thumped the steering wheel. Angry at herself. Angry at the woman that had ran out at them. Angry at the rioting crowds, at the whole bloody thing. Tears ran down her cheeks.

Bridgewater met Jones in the doorway of Blake's office. "Christ Alan, you look like hell."

"Yes Sir. It's getting a bit rough out there." Jones said as they shook hands. "Can you get something for my driver, she's a bit shook up."

"Sure, Jenny get her a drink of something." He turned and led Jones into his office, closing the door behind him.

"What's going on? I saw all the staff cars outside." Jones asked.

"There's a big chiefs meeting. Didn't you get my message?"

"Yes, but nothing about a staff meeting."

Bridgewater laughed. "The shit's really hit the fan on this one. Collins is up stairs with all the top brass. He's spitting blood and wants to know what's going on. So I hope you've got your house in order, because you're in the firing line."

As Jones listened, he brushed down his uniform. Bridgewater held out a flask to him. "A bit of Dutch courage?"

He looked at it. "No, I think a clear head is what's needed here."

Bridgewater shrugged and took a swig. "Shall we go?"

They both left the office and walked side by side to the conference room. The door was opened for them and they entered. The room was crowded. It was obvious they were the last to arrive again and so they quickly took their seats. Jones glanced round the table at the assembled Generals, Brigadiers and Colonels. He was pleased to see most of them looked as untidy as he did.

"Gentlemen." Collins spoke up, bringing the meeting to order. "Now we are all here we can get started." He said glancing across the table at Jones and Bridgewater. "As of 0700hrs this morning the German Government placed all their forces west of the E55 Autobahn on full war footing. An indefinite curfew has been placed on all civilians under the protection of their garrisons and they are requesting the return of the 5th Mechanised Division to Hanover to suppress the civil uprising that has plagued the city over recent days.

Colonel Jones, unless you have any new information for us, I will be directing all British forces to the defence of Hamburg, placing them on full war footing, with nuclear release as a very realistic option."

Jones' mouth went dry and a metallic taste developed in the back of his throat. All eyes in the room were firmly fixed on him, as was the fate of over 12,000 British lives. He took a sip of water to quench his sudden thirst. It didn't help. He quietly coughed before speaking.

"BLACK JACK - HOW YOU DOING BACK THERE?" The Apache's pilot sounded relaxed over the radio.

"No problems, we're right on your tail." Wilson replied. "I make the Muritz bridge two minutes off."

"ROGER THAT BLACK JACK - LET'S HOPE OUR 'LADY OF DARKNESS' IS ON TIME."

"She should be. She's never let us down yet."

"CHANGING CHANNELS NOW."

Both Puma and Apache pilots changed radio frequency to Carling's.

"ROUGE - THIS IS ALPHA SEVEN, YOU OUT THERE? - OVER" ALPHA SEVEN waited. "Come on talk to me, are you listening?"

"ROGER ALPHA SEVEN - READING YOU LOAD AND CLEAR." Carling's voice crackled back at them. "LZ AT GRID 127-534 - APPROACH FROM OUR WHISKEY - LZ IS CLEAN. NO HOSTILES IN HE AREA - LOOK FOR THE GREEN FLARE - OVER."

"WE'LL DO ROUGE - SEE YOU IN A COUPLE MINUTES - YOU GET THAT BLACK JACK?"

"Yeah, Seven. No problem." Moss pointed out the LZ on his map. "Five minutes."

The two helicopters came up on the landing site. Black Jack dropping back to allow the Apache to check it out. The Gunship came steadily over the site. Carling's four tanks stood beneath the bare trees at the edge of the clearing, clearly visible through the thermal imager. Several people huddled together in front of them and a single green flare burned in the middle of the small clearing. "OKAY BLACK JACK - THE BOARD IS CLEAN."

The Apache backed sharply round back on to the LZ as the Puma dived in under it. Both Freeman and Morse were ready with there machine gun at each doorway and the Apache circling over head, keeping watch.

Harris leapt out of the door as soon as Black Jack touched down and ran across the snow towards the three men walking towards him. "Where's Major Carling?" He shouted into Matthew's ear.

"She's back there. With the tanks. You got the ammo?"

"Yes. It's in the chopper."

Louise caught up with him. "Where is she?" She shouted at them.

"Back there." Matthews pointed to the tanks and she started off towards the dark silhouette of the four armoured vehicles.

Harris returned to Black Jack with Matthews and the others. Freeman and Morse had already dragged a crate of 120mm HESH shells to the door. Taking an end each, they carried the heavy crate to the awaiting tanks.

Major Carling sat on top of her battered Chieftain tank, watching what was going on around her. Harris and Matthews swung the crate onto the tanks dozer blade and paused for breath. She swung her legs out the turret and walked down the front of the hull. "You one of Jones' lot?" She said dropped to the ground in front of them.

"Yes Ma'am. Corporal Harris, from the Citadel." He saluted and handed her an envelope.

"What is it?" Carling asked tearing it open.

"New information straight from RED FOX TWO on this offensive. It's unseen by anyone else beside you and the Colonel." He saw her puzzled expression. "We think we may have security problem back in the Citadel."

Matthews dumped a second ammo box onto the Chieftain. "There's eight boxes of that stuff. Kate, you certainly know how to twist the Colonel arm."

"You can thank Major Telford for that." Harris told him, then turn back to Carling. "McKenzie's already gone to ground. She's somewhere east of Friedland. MAJOR and RED FOX FOUR are also in the area. We think McKenzie knows more then she's telling us and we trying to find out what that could be. She knows about the security breach and has gone to ground."

"If what Bayard's told us about Pasewalk is right she's gonna have her hands full."

Inside the Warrior Louise had found Jane laying on the stretcher. Once satisfied she was as comfortable as she likely to get, she had her lifted out and carried to the Puma. They reached it as the last box was pushed out. Jane was lifted in and laid on one of the bench seats.

Sanders, who'd helped with the stretcher, clambered back out as the box was carried away.

"Where you go?" Louise shouted at her.

"I'm staying. It's my crew back there. I'm staying with Carling 'til we find them."

"But -"

"I'm staying!"

Louise let go and she followed Bridie back towards the tanks.

"These eight boxes of 120mm." Harris continued. "You've got HESH, HEAT and one box of APFSDS. There's also a box of 30mm APHE, and two each of 50 Cal and 7.62." Harris told Carling.

She pointed towards the chopper. "You'd better get moving or you'll miss your ride."

Harris looked back to see Freeman shouting and waving for him from the doorway. "Good luck, Ma'am." He saluted again and sprinted for it.

"We're clear." Morse shouted into his headset as he reached the Puma.

He scrambled aboard as she lifted clear of the snow, climbing up away over the trees.

"Okay Alpha Seven, we're out of here." Wilson spoke over the radio. "Good hunting ROGUE."

Both helicopters backed round and headed west.

Freeman slid the doors closed. "Let's get some heat back here." He demanded, securing his M-60 and slumping down in one of the seats.

Moss kicked in the blower.

"Come on, it's cold back here."

"Give it time, it'll warm up in a minute. How's our passenger anyway?"

"Looking good. What do you reckon Morse, worth giving her one?"

"Somebody's beat you to it pal." Morse threw his head back and laughed out loud.

Wilson and Moss echoed with mock laughter.

"You crack me up Freeman." Wilson said. "Now stop fuckin' around and put Robertson on."

"She's busy with our passenger at the moment." Freeman replied.

"Put her on when she's finished then."

"Sure Boss." Morse lounged back in his seat "Fuckin' A." Freeman pulled off his helmet and lounged across the seat beside him.

Jane watched Louise check her blood pressure "Well?" She asked waiting for her diagnoses.

"Blood pressure is up." Louise answered.

"No kidding. Who are you then, a nurse?"

"Nah, I'm just a pen pusher." She started to unlace her wet boots. "Any discomfort?"

"Bloody cold. Back hurts."

"Much? Whereabouts?"

"In the small of my back. It's niggly more than any thing else."

"How far gone are you?" She left the boots and pressed her hand against her side.

Jane flinched. "About seven, eight months. AWE! Christ that hurt. What the hell you do?"

"Just checking."

"Yeah, well get a bloody nurse to do it."

"I was a nurse. Five years worth before I joined up." She pressed gently on her abdomen. "This you first?"

"First and only. I'm not gonna let anyone get me in this condition again." She rubbed her hand over her side. "That really hurt, what did you do?"

"Seeing how the baby's laying."

"He's fine, just like he should be. Why did you gave up nursing to push paper?"

She looked at her. He? Not it? She turned her attention to her abdomen. "That's what nursing was turning into. I was spending more time filling in forms than I was treating people. And besides the pay was crap."

How long you been in?"

"What the army? About ten years now. So it's a boy then."

"Yes. You can tell by the way his laying. A boy's like a football up your jumper, all at the front. A girl you carry all round. And this one all at the front." She looked down towards her feet. "How's the toes? I haven't seen them for months."

Louise replaced the front of her dress and returned to her feet, pulling off the boots and socks. "Don't look to bad." She said checking her toes. "There a bit black, but nothing that want fix itself. I've seen worse." She turned round to Harris, banging on the deck to gain his attention.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT?" He shouted back.

"Pass me those blankets."

"WHAT?"

"BLANKETS." She pointed at them and through a mixture of shouting and semaphore he understood.

He shuffled across to her. "How is she." He shouted in her ear.

"How far out are we?"

"Fifty minutes, an hour. Why?"

"Nothing yet. I want her back to the Citadel as soon as possible."

"That's not good is it."

"No. Wrap these round her and keep her warm and we might be luck."

After Jane was comfortable, he left them alone and made his way forward to the cockpit and tapped on Wilson's shoulder.

"You got her?" Wilson asked Moss before flipping up his IR goggles and turning to Harris. "She must be one important lady to get us out here. Who is she, Collins' mistress?"

"Eh?" Harris didn't catch what he said.

"That woman. She must be someone important to get us two out here." He nodded towards the Apache.

"Yeah. Real important." Harris shouted back over the din from the engines. "How long is it going to take get back in?"

"Three quarters of an hour, tops."

"Good, well lets make best time."

Wilson waited for a moment but it was obvious he wasn't going to get any more out of him, so he turn his attention back to flying the Puma. Harris remained in the doorway watching the Apache through the cockpit glass. It was just visible in front of them through the snowstorm that blew around them both. After a couple of minutes his eyes wandered over Black Jack's instruments and across the cockpit. Noticing an crumpled map stuffed behind Wilson's seat, he pulled it out. "What's this?" He asked opening it out.

Moss glanced at it. "That. It's nothing important, just an old map."

Harris switched on his torch to read it. "These aren't official LZ sites. Hardenbeck, Wesenberg." He held the map out for Wilson to see. "These are civvie settlements."

"It's nothing!" Wilson snatched the map from his and stuffed it down the other side of his seat. "Just an old map like Moss said."

"Don't give me that shit. What's going on?"

The two pilots exchanged a glance.

"Well?" Harris demanded.

"They're unofficial LZ's used by your RED FOX units."

"Why's that? Don't they think the official LZ's are safe?"

"It's nothing like that. All of your units employed local marauder bands to patrol small areas of the countryside."

"What for?"

"They pay them to gather information and provide protection for several of the civvie settlements."

"Pay. What with?"

"Anything they could get their hands on. Medical supplies, ammunition, food. What ever they could scrounge out of the stores."

"Hence the fluctuating stores recites. Dose this mean McKenzie wasn't dropped off at Klein Plasten?"

"That's right. We put she down south of Neustrelitz."

"There's nothing in the flight log."

"Of course not. If Jones finds out about this, he'd jump on us like a ton of bricks. We just log the hours and keep our mouths shut. With no radar watching us, you've only got our word on what goes on out here."

"That explains a lot. Who knows about this? How many are involved?"

"Most of the regular chopper crews and all your RED FOX units."

Harris sighed quietly to himself. "The Colonel gonna blow a shout fuse over this."

Jane felt the first twinge in her abdomen as her womb muscles started to pull open her cervix. At last! she almost uttered, at last she was in labour. Soon her baby would be born and soon she would hold him in her arms, to feel him suckle at her breast. She almost called out for Louise to tell her, but chose not too, she would have plenty of time. Later the contractions would come every five minutes, then three minutes, then every two. There was no rush.

Nattasha smiled as Borrisovich entered. "You look better today." He said. The little food and water he'd smuggled in for her had done their job, she now looked like the attractive young woman she was.

"Did you get a sewing needle?" She asked.

"Yes, but I couldn't get hold of any thread." He held out a tainted piece of metal.

She took it. "Didn't you ask one of the women, their bound to have some."

"No I didn't think." He felt slightly ashamed, it was an obvious curse of action.

She laughed and for the first time Borrisovich saw a brief glimmer in her eyes. "I'll pull down part of this blanket, thank you."

She hide the needle on the underside of the mattress while Borrisovich collected up the bag he'd brought the food and water bottle in.

"Pavel, have you heard anything from my father yet?"

"No. It's difficulty to do anything openly in case General Andreyov finds out, but I am trying."

"Andreyov told me that once he's caught him, he will tried him as a traitor, then win this war."

"That won't happen. No-one is going to win this war."

"He said it's people like my father who have drawn this war out for as long as it has. And that he was responsible for the deaths of thousands."

"Your father has done more to end this war than any man I know. No one can win this."

She bowed her head. "You've seen him. What does he look like? I haven't see him for years."

Borrisovich hesitated for a moment, not sure how to answer. Although he'd seen hundreds of photos of him through out him military career, he'd only really known him for a year. "I don't know, grey hair, blue eyes, about 170 centimetres."

None of that was what she wanted to hear. She wanted to know what he was like. Was the man she'd grown up with still there, strong and loyal to those he loved. Never having gotten over her mothers death, he sometimes seemed distant to her. She could touch any part of his heart bar that one small piece that was her mother's. She'd often felt she was to blame for her death, Misha blamed the decrepit hospital system, which had taken so long to diagnose her illness for robbed him of the woman he loved, and her of the mother she so often needed.

As a young girl she'd never understand why the other children at Kindergarten had two parents while she only had only one. She could still clearly recall the anger she'd felt at the age of five when discovered her own mother under the ground in the cemetery and how she'd hurt him for hiding her from her. That was the year Yasmin Zarudin appeared. She'd came to look after her and the apartment. She was immediately adopted as a surrogate mother. At last she was like the other children. Only her name wasn't Yasmin, it was Charlotte, but she didn't become that until years later. But she was everything she wanted her to be, they talked to each other, played together, cooked and baked. During those few years, to her, she was her

mother. And to Misha she was his lover. Nattasha even asked her if she'd marry her father, but she just smiled and said she didn't think it was the right thing to do at that moment. She never understood what she meant then.

"Did she stay with you for long?"

She looked across at Borrisovich sat on the end of the bunk. She couldn't remember the point when her thoughts became words. "A few years."

Borrisovich remained silent for a while then asked her. "What happen to her?"

"She left us when I was eleven."

"What do you reckon that is over there?" Moss pointed out through the side window.

Wilson looked. "Where?"

"About 3 o'clock. I've been watching it for the past five minutes."

Wilson squinted at the low glow picked up by his night goggles. "A marauder camp of some type?"

Moss shuck his head. "Looks too big."

Mmm, it does." He opened a channel to the Apache. "ALPHA SEVEN. Do you read?"

"YEAH BLACK JACK - WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?"

"Three o'clock, about 5 miles, what do you see?"

The radio fell silent. Then. "THAT'S ROBEL ISN'T IT - LOOKS LIKE SOME KIND OF CAMP ON THIS SIDE OF THE PLACE."

"Yeah, that's what we think. Want to take a look?"

Another short silence.

"WE'RE GAME BLACK JACK - FALL IN BEHIND AND WE'LL GO AND SEE."

They banked right and dropped down to tree top level.

Harris reappeared in the doorway, felling the helicopter turn. "What's going on? I told you we want best speed to the Citadel."

"Moss has spotted something suspicious over this way. It might be ROGUE's bad guys."

"We haven't got the time."

"It'll take less the five minutes. It could save her hours."

Harris weighed up the options. "Okay. Five minutes, no longer."

"Well would you believe that!" Alpha Seven's gunner uttered. "I count at least eight tank. All Russian marks."

"Yeah. I guess this must be Major Carling's bogies." His pilot replied. "You copy Black Jack?"

"YEAH WE HEARD." Wilson answered. The Puma was hover just below the tree tops out of sight of the town. The Apache was a little in front, with it's mast sight peering over the top of the trees down onto the outskirts of Robel.

"we've got eight to ten heavy pieces of Russian hardware plus numerous light and support vehicles - looks like Carling wasn't far wrong." The pilot continued.

Wilson turned to Harris. "Well what do you reckon?"

"Okay, we've found them. Radio their position back to Carling and lets get back to Hamburg."

Wilson turned back to the Apache. "You hear that?"

"WE COPY BLACK JACK." The pilot replied. "LOOK - WE'VE STILL GOT ABOUT THREE HOURS OF FUEL LEFT - WE CAN HANG AROUND HERE AND GUIDE CARLING ONTO THEM - WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

Wilson glanced back at Louise. "Okay. But no heroics. I want both these choppers back in one piece. If you screw up..."

"ROGER THAT BLACK JACK - UNDERSTOOD." The Apache pilot signed off. "WE'LL SEE YOU LATER - ALPHA SEVEN OUT."

"Okay, let's go home." Wilson spun the Puma round and disappeared over the tree tops to Hamburg.

THE TENTH DAY. Tuesday 16th January

McKenzie pushed the doors open and walked out onto the forecourt of London's Victoria Station. Commuters pushed past her exiting from one of the many ticket gates. She was briefly carrying her along with them for a short while before they dispersed. She looked round at the smartly dressed businessman in their suits with briefcases and brollies. Students in jeans with rucksack or hold-all, propping up the plant pots, eating Big Macs and drinking lager. And lost tourists with cameras hanging round their necks, trying to decipher the Arrival/Departure board. All of them too busy to notice her, too wrapped up in their own self importance to give a second glance to her tatty uniform or the blood soaked bandage around her arm or the SA.80 she carried in her hand.

She walked causally across the forecourt unsure of her surroundings. A familiar face in the crowd caught her attention and she stopped. Of course, memory started to return, she was here to meet someone. Someone she knew very well. She looked round for the face again, trying to remember where she'd seen it. A man stood in front of a Tie Rack shop waved. She ignored him, still looking round. He shouted her name and waved again, the little girl holding his hand also waved. She looked at them both. There was something very familiar about them, something intimate. Something she had almost forgotten.

The man shouted her name again. She started towards them, walking slowly, studying their faces. The little girl tried to run to her but the man kept tight hold of her hand. "Mummy." She cried out.

McKenzie stopped, Amy, almost falling to her knees in shock. Oh my God, it's Amy, my baby. How could she forget her. My baby, she held out her hand to her but the man, her husband, held tightly to her hand.

"Charlotte?" A quiet voice spoke from behind her.

She turned and looked at the grey haired man in his Russian uniform. "Misha, It's Amy." She told him, pointing towards her. She looked back at the tearful little girl straining at the hand of her grinning father. "It's my baby."

"We've got to go." He said.

"But it's my baby." McKenzie protested looking back at her.

"I know." He turned round and started walking away from her.

McKenzie stood watching Amy crying out for her, pleading to be rescued. She took a step backwards towards Straczynski.

"Mummy!" Amy screamed, trying to twist her hand free to get to her. "Mummy please don't go. Mummy!"

McKenzie turned away and ran from her.

"MUMMY!"

She stared into the darkness of the night, tears ran down each side of her face, Amy's cry still seemed to echo around the room.

"What's up?" Landers quietly asked as if she too had been woken by the scream.

"Nothing." She sniffed. "Just had a bad dream." She sat up, wiping her face with her sleeve.

"This place?"

"No. Amy. She was there and I didn't know who she was. She was crying for me. God." She wiped her eyes again. "I wish Misha was here."

"You miss him?"

McKenzie nodded. "I do, a lot."

Landers pulled herself up onto her elbows. Daark stirred beside her, muttering something and turning his back to her before settling back into deep sleep. Landers glanced down at him momentarily before looking back at McKenzie. "Are you gonna tell us what this is all about?"

She looked at her, she was naked under the blankets, as was Daark. She'd heard them making love earlier as she laid beside them. She lay still and in silence listening to their rhythmic breathing, short and rapid. She pictured them kissing and caressing each others bodies. She tried remembered the feel of gentle hands on her body, Misha's gentle touch. But it was too long ago. "It's personal, nothing to do with you lot." She told Landers.

"That's a load of bollix and you know it. They torn this place apart looking for you. You've seen what he did to Simmie."

"Yeah I saw. Have you any idea how that makes me feel!" McKenzie snapped feeling angry and lonely.

"That could have been us out there."

"You remember Malbork?" She began. "The bloke commanding this army group is the same person who commanded the division I redirected the artillery onto."

Landers push Daark away and sat up, pulling her jacket around her naked shoulders. "It's more than that. They put that down to bad forward observation, and shot some poor bastard for it. It was a woman who did this. So come on, if we're being dragged into another one of your private wars I think we have a right to know what's going on."

McKenzie bit her bottom lip. "Yeah. Suppose you have." She leaned back against the wall. "Before I joined you lot, I worked for Jones inside Western TVD Headquarters."

"Yeah, we know. There's stories all over the Citadel about that. How long where you there?"

"Eighteen months in all."

"A year and a half in the spiders web, Christ."

"It wasn't that bad. Worst part's leaning to think in Russian again. Misha was my cover. He worked me in and kept the pressure off til I got my feet."

"You worked with him much before?"

She smiles. "He was my first assignment. Jones sent me into Afghanistan to bring him out."

"You go back some years then."

"I spent six years with him once."

"Why'd they never pull him out? Our guys, why they never pull him. I mean a top Russian, what was he then, Major or Colonel? Divisional commander. Why'd they leave him?"

"They wanted too pull him, but he wouldn't go without Nattasha."

Landers expression turned to one of question.

"His daughter. He wouldn't walk until they got her out first." It had made her angry the way the Ministry had handled it. They wanted Straczynski but they didn't want the aggravation of Nattasha. They plied him with every thing they could think of to get him to walk everything but the one thing he wanted. McKenzie spent six months on the internal operation in Afghanistan, working her cover. After the Caron Incident, she'd spent six years in Moscow working with him, trying to get him out. She'd put a lot into it, risked a lot, lost Amy because of it, just for the Ministry to pull the plug.

"So how does Solvac fit into this?" Landers asked.

"He was one of the people I came into contact with at TDV. Along with this woman Matusiak, Ivana Matusiak. She's the woman how did that to Sims. Do you remember those rumours about the Russians using a satellite while we were being pushed out of Poland."

"Yeah, they said they'd pulled one into orbit over Poland and that's how they pushed us out so fast."

"It was true. They pulled Cosmos 133 into an orbit that crossed Western Poland once every eight hours. I handed the info to Jones, but nothing seemed to happened. Next thing I know the CIA send in a team led by a Mossad agent to snatch the hardware."

"How the hell did the Israelis get involved?"

"Through a Polish Jew called Nina Wiste. She'd also been inside TDV and know were the hardware was kept. She led the team in to get it. Unfortunately someone stitched them up, the mission flopped and most of the team got killed Wiste was captured."

"Yeah, And?"

"Mossad had told her to use me as an escape route if the mission went wrong. She told me she'd blow my cover if I didn't help her. With the Russians already kick off on the offensive, there was little more I could do but get out and find some way of slowing the thing down."

"And Solvac's division provided that."

"Yes, I redirected a battery of artillery onto his Division. I figured if I could leave the southern flank of Malbork open we'd be able get out that way, meet up with one of our units and get back to Jones once things had stabilised."

"Well from what we saw your plan worked. So Solvac wants you for pasting his Command."

"I don't think this is Solvac, this is Matusiak's doing. She court us trying to leave. I put a bullet in her and left her for dead. She's after pay-back."

Landers sat in silence for a moment. "But what happened, we didn't pick you up until we reached Kwidzyn, that was two days after the Russians crossed the Wisla and you were alone."

"Wiste brought it on the way out."

Landers glanced round as if she'd heard something from out side. "Guess that's why we had so much trouble getting out of Poland after we -" A far off voice stopped her in mid sentence. "Was that Goodman?"

McKenzie looked towards the door. "Yeah it was." Grabbing her SA-80, she kicked away her blankets and dived through the door into the cold night.

A young boy was running down the street towards her. "Captain, captain." He shouted at her. "Goodman. He want you captain. Quickly!" He grabbed her hand as they met. "Quickly!" He gasped pulling her along. "Goodman need you."

She stooped down to his level. "Where is he?"

The boy struggled for breath.

"Come on kid, where?"

He pointed. "There!"

Two gun shots cracked through the night sky. McKenzie's head snapped round towards them. "FRAN NOW!" She bellowed, before sprinted in that direction.

Goodman was stood in the middle of the next street, his rifle pulled tight into his shoulder, aimed at a lone soldier stood a hundred yards ahead of him. His right arm was held firmly round the middle aged woman's chest, pulling her back tight against him, his right held the tip of his knife up under her chin.

"STAND STILL!" Goodman spat. The soldier took no notice, pushing the woman before him. "Let the woman go. NOW!"

McKenzie joined him, dropping on to one knee and aiming her rifle at the soldier. "LET HER GO!" She bellowed.

"She set us up!" The soldier shouted back. "She brought the Ruskies here. She's a fuckin' traitor."

"Put the knife down Kneale." McKenzie shouted back recognising hi voice. "DO IT NOW!"

Landers went prone next to her, her rifle also levelled at Kneale. Daark joined them a second later.

"Kenzie?" Kneale lowered his knife.

"Yeah. Now let her go!"

"She brought 'em here-"

"No she didn't. They were waiting. It was a trap."

"For us? It was you they fuckin' wanted. YOU!" He let the woman go and walked towards McKenzie. "She was looking for you!"

McKenzie lowered her rifle and stood up. "I know." She glanced back at Landers, she was only half dressed, bare foot in just her fatigues and flak jacket. Daark wasn't wearing a lot more. "You two get back inside before you catch your death."

Daark hesitated. "You sure Skipper?"

"Yes!"

He slung his rifle over his shoulder and helped Landers up.

"And get dressed!" She shouted as they headed away. Then turning back to Kneale. "So where you been hiding?"

Kneale walked up to her. "Around." He eyed up Goodman. "Looking for you lot."

"Any more of your unit still around?"

"No, they're fuckin' dead or haven't you noticed?"

McKenzie glanced across at the line of bodies. "That's not just Sims' lot. How else is out here with you? O'Brian?"

"O'Brian got wasted."

"What? How?" Goodman asked.

Kneale sat on the edge of a wall. "Mortar took 'em all out with their chopper. Wasted the lot of them."

"And who else?" McKenzie asked.

"An old friend of yours. Campbell."

"John? He's down south with Hamilton's lot."

"Nar. They got wasted too."

"Shit!" Goodman uttered. "I knew it was a set up, I fuckin' knew it. I told you we should have bugged out. I fuckin told you."

"Shut up Rik." She turned back to Kneale. "Bad?" She asked.

He nodded. "Yeah. Real bad. What about you? Where's the rest of your unit?"

"You're looking at it."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Three ground crewmen ran towards Black Jack as she touched down on the pad. Morse slid open the door and one of them climbed in to take one end of the stretcher. They lifted Jane out of the Puma into the cold air and the waiting hands of the other two ground crewmen.

"Freeman, give 'em a hand." Wilson instructed from the cockpit. "Morse, find out what we're doing now."

The two gunners dropped down onto the pad and followed the stretcher, Freeman jogged forward and took a corner. "Where we heading Captain?" He asked Louise.

"The infirmary." She told him.

Harris followed them in, Morse walking a step behind him. They accompanied the stretcher party into the main building before turning into the operations room where Morse signed the Puma in. He cursed under his breath. "Hey Karl, you got the time. My watch has stopped."

"Eh 3.50." He turned to Meg. "The Colonel back yet?"

"In his office." She replied. "He wants Black Jack on stand-by for immediate dust-off the instant McKenzie calls in."

"Great." Morse sighed. "I was hoping that was it."

"Sorry love." She sounded sympathetic. "Guess it's not your day."

"Cheers!" Morse dropped the pen onto her desk.

"You've got half an hour to give you bird the once over and fuelled up. Then I'm logging you back on duty."

Morse turned to leave.

"So when did he get back?" Harris asked.

"Half an hour after you left. He wasn't in a good mood when he came back from HQ either. He want this Bayard woman confined to the infirmary and kept under armed guard."

"Okay. But why the fuss?"

"After Anderson. He not taking any chances."

Morse trudged back across the pad towards Black Jack. As he got closer, he dragged his hand across his throat in a slashing motion. Wilson saw him and killed the engines.

The Citadel's infirmary was small, but well served with it's own doctor and nursing staff. It's main intention was to provide short term health care for the Citadel's personnel, and emergency care of it's troops. Not the long term treatment of casualties. They were transferred to one of the three field hospital. The doctor had placed Jane in the adjoining isolation room where he'd examined her and confined her to bed. Louise's fears had been well founded, she had started slow labour. Despite protested loudly, the doctor had taken the decision to stop it or at least postpone it for 24 hours to allow her to recover and regain some strength. "I've put her on a intravenous drip of 5% solution of ethanol alcohol, it should knock her out for at least twelve hours and hopefully do the same to the baby." The doctor explained to Louise once Jane had settled. "Surprisingly enough she's in pretty good shape. Suffering from mild malnutrition, but who isn't these days. Argumentative little bitch though."

"She's one of your bunch, another doctor. What do you expect?"

"That explains everything. Worst patients of all." He chuckled to himself.

"What about the baby?"

"It seems to be in good shape as well. I've attached her to a heart monitor so we can keep an eye on the little mitt. At the moment he's not showing too much signs of stress and if he stays that way over the next 24 hours, I think it'll be safe to let nature take it's course."

Harris joined them in the infirmary. "The old man wants to see you now." He told Louise. "He also wants armed guards placed outside the door."

"Good." Louise replied. "No one is allowed in without my permission."

"Yeah sure." The doctor returned to the isolation room.

They left the infirmary. "Is she Straczynski's daughter?" Harris asked as they walked along the dimly light corridors.

"No. But I think I know who she is."

"When did you work that out?"

"Just before we left. When you were out trying to get that ammo."

"You told Jones?"

"He doesn't know yet."

"Meg said he was pretty pissed when he got back from HQ."

"He's been to HQ? What about?"

"She didn't say. Well, who is she then?"

Louise pushed a fire door open. "Her real name is Jane Bayard. She's a doctor who use to work in one of Warsaw's Hospital."

"Where did you find that from?"

"It's all in the files."

"But we check all MAJOR's and RED FOX TWO's files. There was nothing in them."

"It wasn't in their files."

They both headed up the stairs up to Jones' office.

"McKenzie didn't take command of RED FOX TWO until after they got back to German. Before they were attached to the U.S 5th Mech."

Harris pushed open the door to Louise's office and startled the girl from the radio room as she slammed shut a filing cabinet, trapping a file in the draw.

"Stand easy, Sharron." Louise told her. "Anything to report?"

"No ma'am, everything's been quiet." She answered.

"Where's the Colonel?"

"In his office. He want to see you at once."

Harris opened the draw, pulled the file out and glanced through it.

"The Colonel asked me to file a few reports while the radio was quiet." She informed her.

"When you've finished that. I want you to get me all the stores chits for all RED FOX units for the last six months." Louise turned back to the door. "And I also want the flight logs and fuel chits for all RED FOX related flights."

"Yes ma'am. I'll get to it straight away."

Harris handed her the file and followed Louise out of the office. "Yeah and?" He continued

"And what?"

"Bayard."

"She's mentioned in one of the reports filed with the U.S Army. We've got a copy here."

Jones looked up from behind his desk as they entered the office. "Where's that bloody Apache?"

"We spotted a large armoured body of armour on the outskirts of Robel. They hung back to guide ROGUE onto them." Louise told him.

"And Miss Bayard?"

"In the infirmary under armed guard as you ordered."

"Good." He dropped the pen onto the desk. "Karl, get lost for a while. And close the door on your way out."

Harris glanced across at her. She gave him a half smile before he left.

"Well?" Jones asked her after a few seconds.

"You know who she is then." Louise asked him.

Jones lend back in his chair. "McKenzie's medic, Marie Taylor. She was there when they picked her up."

"You got the file then."

Jones nodded. "I also had a chat to our CIA friends while you were out. They think this Jane Bayard is really Nina Wiste."

Louise pulled a chair up and sat opposite him. "That's interesting."

"And so's the fact that they know you'd sent the choppers out to pick her up."

"We still have a security problem then."

"It looks that way. They are under the impression she knows something about Operation SLEEPING SATELLITE."

"So there was something in those reports, not just rumours. It seemed so far fetched at the time."

"Yes, it's one we missed big time. It was a joint CIA/Mossad job to grab the ground station." Jones told her about his conversation with Renzetti.

"She's not Wiste." Louise said. "Her name is Bayard. No doubt about that."

"I know. So where is the real Nina Wiste?"

"Only McKenzie can tell us that."

Jones picked up his pen and started playing with it again. "How is she? Bayard, how is she?"

"Fine, so the Doc said."

"And her baby?"

"I don't think there are any real problems. I've asked to be kept informed."

"Good." Jones lent forward lowering his voice. "If the DIA and CIA think she's Wiste, chances are so dose everyone else. I want to use this to flush out our informer."

"That's why you placed her under guard?"

"Yes, I want her watched constantly, with one person inside the infirmary and two guards out side at all time."

"If you want someone to get to her, isn't that a bit heavy."

"It's what we'd give anyone else. If our friend's any good they'll get round it."

"Okay I'll see to it." She stood up.

"How many people know who she really is?" Jones asked her as she headed to the door.

"Besides you and me, just Karl. The chopper crew reckon she's Collins' mistress."

"In that case no one except us three will be allowed to be alone with her."

Borrisovich walked quietly into Operations. He could feel the tension in the air even before he heard any of the conversations. General Andreyov was stood on the opposite side of the room before a large deployment board listing all the divisions in Poland under Chorski's command, each was listed in there Army groups. Beside each was written their current status. Eleven of these, representing the 1st, 2nd and 20th, had the words 'Resumed hostilities'. About 50% of the others bore the words 'Disbanded', 'Not responding' or 'In active'. None of which amused Andreyov. Borrisovich noticed Chorski stood across the room and nodded to him. Chorski know it meant he had something to tell him in confidence. Andreyov was busy shouting at a girl Captain to notice him walk over to his Lieutenant. "What's happening?" Borrisovich asked.

Chorski glanced at the board. "You don't want to know. What's wrong?"

"It's Nattasha -" Chorski noticed that, Nattasha not Straczynski's daughter. "We've got to get her out of here. Andreyov's using her to lure Straczynski back here. That's if he doesn't kill her first."

"I know." Chorski thought for a moment. "You know Svetlov, the Hip pilot who flew Straczynski into Germany. Get Nattasha aboard his chopper and have him fly her out to where he dropped him. Better still try and find Rutowski. He's got a field hospital with his division."

"What about this place?"

"Andreyov's has the backing of Moscow on this. They've handed the whole theatre over to him. There's nothing I can do. I've got to fly out to Muncheberg to see Kobiechi. He thinks he can still win this by breaking the British/German alliance and wants Kobiechi to turn on the Germans."

"Can't you take her with you?"

"No, we'll be using Andreyov's Hind."

"Will Kobiechi do it?"

"God knows. She gave the 20th Cavalry a hard time." He glanced round to make sure on-one was in ear shot. "If I can get to talk to her, I'm going to ask her to help me get rid of this bastard. About half our divisions are refusing to go onto a hostile footing. A few of them I think I can convince to support me in turning against Andreyov. And if I can gain Kobiechi's support, no doubt a few more will follow." They looked back at Andreyov. "Get her out of here Pavel, as soon as you can. This is going to get out of hand. We will have Russians killing Russians before it is finished."

Andreyov had been watching them, trying to read their body language, Chorski's was that of a father giving his favourite son some advice he knew he had to follow. But what, Andreyov wondered, what advice. He'd have to find out.

The girl captain distracted him. "Major Naznanski of the 129th Motorised Rifle sir. He's refusing to acknowledge any orders until he speaking to the General Chorski."

Andreyov looked at her in disgust. Chorski moved to take the field telephone from her, but Andreyov snatched it from her before he could. "This is General Andreyov, what is the problem Major?" Chorski tried to listen to Neznansky reply but it was too muffled. "General Chorski is no longer in command. You will speak to me." Andreyov continued. There was pause while Neznansky spoke. What ever it was he said, Andreyov obviously didn't like it. "Major, if you ever speak to me like that again I will see that you are replaced!" More chatter from the other end of the phone. "Major, you are -" Andreyov stopped as the other end went dead. He handed the phone back to the Captain. "Where are the 129th?"

"Gniezno sir." She replied.

Gniezno, nearly a hundred kilometres away, Chorski thought, too far away for Andreyov to do anything about. Major Neznansky was someone else he must speak to.

"I want that man replaced." Andreyov stated to all of operations. That would take time. Time Chorski would used to good effect.

"Roger ALPHA SEVEN. ROGUE out." She pulled her headset off and dropped down from the turret. "Okay, here's the story." She said to her crews. "The apaches just bugged out. They're getting low on fuel and don't fancy ending up like the Stallion. There's about twenty AFV's hauled up in an industrial estate on the south side of Robel. They've established four separate camps. One large one, containing most of the big armour and three smaller ones with one or two APC's in each. As far as I've established, they don't know we're here. Which gives us the advantage. But I don't want to end up slogging it out with them if I can avoid it. They out gun us so if possible I want to try and talk to them first."

A murmur rumbled amongst them.

"Fine, so what's the plan." Griffin asked.

"There's a ridge running along the south side of the town about 2 K's from the estate. We'll head there and re-assess the situation then." She looked round at her three commanders, all of whom were scribbling notes. "We'll approach from the south. Move on to the ridge slowly and quietly. Keeping about 3 to 4 hundred yards apart. Jenny, keep the Warrior behind us and out of sight." She addressed them all again. "Don't fire until you're fired on. Keep the range long and hit the heavy stuff first then relocate. You got that?"

"Yeah. No problem" Jarvis replied.

Griffin nodded. "Yep."

Jenny smiled.

"Good." Carling continued. "We're moving out in half an hour."

Eurika was becoming impatient with her confinement. She felt isolated from government. She needed to know what was happening and the visits from Kubrick and members of her staff won't providing her with the information she required. She feared things were slipping out of her control into a downward spiral. Hellor was an incompetent fool who'd let Hauer take advantage of him. He may once have been the most popular leader Germany had had since Adolf Hitler became chancellor, but now he was nothing more than a puppet for the ambitions of Hauer. How could she have loved such a man? Once she's seen him as the young and virile leader of the new Germany. Kurt Hellor had stirred up such nationalism that had not been seen in his country for fifty years. He swept to victory with twenty percent more vote than his nearest rival. When the 2nd Russian Guards Tank Army moved into Poland to 'assist' the Polish army in suppressing civil disorder, Hellor had been the loudest voice, condemning the actions as oppressive and a return to the ways of the old Soviet regime. And when the shooting did start he'd negotiated with the Allied Forces; the Americans, British, Belgians, that all major actions would be staged by the German Army.

She couldn't, wouldn't allow that to happen.

Kubrick arrived for the first of that days two briefing sessions. He greeted her and pulled up a chair for the now regular briefing on that nights developments.

"Han, get me out of this bloody bed." She said before he could start. "Get me a wheelchair or something and got me out of here."

"Why? What do you want to do?"

"Confront Hellor. Somebody has to stop this charade before it gets out of hand."

"Is that wise."

"God dam it Han. I'm just crippled not brain dead. Get me a wheelchair!"

Despite objections from her doctor, Eurika won though. They found her some clothes and a nurse helped her dress while they found her a chair. Within half an hour she was being lifted into Kubrick's Mitsubishi. Kubrick briefed her on the drive back to the Parliamentary building, finishing after ten minutes sat in the car-park with the engine running to keep them warm.

Vonnegut waited patiently with the other ministers for Hellor to finish on the phone. Kubrick and Hauer were still absent despite the meeting being called for five minutes ago. Hellor had been asking some probing questions about Colonels Jones visit. Why had he came here? What did he want and why wasn't he informed? All of which Hauer had answered less than perfectly. The stench of conspiracy was about for all to smell and Vonnegut was doing his

best to ensure he wasn't tainted with it. Something Hauer was not doing, he'd positioned himself right in the centre of it. Scandal and conspiracy was a two edged sword and he knew it didn't always fulfil the downfall it often predicted for the individual. Hauer was using it to engulf his rivals, entangling them in a web of deceit and deception. Guilt by association was becoming the order of the day, and Hauer was associating with so many, but mostly Kurt Hellor.

Vonnegut had heard whispers within the government of resignation and challengers for the premiership. He'd been asked if he knew how would stand, Becker; the Transport Minister had been rumoured to be one, as had Schults; a promising back bencher. It had also been speculated these were nothing more than distraction for the first round challengers before the big gun like Hauer and himself stepped in.

The chamber door opened and he turned expecting to see Hauer enter at last, instead he saw a wheelchair bound Eurika being pushed in by Kubrick. She looked healthier than he'd imagined, the only external sight of the assassination attempt other than the chair was the sling on her left arm. Hellor looked up from the papers. "Eurika, I thought -" He stood and moved to greet her.

"I bet you did." She snapped bitterly.

He stopped in front of her. "I'm Sorry?"

She looked at the assembled faces. "Hauer not here. Out mustering support before declaring his leadership challenger, is he Joe?"

Vonnegut remained silent.

"Eurika. I think we should talk in private."

"Like hell, Chancellor. The incompetence of this government leader is of concern for everyone here."

"What incompetence?"

"The escalation of hostilities between the Russian and Allied armies onto German soil."

"We have done no such thing."

"Then why have three Russian Tank Armies advanced a hundred kilometres beyond the Oder River."

"The intrusion of Russian forces onto our soil is a direct violation of the cease-fire agreement. Which we are attempting to counter without plunging this country back into all out war."

"Then why are the Russian tanks running on fuel supplied from our refineries." A low murmur followed that. "540,000 litres of fuel oil was delivered to the garrisons at Pasewalk, Munchenburg and Prenzlau in the first two weeks of this year. That's in excess of ten times

their normal delivery." She throw a folder full of papers onto the low coffee table in the centre of the room. "150 tons of ammunition, most of it specifically for Russian calibre weapons. Additional requests for replacement horses at three time the rate of the Marauder Suppression units. It's all there."

Someone pulled part of the file from the folder.

"Out. Every one get out." Hellor ordered. They looked at him. "GET OUT. NOW!" The file was dropped back onto the table as they rose and shuffled towards the door. Kubrick turned to go but Eurika took his hand and stopped him.

"Not you Joe." Hellor said seeing him rise. "You stay, and were the hell's Hauer?"

"I'm here." He replied pushing his way into the room.

"What the hell's going on Bernard?"

He waited until the door clicked shut behind him. "How much does he know Joe?"

"She's told him most of it."

"Told me what Bernard. Exactly what is going on?"

Hauer walked across to the sideboard and poured himself out a cup of coffee. He turned round to face Hellor and took a sip. Hellor scooped up the folder from the table and ripped it open.

"Your name is among those papers as much as mine." Hauer calmly told Eurika.

"Jesus Christ, she's right. We've been supplying the Russians. What the hell have you done, Hauer." He throw the folder across the room.

"Exactly what you ordered me too." He pulled a letter out of the inside pocket of his suit, opened it and read. "'To Bernard Hauer, Minister for Internal Security. From Kurt Hellor, Prime Minister of the United Germany. You are here by authorised to take what ever action you deem fit to maintain the security of this nation.' so on, and so on. Need I go on. YOU wrote this."

Hellor took the letter, hand written on official note paper. His face white over, he know it was written in his hand.

Hauer snatched the letter back from him "This is my get out of jail free card. Have you got one of these Eurika." He turned and left the room.

Eurika watched Hellor's stone white face as he struggled to find a seat. "What about you Joe, Have you got such a letter?"

He didn't answer her. He sat for a moment looking at the scattered papers. He recognised some of them as memos he'd sent to Hauer, reports on the Russian Division strengths. He was implicated. He stood up and pulled his jacket straight. Eurika glanced across at him, while

Hellor's remained firmly fixed on the floor. He nodded at her with a half smile on his face, then he left. Once outside he quickened his pace to catch up with Hauer.

Hellor looked up once the door had closed. "What have I done Eurika? What have I done?"

"You're the Chancellor. You tell me."

"I'm not finished. I will not resign over this. I have lead this country all through this war and I am not going to resign now it is over."

"You may not have a chose."

Vonnegut caught Hauer on the main stairs. He slowed and walked along side him while he caught his breath. Hauer stopped. "She knows everything."

"Could she hang us?"

"Not if we move first. Hellor's finished. If we move now we can force a leadership challenge before this week is out. Becker will stand as a first round candidate, as will Schults. They'll split the vote and prevent Koch getting a majority. Then we'll go in on the second round and beat her."

Carling brought the chieftains TOGS system on line again. Through the cupola sight she studied the lay of the ground between her and the industrial estate, the light sensitive equipment turned everything into various shades of eerie green. She slowly panned the turret from left to right, scanning the building, picking out the armour parked among them. She noted their location.

"What you got?" Matthews asked from below her.

"Two T-80's close to that long shed." She replied. "Now that's interesting."

"What?" He didn't look up from his Game Gear.

"Three fuel bowser with German markings just like the one we got the other week."

"Oh yeah." He glanced through his own sight. "Three guesses were they came from."

She glanced down at her gunner. He was perched below hr knees playing the Game Gear again, while her gunner and driver slept. She'd no idea were he'd got the dam thing from, he'd had it as long as she'd known him, but it was handy on these long silent watches to relieve their boredom. He'd wired it up to the Chieftain's batteries and through a home-made transformer.

"Dam!" He cursed. Matthews was good on the thing. He'd mastered all the games he had. But every once in a while he got caught out. "Want a go?" He handed it up to her.

"What is it?"

"Sonic."

"Yeah, why not." She took the game and started playing while Matthews peered through his sight. Watching the estate. Several minutes passed then. "Heads up, we've got movement."

Carling immediately looked through her sight.

"BMP and a Saxon moving out, heading west." He told her.

"Yeah I've got them." She flicked on her radio. "Alison, Tom, you both awake?"

"YEAH - WE'RE HERE." Jarvis answered first. "GOT 'EM BOTH - LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE HEADING TOWARDS THIS NEAREST PERIMETER CAMP."

"Right, you keep on them. Alison anything else?"

"NOT YET - WE'RE STILL LOOKING." Griffin replied. "SHIT! - THE TOGS HAS GONE DOWN."

"Alison?"

"Kate." Morgan, her loader, interrupted. "Take a listen to this." He pointed to his ear piece.

She flicked her radio onto the same frequency. The chatter of several Russian radios met her ears.

"What they saying?" Matthews asked her. She waved her hand at him to shut him up while she listened. "What?" He whispered to Morgan.

"Russian chatter. Most likely that lot down there." He whispered back.

"What they saying?"

"Something about patrol status." He paused. "Probably them two personnel carriers talking to their HQ."

Matthews looked back through his sight. "I've seen a T-80 down there that's covered in aerials."

"Where?" Carling asked.

"To the right of the fuel bowsers, just behind that BMP."

"Yeah, I've got it." She flicked her radio back to the tanks net. "Alison, you back on line?"

"YEAH - WHERE'D YOU GET TOO?" Griffin replied.

"Listening to our Russian friends."

"ANYTHING OF INTEREST?"

"Yes. Very. I think it's time we acted. Tom, you listening?"

"YEP." He replied. "I'VE GOT A BEAUTIFUL T-74 LINED UP IN MY SIGHTS JUST WAITING TO BE WASTED."

Carling looked down at Matthews. "What we got?"

"One APFSDS waiting for that command tank." He glanced back up at her as he packed the computer game away.

"No. I want that one left alive for the moment. Find something else."

The turret twitched. Adjusting slightly as it lined up on another target. Carling flicked her sight to maximum magnification as the tank come into line. Two men were sat in it's turret hatches. One of them was smoking, while the other drinking from a mug. She flicked the radio back to the Russian frequency. The Russian command tank was still chatting away, oblivious to the fact they were being listened too.

Carling keyed into their channel. "Attention Russian forces in occupation of Robel. You are in breech of the cease-fire agreement made between NATO and Russian High Command of November last year. You are required to surrender to the nearest Allied unit and explain your intentions. Any action taken by you armour or troops will be interpreted as hostile and will be dealt with accordingly."

That set the cat among the pigeons.

The radio fell silent for a second. Then the frantic chatter returned. None of it directed at them. Through her sight she watched the two men drop inside their turret. The gunners hatch slammed shut after him and a cloud of black smoke bellowed out of the tanks exhaust ports. The head of it's commander reappeared behind the hatch over as the tank moved off.

"Warned em." Carling uttered. "Waste it Gav."

The chieftain rocked as the 120mm rifled gun fired. The Russian tank erupted onto a ball of flames. The two either side of it went the same way, demolished by a single shell from each of Carling's other tank.

Carling keyed the radio again. "Attention Russian forces. You were warned that any action taken by you armour would be interpreted as hostile and would be dealt with accordingly. We mean what we say. You are now ordered to surrender."

The Russian commander was shouting back through the radio, but again it was not at Carling. One of his tanks returned fire. The shell landed close to Griffin's Challenger.

Carling keyed into the tank net. "Watch it Alison. They've got your position."

"I SEE IT - SHIT! - I'VE LOST THE TOGS AGAIN - FUCK! - FUCK!"

"Gav. Get us onto that bastard." Carling ordered.

"I'm onto it." He replied, swinging the Chieftain's gun round towards the Russian tank.

"Alison we're onto him."

Griffin was too busy shouting orders to her crew to reply straight off. "NO GOOD - THE BASTARD THING ISN'T WORKING."

"Get out of there. Now!" Carling ordered her. "Back up, back up!"

Griffin's Challenger started to move. Struggling in the deep snow.

Carling glanced down at Matthews. "Nail him Gav."

"He's dead."

The Russian tank fired a second shell moments before the Chieftain's shell struck home, tearing the T-80 apart. Carling twisted round in her seat, straining to see Griffin's Challenger. "Alison!" She shouted into her headset. "Alison, answer me."

She didn't answer. A thin cloud of smoke marked the position of her tank. Carling cursed. "Jenny, get someone over to see what's happened." Then she turned her attention back to the Russians, changing radio frequencies again.

The Russian Commander was still shouting orders to his men. "CEASE FIRE! - CEASE FIRE!" His men were finally listening to him. "HOLD YOUR FIRE." He ordered them as their guns fell silent. "HOLD YOUR FIRE - YOU WILL NOT RETURN FIRE UNTIL YOU ARE FIRED ON." He waited for a few seconds listening for a reply. None came. "COALITION COMMANDER. THIS IS COLONEL DAVIDOV RUTOWSKI OF THE RUSSIAN 21ST MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISION - YOU ARE REQUESTED TO IDENTIFY YOURSELF - OVER."

"Colonel Rutowski. This is the commanding officer of the 15/19th King Hussars. You are ordered to cease all hostile actions and make clear your intentions." Carling replied.

"PLEASE INDICATE WHAT YOU MEAN BY 'OUR INTENTIONS'?" He answered.

"Colonel Rutowski. Your division is over 100 Kilometres inside Allied territory. You are in occupation of the German town of Robel, and you are in possession of several pieces of German hardware. You will convey to us the reasons for your presence here."

"WE HAVE CEASED FIRE - PLEASE ALLOW US FIVE MINUTES TO TEND TO OUR WOUNDED THEN WE WILL TALK."

"Five minutes. Agreed."

Colonel Rutowski looked across at his second in command. "It is Major Carling, isn't it?"

Downski nodded. "It is her Regiment and I'm sure that's her voice."

"Wouldn't it be glorious if we could defeat her. here." Rutowski pondered. "After all this time it would be one in the eye for High Command."

"You're not forgetting her reputation. Are you."

"No." Rutowski shook his head. "Do you think it's all true? Or is it just one of those myths?"

"I think some of it must be true. All myths are based on some truth. She was in Malbork."

"I suppose it's a bit like the German pilots of The Second World War. They were all shot down by Spitfires. Every successful marauder attack was attributed to her. Reputation has a lot to answer for."

"But is it only a reputation. I mean is she really that dangerous?"

"I think she is dangerous, in that we expect her reputation to be true. And that we may fail to grasp an opportunity to put a halt to all this." He waved his hand at the burning tanks.

"Are you saying we should talk to her?"

"Yes. Definitely yes. For God sake, yes. Revenge is not a good enough reason to continue the fight any more."

"What do we tell her?"

"The truth. Someone has to start."

Downski looked round at their tanks. "How many tanks do you think they've got?"

He nodded towards the thin smoke drifting over the ridge. "Definitely one. I'd say at least three or four more. Does it matter? We are here. They are out there. I don't know about you, but I don't want to fight anymore."

"But it's Carling." Downski protested. "She's responsible for the annihilation of three whole Tank divisions."

"God sake Downski. She is just a woman, not some demonic killed. She is just a superb tank commander with an astonishing flare for armour tactics."

Sergeant Krivda walked across to them. His uniform was blackened and charred. "It's no good Sir. They're all dead."

"How many have we lost?" Rutowski asked.

"Four. They never stood a chance. All direct hits straight through the front armour." Krivda sighed. "What are they, British 120mm?"

"We think so."

"Did we hit any of them?"

"I think we got one. About 100 metres to the left of that wall." He pointed out towards Griffin's Challenger.

Krivda looked through his binoculars. "Where?"

"Out there. Near that barn shell."

"That's nearly 2 kilometres away."

"Yes I know. And I think there is another one some 300 metres to its right."

Krivda looked across. The vegetation in that area wasn't snow covered anymore, and maybe that was an aerial. It was hard to tell. "Two Kilometres. Christ."

Rutowski turned back to Downski. "Let put a stop to this. Please."

He looked round at their situation. They'd done what they'd set out to do. The German army had fulfilled their part of the bargain. What more was there left to do. There was no purpose now. "Maybe your right."

"Krivda?" Rutowski asked.

He nodded.

"Then pass me the radio."

Carling pulled off her headset. "They've agreed to a meeting. Three of us and three of them."

"You sure?" Matthews asked.

Carling popped her hatch and clambered out.

"Kate! Are you bloody sure about this?"

"No, are you. Find out how bad Alison is."

Jarvis waded across the snow towards her. "I was listening in. I'm coming with you." He said as he drew closer. "My lot have been told at the first sign of trouble to paste the command tank."

Matthews chucked Carling her SA-80. "Be careful."

She caught it, slung it over her shoulder and headed away.

"Kate." Matthews called after her. "Keep in touch."

She waved the handset at him before clambering over a snow drift.

Using what cover they could, they crept closer to the Russian lines. Jarvis paused for a few seconds at the foot of a snow drift.

"Hey Kate, what's the chances of this being a trap?" He asked.

She turned to him. "You're been out here as long a I have. You tell me."

"Yeah, but you're the one with the Major pips on your shoulder."

"She shrugged. "About 50-50."

Three figures appeared in the field in front of them. Two of them looked like officers. The third a rating.

"They look like our guys." Carling commented, studying them through her binoculars.

"Certainly looks like it." Jarvis glanced over her shoulder.

"Right, let's get going." She pushed her binoculars back into their pouch and started over the drift.

Her handset crackled into life. "KATE?"

She swore and ducked back. "Yeah, I'm here Gav."

"I'VE GOT THREE RUSSIAN OFFICERS WAITING IN THE MIDDLE OF A FIELD ABOUT A HUNDRED METRES AHEAD OF YOU."

"I see them. How's Alison?"

"THE TANK'S OUT OF THE GAME - BUT SHE'S OKAY."

"Right, it's not a problem. Get 'em back to the Warrior and well try and recover the tank later. We're going in now. Kate out." They both picked themselves up from the snow and steadily walked forward towards the three officers. The young rating cocked him AKRM as he saw them. But one of the officers spoke to him and the rating slung his rifle back over his shoulder.

Carling and Jarvis stopped some ten feet away from them. "Colonel Rutowski?" She asked.

The taller officer saluted her. "Major Carling, I've looked forward to meeting you in person." He held out his hand to her. She stepped forward and shuck it. "We have met before on the battlefield, at Malbrok."

"Yes, I remember your division." She told him. "You put up a good fight. Caused me a few headaches."

"Head..aches?" Rutowski asked her, not quite understanding.

"Em, problems."

Rutowski nodded.

"This is Captain Jarvis." She continued. "My second in command."

"This is Captain Downski and Sergeant Krivda."

"Good, that's the formalities over and done with." Carling's tone changed. "So here it is. First. Your division ran into a bunch of marauders about 20K's east of here. The marauders had captured one of our helicopter crews which we think you now hold. We want them released to us immediately. Second. You are to hand over all information regarding this offensive. Identifying divisions, strengths, objectives, supply lines. The works."

Downski whispered into Rutowski's ear, translating the words he didn't understand.

Rutowski nodded slowly as he listened.

Finally he turned back to Carling. "If we refuse?"

Carling sighed. "Then we both walk back to our tanks and we slug it out. The choice is yours."

"And if we don't let you go?"

"My tanks have their orders. They do not need either of us to carry them out. Can you say the same?"

Rutowski looked at her. "I do not wish to surrender to you. That implies I should disarm my men and that you should supply protection for them. We both know that is impractical. I have completed the task I set out to do and do not wish to fight either."

"Okay, that make sense. But it doesn't solve our problem. You are still in occupation of Robel, which is in violation of the cease-fire agreement between Pila and Hamburg. By simple being here you are committing an act of aggression against the Allied Forces."

"Major Carling. I fought against you at Malbork. For four days you held off my divisions, out manoeuvring me at every turn. Against overwhelming odds you allowed the German 3rd Army to escape over the Wisla River. And even when I thought I had you after the bridge was blown, you still slipped out of my grip. In those few days I lost 15 tanks and over 500 men. We our both soldiers, be it on opposite sides of the political divide, but we are still soldiers. I know you are not one of these desk officers who sit behind their desks, hiding behind piles of papers."

Carling watched his eyes, looking into his soul. "This will not be a surrender." He added. "This will be a truce."

She took the pistol he held out to her, a Makerov PT, an odd weapon for a tank commander she noted. "Then you will help me by providing the information I have asked for."

Rutowski nodded. "Yes."

Carling handed the pistol back to him, pulled out her handset and she keyed the mike. "Gav, you listening?"

"YEAH - WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE?"

"We're coming back. See you in half an hour. Out."

She pushed the handset back into her webbing.

"I will come back with you." Rutowski said.

"No, you can't!" Downski protested.

"I can." Rutowski snapped back at him. "You will return to the division with Krivda. Tell them that I have agreed a cease-fire with Major Carling and anyone who does anything to jeopardise it will be severely dealt with. Is that clear?"

"Yes." Downski replied reluctantly.

"That is an order Captain Downski."

"Yes sir. I understand."

Rutowski turned back to Carling. "Shall we go."

Andreyov's Hind swung close to the ground, It's pilot pushing the art of tactical evasion flying to the limit. Chorski grabbed a hand strap as the Hind turned hard right around the edge of a forest before levelling off and heading west again below tree top height. This is ridiculous, he thought, this type of flying is put unnecessary strain on the airframe and engines, and burning up too much fuel. Not that that appeared to bother the pilot, with two 1500 gallon drop tanks strapped to each weapons wing, he had plenty to burn.

Chorski looked across at Colonel Andreyov and the two Soldiers hoping to see a look of disapproval in one of their faces, but was disappointed. The soldiers, long time servers with General Andreyov were used to the pilot, and Colonel Andreyov was ginning from ear to ear, looking like a kid on an American roller coaster ride. Not that he'd ever been on one.

"This is great isn't it." Andreyov shouted at him. "Wish I could fly like this."

Chorski tightened his grip on the strap as the Hind turned hard left along a river. He was sure he heard the airframe scream in protest.

Bridgewater read the radio communication from ROGUE again. "And she want's you to fly out to meet them."

"That's right. Major Carling's already moved her armour into Robel."

"Major Carling, Jesus man, She's a bloody deserter. Fitzwilliams wants her hide, if she ever gets back here."

"She's also the best tank commander we've ever had. If it wasn't for her we'd have lost Malbork a lot earlier then we did. She held the town for 36 hours while the rest of the German 3rd Army pulled back across the Wisla River."

Bridgewater was well aware of this. NATO lost the war when Malbork fell because that was when the will to keep on fighting went. The Russians had spent 6 months preparing for it, building up their forces for one final push that they hoped would break the stalemate which had split Poland in two and end the war one way or another. They raked up everything they could, from Category 1 divisions mobilised from the Eastern front to third rate Category 3 divisions with their out dated equipment and outdated soldiers. It was a gamble that could have gone either way, but it paid off. NATO collapsed under their weight. The U.S. 7th Corps crumbled along with the southern flank as they tried to withdraw west of Kalisz. And the northern flank would have gone the same if it wasn't for Carling's Regiment. Over 90% of the German 3rd Army escaped over Wisla River before the bridges went up trapping her on the wrong side. She had six tanks when that happened having lost only two to Russian fire in three days. When she finally broke free from Malbork and ran south into the Polish countryside she only had two left.

It was one of the great heroic actions of the war, but when she finally made it back to Germany four months later, Fitzwilliams accused her of desertion, treachery and aiding the enemy to gain control of Malbork and was relieved of her command pending the outcome of the enquiry. The next day she had gone, taking four tanks with her and the enquired ruled against her in her absence.

Rumour had it she'd set up camp in the Lake Muritz area. But no-one went looking for her despite Fitzwilliams rantings. Once RED FOX FOUR found the remains of a marauder band that had obviously tried it on with her. Only two were left alive. She'd removed all their fingers from each hand and blinded them both, but not before making them watch their friend's being killed. They left her alone after that.

"Is she coming back in?"

"Not until Fitzwilliams is dealt with and the enquiry over turned."

"What she want me to do, arrest Fitzwilliams?"

"She want's another enquiry into Malbork."

"Collins not going to like it."

"That all depend whether he want a burnt out General, or the best tank commander we've ever had."

Bridgewater picked up her file and glanced though the pages. Her promotion to Major was only a field commendation which was never confirmed by Headquarters, but every one recognised it. Bridgewater had met her once before the war ad a couple of time during. But like most men, he hadn't seen any further than that gentle bouncing chest of hers. A real page three figure he remembered thinking at the time, then a young attractive Lieutenant trying to make a mark for herself in the male dominated armoured division.

He turned a page of her file.

She took command of the 15/19th Hussars two years ago after it's last commander was killed in action and from that moment on she'd kept them in the thick of it. They regularly spearheaded the 3rd German Army all the way across Poland to the Russian boarder. They were the first armoured unit into every major town and city along the Baltic Coast. On the cutting edge all the way.

She made her mark all right. Under her command the 15/19th achieved the highest kill ratio of any unit in Europe.

Impressive.

"Okay Alan." Bridgewater said. "I'll sort it with Collins. When can you leave?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"Good. Keep me informed."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

McKenzie clicked her fingers and pointed to the battered jeep parked beneath the shelter of the shops. Daark nodded, held up a hand. Goodman acknowledged the single. Daark swung his arm around over his head then pointed at his eyes. Landers acknowledged and thumped Rik on the arm. "Check round the other side, go with him Kneale."

"What's that, Corporal?" Kneale snarled.

McKenzie glanced back for Daark. "Get it together Kneale, get around the back and see how many there is." He grunted begrudgingly and moved away. Goodman shrugged at her. "Move it Rik. We haven't got all day."

They'd been in Pasewalk for almost two hours, moving in through a housing estate on the north west side. They'd encountered several defensive points but until now none of them had been manned.

Goodman was back five minutes later, shuffled in beside McKenzie. "Just four of them, no sign of anyone else." Kneale confirmed it a minute later.

She attracted Daark's attention again, pointing at the jeep, indicating there were four of them and she wanted them dead. Daark acknowledged and disappeared from sight. She tapped Landers and nodded to the one stood near the jeep. She too moved off.

"What about us?" Goodman asked. "Round the back again?" She nodded and followed them to the rear of the shops.

Goodman paused at the rear service door. He checked the room and waved McKenzie in. She walked past him towards the store room door, Kneale followed three steps behind. She stooped at the door and looked into the shop. Two of the four soldiers huddled by a small fire

were a pot steamed. Through the dislodged boards covering the window, the other two were just viable stood by the jeep. Goodman joined them, peering over her shoulder into he shop, "What we waiting for?"

"Matt and Fran. If there's a radio, it'll be in the jeep. These two have just got light kit. They've not been here long, the jeeps clear of snow and they don't look cold enough."

Two more shadows appeared outside. Daark grabbed one of them by the neck as he turned, pushed him back against the bonnet and lunged his knife into his chest. Hearing the gargled cry, the second soldier turned also, raising his rifle to Daark. Landers shifted her aim slightly and put a single bullet into the base of his skull.

The close proximity of the shot startled the remaining two, both looked up and grabbed their rifles. Two bullets from McKenzie took out the first one who moved, a single round from Goodman downed the last one.

Landers appeared at the shop door. "Clear out here, both dead."

"What about the jeep?" Kneale enquired following Goodman over to check the two bodies.

"Matt's checking it out now."

Goodman rolled over the last body, "this one's still alive."

Kneale reached for his knife, "Not for long."

"Leave him!" McKenzie ordered as Kneale raised the knife. "He could tell us something."

His reluctance to follow her order was clear on his face. "Guess it's your lucky day, kid." He released the boy and walked out to the jeep.

"Rik, secure the back while I question him."

He picked up the dead man's AKM and headed out to the service doors were he waited until a single shot announced the end of the questioning. He walked back through the shop, past the two bodies, to were the others waited. "What we got?"

"The German garrison is being held in a sports hall near the railway station. The Russians have their hardware in the sports stadium, the German stuff is still at the railway station. There's about half the Army Group still here, rest of it's already moved west. Rik, Matt, I want you two to check out the station. Me and Fran will check out the stadium. Kneale, you go with them. I want to know were there their HQ is and were I can find Solvac."

"What about the jeep?" Daark asked.

"There's too much activity around here to use it right now, but we can use the jeep to get out of here later." She glanced round at the bodies. "Get them out of sight."

The border town of Kostrzyn came up quickly, the Hind popped up over the burnt out roof tops and across the Oder, before followed the road straight to Munchenberg. Chorski watched the snow field zip past them too fast and too low. They sped past the site of a battle, still littered with bodies of men and animals. He saw a pack of dogs fighting over one. Colonel Andreyov saw them too and aimed his AK at them through the open side door. They scattered as the bullets rained down, their yelps drowning out by the noise of the helicopter.

"Bedevilled animals, tearing at our countrymen." He swear at them.

"That was Kobiechi's doing." Chorski shouted back. "That was Russian killing Russian down there."

"She is not Russian, she's a traitor like you good friend Straczynski. She'll face the firing squad before the day's out."

Chorski noted the malaise in 'good friend'. "Shooting Kobiechi won't instantly return the 1st Shock Army to our control. For her to move the Army west of the Oder she would have had to have had the co-operation of almost every man in each division."

"But she's there figurehead. Cut that off and the others will fall in line."

Chorski returned to watch the fields. It had been a long-time since he'd seen Marie Kobiechi beyond the confines of a military uniform. He wondered if he would still felt any of what they had felt so many years ago. She'd wanted to continue the affair even after Nardia had found out, and she did briefly and more discreetly until her death. Chorski's guilt had almost been too much for him to bear. Her suicide was so final. Unlike a road crash that takes someone from you by chance, suicide was all so final. A deliberate act almost as unforgivable as murder. Kobiechi had tried to continue the affair after, but he refused, spurning her and driving her away from him.

Andreyov ordered the pilot to fly to the south of the town at a safe distance while he studied it through the open side hatch. Chorski watched the burnt out shells of houses and shops slip past, dark and abandoned. Initially he saw nothing else. Then he saw a tank tucked away among the debris. At first he thought it was a derelict, knocked out and abandoned after an earlier battle, but then he saw a second German Leopard, parked next to a Russian BMP with a dozen black figures scuttling about. One of the tiny figure stepped forward and hoisted a pack onto his shoulder. Chorski watched as his buddy slap him on the back then run clear. Moments later he disappeared behind a bright flash and a shroud of dust. "MISSILE!" Chorski yelled.

The Hind rolled hard over as the missile passed over them, missing rotor tips by mere feet. It snaked off into the dull sky leaving a trail of white smoke behind, before arching back down towards them. Chorski hung tightly to a hand straps as the Hind twisted and turned. Andreyov made a grab for one but it slipped through his fingers. He toppled across the cabin as the violent turn hardened. His head struck a sharp corner of the bulkhead, splintered his skull, before rolling forward onto the deck. One of the two soldier let go of his hand hold to grab Andreyov. The Hind turned hard left, turning inside the missile. The two tumbled back across the cabin landing heavily against fuselage. They dropped lower leaving a trail of flares

in it's wake. The airframe screaming under increased stress. The tail drive shaft bearing seized, gripping the shaft with an iron like grip. The shaft sheared, shattering the gearbox. The pilot fought in vain to recover the aircraft, but they were beyond help. Mid way through a roll, the hind had thrown herself into a tumbling spin. They struck the ground a second later and broke up.

Landers tapped McKenzie on the arm. "Down there." She pointed at a first floor window of the sports stadium.

McKenzie swung her rifle onto it, peering through the starlight sight, lining up on the man sat in the centre of the room. "That's Korrell, the German commander. Doesn't look to happy, does he. The one opposite him is Klein, his two IC."

"What about the other two?" Landers asked.

"The one at the back's Andropov. Don't know the other one."

Landers panned her sights across the line of windows. "Second floor, third from the left."

McKenzie swung across to it. A woman stood with her back to the window while a man walked about the room behind her, only allowing them a brief glimpse of him. "Don't know." She pulled the rifle away from her eye. "What's the count on the hardware?"

"Eleven personnel carriers and eight tanks, two of them are Leopard Two's."

"They're repainting the German tanks?"

"Don't know, all the German stuff I've seen still in drab. They might have brought these two with them."

McKenzie put her eye back to her rifle sight. "What do you make of the first floor windows above that T-74."

Landers looked. "Operations room. Maybe a radio room."

"Yeah." McKenzie slumped back down behind the parapet. "Lets get round the other side and take another look."

"Are you gonna tell the others?"

"No. We've nothing to tell them yet." She picked up her SA.80 and moved away across the roof.

Kneale looked round at Goodman. "There's nothing here." Then at Daark, "Is there."

"No." He agreed looking out the window into the desolated street. They were a mile north of McKenzie and Landers, working their way through the desolate streets towards the railway line. "Come on, we're out of here."

They crept through the house to the back door and into the garden. Goodman paused for a second at the door and pulled out his crude hand drawn map of the town.

Daark glanced back at him, annoyed that he'd stopped again. "What?" He demanded.

"Just give me a second to put this place down." He drew the street onto it.

Kneale stepped past him. "What for? There's nothing here."

Goodman ignored him and finished drawing the street in. Daark cursed to himself then moved off, with Kneale close behind, down the garden and over the broken fence. Goodman stuffed his map back into a pocket and followed. Daark ducked across the alley and through the opposite garden, then along the side of the house. There they stopped at the front corner and checked the street in front of them. It too was empty.

"Where's that bloody Yank?" Kneale asked looking back.

"Here he is." Daark nodded towards Goodman as he struggled over the fence.

"Prat! He should have stayed with Mac, he's slowing us up too much."

Goodman stumbled from the fence. "Matt, hold up!" He called across at them, but they didn't. Kneale scrambled over the front wall and across the street, with Daark only a step behind, moving down the street by a few houses before diving in through an open door.

Goodman reached the corner just in time to see Daark disappear into the house. He paused there for a second, fighting for breath. His chest hurt like hell, burning with every breath. He was having problems keeping up.

Daark paused at the back of the house. The garden ahead of them was open, with little cover between them and the large rail marshalling yard at the end. "Shouldn't we wait for him?"

"Nar, we him nowt." Kneale glanced back for Goodman but he was nowhere to be seen. "Go on."

Daark reluctantly crept out along the fallen fence until he reached the hedge at the end, there he stopped again and scanned the yard through his rifle sights for signs of life. A dozen rakes of disused wagons occupied the lines along with a rusting shunting engine. North, beyond them stood the stone built station, now yellowed with age and blacked by fire, it's steel and glass canopy spanning the three platforms. Under it three rusting Marauder waited while two BMPs were parked outside.

"Well?" Kneale joined him.

"Clear."

Kneale slide down the embankment and across the lines to the nearest wagon, he crouched next to it and covered Daark as he joined him. Kneale stood up and started along the rake towards the station. Daark glanced back for Goodman again, following Kneale when he saw no sign of him. As he reached the last wagon Goodman appeared at the hedge row on top of the bank. Daark waved to him before following Kneale around the front of the wagon out of sight.

Goodman slide down the bank and waited for a while to catch his breath again. "What the hell they playing at?" He uttered. "The fools gonna get himself killed charging off like this." Kneale had been ribbing him with his anti-American remarks since Wilhelmsburg, and Daark seemed to be agreeing with him. He cross the tracks and settled beneath the running gear of a wagon. He could see them beneath the rakes of the wagons, crouched next to them. They were waiting for him at last, but then they ducked under the wagon and disappeared out of sight. Goodman crawled across the tracks to where he'd last seen them. Their tracks disappeared under a wagon and along the next rake. Goodman followed them, only stopping when they disappeared under another wagon. What the hell they playing at? He crouched down next to this wagon, exhausted and wishing he had stayed with McKenzie. The sound of muffled voices startled him, coming closer in the darkness. He turned just his head to look along the line of wagons and saw two soldiers were walking towards him, chatting to each other, oblivious of his presence. He stepped backwards into the shadows between the wagons. The two soldiers kept talking as they walked straight past him, neither of them noticing the disturbed snow at their feet or the glint of Rik's knife blade. He stepped out behind the nearest one and drove the knife straight up between the ribs and into his heart. The other one turned round, holding out a hand to steady his friend as he slipped on the snow covered ice. Instead he found Goodman pushing his body into him, forcing him down with all his weight, ripping the knife out of the back and into his chest. He twisted it and ripped it out. Neither of the two soldiers got out much more than a gasp.

Goodman looked round again. It was still clear. He turned the top body over and started rifling through his pockets. ID card, fags, ammo and silk knickers! He sniffed them, clean as well. They'd be handy to swap with Fran or Mac. Stuffing them into his pocket along with the other stuff, then started on the other body. Again ID, ammo for his AKM, and a 44 Magnum. Goodman slowly drew the weapon from its holster as if he was undressing a woman. He savouring every moment. Wow! he mouthed the word. The weapon was clear, well looked after. Its mechanism was smooth and sweet and operated with crisp metallic click, but there was no ammo. He pushed it back into its holster and packed it securely into his pack rapped on a layer of clothes. Neither soldier wore anything of any good. Both of them were taller and thinner than him and their uniforms looked in worse state than his own. Yet the boots of one looked in good nick. Goodman checked the size, they were about the same as his. He unlaced them and pulled them off, putting them up against his own boots again to check the size. He pulling his own holed boots off and pulled the new pair on. They were a bit tight on the in-step, but weren't all new boots. He laced them up tightly before tossing his old pair under a wagon. The soldier also had a good pair of socks on. Goodman pulled them off him and stuffed them into a pocket, he'd wash them first. After that he dragged the two bodies under a wagon, before picking up Daark and Kneale tracks again. It led him towards the station to where he found them waiting beside the shunting engine.

"Where you been?" Daark asked him.

"Taking out two that you missed."

Kneale looked back at him, noticing his panting. "Told you Goodman, you're getting too old for this crap."

"Yeah sure, I was doing this shit before you were out of dippers."

"Nappies you daft yank prat! Dippers, Americanisms."

Daark smeared.

"The fact is you can't keep up, old man."

"He's right Rik. You should have stayed put with Mac." Daark added.

"Tough shit, you're stuck with me this time. So get used to the idea." Goodman snapped.

Daark turned his attention back to the station. "Fuckin' great, isn't it."

Goodman sat quiet for a moment catching his breath. "We'd better call in."

"What for, we ain't got owt." Kneale croaked.

"Cos the captain told us too."

"There's nothing here she needs to know about, Yank!"

Goodman grabbed him on his shoulder. "Watch you mouth Kneale!"

Kneale batted his hand away and span round to confront him. "You gonna make something of it? Well?"

"She's the skipper!"

Kneale grabbed him. "She ain't mine. Mine's laying dead twenty K's north west of here, thanks to her. If you want to talk to that pussy-arsed CO of yours, you do it. Give him the radio Matt." Daark hesitated. "Matt, give him the radio!"

Daark handed the handset over. "Here you are, you talk to her and tell here we've found nothing."

Kneale laughed briefly at him then moved out from the cover of the wagons towards the station.

"Matt -" Goodman started, but he was gone, following Kneale. He cursed and started after them, not getting four steps before he saw the two guards come into view, running from behind the engine. One of them shouted a warning at Daark and Kneale as they brought their rifles up. Daark turned at the shout and fired a burst at them from the hip. They returned fire and he took a hit and went down. Goodman nearly shouted out as they ran forward, he nearly opening up on them as they reached Matt, that was until he saw more soldiers approaching

from the station. Out gunned he stepped back into the cover of the wagons and looked for Kneale, but he'd had vanished the instance the first shot was fired started. He didn't see were he went and didn't care. If there was justice, he'd be dead. Great! Just bloody great! He slumped down under a wagon and watched them drag Daark away, not knowing if he was dead or not. Then he took one last look around and headed away.

McKenzie settled into a new position on the west side of the stadium, looking down from the third floor of a five story office block. The woman at the second floor window was now directly opposite them. She'd turned round now and was looking out on to the street below. Two Brim's stood either side of the entrance to the headquarters building. McKenzie lined the rifle sight onto the centre of her face, it would be an easy shot to take. The woman was just stood there, leaning against the window totally unaware of the danger she faced. She was talking to the man pacing the office behind her. McKenzie shifted her aim over the woman's shoulder onto him.

"Well?" Landers asked as she too studied the window.

McKenzie shuck here head. "I don't know, I think it's Solvac behind her, but I can't be sure. The woman's Matusiak."

"The woman from Olsztyn?"

"Au-ha." She pulled the rifle away from her eye. "Where's Goodman and Daark?"

"There somewhere on the north side with Kneale."

"Get hold of them and find out what they've found."

Landers slipped back from the window and pulled the handset from her webbing. "Matt, you read? Over." She waited.

"NO - IT'S GOODMAN." Came the reply.

"Mac wants to know what you've got."

"WE GOT TROUBLE, THAT'S WHAT WE GOT - MATT'S GOT HIT AND IS DOWN AND KNEALE'S FUCKED OFF - MATT'S DOWN IN THE OPEN AND I CARN'T GET TO HIM - CHRIST, I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF HE'S DEAD."

"Calm down Rik. Where's Kneale gone?"

"FUCK KNOWS - HE JUST VANISHED WHEN THE SHOOTING STARTED."

"Okay Rik, tell us what you've got."

"ERM? WE'RE IN THE RAIL YARD ABOUT A MILE NORTH OF YOU - THE STATION'S UP AHEAD WITH THE GERMAN HARDWARE IN IT, BUT I'VE ONLY SEEN RUSSIAN INFANTRY - NOT SIGN OF THE GARRISON."

"What numbers?"

"ABOUT TEN OR SO PC'S."

McKenzie moved her aim onto Solvac. "I hate that bastard!"

"What?" Landers asked, unsure who she was speaking too.

"WHAT'S THAT FRAN?"

"I could take him out right here." McKenzie continued

"Just hang on a minute Rik, something's going down here."

McKenzie was still fixed on Solvac, still behind her. His hand came up to her shoulder pulling her hair away from her neck, he kissed her. She rolled her head to one side and her closed her eyes. His other hand came round her front moving up over her pullover to her breasts.

"Mac, what you gonna do?" Landers asked.

"Nothing...." She answered. "Yet."

Matusiak reached down and pulled her pullover up over her head, dropping it onto the floor beside her. Solvac kneaded her naked breasts between his rough hands, pushing them together then pulling at each nipple. And McKenzie watched. Matusiak's head rolled back as she revealed in it, enjoying the way he treated her body. McKenzie watched in silence with unenvious eyes

"Charlotte?" Landers asked quietly.

Solvac right hand moved down over her plump stomach and under the waistband of her trousers. She leaned back, sucking in her stomach to let him. She popped the top button and he pushed his hand further inside, invade her body.

"FRAN, WHAT'S GOING ON?"

"Hang on Rik."

A thin smile had formed on McKenzie's lips as she moved her aim back onto Matusiak, her finger tensed on the trigger.

The bullet cracked the window pane and struck Matusiak just above the eyes. Solvac leapt away from her as the back of her head exploded into a mist of red blood and bone, she slumped to the floor. Solvac stared at her, taking several seconds to react her death. A single hole just above her eyes showed where the bullet entered. A crumpled mess of skull, hair and

brain marked it's exit point. Her legs twitched twice and her chest rose from a spasmodic breath. "Ivana?" He edged towards her, hardly daring to touch her face. She stared across the room at the far wall. A single bead of blood trickled in one eye. "IVANA!"

Across the street McKenzie pulled her rifle away from her shoulder and stood up in full view of the window. "Shit Charlotte, what the fuck have you done?"

Solvac looked up at the cracked window pane and at figure in the window of the building across the street. He moved forward to the window, instantly recognising her. "Zarudin!" He shouted at her. "Zarudin!" Then he remembered. "McKENZIEEEE!" He hammered the glass with his fist. "I'm going to kill you, McKenzie. I'm going to kill you now." He snatched his pistol from it's holster and pointing towards her, emptying the full magazine at her. The glass window before him shattered, showering him in a shroud of tiny splinters. Landers ducked away from their window as bullets ricocheted of the masonry and across the room. But McKenzie remain unmoved, she starring back at Solvac with hard unforgiving eyes. He dropped the empty mag out of his pistol and grabbed a full one from his belt. She smiled again and brought her rifle back into her shoulder, watching him fumbled with the new magazine. He saw her pull the rifle tight into her shoulder and had no doubts that it was lined up on him. Panic seized him, hurling the pistol through the window, he dove for cover as the bullet tore through the muscle of his upper arm. He stumbled to the floor, not registering he'd been hit. McKenzie flicked the weapon on to fully automatic, pausing just long enough for him to regain his feet and start moving toward the door, then she laced off a burst after him.

Landers grabbed her and pulled her away from the window. "Fuck sake Mac, what the hell you doing?"

She pushed her away and levelled the rifle at her. Her eyes cold and hard. Outside, shouts were going up all already the building, people were running, alerted t their presence. Landers keying the radio. "Goodman."

"YEAH - WHAT THE HELLS GOING ON OVER THERE?"

"We've been spotted and we're getting out of here. We're gonna head north-east and find somewhere to hide. Where are you?"

"ABOUT QUARTER OF A MILE NORTH OF YOU - WHAT ABOUT MATT?"

"He'll have to look after himself. Watch yourself. Out." She stuffed the radio into her webbing and looked back at McKenzie. "I'm getting sick of your personal fuckin wars. You start getting it together or you might find yourself out here on your own." She waited for her to answer. When she didn't she headed out of the room onto the stairway.

McKenzie looked back to the window. Solvac was gone leaving Matusiak lying in the middle of the floor surrounded by broken glass. She brought her rifle up again and studied her half naked body through the starlight sight.

"COME ON WHILE IT'S STILL CLEAR!" Landers shouted back.

McKenzie lowered her rifle.

"What the hell you playing at now?" Landers demanded. "Come on before they cut us off." She leapt down the stairs, knowing it would be their only way out. She reached the next landing realising McKenzie was not behind her. She turned and shouted only to be met with a hail of bullets from below.

"FRAN!" McKenzie yelled out.

"Down here. They've got me pinned."

McKenzie stuck her head over the edge of the stair well. Landers was on the landing below her pinned down by fire coming up from landing below that. Two soldier were firing blindly up the stair-well. And below them more were moving up. "Hang on Fran, I'm coming."

"And I'm just breathing heavily. JUST GET A FUCKIN' MOVE ON!"

She pointed her SA-80 over the edge and emptied the magazine into the stair-well. Landers scrambled clear under the covering fire, crawling back up the stairs on all fours. As she reached the top McKenzie pulled the pin of a grenade and let it bounce down the stair-well and they scrambled away into the dark heart of the building. It went off five seconds later, filling the landing behind them with thick, choking dust. They ran onwards, leaping over broken furniture and fallen ceiling panels looking for a second staircase until they reached the last room. "Where now?" Landers panted.

"The window." McKenzie shouted back.

"Sod off, we're three floors up. There must be another staircase somewhere we've missed."

"Do you want to go back and face them?"

"They wouldn't be there if it wasn't for some bright spark." She was already back in the previous room checking out a doorway. McKenzie followed her without replying.

Landers saw them first along the corridor they'd ran through. She instinctively brought her rifle to bear on them, but didn't fire. In the darkness they hadn't seen them yet and that was the best way now, run and hide. They were searching the rooms one by one, slowly checking each one out. A long and time consuming, but thorough task. She clicked her fingers to attract McKenzie's attention and pointed at them. She nodded, moving to a door and looking into the room. This was the first room they'd checked that wasn't an office. Two doors led off it possibly to another staircase. She waved at Landers to follow her then quietly moved in. Landers stepped in a moment later after a last check on there closing pursuers. McKenzie pointed her towards the nearest door while she moved to the other one as the sound of shuffling of feet and whispered orders announced the arrival of the searchers outside the room.

Landers stepped through her door into pitch blackness. Another step told her she'd walked into a store room. Dead end, she cursed and turned back, stepping back into the room at the same instant as two Russians walked in from the corridor. She froze, hoping the darkness would hide her. The first soldier, a middle aged man, walked slowly into the centre of the room. The other, a woman, remained at the door. From the corridor someone spoke to them. They both turned and answered before continuing the search. Very slowly Landers moved

along the wall into the corner of the room and crouched in the near pitch darkness. The man pointed to the store room door. She nodded and moved along the wall towards it and stepped towards it, the woman moved towards it as well, following the wall towards Landers. Landers pulled her knife from her webbing. They both moved closer to her. The man whispering directions to the woman as he paused at the doorway. The woman also stopped, straight in front of Landers. She swapped hands with the knife. The man stepped into the storeroom leaving them alone. Gripping the knife firmly, she thrust it up between her legs into her abdomen and pulled it down. The woman screamed out.

Landers pushed her away and turned to face the man as he came rushing back out. She lashed out at him, slashing him across his chest. He jumped back out of her reach and grabbed the hand with the knife, holding it away from him, trying to brake her grip. She kneed him in the bollocks, pulled her hand free and brought it down, sinking the blade deep into his chest. She twisted it and ripped it out and pushed him to the floor.

Despite the sound of running feet, she hesitated for a second to look at the two of them. The man lay dead at her feet. The woman against the wall clutching her blood soaked abdomen, crying. Death at this close a quarter, was uncomfortably too close.

A third soldiers burst into the room, his rifle at the ready, straight into McKenzie's sights. Two bullets took him down and sent the others diving back into cover. Landers scrambled through the doorway after McKenzie and they were running again, through dark rooms and corridors until they found a stairway. Small and narrow and nearly blocked with debris. They clambered down it to the sounds of their pursuers drawing nearer. They leapt the last ten foot on to the ground floor.

A hand grabbed McKenzie as she landed, pulling her back into the shadows. Landers landed seconds later, whipping round, bringing her rifle up to bear.

"NO FRAN!" He shouted, holding up a hand to her.

She glanced back up the stairs. "Rik? What the hell you doing here?" She asked as she too moved into the shadows.

"Looking for you."

"Well you found us. Any news on Matt?"

"No. Last I saw they were dragging him away towards the station."

"He'll have to look after himself for a while longer."

"Guess that's how they know we're here. He must have told 'em."

Landers shot McKenzie a look. "Yeah, must be."

Above them they heard orders being shouted followed by a burst of gunfire down the stairway.

It ceased and after a second Goodman stepped out of the shadow and looked up the stair case. "Come on, this way." He clambering through a broken window and McKenzie and Landers followed him.

Straczynski and Campbell kept low as they scurried across the main road and disappeared into the cover of a house. From the inactivity they'd seen from Pasewalk's outer sentries when they'd entered the town, things had increased ten fold increase.

Campbell checked round the corner before continuing across the next road. "Check point." He said ducking back into cover. "Two jeeps and a BRDM. God knows what's going on, but somebody's certainly woken them up." Straczynski stepped past him and looked, then moved back. "I don't think we can get much further with out being seen."

"Bloody great. What now?" Campbell looked again. "Shit! They're coming this way." He leapt back into cover, straight onto the end of Straczynski's rifle.

"Stand up, John." He ordered him. "Hold your rifle above your head and stand up."

"What?" Campbell looked back in disbelief, but a nudge from the rifle made it clear this wasn't joking and slowly and reluctantly he did as he was told.

"Corporal!" Straczynski called out. "I have one of our intruder." He motioned Campbell out into the open. He did so, backing slowly into the street.

The patrol came running across. One of them pulled Campbell's rifle from him, while another pushed off his helmet and forced him face down on the ground and searched him while a third held a rifle to his back. After a couple seconds he was hauled back up onto his feet and ordered to drop his webbing. Campbell did as he was told.

Straczynski seemed to be ignoring what was happening to him, talking to the Corporal, taking a cigarette from him and lighting it. The Corporal lit one for himself, nodding as he agreed with what Straczynski was telling him. Final they looked at Campbell. "I heard they've got others." The corporal said as Campbell was pushed into earshot.

Straczynski replied. "How many do you think they are?"

"About a dozen. They picked the other ones up close to the station." Corporal Sergov continued.

Straczynski looked at Sergov's squad. "What about your men?"

"Boris." Sergov called one of them across. "The General's now in command. You got any problem with that?"

The tatty young private looked him up and down. "That depend what we get out of it."

"A descent place to sleep and a woman to keep you warm." Misha replied with a hint of sarcasm. "Is there any thing else?"

Boris laughed out load. "Nar, I don't see any problem."

Straczynski grunted in approval. "We'd better get back to headquarters as well." He told Sergov. "You soldier, pass me his webbing." The soldier obeyed his new commanding officer.

Campbell remained silent, putting up only a token resistance as his hands were tide behind his back. Straczynski took Campbell's SLR from another soldier before heading towards the jeeps. "Which one's yours?" He asked Sergov.

"This one." He kicked the tidier of the two vehicles.

Straczynski climbed in.

"What about the check point, sir?"

Straczynski looked round at Campbell. "I don't think that will be needed now."

Sergov also glanced across at Campbell as he was unceremoniously bundled into the other jeep. "No sir." He said climbing in behind Straczynski. Campbell's webbing was dumped beside him as the rest of his men climbed aboard.

Despite being blindfolded and bound, Daark still maintained his sense of direction. The truck he'd been bundled into drove away from the railway station and turned left under the lines, taking them south towards the Garrison he summarised. Although not seeing Kneale since being shot, he had heard him, shouting and protesting as he too were bundled in, though now he was silent. Every time he tried to talk to him, one of his captures jabbed the bullet wound in his leg causing him to cry out. After the third attempt had failed to raise a response from him, Matt decided the pain was becoming too much. The truck jolted and rumbled over the pot holed road, twisting and turning but still heading south. However his sense of distance was less acute, a ten, fifteen minute drive had covered, what, three or four miles maybe. He felt the truck lurch to the left, the rear wheels slide under the icy conditions. The driver controlled the slide and brought the truck to a halt. Daark listened, he could hear other engines. Other trucks or armoured cars, he summarised, not heavy enough for tanks or PC's. The tailgate clattered open and he heard their captors clamber out, then he was dragged forward by his bound arms. Daark hesitated as he felt the edge of the truck, trying to remember how high it had felt when he got in to judge the distance he had to drop. Annoyed at his hesitation one of them pushed him from behind and he stumbled onto the road. Kneale followed him a second later, forcing a curse from his lips as he too fell. Cheered slightly by it Matt struggled to his feet. He was pulled round and blindly lead off, stumbling up several steps and into a building. A narrow corridor by the sound of it and the number of people he brushed against. They stopped him and turned sharply right into a room, a big room, cold and unheated. The floor texture changed from the carpet of the corridor to a hard concrete or tile

which echoed footsteps and voices. The grip on his arm lightened and he was pushed forward, stumbling over a 6 inch high divide and falling onto the cold floor beyond. He lay still expecting to be hauled, but instead the voiced faded away leaving him alone in cold silence. He tried to assess his surroundings. The floor felt wet and smooth beneath his hands, a ceramic tile with a slightly raised pattern and a gentle slope running away from the low divide. Using his shoulders and the floor Daark managed to push the blindfold partially away from one eye. He squinted at the blinding light for a second before looking at the tile covered wall before him, smeared with grime and excitement and blood, which ran down onto the floor to drain away down the drain over which he lay. Voices announced the return of his captures and before he had chance to roll over to see them, a chair was placed in the floor beside him and two sets of hands lifted him onto it.

"You are from the British Reconnaissance unit know as Red Fox Two," a voice said fully removing his blindfold. "Is this correct?"

Matt squinted at the man before him. "No, I'm _"

Wham! The punch had taken him completely off guard, sent him tumbling off the chair and back onto the blood streaked floor. "I am Colonel Leonid Solvac, Commander in Chief of the 20th Guards Tank Army." He said in a perfectly calm voice. "Your identity card identifies you as Flight Lieutenant Matt Daark, a member of the British reconnaissance unit Red Fox Two."

Daark looked up at Solvac, his left arm hung in a sling and his breath stank of whiskey. He was pulled to his feet and pushed back onto the chair while Solvac stepped back into the changing room and took a folder from a captain. Daark glanced sideways at the two guards stood with him. Solvac returned and crouched to his level. Daark could see smearing the speckles of blood across his face and hair, more blood stained the sleeve black from an untreated bullet wound in his upper arm. "Most people shake my hand, not try an' break me nose." Daark replied.

"I was clarifying your position, Flight Lieutenant Daark. I will ask you the questions, you will answer them, properly. If you don't, a broken nose will be the least of your worries."

No kidding, Daark thought to himself.

Solvac pulled a photo from the folder and showed it to him. "This is you," he pointed at it, "beside the blond haired woman."

Daark stared at the picture. "Mandy!" He whispered.

"She's dead. I took this from her, along with this," the photo of Slater, Landers and Goodman, "and this," her ID card. He returned to the group photo, "the blond woman is called Landers, a corporal in your army. This man, the American, he is a curiosity. We are informed he is Colonel Goodman, he has the same serial number as Goodman, the same pay code, even the same next of kin as him, yet our records show a Colonel Richard Goodman was killed at Wronki on the 16th of September, when the 6th Light Infantry Division were wiped out trying to cross the Warta River. I don't know who this man is, but he isn't Colonel Goodman." He paused for a while to let that sink in. Then he tapped the photo again. "And that is you. All these three people are current members of Red Fox Two. " He pulled a copy of RF-2's

personnel list from the folder and showed him. "Your commanding officer is Captain Charlotte McKenzie. I want her." Solvac continued. "Where is she?"

"I don't know."

Wham! Daark was on his back again, his face tingled with pain. Before he had time to focus on the light above him, he was hauled back up onto the chair, warm blood and mucus trickled over his lips.

"Maybe you I have failed to enlighten you to the situation. Charlotte McKenzie's real name is Yasmin Zarudin, she is - was a KGB counter insurgence agent."

"You're lying."

"She has been a reliable source for our intelligence agency for almost ten years. How do you think I got this information about you and your operation."

"Your fuckin lying." Bad thing to say, he tumbled from the chair again, this time the blow caught the side of his head.

Solvac straightened and opened the folder. "You at Matthew Daark, a flight Lieutenant in the RAF. You flew Puma helicopters until 16 months ago when you were shot down near Vilnius causing the deaths of ten combatants and two of your crewmen. Six weeks later you were assigned to Long Range Reconnaissance."

Daark struggled to sit upright. "That's no great secret, anyone could find that out."

"You are married with two children, a boy of five and a daughter of a little over eighteen months," Solvac continued, "last known location was the Leeds area of England." He dropped a single sheet of paper onto the chair. "Think it over - Matthew Daark."

Solvac turned to leave the room, he paused beside the guard at the door. "Put the other one in here as well.

Daark shuffled across to the chair, the hand typed sheet listed his personnel details, his age, blood type, last known address of Rachel and the kids. How could they have got this?

Kneale stumbled through the door ahead of two guards who pushed him to the floor on the other side of the divide. He too still had his hands bound and from the fresh blood and bruising on his face, he'd also been interrogated. Kneale rolled round to face Daark once the guards had left. "Kenzie's a fuckin' spy," he spat.

"She isn't, it's someone else. That bastard's been lying to you." Daark wondering what evidence Solvac had laid before him.

"She set us up," Kneale struggled into a sitting position. "She sent us to the station, then told 'em we were there, that Yank's in on it too. He ain't Goodman, the real Goodman's dead. They're all Reds, her, the Yank, even the bitch Landers, they're all Reds. Fuckin' McKenzie, her name's Yasmin Zarudin. It's a fuckin' Russian name."

"Use you head Kneale -"

"She set us up, set us all except you lot. We nearly got wasted at Templin, O'Brian's lot did. They were waiting for us, they knew exactly where we were, exactly when. Hamilton got it at Munchenberg. Only you got in clean."

"We changed the LZ, they would have got it."

"She told 'em we were at Wilhelmsburg, she told 'em every thing."

"No, it wasn't her. Someone else did it, someone at the Citadel."

"It was her."

"Fuck off Kneale." He pulled up to his knees. "She's straight."

Kneale lunged over the divide at him, striking him in the chest with his shoulder before crashing to the floor behind him. Daark spun himself round and kicked out at him. "Listen to me Kneale. It's not here!"

Kneale pulled himself up onto his knees and lunged at him again. Daark tried to back away, but his bound hands prevented him moving quick enough to avoid Kneale's second lunge.

"It's not her!" He tried to kick back, but Kneale was in the wrong place. He tried to turn, to get his feet between him and Kneale, but he was too close to the wall. Kneale's left foot thumped hard against his throat, pinning him against the wall, then he brought the heel of his right boot against the side of his face.

"She's a fuckin' spy," he spat, kicking again.

"NO!"

"She's a fuckin' spy." Daark's head recoiled back against the wall, cracking into the ceramic tiles, unable to move, unable to defend himself. "She a fuckin' spy!" Kneale spat.

The two jeeps and the BRDM threaded their way through the hurriedly erected check point outside the Sports Stadium and came to a halt outside the main doors. Straczynski stepped out of the lead jeep and surveyed the bustled of activity around them. "Where were they?" He asked Sergov after being told of the attack.

"In the buildings behind us." Sergov pointed up at the flashing touches in the office block windows. "Apparently they took a shot at Solvac."

"Did they get him?"

"I don't think so. The rumour is they got Captain Matusiak instead. Not that she's any great loss to us."

"Not very good was she?"

"She was okay as far as an officer goes. She just has a privileged position."

"Solvac's personal bodyguard." Balski added.

"More like his shagging piece." Boris muttered to the amusement of Sergov's men. "Gobbled her way to the top."

Straczynski tried to keep a straight face but failed. He ordered Campbell dragged out of the jeep and brought to the steps of the headquarters building. Straczynski took a last drag from the cigarette before dropping it on the steps in front of Campbell and stamping it out. "I want this building secured. Disarm everyone and hold them in the rear courtyard. Block the entrance with the BRDM. No-one gets in or out of this building without my permission."

Sergov followed Straczynski through the empty corridor towards the double doors into the Ops room. Captain Iamskov looked up from behind one of the radio operators as they strode in.

Borodin joined him. "Who's that?" He asked nodding toward him.

"I don't know, Solvac said nothing about visitors did he?" Iamskov watched Sergov's men move into the room. He recognised a few of their faces.

"Where do you think he's from. Pila?"

"We best find out." Iamskov walked over to Straczynski. "Can I help you."

"Captain." Straczynski replied. "I'm looking for Colonel Solvac."

"He's not here at the moment. Can I help."

"No." Straczynski answered sharply. "I want Solvac. Where is he?"

"He is not available at this moment. May I ask who's enquiring?"

Recognising Sergov, Borodin walked over to him. "Who is he?" He whispered.

Sergov smiled. "The new boss. Solvac's madness has gone too far this time. It's time to pick which side you want to stand with."

Borodin frowned. "What do you mean corporal."

"Work it out, sir."

Iamskov snapped to attention the second Straczynski's GRU card was held out to him. "Sir, General Solvac is resting in his quarters. I will send someone to wake him." He turned to bark an order to one of his subordinates. But Straczynski stopped him.

"You will show me."

"Yes sir."

Annopol noticed Iamskov change of attitude and became uneasy, he nudged a radio man. "Get a platoon back here now," he whispered.

The radio man did as he was told until a rifle barrel was pressed into the back of his neck persuade him otherwise. A moment later Annopol found a second rifle in his back. "Over there." Sergov ordered them away from the radios.

Annopol looked round the room. Sergov had a dozen men with him; just his unit, but he outnumbered and out-gunned those in Ops. He turned to Straczynski. "Who are you?"

"Major General Straczynski... GRU."

"Oh God. I knew this would happen." Borodin blurted out. "We should have known."

"Shut up." Annopol snapped.

"We should have followed the plan. Dam Solvac. We should have been away from here."

"Borodin, ENOUGH!" Annopol shouted.

"God, he's G.R.U"

"BORODIN!" Annopol shouted, then he stood and walked over to Straczynski. "Sir, I am Major Annopol. These people are my responsibility. I presume Pila has sent you."

"That is correct."

"Are we to be placed under arrest?"

"Yes."

"What are the charges?"

"Desertion and violation of the cease-fire agreement."

A mutter went round the room. They all knew the penalty for desertion was the firing squad. Annopol move to settle them. "These people were following orders. The command officers are those who have instigated this crime. These people were following orders."

"Military law is quite specific on this matter Major Annopol. All those participating in such crimes will be tried and if found guilty will be shot. Now I wish to see General Solvac."

"I don't know where he is at this moment. His personnel vehicle is still here, he might be in his quarters."

"Sergov, take four men and check out his quarters." Straczynski ordered. "You, Iamskov, show him where it is."

Sergov glanced round, "Sir, I don't have enough men to secure this building. I can hold this room, I can hold the front, but not much more."

"Detain Solvac and we won't need too."

"I don't have the men."

Shit! Straczynski looked round the room, how many could he trust? "John, take two and do it."

"What!" Sergov objected.

"You soldier, what's your name." He asked the private holding Campbell.

"Balski Sir."

"Release him, now."

"But why? He's the enemy," Sergov protested. "He's our prisoner."

"He is one of us Sergov. Now release him."

"But sir -"

"Release him Balski. Now."

He turned back to Iamskov. "Iamskov, you will co-operate with us and take us to Solvac quarters. Sergov, if anyone tries to leave this room or cause a disturbance, you will shoot them. Is that clear?"

"Yes sir."

Annopol nodded to Iamskov. "Take him to the Generals quarters. Borodin, relieve everyone of their sidearm."

Solvac's valet leapt to his feet in protest at the intrusion into Solvac personal quarters. Straczynski ignored him, pushing him aside and walking into the room. Still spouting objections the valet reached for his sidearm, but the rattle of Balkov's rifle coming to bear.

"You." Straczynski snapped at him. "Where is Solvac?"

"I am not at liberty to say," he replied smugly.

Boris leapt on him, knocking him to the floor with his rifle butt. "When the General ask you a question, you will answer him."

"Do as he says." Iamskov spoke up.

"Captain Iamskov, isn't it." The valet coughed. "General Solvac will be notified of your conduct, captain."

Straczynski walked over to him. "Captain Iamskov is assisting me with my enquires." He said showing him is GRU ID card.

"Tell him what he wishes to know." Iamskov repeated. "Where's Solvac?"

"I am not at liberty to say."

"Fine, shoot him." Straczynski calmly replied.

Boris placed his pistol against the valet's temple and cocked the hammer.

"NO, NO. HE'S... He's interrogating the prisoners."

"What prisoners?" Straczynski demanded.

"Two they caught at the railway station. One of the snipers I think."

Straczynski turned away and walked into the second room. "Boris, disarm him and take him down stairs with the others."

They did as they were told, stripping the valet down to him combat trousers before bundling him out through the door. "And were do you stand Captain Iamskov." Straczynski asked him once they were alone. "With Solvac, or Pila?"

Uneasiness crept over him as he glanced between him and Campbell. "I'm not sure what you mean, sir."

"The question was simple. Do you agree with the action Solvac has taken?"

Iamskov pondered his answer, to deny he was in favour of the action would be the only way he might avoid the firing squad. With luck and if he could prove he was forced into this action, he might have his sentence reduced to several long years in the interior. Yet that was not the case. "Yes sir. I did agree with the entail intention of this action. Pila could not offer us what we had here."

Straczynski listened to his chose of words. "Very well captain." They returned to operations. General Golodkin was waiting for him when they returned. He walked straight over to Straczynski and greeted him as an old friend. "Mikhail," he said. "It is good to see you again. I only wish it could have been under better circumstances."

"It has been a long time Yuri."

"It has, too long." He sighed. "So TDV has finally caught up with us. What of the other two Armies. What news of them?"

"Kobiechi has stopped at Muncheberg, though we do not know why. Rutowski is still unchecked and once I'll dealt with Solvac he will be my next priority."

Golodkin looked round the room. "These people were only following his orders. They don't deserve the firing squad."

"That all depends." He looked over to Sergov. "Is the building secure?"

"As good as it's gonna get, sir." Golodkin closed the door behind them.

"Why Yuri?" Straczynski asked before taking a seat. "Why are you here? All Divisions are under orders to cease hostilities against the Allies and move east onto their home soil at the earliest opportunity. Not west."

Golodkin poured a drink into a cracked glass and handed it to him before poring himself one and draining it. "Don't you know. Didn't TDV tell you?" He refilled the glasses.

"They don't know. That's why they sent me to find you." He took the drink. "So what is happening?"

"Who long have we been fighting this war for, almost four years now isn't it? And what have we achieved?" Golodkin drained his glass, refilled it and drained it again. "On new years day I was overlooking the Oder facing the German Army just like I had done four years ago. Nothing has changed, except two hundred and fifty million people are dead. I went to Poland as a peace-keeper, to help the government regain civil order, not to start a war. We destroyed that country Misha, us and the Allies have devastated every square kilometre of Poland. The land can hardly support it's own population let alone an army on the move."

"So why this?"

"Two months ago a meeting took place between a representative of the German government and the commanding officers of the 1st, 2nd and 20th Army."

"Why only those three?"

"Because we were the most westerly and best suited their needs. They agreed to supply us with all the fuel, food and ammunition needed to move all three army groups into Eastern German. We all we had to do was make it look real."

"The agreement was all three groups would advance towards Lake Muritz area of Germany with the co-operation of the German Army. Once at Muritz, we would be allowed to set up home for ourselves. The only clause was we had to make our advance seem sufficiently aggressive to arouse the concern of the British Army."

"Why the British?"

"Because they are returning to United Kingdom. The German Government does not want that to happen."

"That doesn't explain why you agreed to this. This action could of started the war of again."

"No. The Germans said they would not let it go that far."

"So what has gone wrong?"

"As the 117th were preparing to leave Friedland they were turned on by the local garrison. Maybe old prejudices don't go away as quickly as we hoped. Half the 117th was destroyed. Of course retaliation followed and the Friedland Garrison and civilians were eliminated."

"Eliminated?"

"Forcefully removed from the town and disposed of."

Straczynski feared he understood what he meant. "How many people are we talking about?"

"Maybe three hundred."

"And Solvac authorised it."

Golodkin nodded as he poured out another drink. "It went wrong from there onward. Events and circumstances overwhelmed us and we could not stop it."

CHAPTER TWENTY

Goodman led McKenzie and Landers away from the stadium into the dark and deserted back streets of Pasewalk, after twenty minutes, he stopped and squatted next to a wall. "What's up?" McKenzie asked.

"Nothing." He pulled his map out of his pocket. "Just a little lost."

McKenzie took the map from him. "Where'd you get this from?"

He snatched it back. "I drew it myself."

"What the hell's it of?"

"This place, what do you think." He showed it to them. "We were here when Matt got grabbed, at the station. I reckon they'll have taken him to the stadium, back that way. We should get him out as soon as we can, before he tells 'em how many of us there are."

Landers nodded. "I agree."

"Are you sure he's in the stadium. We never saw him being taken in."

"Shortly after he went down one, a truck left the station. I followed it there. He's got to be in there."

"We never saw any sign of Matt or a truck." Landers added. "There's only three of us now. Unless we're sure, we can't risk it."

"What about Kneale?" McKenzie asked.

"Don't know. I didn't see where he went."

"Fuck him. He's not one of us. I say we bug out."

"Fran, he was with Matt. He might know where he is."

"He's an arse-hole Rik. If Matt was stupid enough to get too buddy with him, then that's his look out." A BMP rounding the end of the street stopped her short. It stopped and its search light flashed across the desolate houses. They scrambled to their feet and dived through the nearest doorway.

Ducking under a canvas curtain, hey stumbling into a brightly lit room to startled squeals and screams from the occupants. McKenzie squinted, shielding her eyes with her hand. "Sit down and shut up." She ordered as sight returned. "Fran check the front. Rik, the back room."

Then she studied the man in his late forties stood before her. The woman that clung to him hardly looked twenty, not much older than the two teenage boys that stood close by. And a young girl clung to her father side, crying. "It's okay, we won't hurt you." She reassured them.

Landers returned from the front. "Mac, BMP plus ten or twelve men, coming this way, checking each house."

"Goodman?" McKenzie called out. "What you got?"

He reappeared. "Three kids. All sleeping."

"Anymore in the house?" She asked the man.

"No." He answered comforting the little girl. "Just the eight of us."

Landers stuck her head back into the room. "Mac, they're getting closer."

McKenzie looked at Goodman.

"No chance. Like Fort fuckin Knox back there."

She turned to the man. "They're looking for us. We need somewhere to hide. Will you help?"

"There.. there is up stairs." He told her.

Up stairs, trapped. "Rik, you sure we can't get out the back?"

He shook his head. "No way."

Outside the BMP drew nearer

"Dam! Show me the stairs." She snapped to the man.

He took her over to a door. "Up here." He said opening it.

Goodman headed up, the beam from his torch flashing across the darkness. "Yeah, it's clear." He said after a few seconds.

Landers hurried across the room and followed him up the stairs.

Outside the BMP was level with the house.

McKenzie grabbed the young woman by the arm and pushed her after Landers. "Keep quiet and say nothing about us and she'll be all right. Understood!" She didn't wait for the man's answer before following her up the stairs. She pulled the woman back into a dark corner of the room. "Just behave and nothing will happen to you."

Below them heard the Russians entered the house.

"Them kids down stairs." McKenzie whispered in the frightened woman's ear. "They yours?"

"The three in the back room, yes." She whispered.

"What are they, boys, girls?"

"Twin girls and a boy."

Beneath them there was a loud crash as something fell to the floor. The woman flinched, but McKenzie held her still. "How old are they?"

"The boy's 7 months. The girls are 18 months."

"By him?"

"The girls are yes." She jumped again as something else hit the floor.

"And the boy?"

She glanced at Goodman. "I was raped, by an American soldier."

McKenzie followed her stare "They've gone now. And him, he's still a virgin."

"You're not funny any more McKenzie." He frowned.

The door at the bottom of the stairs was opened and a stream of light lit up the room. McKenzie pulled the woman further back into the shadows. "Just think what'll happen to them kids if they find us up here." She reminded her. A single soldier walked up, stopping at

the top step to look round the dark room. Seeing nothing, he turned to go back down. Below a baby began to cry. The woman flinched and tried to break free as the other two quickly followed. The soldier stopped and looked back.

"My babies." The woman cried out, breaking free from McKenzie's grip and scrambled to the stairs, McKenzie diving after her. She saw he bring his AKRM on to her, but Goodman had other ideas. He stepped up behind him, grabbed him under the chin and slit his throat. The woman scampered past them both and onto the stairs. McKenzie grabbed her foot as she reached the top step, pinning her down half way down the steps. A younger soldier appeared at the doorway. McKenzie scrambled over the woman and dove at him. They both crashed into the room. A third soldier came running to his aid but was quickly leapt on by the two teenage boys. Landers followed her into the room. Seeing the boys struggling, she turned to their aid first, aiming her pistol at the soldier and shot him dead. He dropped without hesitation, leaving the two boys in stunned silence. The young soldier beneath McKenzie stopped struggling. She pushed him face hard into the floor and searched and disarmed him. The woman hurried down the stairs into the mans arms, before turning to her crying children. Goodman followed her down.

Satisfied the young soldier was harmless, McKenzie pulled him up and pushed him to Goodman.

"How many more we got?" Landers asked.

McKenzie glanced round. "BMP and the rest of the squad. We got three."

"How many more?" Goodman snarled at him.

"Six." He blurted out.

"Good!" McKenzie grabbed him and bundled him towards the door into the hallway. Landers and Goodman followed her. She pushed the soldier out into the street, keeping him between the BMP and herself. A second soldier sat in the back stepped out towards them, specking to him. McKenzie shot him with her pistol from over the boys shoulder. The commanding officer stood on top of the BMP, threw himself flat onto the hull, not sure where the shot came from. The gunner did, and fired his AK at her. She pushed the boy forward using him as a shield, firing blindly over his shoulder. His body jerked as he was hit from the AK, slumping back against her. She pushed him away and dove for the BMPs open rear door. Landers and Goodman opened up from the house, reaping the top of the BMP with automatic fire.

The BMP's gunner fired a burst at her as he scrambled in from within the turret. She throw herself flat onto the deck as bullet ricocheted around her. She could hear him shouting at someone and the radio babbling back, no doubt calling up reinforcements. Aiming blindly towards him, she emptied the whole clip in his direction. She heard his cry as he took a hit followed by him slumping down. She leapt onto him, striking him with the empty pistol before realising he was dead. Relieved, she slumped down for breath. Dropping the empty clip out of her pistol and slapping in a fresh one and chambered a round.

Behind her three figures dived into the back of the BMP under a hail of fire and slammed the door shut. McKenzie looked up expecting to see Landers or Goodman, instead she saw three

Russian soldier. Battered, bleeding and not looking happy. They stared at each other for what seemed like an age. Then all of them; like in a Wild West quick-draw contest, brought up whatever weapon they had in their hands. In the cramped and cluttered interior of the BMP McKenzie's small pistol had the advantage over the bulky rifles. She pumped the trigger until the breach snapped back. She reached for a fresh clip as she dropped the empty one from the pistol grip. But there was no clip to replace it. The last one lay between her legs.

"Captain!" Goodman cried out as he leapt at the BMP. "Mac, answer me!" He dragged the rear door open and two dead soldiers tumbled out on the ground at his feet. "Mac?" He shouted again.

She instantly switched her aim to him, staring down the sights of her empty pistol at his face. He grinned at her. "Shit Captain, thought you were a gonna then." He turned away and let the door swing close again.

McKenzie cursed herself. She'd got trigger happy, wasting ammunition unnecessarily. She'd done exactly what she'd chastised Goodman for not 24 hours ago.

"Looks like we've got some admirers." Goodman pointing to the small group of people that had emerged from the desolated houses.

She looked then turned back to Goodman. "I'm almost out of ammo, what you got?"

He held up his M-16. "I'm on my last mag. A couple more pistol clip and half dozen cartridges for the shotgun. What about you?"

Landers slung her rifle over her shoulder before searching the bodies. "Mag and a half. What about the Captain, what she's got?"

Goodman dragged the two bodies from the BMP over to her. "About same as us I guess." He started searching them as well. Stripping them of all their weapons and ammo, hoping for something of the same calibre.

McKenzie pushed through the small crowd huddled about them. They shock her hand and patted her on the back as if she'd single handed freed them from tyranny. It wasn't right, she hadn't done that, if anything she'd just placed them in more danger. But they didn't see that. She didn't like it, not at all. It was all wrong. "Fran. Get these people back into their houses!" She pushed them away from her. "GO BACK. GO INSIDE!"

Cannon fire tore down the street just above their heads. She snapped round and saw a second BMP sat at the end of the street, it's squad rapidly deploying into the surrounding debris as it's cannon opened up again; this time at the crowd. They scattered, running blindly in panic towards their homes; back to their hiding places from which they'd come, leaving the dead and dying behind them. Landers gave up trying to push her way through the crowd and let them surge past her, turning her attention to getting into cover before she too fell victim to the cannon fire.

Goodman dropped flat onto the ground close by behind a mound of rubble. Landers found herself overwhelmed by the crowd to reach him, and found herself in the open. She pushed

the last few of them out the way before dropping to her knees and laying a burst at the attackers.

Goodman fired off a couple short burst before switching to single shots.

"Where's Charlotte?" Landers yelled finally reaching cover.

He glanced across at her.

"MAC, WHERE IS SHE?"

He looked around for her. "DON'T KNOW, OVER THERE LAST TIME I SAW." He shouted back, quickly pointing to where the first lot of civilians had been gunned down.

Landers flicked her rifle to single shots. "I CARN'T SEE HER." Goodman looked but he couldn't either.

Solvac strode into the command room like a man with purpose. Before he'd even unbuttoned his coat he was in full cry. "Annapol, have they found the hostiles yet?" Then he saw Korell. "What's he doing here. Get him back down stairs."

On-one answered. Solvac threw his coat across a desk before turning back, sensing something wasn't right. Annapol and Iamskov exchanged glances. Then Annapol spoke up. "Not yet. We are concentrating on the north side with a street by street search of the area. However, they could be long gone by now."

No, not McKenzie. Solvac stared back at Annapol. "I want to see you in my office." He headed for the door past Korell. "And get him down stairs."

Sergov stopped him at the door.

"Get out of the way soldier."

"I'm sorry Colonel." Sergov replied. "You are not allowed to leave this room."

"What! Get out of my way soldier before I have you shot. Annapol, get him moved."

Annapol felt very uneasy. "Corporal Sergov is only following orders."

"Orders? We'll see about that." Solvac reached for his pistol, which was just what Sergov hoped for. He swiped him across the face with the butt of his AKM. Solvac staggered backwards, clutching his jaw. Balski pulled Solvac's pistol and aimed it at him.

"Sir, you are not allowed to leave this room."

Solvac fixed a glare on him. "You are dead Corporal Sergov. I'll have you shot for this." He turned to Annopol. "And you."

"Major Annopol." One of the radio operator shouted across the room. "A patrols have just encountered hostiles." Annopol headed across to him. "'C' section have just responded to a request from 'B' section. They found their BMP under attack by a mob of twenty to thirty civilians." The operator continued.

"Where's this?" Annopol asked.

Iamskov pointed to the map. "'B' Section where here."

Annopol looked. That was a mile Northwest of them.

"'C' Section fired to disperse the crowd and is now under return fire from a small group of hostiles."

"Can they identify the hostiles?" Annopol asked.

"No sir. They number three to five."

"Tell them to cease-fire on the hostiles. I want them all alive. They are to surrender to them if need be, but I want them alive." Straczynski's voice boomed from the doorway.

Solvac head snapped round recognising him instantly. "That is a direct violation of Russian military law, General Straczynski." Solvac tried to confront him, but Sergov pushed him back. "Order them to press home the attack. Get 'A' and 'D' sections to assist. She mustn't escape!"

Annopol looked at Straczynski for guidance.

"DO IT NOW!" Solvac bellowed.

Straczynski glanced down at him. "Cease-fire Major Annopol, and surrender to the hostiles."

"NO!" Solvac protested. "THAT MAN IS A TRAITOR. He is working with them."

Annopol glanced briefly across at Solvac then back to Straczynski, who nodded. Annopol gave the order.

Straczynski turned to Solvac. "Where are the soldiers captured?"

Solvac glanced round the room before answering. "They are in the sports hall changing room on the opposite side of the stadium."

Misha looked across at Campbell. "John, go and get them. Annopol, show him the way." Then he turned back to Solvac. "Corporal Sergov, take Colonel Solvac to his quarters and hold him there."

Rik laced off the last two rounds from his M-16 before slumping down behind cover. "That's it, I'm out." he shouted to Landers.

She'd exhausted her rifle ammunition ten seconds before he did and had switched to her pistol, but the range was too long to make the shots worth while. She snatched an AKM from her feet and slung it at him. He caught it before it bounded on the frozen ground and scrambled back to his position. Cocking the action, he aimed it towards the BMP. Four rounds spat from the barrel before it jammed. Ducking back, he cocked it again, releasing the jammed round and managed to get another two off. "Fuckin' bastard thing!" He stood up and hurled the rifle at them. "Come on. Come an' get us!" He snatched out his sidearm and fired off seven rounds after it.

Landers crashed into his legs, bringing him down on the brick rubble. He rolled clear of her and came up to his knee, his pistol aimed at her.

"Christ sake Rik, it's finished," She panted, her pistol aimed at him. "We're finished. Matt and Charlotte are gone. There's just us left Rik." She ignored the sound of soldiers running towards them. "Let's call it a day."

Goodman relaxed slightly, Landers slumped down in front of him, their pistols still aimed at each other. Out of the corner of his eye the soldiers draw closer. Two appeared in front on his, levelling their rifles at Landers, he could hear more behind him. "Drop the gun!" one of them yelled, a rifle nudging at his back. He looked up at Landers, her expression was blank, as his finger tensed in the trigger he saw the corner of her mouth turn upwards. The pistol was wrestled from his hand. Landers let her go as it was grabbed and placed her hands on her head.

Nattasha lay still on the bunk while General Andreyov finished dressing. He hadn't spoken a word to her since he entered the room and forcing himself on her. He'd made his intentions brutally clear to her, she was nothing more than an object of his sexual deprivation to him. A think to be mistreated and abused at his whim. He straightened his jacket and he hammered on the door. It took a few moments for it to open, just long enough for him to look back at her. She was still laying as he'd left her, nearly naked and on her belly; not crying or sobbing, just deathly quiet. He began to wonder if it might mean anything, but then the door opened and he dismissed it as his other duties beckoned. The guard took a quick glance at her and wondered too; how long it would be before he would have his chance at her.

She waited until she heard the outside the room fell silent before moving. Easing her bruised body back to life, she slowly sitting up and pulling her skirt down from her waist. Andreyov had ripped the seam apart in his eagerness and she pulled the two half together over her legs. Her briefs, the waist band torn still hung around one ankle. She kicked them off before refastening her bra and pulling her blouse tightly around her.

She sat like that listening to the silence.

The sound of the guard being relieved some hours later moved her to look at the door. They changed every twelve hours. That meant another day had passed when he had not come for her. Another day. She retrieved the needle from under the mattress and using it began to pick at the blanket. After pulling several lengths of thread, she started to repair the seam of her skirt, crudely tacking it together. Then she collected the buttons from the floor, removed her blouse and sowed them back in place, then redressed; fastening each button and smoothing the material down until she was satisfied she looked decent again. Then she walked over to the small window. The single low wattage bulb gave out just enough light for her to see her own reflection. She tided her hair as best she could and wiped away the worst of the grime from her face with her briefs dipped in melting snow. She pondered for a moment on whether someone was watching her from outside. Maybe Andreyov was stood out there in the darkness watching her. A smile turned the corners of her mouth. He may have defiled her body, but he had not touched her soul. No matter what he subjected her to, he could not touch that. Only one person could touch her there. She rung the briefs dry then placed them into her skirt pocket.

Once she'd finished she took one last look at herself, Borrisovich was right, she was still pretty; she'd always been told she was the image of her mother; but never having met her, only had there word.

With her elbow she smashed the window. It took three attempts to brake the small pane and left her elbow cut and bleeding. She pick a large enough piece of glass from the frame. Then she returned to the bunk where she sat and looking at it. Four inches long, roughly triangular in shape, it couldn't have been better. What she did next took all her courage; taking the glass in the palm of her right hand and she pressed the long sharp edge against the side of her neck; an inch below her ear. She brought her left hand up and wrapped it around her right hand gripping the glass firmly. The edges cut into her palm and bleed trickled down her wrist, but that didn't matter. She turned her head away and closed her eyes. For a second she hesitated, momentarily doubting she had the courage, the strength to do this, but it was only for a moment. She drew the glass forward, pushing it in as deep into her neck as she could.

Blood shot across the room under pressure. Panic surged through her, unbelievable horror at what she'd just done to herself. Her subconscious rebelled, telling her body to live. I want to live, it screamed, he might be here tomorrow. You must live til tomorrow. She dropped the glass and clenched her hands over the gash. But it was too long, too deep. I can't, she told herself, I can't. Her sight became cloudy, colours faded away to greyness. Your said he might come today and he didn't I can't wait another day. The cloud of unconsciousness started to grow over her, her grip weakened as her life blood drained from her. She slumped down onto the floor, her blouse and skirt already soaked. The blood, now tricking out, puddle on the concrete floor around her. "I love you Daddy." The greyness became darker. Nattasha hand fell away from her neck and she slumped down across the floor, her breathing now quite shallow and quite slow.

Sergov's men hadn't secured all of the stadium complex, he lacked the man power to do it. He concentrated the few he had on the Operation centres, hoping Straczynski would have the authority to talk the others round. Annapol found this hadn't reached the guards on the far

side. They still reminded loyal to Solvac and it took some straight talking and the threat of a bullet in the head before they relented to allow him, and the soldier in British DPM through.

The guard led them into the changing room. Annapol walked in, turning on the light. "Why doesn't it work?" He demanded.

"Erm, I don't know sir. The bulb might have blown."

Campbell pulled his right angle torch from his webbing and switched it on. The beam flashed across the floor and over the benches. Annapol took a torch from the guard and added it's light top that of Campbell's. "There," he said, catching movement from the shower area.

Campbell shone his torch at the point were Annapol's dwelled. "That's Kneale." He moved towards him, stumbling over the low divide. "Kneale, can you hear me?"

"Campbell, you're like a bad penny."

"Yeah mate, Christ, what the hell they done to you?"

Annapol joined them, lifting up Kneale's head and shining the torch into his face. "Get a medic over!" He ordered the guard. "Campbell, hold you light steady."

His torch rolled onto Kneale's legs as he tried to see the extent of his injuries. Kneale moved his legs and the torch toppled onto the tiled floor. Campbell reached out to pick it up, as he did so the beam flashed across Daark's blooded form. "Jesus Christ, Matt!" Taking both torches he move to him, "Come on Matt, talk to me."

Solvac walked slowly into him dark quarters, Matusiak's body still lay in the middle of the floor were she'd fell, still covered by the blanket his valet had laid over him. Straczynski had detained him under armed guard. Sergov or someone was waiting in the other room, hoping he'd make an attempt to escape so they could shoot him. He would not give them that pleasure, even if they was a fair chance of succeeding. The shattered window was unprepared. Shattered glass and broken frame littered the floor. It presented no obstacle to him, yet he was four floors up and the exterior of the building was clean and smooth and difficult to climb. He walked over to Matusiak, his boots crunching the shattered fragments of glass. He took a corner of blanket and pulled it away. She stared blankly back at him. The shot that had killed her had only left a small neat hole in the centre of her forehead, hardly blemishing her looks. He could remember it happening clearly in his mind, re-running every moment through second by second. Originally he thought the shot was meant for him and McKenzie had missed. But now he know differently. She'd meant to hit Matusiak at that precise moment, when they were closes. To steal her from him.

"Solvac!" A voice whispered from somewhere in the room.

He stood up, his hand went automatically for his sidearm which he no longer had. The room was dark, lit by only by the light from the other room. His eyes settled on a shadow sat in a

chair in the far corner. He squinted, straining his eyes but the figure sat unbelievable still, hardly breathing.

"I've been waiting a while for you." It continued.

Solvac took a step forward. "McKenzie?" He saw it move, saw the light reflect off the glass of the rifles sight. Then he saw her stand up and step from the shadows into the light. Her face was smeared with grim and dried blood, and her hair was knotted and twisted.

"Why didn't you kill me then?" He asked pointing at Matusiak.

"To see your face when it happened. And to let you know who was coming for you."

"You are crazy woman, obsessed by revenge."

"Me, crazy. I saw what happened at Friedland and Wilhelmsburg. I'm not obsessed with revenge. I don't see your name daubed over the walls."

"That was not my doing. It was not meant to happen like it has." He held his arms out in defeat then tried to smile. "I thought you would be away from here by now."

"No. Not while your still alive. There's a few debt to pay-back. She got her's, now you're owed yours."

"Pay-back? For what? This is a war woman. There is no debts to pay-back, only victims of circumstances."

"I wouldn't call Nina Wiste a victim of circumstance."

"Who?" Solvac raised his voice.

"Don't play dumb with me. I'm not in the mood."

Sergov stepped into the doorway, attracted by the raised voice. "Who you talking too?" He asked before he saw McKenzie.

She swung her SA-80 onto him. "Just back off soldier, this is personal."

Sergov lowered his AKM. "Okay lady, just don't do anything hasty. This man's under arrest and in the custody of the Russian Army -"

"I don't give a shit! Just stay out my way and you won't get hurt."

Sergov glanced over his shoulder. "Bovaski, get the General. NOW!"

Solvac stepped towards McKenzie and she snapped the rifle back onto him. "JUST BACK OFF!"

Solvac did. "Look, Nina's death was just circumstances."

"You remember her then. Then there was a purpose behind her death."

"It was circumstances."

"Circumstances, my arse. You shot her in cold blood."

"I WAS FOLLOWING ORDERS. She was trying to escape, you were trying to escape. You were both enemy agents. I was following my orders when I shooting her."

"But you didn't just shoot her." McKenzie ripped the blanket off Matusiak. "That's shooting someone, I shot her. Quick and clean, she never felt a thing. What you did to Nina was torture. You shot her 33 times and still didn't kill her. And every time she moved you put another bullet in her. You tortured her to death."

"She was the enemy. I did what was necessary."

"DON'T! Don't you dare try and justify your actions to me. She was down in the open, a sitting target. You could have finished her quickly, even recaptured her if you wanted. Instead you played with her, torturing her."

"But it was you who fired the bullet that killed her."

"SHE BEGGED ME TOO!"

"Lady, hey lady -" Sergov started.

"It's Captain to you, Corporal!"

"Okay Captain. I think this has gone for enough."

She looked back at Solvac. "It has hasn't it. It's gone on for far too long. Say good bye Leonid Solvac."

"No!" Both Solvac and Sergov shouted in unison. But to no avail. She let fly with her SA.80, kneecapping Solvac. He fell across Matusiak's legs. "No, Yasmin. Please." He holding up his hand to protect himself. "Let you get away. You destroyed the satellite station and my division and I let you get away."

"BULL SHIT."

"No please Yasmin. I let you go. You can go now, I won't stop you. He won't. PLEASE YASMIN."

McKenzie paused for a second, remembering how Wiste had uttered the same last word to her. "Fuck you!" She fired another burst and Solvac lay dead.

Sergov looked on in silence. McKenzie slung her rifle over her shoulder and looked at him, but he was still starring at Solvac. She took a step forward, trudging wearily towards the door. He stopped her as she passed, holding onto her arm. For the first time he saw her clearly. Her hair was matted with grime, dried blood from a gash on her forehead mingled

with more grime and a bruise on her left cheekbone. She looked into his eyes wondering why he hadn't shot her yet. "It's finished." She whispered.

Campbell burst through the door with Bovaski close on his heels. He stopped at the sight of McKenzie's bedraggled form. It seemed the only thing keeping her standing was Sergov holding her arm. "Mac?" He said.

She turned her head towards him but there was no glint of recognition in her eyes.

"Check the other room." He told Bovaski.

"He's dead." Sergov said before he took a step. "She shot him."

Campbell looked back again as Straczynski entered the room. "He's already dead." He said before he had time to speech.

Bovaski smirked. "About time."

"Bovaski!" Sergov snapped. "Do as you were told. Check the room."

"Yes Corp." He stepped past them.

McKenzie pulled herself away from Sergov and started across the room. Straczynski stepped towards her. "Charlotte." He paused and waited for her to reply. "Fran and Goodman are out looking for you. They thought you were dead."

She stepped past he. "No. Not yet." She walked out of the room.

Campbell caught up with her at the head of the stairs leading down to the main foyer. "Mac, what the hell happened?"

"Where's Fran and Matt? We're leaving."

"Mac, it's over. Solvac's armour never got any further then his place."

She looked at him for a second. "How the hell did you get here. We had you down as dead."

"Yeah I know, Rik told me."

"You know about Mandy?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry John. I really am."

"I know."

She started down the stairs. "Where's Fran and Matt? I want to get out of here as soon as possible."

Campbell stopped her again. "Matt's dead." To his surprise she showed no reaction to that. "Fran and Rik are around somewhere. Kneale's here too, he's in the med-centre. I think you should go there and get looked at."

She let Campbell lead her there. As they entered they ran into Kneale. He stepped back away from them, then, grinned at them. McKenzie glanced across at him. "You better have a good explanation for running out on my unit, Kneale."

"I don't know what you talking about, Captain McKenzie. Your Colonel Goodman ran out on me and Daark in the middle of a fire-fight, he's the one you wanna be questioning."

"Then we have a difference of opinion. You will have a report on my desk two hours after we took down at the Citadel. Is that clear Kneale? Til then stay out of my sight." She turned and headed away without waiting for a reply.

Kneale smiled to himself as he watched her go. Then he stepped over to Campbell. "Didn't think you'd make it."

"Hoped more like. I'm gonna see you swing Kneale. You're gonna hang for that girl."

Kneale stepped closer to him and lowered his voice. "You should have ended it out there when no one was watching. Cos they're gonna do sod all when we get back. Not after I tell 'em what I know."

"Piss off Kneale before I -"

"Before what? What you gonna do? Fuck all, just like the others. It's always gone on and it always will. They'll never stop it and you now it."

Kneale walked away. Campbell watched him go before following McKenzie.

"John, what's the problem?" She asked.

He glanced across at her. "Nothing."

Borrisovich entered the dark cell and waited for the door was creak closed behind him. He stood in silence for a second or so to allow his eyes to adjust to the dim light. Nattasha was laid on a the floor on top of a blanket, sleeping. She'd slept so little over the past day and did not wish to wake her. The room felt colder then normal. A cold air blow in through the window, bringing small flacks of snow with it. Borrisovich looked up at the broken window, pushed slightly outwards with a single long fragment missing. The window had been intact last time he was here. He looked on the sill and floor for the fragment, but could not see it. He looked back to Nattasha. In the half light the blanket seemed to glisten and the edges -

"Nattasha!" He stepped into the pool of blood touched her lifeless body. She was cold to the touch. He lifted her up in his arms. Her eyes remained shut, as if still asleep. Her head rolled

back revealing the large gash in her neck. "Nattasha!" He said again, listening for her breath and checking for a pulse. But there was neither. Dried blood matted her hair and blouse. There seemed too much blood for the eight pints there was meant to be. "Nattasha, no!" He cried, holding her body to him, unconscious of the tears running down his cheeks. "No!" He laid her on the bunk. How could she have taken her own life? Why did he feel so angry about it? Why couldn't she have held on for one hour more? He straightened her skirt and saw the new bruises on the inside of her thighs. Rage filled him, welling up from his stomach until it filled his whole body. He clenched his fists, tensed every muscle until he could hold it any longer, but there was nothing to vent it on, an empty room, a barred door, nothing. He'd failed her, he should have acted quicker. Done something, or at least told her he was trying to do something. But he hadn't. He'd failed her, just like he'd failed Chorski. Now he was missing and she lay dead before him. It was then he realised the courage she'd shown in taking her own life. He held her close against him, staining his uniform with her blood. "I love you." He whispered.

The guard opened the door promptly following his knock. The first thing he saw was the bloody uniform. "Lieutenant, are you -"

Borrisovich grabbed him by the throat and held his pistol to his head. "You heard, didn't you." He spat. "You heard what that bastard was doing to her."

"No sir, I -" Borrisovich cocked the pistol. "We were ordered to ignore anything I heard from inside the cell."

"But you heard. You heard everything he did. I bet you even wished you were in there doing it to her. DIDN'T YOU!"

The guard's jaw quivered. "No. I -"

"Andreyov and his bastard of a son. It was them, wasn't it."

"Yes."

"Just them?"

He nodded.

"Not Chorski."

He shook his head.

"Chorski never saw her?"

"No Sir, never."

Borrisovich's grip loosened for a moment while he figured out what next. "Who was last to her? Was Andreyov? Was he the last one to see her?" It had to be Andreyov, only he could have driven her to that.

"Yes, about an hour before I came on duty."

He grip tightened on the guard again and pushed him back against the wall. "No one enters that room until I get back. Do you understand?"

"But General Andreyov -"

"FUCK ANDREYOV. If I find anyone's been in there I'll shoot you myself."

The guard hesitated for a moment then said. "Yes Lieutenant. You can rely on me."

Borrisovich stared hard into his eyes. "Good." He let go of him, then walked away, heading for Andreyov's office, pistol still in his hand.

Svetlov was waiting next to his Hip. "Here they are." He said as Borrisovich walked out of the building. But instead of bringing Nattasha to the chopper, he was alone and headed straight towards the operations building. Svetlov glanced back at his co-pilot. "Something's wrong." He said before looking round to see if anything abnormal was happening. But it was still quiet. "Something's gone wrong. Stay put, I'm gonna find out." He ran across to Borrisovich. "Pavel." He said, before seeing the blood soaked uniform. "What the hell happened?"

"Get out my way Svetlov."

"What's happened? Where's all the blood from?"

Borrisovich stopped. "She's dead. Andreyov killed her. The bastard murdered her."

"Shit! Andreyov knows then." Svetlov suddenly became more concerned about the safety of his crew than that of Straczynski's daughter. "How did he find out?"

"I don't give a shit. I'm going kill him." He pushed past him.

Svetlov stood watching him for a while then ran back to the Hip. "The whole things off." He panted at his crew. "Andreyov's found out. If we're asked we know nothing about the girl. Borrisovich put us on standby to fly a recon platoon out. You got that." There was a few startled faces from the crew and no doubt questions as well, but he didn't hang around to hear them. He had to stop Borrisovich before he did something they'd all regret.

He caught up with him as he entered the busy operations. "Pavel, don't do this. You'll never get away with it."

Borrisovich looked at him. "Get out my way, or I'll shoot you as well."

"Pavel this is stupid -"

Borrisovich put a shot past Svetlov right ear into the wall behind him. General Andreyov was out of his office in an instant demanding to know what the shot was. Borrisovich switch his aim from Svetlov and fired off three shots in quick succession before Svetlov grabbed his arm. Andreyov ducked as all the poorly aimed shots embedded into the wall around him. Svetlov wrestled Borrisovich to the ground, struggling to get the gun from his hand. A forth shot sounded, for a second neither of them moved, then Borrisovich came up to his knees and

brought the pistol to bear on the evading Andreyov. But before his finger could tighten on the trigger a burst of automatic fire cut across him from Andreyov's body guards.

Andreyov approached the body, eager to see the face of his would-be assassin. He was surprised to see Borrisovich laying dead at his feet. He'd hoped to coach this young man into his fold now he was out from under Chorski's influence. May be his assumptions of him had been wrong.

THE ELEVENTH DAY. Wednesday 17th January.

Kobiechi almost choked. The sight of her former lover laying dead before her was almost enough to tear her heart out. She still loved him. She loved him as much as she did when they parted in Moscow all those years ago. "Yes, that is General Chorski." She almost whispered. "And that's Colonel Andreyov I think."

"Two pilots are burnt beyond recognition. The other two are just ratings, Chorski's body guards I guess." The Captain who supervised the recovery of the bodies told her. He pulled the blanket back over them.

"No leave it." She whispered.

He didn't hear her.

"LEAVE IT! Just Anatoli."

He pulled the blanket off his face. "Do you wish us to leave?"

She nodded.

She kept her composure just long enough for the door to click shut behind him.

When she emerged from the room her eyes were red and puffed up, she hurried past the Captain and returned to her quarters where she washed her face. She returned several minutes later looking more comfortably with herself. "Where are the survivors of the 20th?" She asked Colonel Fromm, the Munchenburg German Garrison's CO.

"They're being held across the road. Do you wish to question them?"

"I do. They might know something."

Captain Narmonov was surprised how well they'd been treated since they'd been captured. The battle between his company and the garrison had been fierce and frantic with heavy loss of life on both sides. It sickened him to know he'd been fighting against his own countrymen, killing them as easily as he had the Allies.

He was even more surprised to see both the Russian and German commanding officer walk into the room they'd been held in. "Lieutenant General Kobiechi?" He snapped to attention. The other three soldiers with him quickly followed suit.

"At ease Captain." She said. "Tell me about the events of the past few days."

"I'm sorry ma'am, I am not allowed to disclose that information to someone who is technically an enemy of the state."

He was right to do so, a good soldier. "Captain, General Chorski is laying dead across the road. His helicopter crashed on it's way here, killing him and Colonel Andreyov. I need to know why he was coming here."

He refused to answer. Standing fast to his first statement. Kobiechi changed her tack. "How are your men?"

"They are fine Ma'am. As far as prisoners go we have been treated extremely well. What about my wounded?"

"They are being treated. So you consider yourself prisoners?"

"Yes Ma'am. You attacked my troops and you are now holding us as Prisoners of War."

"You where meant to take your bloody nose and run back to Pila with your tail between your legs."

"I had my orders, Ma'am. They came straight from General Chorski. I carried them out to the best of my ability."

Fromm spoke up. "Captain. What state is Poland in?"

Narmonov paused. "I'm sorry sir. I don't understand the question."

"There hardly enough of the viable farming land left intact to support the civilian population let alone the entire Russian army. How does Germany compare to it?"

"Poland has been the battle field of Europe for three years, German has not. I don't see the relevance of the comparison. Sir."

"Dam it Narmonov!" Kobiechi snapped. "We are no longer part of the Great Russian Army. The rules have changed. Moscow is no longer in control."

"So you deserted." Narmonov still looked unmoved.

"Use your head Captain. Do you think the Germans would allow us to just saunter in here. We were invited. It was prearranged. We had a deal with the German Government, they allowed us here."

"So we can add conspiracy to your list of crimes." Narmonov's voice remained constant, but his face was just starting to betray his curiosity.

Kobiechi changed her tactics again. "If my division had stayed in Poland and followed out their orders, they would have died. Killed either by a civilian population who'd refuse to feed them, disease, marauders. Or by some mad bastard who would give us another order which would be beyond our capability. How many other divisions do you think will obey those orders?" She calmed her voice. "We had a deal. The German Government let us come here, onto a land that had not been fought over. They are allowing us to integrate into the German Army."

Narmonov remained fixed.

"Captain Narmonov, the war is over. It is finished. The only battle now is the one of survival. Those who try to return to Russia will die. Those who remain in Poland may just survive. But we will live."

Narmonov remained silent for nearly a minute. "You still disobeyed a direct order from Pila."

One of his soldiers stood up. "I wish to join you."

"Velikiy!" Narmonov snapped.

"I don't want to return to Poland." He continued, ignoring his Captain. "I've seen what we're going to face back there. I want to stay here."

"And what of the rest of you?" Fromm asked.

The other slowly stood up. Narmonov watched them, torn between his concessions and his duty. "Yes, we all wish to stay." He finally said, lowering his head.

"Then tell me what action Chorski has taken against the three army groups."

Rutowski sat uncomfortably behind the desk. Since he agreed to the meeting he'd been reaped by doubts. He wished he had someone he could take into his confidence and voice his fears. But there was no-one. Downski was a good man and despite a good working relationship, they were not exactly close friends. Friendship-wise he was closer to Krivda, but he couldn't discuss decisions of division level with a corporal. He wondered if Carling had had the similar doubts before she brought her tanks in. She had placed great trust in him to do that, yet he found it difficult to return that trust. He looked across to her. She looked splendid, dark-eyed and raven black hair; she was not what he'd expected her to be. She was petite and delicate looking. "Are you sure about this Colonel Jones?" He asked.

"Yeah." She nodded. "He's one of the good guys. You can trust him."

"And what if I can't?"

"You must trust somebody some day."

Downski entered the tent. "There's a helicopter approaching."

Rutowski followed him out of the tent into the crisp cold air. He listened, watching the sky, trying to determine what type of helicopter it was before he saw it.

"There." Carling pointed to the small black dot.

Downski held his hand up against the glare from the snow. "A Puma, isn't it?"

"No. Not tall enough." Sanders answered as she and Clancy joined them. "That's Heartless."

"The Blackhawk?" Carling asked.

Clancy nodded. "Yeah, Nelson's ship."

Rutowski watched the dot grow larger. "You can tell from this range?"

"It's the only one we got left flying. The Stallion's somewhere over there and the other Blackhawk went down 6 days ago. That leaves Heartless." Clancy replied.

Rutowski looked at him. The pilot's condition had deteriorate since they'd picked them up. Despite his objections he'd insisted his MO should look at him. The MO reported he had an infection in his lungs as well as abdominal bleeding. He treated him as well as he could, but he didn't expect him to last much longer then a month. Clancy had laughed when he told him. "Well that nineteen months longer then they first told me." But this time he know they might be right.

A second helicopter dropped out of Heartless's silhouette, it's stubby wings laden with rocket pods and drop tanks. "What's that?" Rutowski pointed.

"Looks like an Apache Gunship." Downski answered.

"Standard escort." Carling cut in sensing Rutowski's sudden uneasiness. "Nothing to wary about."

The two helicopters flew low over the south edge of the estate, banked around and back over head. Rutowski's men had cleared the snow from a road and marked it out for a landing pad. Heartless pulled up into a hover before dropping down onto it while the Apache kept watch above.

Rutowski waited for it to settle and the engine tone to drop before walked steadily towards it. Cole slid open the side door and stepped out carrying an AKM. Rutowski hesitated, knowing the crew would be armed, but somehow not expecting it. He shot Carling a look. She nodded

reassuringly at him. Jones stepped out followed by an armed Harris. They walked over to Carling.

"Sir." She greeted him. "This is Major Rutowski, commanding officer of the 2nd Guards Tank." They shook hands.

Above them, the Apache received the all clear from Nelson and dropped down next to Heartless. Both helicopters shut down their engines and silently fell over the estate.

Rodregus stepped out and walked over to one of Rutowski's men holding out a pack of fags to him. The soldier took one and Rodregus lit it for him before lighting his own.

"It appears the soldiers have more trust in each other than the Generals." Rutowski pointed out.

"What do you expect." Carling commented. "They only try to kill each other when they're told to. We're the ones who order them to do it."

Jones looked at her. "Kate, you're getting very philosophical in your old age."

"Yeah." She shrugged. "This war has that effect on people."

Clancy muffled a cough, then turned away from the group and spat out black flem and blood. He staggered over to the side of a building, leaning against it as he threw up. Sanders moved to help him.

"Corporal Krivda, get Mr Clancy back to the medic." Rutowski ordered.

He helped Sanders lead Clancy away.

"How much longer has he got?" Jones quietly asked.

"Month at the most. My medics have given him some anti biotics, but I think he's too far gone. I'm sorry."

"Shame. He's a good pilot." Harris commented half to himself.

Rutowski glanced back at Clancy. He'd thrown up twice more. A stretcher had been brought and Sanders and Krivda had lifted him onto it. Maybe he wouldn't even last that long. He turned back to Jones. "If we are to discuss things, shall we get on with it?"

Rutowski led them back into his tent. Harris remained outside for while then returned to Heartless.

Krivda entered the tent. "Excuse me sir."

"Yes Krivda, what is it?" Rutowski answered.

He handed him the radio message.

Jones shot Carling an uneasy look, but she was too busy watching Rutowski to notice. "General, is everything all right?" He asked.

"No. This is from Lieutenant General Kobiechi. She is concerned that our actions have not gone down well in Poland." He handed the paper to Jones.

Fm: CINC 1st Guards Tank Army.

To: CINC 2nd Guards Tank Army.

Z134519ZJAN.

.Supreme Commander Western Theatre, General Chorski has been killed in a helicopter accident at Munchenburg. Moscow has placed General Andreyov in overall command of TDV with orders to resume hostilities and bolster the advances of our three Army Groups. All 'Return Home' orders have been cancelled. All TDV divisions are at present being rallied to full war footing. No Division is to be spared. Wish to know whereabouts of Major General Straczynski. Following Anatoli Chorski's death, I believe he may be the only other person who may be able to turn this off. Davidov, we have started this war.

.Lieutenant General Marian Kobiechi.

CINC 1st Guards Tank Army.

He looked up from the message at the silent faces.

"He's at Pasewalk." Carling told them. Jones glanced at her again.

Rutowski scribbled down a brief radio message. "Sent her this then try and raise Pasewalk. He told Krivda as he wrote.. I don't care who you get, just get someone." He handed him the message and he left. Then he looked at Carling. "You know Straczynski?"

"No, Sanders picked him up from Hardenbeck along with that pregnant girl. She flew him out there and dropped him off with one of the Colonel's recon teams." She turned to Jones. "How is she?"

"She arrived safely."

"Good, what about her bairn?"

"Safe."

Rutowski sat pondering Carling's words. "Colonel Jones, do you regularly transport Russian officers in your helicopters?"

"I was just passing on what Lieutenant Sanders told me." Carling answered quickly sensing a hint of mistrust return.

Rutowski wasn't satisfied with the answer but it was the wrong time to press them for a better one, there were more important matters at hand.

She pulled the blanket away from Jane's arm touched it with her cold hand. Jane stirred, rolling half onto her back. Meg turn her arm over to reveal the inside of her elbow. Her icicle touch awoke memorise of laying alone in the snow at Muritz. Her eyes shot open and she tensed.

"It's okay dear." Meg said to her as she pressed the point of the needle into her Brachial artery. "Nothing to worry about."

Harris stepped through the door wheedling a intravenous drop stand. Meg heard him approach her and looked round to see him swinging it at her. It crashing down on her before she had time to protect herself, sending her staggering across the floor. "Get out of here!" Harris shouted to Jane, pulling the blankets off her.

Jane ripped the needle out of her arm and rolled onto the floor as Harris through the blankets over Meg before rained another blow down onto her. She stumbled against the wall, her arms up to protect herself from Harris' onslaught. He force her down to her knees and almost into submission. Then from the corner of her eye she caught sight of Harris' colt lent against the

chair. As he pulled the stand back for another blow she dived for it. He saw her move and know what she was after, but could do nothing to stop her reaching the rifle. He caught a glimpse of Jane scrambled across the room and out the door and know he'd almost done enough. He hit her again as she fumbled to get the safety off then pulled the trigger. She laced a burst across the ceiling then walked it down the wall towards Jane. Harris threw the stand at her in one last effort before diving after Jane. Bullets followed him, shattering the glass partition.

"Out, get out that door!" He yelled at Jane, picking himself off the floor and pushing her up and out though the door.

Meg pushed the stand and blankets off her, picked herself up from the floor and took an aimed shot at Harris' back as he disappeared out through the door. "Dam!" She cursed, stepping over the stand and out the infirmary.

"Come on. Run!" Harris shouted, pushing Jane past over the two dead guards and along the dark corridor. He looked over his shoulder several times, waiting for Meg to appear in the doorway. Jane stumbled in front of him and they fell. He grabbed round the waist and dragged her up.

Meg levelled the Colt at Jane's back, waiting for a clear shot at her like she'd been taught. She cursed Harris for blocking her line of sight and was tempted to take him out too, but her orders only referred to Wiste.

Alarms started going off.

It was too late for discretion, it had gone wrong already. In desperation she laced of a burst at the two of them.

Jane was half pushed and half threw herself round a corner, tumbling across the floor. Harris dived flat on the floor as bullets struck the wall above him, showering them both in plaster.

Knowing she'd failed, Meg headed off down another corridor away from them. With her cover blown she had little time to get away.

Harris lay still for a moment, panting. Jane was sat close by, leaning against the wall. He noticed the droplets of blood ran down her legs to her feet and the growing stain on her gown. "You all right? You hit?" Harris panted.

She shuck her head, too breathless to speak.

Three armed guards appeared from the stairs and ran towards them. "She went that way." He shouted at them. "It's Meg Riley. And she's armed. Two of the guards leapt over them and continuing down the corridor. The third stopped next to them. "We're okay. Get after her." Harris told him, rolling over and lent against the wall, still trying to catch his breath. He then followed the others. "And I want her alive." He shouted after him.

Before they were out of sight Louise appeared at the stairs accompanied by half a dozen more troops. "KARL!" She bellowed.

"We're here." He panted. "It was Riley, Meg Riley. She's our bloody spy. Meg pissin' Riley."

She snapped orders to four men and they followed the others. Then she glanced down at Jane. Her face was stern and full of concentration. She turned back to the other two. "Get this area secure. I want the infirmary cleared, and I want to know how she got past the two guards. Stay with her Karl, I'll get the Doc." Then she followed the men.

He looked across at Jane again. "You all right?"

She looked back at his, breathing quickly and deeply through her mouth. "Give me your hand Karl. I need to hold it."

He held his hand out to her. "Why?"

She took it. "Cos I've started."

"What?"

"I've started." She squeezed it hard as another contraction came. "This baby's on his way."

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Jenny knocked on the door and entered the office again. "Excuse me sir. There's a message for Colonel Jones from the Citadel." Bridgewater waved her in and she handed him the message.

"Problems?" Collins asked as he read it.

"Yes, a security breach." He looked up from the note. "If it's all right with you, I think this requires my immediate attention."

"Yes, certainly Alan. Get it seen to."

Jones picked up his papers and shuffled them into a neat pile before placing them in his briefcase. The meeting had been relatively successful. General Rutowski, Collins and Bridgewater had been deep in conversation, discussing the absorbing of the 2nd Guards Tank Army into BAEUR. One of Rutowski main points was to keep the Army Group together, he did not want to see it fragmented through out BAEUR. Another was his insistence that it would still be known as the 2nd Guards Tank Army. After some discussion this had been agreed on. Now they discussed mandatory items of the relocation and Jones had found he hadn't had anything to say for the past half hour. He felt satisfied he'd played his part in this meeting and now had more important things to attend to. He closed his case and stood up. "With your permission, sir."

"Yes, certainly." Collins answered. Thank you Colonel Jones."

Jones walked round to Rutowski and shook his hand. "Sir."

"Thank you for your help Colonel." The Russian said. "I hope this incident can be forgotten, or at least forgiven."

"Yes, so do I." He looking at the other two. "Good day gentlemen."

Bridgewater rose and accompanied him to the door. "That was a gutsy move bringing him back here. You've done well son." He said quietly.

"Thank you sir. But he's only one of three. We've still the other two to stop."

"Keep me informed."

"Yes sir, I will." Jones left.

Taylor was waiting for him in the foyer. "Sir, got a message from Captain Robertson."

"Yes I know. It came though up stairs. Did she say who it was?"

"You're not gonna like it, Meg Riley."

Jones stopped and looked at her. "Meg?" She nodded. "What about Bayard?"

"Something about a baby's on it's way."

"On the way? Dam." He pushed the main door open and continued out to the Mondeo.

Whicket trudged wearily up the stairs onto the tenth floor landing. He pausing momentarily to catch his breath, wishing the flats lifts were still working. He'd not been felling too well over the past few weeks. Not since he'd found that abandoned MLRS weapons store near

Weima. Recently he'd become prone to mouth ulcers and vomiting. Purple blotches had appeared on his skin and constantly weeping sores rubbed painfully against his clothes. His retched, throwing up the bloody contents of his stomach. He was surprised there was still something to bring up. It had been the third time he'd thrown up this morning.

Spitting out the last traces of vomit from his mouth, he swigged down a couple of mouthfuls of water before walked towards one of the flats, it's front door kicked down long ago. Still wrenching, he staggered along the hall, stepping over broken furniture and pottery. An old jewellery box laying on the floor in the bed room caught his eye as he passed the door and he stepped into the room to pick it up. The boxes pink fabric covering had turned grey with age and the decorative carvings were broken off. He open the lid. A miniature ballerina rose up from underneath it and started pirouetting to the Love Theme from Doctor Zhivago. A smile cracked his lips and he walked slowly into the living room, listening to the music box.

Overtured furniture littered the room and tattered curtains flapped in the glassless windows. He walked over to them and looked out over the rooftops. The tenth floor gave him a good view of the devastated city. He brushed part of the window ledge clear with his sleeve, and placed the jewellery box on it after winding the mechanism. The repeating music played as he searched the kitchen for something to eat. There was nothing of course.

He stood back by the windows with the cold wind howled passed him and looked at the city beneath him. It was mid afternoon and the streets were bustling with people. He pulled his sniper rifle off his shoulder and peered through the telescopic sight.

He spotted a lone Warrior APC picking it's way down the centre of one road. Armed soldiers looked out the back, watching the crowds and watching the buildings. Whicket lined up on the soldiers, picking out one soldier, a young girl with long blonde hair tied back in a plait. Her helmet looked two sizes too big and almost drowned her. He adjusted the sight until her image was clear, the cross hairs lined up on the side of her forehead. She was laughing, talking to her mates, oblivious of him watching her. It would have been an easy shot to take. He pulled the sight away from his eye. The Warrior was still a good half a mile away. An easy kill, they wouldn't even know where the shot had come from.

The Warrior turned a corner into a bustling street market and come to a halt, confronted by the milling crowd. The barter markets looking like something out of South America or Africa. There were lots of them around these days, where goods were sold, swapped and bartered for. It was from places like these the ordinary people scrapped a living.

The Warrior edged forward slowly pushing it's way between the ground carpets and rickety stalls. Passed a cat skin seller, clad in his wears, shouting his slogans. Passed the medicine man, holding up brightly coloured bottles that could cure anything from baldness to Rabies. And the charm seller flogging the last lucky charms of some long dead soldiers, guarantied to work: An American helmet with a bullet hole through the front. It bounced off the side of the Warrior, followed by a hail of abuse from her. The blond girl swung her SA-80 round onto the charm seller.

"GET OUT OF HERE!" The old hag bellowed.

More missiles and abuse flow at the Warrior from the other sellers and buyers.

"Driver, move!" The commander ordered. They accelerated forward, demolishing the end of meat stall.

Whicket walked across to another window. A battered car caught his attention as it weaved its way passed the horse drawn wagons and foot weary passengers. He peered at it through the rifles sights, studding it carefully; its smashed headlight, broken nudge bars, dented body work. Behind the wire mesh covered windscreen sat the two people. The passenger was asleep, his head lent back half obscured from sight. The driver looked relaxed, tapping out a tune on the steering wheel. This one would do. He adjusted his grip on the rifle and propped himself into a comfortable position. Then he lined the cross-hairs up on the driver and applied gentle pressure on the trigger and waited.

The crack woke Jones from his shallow sleep. The windscreen had gone, completely shattered and obscuring their vision. But they weren't slowing. Something was up. He glanced across at Taylor. She was laid back in her seat, staring at the roof. He felt the car drift off the road. He grabbed the steering wheel as the front wheel hit a ditch and the car started to slide. They dropped into an ice filled hollow and the car rolled, cart-wheeling over and over. Jones was thrown about the inside of the car, smashing against the body work and flying debris. Then they came to rest on the roof. Jones lay still unsure how badly he was injured. Taylor lay across him. They were both covered in blood, but whose he didn't know. Every part of him throbbed with pain. He laid still and tried to concentrate. Petrol dripped from split jerry cans and live ammunition rolled about him. Staying still may be a fatal mistake he decided. "Marie?" He pulled his arm free.

She didn't answer.

"Marie." He said twisting her round to see her. He put his hand up to support her head he wanted to move her, but pulled it away quickly hold a piece of her shattered skull. Blood, skin and hair still attached. Panicked seized him. Forgetting his own injuries he started kicking wildly at the mesh covered side window, desperate to escape from this steel coffin.

The mess gave way and he struggled through the crushed window and scrambled away from the car. Once across the road he stumbling to his feet, he looked back. The Mondeo lay on its roof, half buried in a frozen drainage ditch. Steam rose from the engine and water oil and petrol pored onto the road, but there was no signs of fire. He took a step back towards it and falling over a pot-hole. He tried to stand but his strength had gone, only allowing him to get to his knees.

A young man appeared above him on the debris mounds. He wore a long weathered cloak and carrying a six foot pole that he didn't need for walking. He reminded Jones a wizard from a Tolkien novel, all grey and weather-beaten. As more people appeared, Jones sensed danger and forced himself to his feet.

Drew walk down onto the road and stopped some feet in front of Jones. He eyed him with a hint of recognition. Jones stepped away from the Mondeo. His hand moving slowly towards his automatic, to be on the safe side. But it wasn't there. The holster was empty. It must still be inside the car along with the Colt Commando.

Drew glanced back at the car knowing he'd seen it before. Hazel joined him. "That's the car." She whispered.

"Mmm?"

"That's the car that killed Mary. He killed her." She scooped up a half brick. "You killed Mary!" She hurled the brick at him. Jones stepped out of the way as it stuck the ground close to his feet. He took a step towards the car knowing the weapons would be his only salvation. "PIG! MURDERING BASTARD!" She hurled another brick.

Several others followed her lead, enticed on by her screaming. A rain of bricks and rocks fell on him. Several found their mark, striking Jones on his arms and legs. Inflaming already badly bruised limbs. Others ransacking the car, dragging out the jerry cans, tool boxes and Taylor's body. Greta and Hansell started to strip her, tearing of her jacket. Greta took it from her and rapped her lifeless baby in it as Hansell squabbled with her before stripping of Marie's boots and fatigues.

Spaatz found the two Colts, holding them about his head he yelled with delight. Galloway snatched one out of his hand and leapt onto the overturned Mondeo and bellowed like a triumphant gorilla. He waved it in the air, pulling the trigger and letting the weapon bucked wildly in his loose grip until the magazine was empty.

The hail of bricks finally forced Jones down onto his knees. Drew pushed his way past Hazel, running at him and kicking him. Jones rolled up into a ball to protect himself. Drew stopped, this wasn't right. He remembered how he'd seen him trying to help Mary. But that was all he had done, try to help her not saved her. But it was more than he'd done. Hazel ran past him and kicked Jones.

"Stop it!" He told her. "Leave him alone."

"Why?" She protested. "What's he ever done?"

"Just leave him!"

The Warrior reared up out of a side street, turning quickly on its tracks to face them. Galloway, now holding the both Colts, turned them both onto it, emptying both magazines into the front armour. The crew ducked inside, slamming their hatches shut after them as bullets ricocheted off in all directions.

Both weapons fell silent. He dropped weapon and grabbed a new magazine from Spaatz's hand. The Warrior's chain gun caught him in mid action slicing him in half before he could reload the weapon. The others scattered scampering away over the rubble as the turret panned round after them. Greta reached the top of the rubble before remembering her baby. She turned back for her, but was met by a hail of fire that cut her down.

Within second the car was surrounded by soldiers. They fired at anyone who stopped or looked back.

Jones struggled to his knees with the assistance of two of them. "You all right Sir?" The blonde haired girl asked.

Jones rose to his feet. His jaw was sore and his limbs bruised.

"Sir?" The girl asked again.

Satisfied that the rioter had been driven away, the Warrior's commander swung himself out of its turret and leapt down onto the icy road.

"Colonel?" He saluted, surprised to see him. "Are you okay Sir?"

"Yes Corporal." Jones replied. "I am now."

"There's a medi-kit in the back. We can get those cuts looked at."

"My driver?"

"We're seeing to him now sir."

Jones took a step towards the Warrior, supported by the girl. He heard a dull thud, like a punch, and the girl let out a sudden cry as she was pulled from him and thrown backwards. Jones turned to see blood sprayed out her neck, at the same instant sound of a single rifle shot echoed over them.

"SNIPER!" One of the soldiers yelled out.

The squad dove for cover. Jones was grabbed by the corporal and pulled down in front of the Warrior. "Where from, anyone see it?" He yelled.

The turret had already whined round to face their rear. "BEHIND US." Someone replied. "PROBABLY THOSE HIGH-RISES."

Jones starred at the girl as she lay on her back in the middle of the street. She was still conscious and in shock. Her hands were at her neck try and stem the flow of blood.

"ANYONE SEE HIM?" Yelled the Corporal.

"What about her?" Jones pulled at his sleeve.

The corporal looked at her. "She's too far out. I'll lose another man getting to her.

"I think I can get her." A soldier with them spoke up.

"No it's too dangerous." The corporal replied.

"He's not gonna fire unless he's got a target, is he Corp. I can get her.

"No!"

"I'll go." Jones added.

"No way, sir. You stay here."

"You can't leave her."

"Then let me."

The corporal hesitated for a moment. "Okay Chas. REST OF YOU WATCH FOR THAT SNIPER!"

Chas edged to the limits of his cover. "Hold on Nickie. I'm coming to get you."

He sprinted out into the road towards her. A bullet struck him in his upper arm, shattering his humerus and throwing him down beside her.

"GOT HIM!" Someone yelled. "RIGHT HAND BLOCK, TENTH FLOOR." "Tom." The Corporal banged the Warriors hull.

"I heard." The gunner replied as the Warriors turret twitched to line up on the floor.

"SECOND WINDOW FROM THE RIGHT." The soldier continued.

A hail of 30mm shells tore into the side of the flats, shattering the remaining glass and masonry, burning through flesh and bone.

Whicket lay motionless, his rifle was flung across the room where it waited for its next owner, beside him the jewellery boxes ballerina performed her last pirouette as the music died.

Eager hand grabbed the girl, pulling her from the ice covered road and into the back of the Warrior. The medi-kit was pulled open and a hurriedly prepared field dressing was pressed into place over her neck wound. She was trying to speak, but only spluttering up mouthful on blood.

"Quiet, don't talk." One of her mate told her as he gave her a shot of pain killers.

Drew kept tight hold of Hazel's hand as he ran, stumbled and scrambled over the rubble. When he needed a hand to steady him, he dropped his staff rather than let go of her. When she fell, he pulled her on, dragging her over the bricks, timber and metal. Behind them he heard the Warriors 30mm cannon opened up and ducked into a hollow in case it was aimed at them. The debris beneath his feet moved, opening up into a hole. He tried to move away but that only caused the hole to open more quickly. He tumbled through before being snatched back and held momentarily in mid air by Hazel's arm. She grapple for a footing to stop herself from plunging after him. She struggled to hold onto him, but she wasn't strong enough. Her grip failed on his hand and he fell the ten feet on to the hard concrete floor. Hazel teetered on the edge momentarily before the rubble moved beneath her and she followed him through. She cried out as she landed.

Drew was straight back onto his feet and searching for a way out of the room, kicking at a door three times before it gave way. He scrambled through into the next room and across to the window.

The street outside was empty, no sign of the others, no sign of the Warrior.

It was then Hazel's cry reached him. Not a cry of pain or discomfort, but a cry of real agony. He crept back to the door. She still lay on the floor where she'd landed, one leg twisted unnaturally beneath her, two red stains marked bullet wounds, one in her stomach, the other in her arm. And grazes on her face, hands and legs from where he'd dragged her along.

"Hazel." He whispered.

"Drew." She panted. "Drew I can't move. I can't move my legs." She couldn't see him, her head was turned away. "Drew, where are you, I can't see you." He stepped away from her. "Drew!"

He stopped in the middle of the street, panting. Where now? What to do? Food, that's it, got to find food and warmth, yes somewhere to keep warm. He started along the empty street. But what of the others, wonder if any of them made it? They'll be long gone by now, surly. Or dead. He stopped. And Hazel? But she's dead now anyway, or might as well be. If you can't run and hide you might as well be... He looked back at the house. But she wasn't dead, not yet. That soldier in the car had stayed with that Mary until she was dead, she didn't die alone, and she'd tried to kill him. All Hazel had done to him was love him.

She was crying quietly to herself when he returned. Tears cut paths through the grim in her face.

"Hazel?" He crouched down next to her.

"Drew, don't leave me, I can't move."

He moved around her so she could see him.

"Hold me." She pleaded.

The Warriors was waved past the Citadel's gate guard and onto the flood lit pad. It drew to a halt along side the puma. Louise walked out of the office block to meet it. "McKenzie's on her way in." She shouted to Jones as he stepped out the rear door.

"Where was she?"

"Pasewalk with MAJOR and Sergeant Campbell. 'Heartless' picked 'em up at first light."

"Is ALPHA ONE airborne?"

"Not yet. They'll be another couple of hours. They had more wiring damage than they thought."

Harris followed her out. "Where's the car?"

"It's wrecked Karl, and Taylor's dead. Sniper took her out."

"That were you got the bruises from?"

"Yes. Sign me in Karl, then find us a Land Rover." He walked off with Louise at his side.
"What states McKenzie in?"

"Just five of them left. She lost Slater, Garret and Daark."

"Who's the fifth person?"

"Kneale from Sims' unit."

Jones cursed under his breath, more dead. "What about the 20th Army Groups?"

"McKenzie said they've sorted it."

"Nothing else?"

"No, just that."

"And Meg Riley?"

"Downstairs in the cells. She's in one hell of a state, the Rock-apes gave her a real kicking."

"I'm not surprise, they're still pissed about Anderson. I'll talk to her later."

"Bridgewater's been in touch." She said. "Collins wants to see you tomorrow morning at 09.00."

He walked into his office and over to his bunk. He caught a glimpse of himself in the cracked mirror. "I could do with a shave." He muttered to himself. "How's our expectant mother doing?"

"She gone into full labour. And it looks like it's going to be a long one. She keeps asking for Straczynski."

He pulled on his combat jacket, then picked up his Kevlar flak jacket. "It doesn't look like his coming. You best get down there and stay with her."

"What about this place? I can't just leave it." Louise sounded like she was saying it out of duty rather than anything else.

He stopped and looked round his office. It hadn't changed, it never did, except to get dustier and dirtier. "This place can look after itself for a while." He walked over to the door, collecting his rifle from the desk. "I'm gonna speak to Meg."

Jones had seen Meg Riley look a lot better then she did at the moment. The Rock-apes had beaten her black and blue. Anyone who was caught breaking into the Citadel would be lucky

to get off lightly, but considering she'd shot four of them buddies before they caught her, she was lucky not to be dead herself.

She looked up at he entered. Her left eye lid was swollen up to several times it's normal size, forcing it shut, her lips were split, her nose broken. "What you going to do with me?" She croaked.

"I haven't decided. It depends on how you co-operate."

"That sound fair enough. What do you want to know? Who I work for?"

"I know that already. I want to know why you wanted Nina Wiste dead."

"She's an enemy agent."

"She works for the Israelis not the Russians. I wasn't aware they'd swapped sides. What does she know that frightens your people so much that their prepared to compromise your position here for it?"

She didn't reply.

"Where you acting on DIA orders, or off your own back?"

She still remained silent.

"Come on Meg, you blow you own cover to take out one Israeli agent who's been out of the game for over six months. You've been on my staff for two years. Between you and Anderson you've kept the DIA informed of every move we've made. So what has Nina Wiste got on your people that frightens them so much?"

"You don't expect me to tell you that, do you?"

"Yes I do. What is Rees and Polmer so scared of?"

"Jesus Colonel. You're living in fairyland."

"No I'm not. I'm firmly planted here in the real world. I know what's going on out there." He walked across to her and lowered his voice. "I know what Captain McKenzie will do to you when she gets back here."

Meg glanced up at him.

"Yes, she's still alive. Your people got it wrong. The ambush missed her, she changed the LZ on the flight out."

Meg lowered her head. "She won't do anything."

"Yes she will, she'll be back and she'll be looking for the person that set her up. And you're in the frame. Now, despite the best efforts of both the DIA and German Government, we are

still going home this spring. What about you? Are you going to start talking to me, or would you rather take your chances with McKenzie?"

"How do you know she's still alive?"

"She is, believe me. 'Heartless' is on route back here right now with her aboard."

Meg looked down at her bandaged hands. "Polmer wanted her out the way because she knows what really happened with OPERATION SLEEPING SATELLITE."

"Go on."

"Polmer was on the operation to grab the stuff."

"Polmer is DIA."

"I'm not the only one who swapped sides, Polmer did as well."

"So why does he want Wiste dead?"

"She led the operation into Olsztyn. Polmer double crossed them, led them all into a trap. He thought they were all dead 'til you brought her back here."

"So it's Polmer calling the shots, not Rees."

She nodded.

"Are you going to tell me why?"

Meg looked up at him. "Why what? I worked for Polmer?"

"Yes."

She lowered her head again. "He promised he'd help me find my mother when we get back home."

"And what about Anderson? Something similar."

She nodded.

Jones looked at her for several minutes. "The DIA are working with the German Government to keep us here. The help you gave them could have postpone the withdrawal by at least a year. Polmer had you working for the wrong side, Meg."

"The DIA are pro BAEUR."

"They want us to stay here. They don't care if it's BAEUR, the Americans or the Russian 1st Shock Army. They don't care who we are as long as we keep the civvies quiet." He walked over and leaned on the table. "You've only got till Captain McKenzie gets back. Then, if your

haven't convinced me you're worth keeping, you're her's. She gets total card blanc. No questions asked. You understand me" He walk back to the door and hammered on it.

"Colonel, what about Wiste. How is she?"

"She isn't Nina Wiste, the woman up stairs is a nobody. She's a civvie who got mixed up in the middle of it all." The door opened and he stepped onto the corridor. He took one final look at her. "Polmer got it all wrong." She didn't say anything or even look up at him like he hoped she would. He left and the door slammed shut behind him.

They were exhausted. The noise from the engines didn't bother any one of them. They slept, Landers sprawled out across the bench seat, her heads lay across Goodman's lap. He sat with Campbell, slumped against each other as if drunk. The only one who was awake was Kneale. He sat in silence by himself staring out the window into the darkness, always alone, always the outsider.

McKenzie was also awake. She also sat alone, leaning back against the forward bulkhead with her eyes closed, her mind racing too fast to let fatigue let her sleep.

A voice reached her over the din. "Mac."

She opened his eyes and looked at Rodregus. He was stood in front of her, looking a lot older then she remembered, or was it just rougher?

"Hey Mac, are you all right?" He asked.

She remained silent, starring at him wondering how old he was and who he'd left behind to fight this war.

"Mac?" There was a hint of concerned in his voice.

"Yeah. Why?" She finally replied.

"You seem a bit -"

"A bit what?"

"I don't know. A bit messed up I guess." He sat down next to her. "Did you know 'em? Any of Simmie's lot, did you know 'em?"

"No. Not really." She leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes again.

Rodregus watched her in silence. Her eye lids flickered and her head slowly started to roll to one side. She snapped upright, opening her eyes again. But this sudden awareness only lasted for a few seconds before her eyelids drooped and her head rolled onto her shoulder again.

Taylor's body had almost been stripped naked, lay beside the car were the youths had dragged her. The body of Greta's baby, still rapped in Taylor's Jacket, lay close by. The bullet had killed Marie instantly, entering the front of her head with a small neat hole, and exiting the back, taking half her skull with it. Jones wondered if she felt anything as he stroked her cheek. "Sergeant, pass me a blanket." He asked.

He pulled one out of the back of the Land Rover and handed it to Jones who placed it over her.

"Where we taking her Sir, the grave yard?"

"No, back to the Citadel." Jones replied. He looked round at the eight civvie bodies. "Get them lot out of here before they start rotting."

The Sergeant snapped orders to the small group of men waiting around the back of a truck. They ambled across to them and started to throw the bodies unceremoniously onto the flatbed.

"Look lively, get a move on!" The Sergeant barked at them.

Jones stood up and walked across to the overturned car, he picked up his Colt from the ground, surprise it was still here. The other one was still in the Galloway's hand. One of the soldier prized it out and handed it to him before dragged his body off the car. Jones placed both rifles in the back off the Land Rover then walked over to Harris. "Sorry about the car, Karl."

Harris kicked it. "Doesn't matter. It was only a heap of rusting junk anyway." He shrugged and walked around it again. It was obvious by the tone in his voice that it meant far more to him than that.

One of the soldiers picked up Taylor's body.

"Put her in the Land Rover." Jones told him.

"But Sir -" He started to say.

"Do as the Colonel tells you soldier." The Sergeant ordered him.

"Yes Sir."

Another handed Jones his automatic. "It was inside along with your brief case."

Jones took the pistol and checked it over before putting it back into it's holster. "Put the case with Taylor."

The Sergeant walked across to them. "What about the car, you want it left here or what, sir?"

"Get it back to the Citadel." Harris replied. "And we'll what we can salvage."

The sergeant shot the corporal sideways glance.

Jones nodded. "Yes, have it taken back to the Citadel by nightfall."

"Yes Sir."

Jones climbed into the front of the Land Rover. "By nightfall." He repeated.

The Sergeant saluted him and returned to his men. Harris clambered in behind the wheel. "Where now?"

Jones took one last look round. "Lets go and find Renzetti."

Donavon's MUTT wasn't hard to find, Harris had regally seen it parked up outside one of Hamburg's many brothels. Jones gave one of the Colts a quick once over as they drove to it in silence. As she pulled up outside a girl sauntered across to them, exaggerating the swing of her hips. She looked attractive from a distance, with bright red lipstick and dark eye liner, but it couldn't hide the gauntness of her face as got near. She wearing a loose fitting top, mini skirt, goose pimples, and looked half frozen. "Hey baby, you got German girlfriend?" She asked in broken English.

"Not at the moment." Jones replied pushing fresh bullets into the Colts magazine.

The girl lent forward against the Land Rovers door, giving Jones and Harris a good view at her ample breasts. "Well baby I so horny, ja. So horny, we make love all day."

"Yeah, maybe." Jones answered not really taking much notice of her. He snapped the mag into the Colt.

"Come on baby, ten dollars." Despite the absence of any hard currency people still talked in terms of dollars.

Jones stopped and looked at her. "Ten dollars."

"Ja, ten dollars for all day." She blew him a kiss.

He glanced down her cavernous cleavage to her dark brown erect nipples. "Nar. Too much, five."

"Five dollars, only blowjob." She grinned. "Me very good."

"I bet you are." Jones glanced back at Harris. "And for him as well?" He asked her

"Ja, ja, five dollars each." She blew Harris a kiss too. "I do you both. But I want you first." She squeezed Jones' leg.

"She's too much for me. What about you?." He asked him.

"Nar, I want the full lot." Harris told her.

"Five dollars not enough. Eight dollars, but no anal sex."

"Seven." Harris offered.

"Okay, seven dollar."

"Still too much." Jones replied. "You can have her." He stepped out of the Landrover and walked into the house.

A rotund woman with trawled on make-up approached him in a similar fashion as the young girl. "Where's Donavon?" He demanded.

"We have no girls call that." She replied. "Can I arrange for one of our other girl to see you?"

Jones peered through the smoky room.

"Well luv, what's it to be?" The woman persisted.

"Look lady, I want Donavon, that's his jeep outside. You can start co-operating or I've have this place torn down."

The smile dropped from the woman's face. "He's not here. He's gone out."

Jones pushed his way past her.

"No you don't." The woman cried out trying to stop him. Jones pushed her out the way again and walked into one of the rooms. The sickly sweet smelling smoke obscured his vision as he looked round the room at the faces of customers. One of them recognised Jones and snapped to attention, the others quickly followed much to the annoyance of the girls, but Donavon wasn't there. Jones returned a casual salute before turning back to the hallway. The woman met him again with two of her bouncers flanking her.

"He isn't here." She told him. "Now I suggest you leave." Jones eyed up the bouncers. They were heavy set opposed to muscular.

"You heard her." Said one of them.

Jones cocked his Colt. The two bounces stepped in front of the woman with sub machine guns in their hands. Jones stepped back into the doorway. "Sergeant Moodie." He shouted into the room. "Get your squad out here now!"

He stepped away from the door as the squad piled out into the hall, still fastening up their uniforms. The two bouncers backed away the eight men stepped out between them and Jones.

"Moodie. I want this building secured." Jones orders. "And disarm them two."

They quickly followed out his orders, disarming the two oafs and herding the girls into the room amidst squeals and screeches of protest.

"SIR!" One of the men shouted out as he found a locked back room door.

It was met a sturdy boot as Jones arrived and was quickly removed from it's hinges. The man piled into he room to more squeals of protests. Jones followed as one of two naked girls was thrown into him. He pushed her away as a half dressed Donavon was dragged out.

"That's him. Get him outside." He said, stepping aside to let them drag him into the hall. He followed, stopping by the old woman. "Next time I ask you for someone, you will get them for straight away, otherwise I'll have one of my PCs park in your front room. You understand me." He walked out ignoring the insults she shout after him.

Harris was waiting in the Land Rover with the girl sat on his knee. He pushed her off and stepped out to meet him; the girl still clinging tightly to him. "You know, this poor mitt's half frozen." He said. "She's not even wearing knickers." He lifted her skirt to show him.

Jones dropping his rifle into the Rover. "Was she as good as she said?"

"It's so bloody cold out here. She couldn't find anything to suck on."

Jones walked back to the MUTT were Donavon had been thrown against the bonnet.

"Where's Renzetti?"

"What do you want him for." Donavon was defiant. "Give me the message and I'll pass it onto him."

He slammed his hands down on the bonnet. "I'm not in the mood to be piss about. Now are you going to tell me where I can find him."

Donavon glanced from Jones to Moodie then back to Jones. "Okay. I'll tell him. I'll tell him you want to see him."

"You've got two hours. I want to see him at Anckelplatz, under the railway bridge. You got that." Jones told him without returning his stare. Then he returned to the Landrover. Harris patted the girl on the bum and sent her back into the house before following him.

Moodie walked over to them. "Good work Corporal." Jones told him. "In the right pace at the right time for once."

"Thank you Sir." He saluted his C.O.

"I need your unit at the Citadel immediately. Report to Lieutenant Mayer, he'll have you're orders."

"Any clue to what's it about."

"To put someone's house in order. They'll be two Warrior's prepped for you."

"Yes sir. The lads will be look forward to it."

"Good, let's go Karl."

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

"Mac!" Rodregus shock McKenzie.

She woke slowly from her sleep, the swaying of the chopper not helping her regain her bearings.

"Captain!" Rodregus shouted at her.

"What? Yeah, okay I heard you." She shouted back, still trying to make sense of the choppers interior. For some reason she expected to see the inside of Black Jack, not Heartless.

"We're just about to land." He continued.

"Why? What's up?"

"No. We're coming up on Hamburg."

She looked at him for a second, they didn't seem to have been in the air long enough. "Oh right. Wake the others up will you." She shouted back before making her way forward.

Nelson glanced back at her as she crouched between the seats. "God you look rough. Glad I don't wake up next to you every morning."

Davis turned round to see who he was talking to, he nodded at her and she managed to smile back. "I was dreaming." She told them. "It was summer before the war at the house we had in Yorkshire."

"Sounds nice." Nelson commented.

"It was. Amy was there too, in her summer frock."

"Maybe it's a sign of thing to come."

"No. She was only three or four. Then Wilson turned up in Black Jack and I had to go. As I flew away Amy was crying, shouting for me to come back. God I miss her."

Davis looked across at Nelson. "Who's Amy?"

"No one you know."

The two tower crane singled out the Citadel from the mass of devastated buildings around it. Davis circled Heartless to the north of it over the river while talking to the Citadel, requesting clearance to land. McKenzie took the opportunity to look down at their home. The pad looked tiny from where she was, the giant Super Stallion sat in the middle, Black Jack was beside the transit shed and two Warriors APCs stood in front of the office block. Between them they nearly took up all the pad.

Heartless dropped down over the river and approached from the west. McKenzie's eyes fell on the Stallion as they draw nearer. It looked in one hell of a state. Nelson had told them it had got shot up, but she didn't expect anything this bad. Davis squeezed Heartless in between it and Black Jack, touching down so gently McKenzie only noticed when the engine tone changed.

"Welcome home people." He sighed switching off the engines and starting his post flight checks. "We hope you enjoyed your flight and will fly 'Seat Of Your Pants Airlines' again."

His humour went unnoticed. He glanced back at her. "I'll stand you a drink once you've finished with debriefing." He promised.

"Later. I'm gonna hit the sack first." She turned back to the cabin. Landers was already out walking back to the barracks, her head lowered and Daark's pack slung across her back. she followed her out and walked across to the small congregation of pilots stood next to the Stallion. "Hey Wilson. Where the hell where you? We had to get that lot to bring us back in." She thumbed towards Heartless, trying to made her voice sound as up-toned as she could.

"Sorry Mac. We got stuck flying the Colonel about."

She greeted Sanders. "Glad you made it. Heard you got a pasting, but I didn't think it was this bad."

"I had us down as gonna a couple of times myself, but we pulled though."

"Who's the new guy?" She pointed to the Russian pilot.

Sanders glanced round at him. "Nikola Downski, ex-Hind jock. Decided he wants to fly a real chopper now."

Campbell stepping out onto the pad before stopping unable to walk on. He sat on the edge of the doorway.

Goodman joined him. "Christ man, I never thought I'd see this place again."

"Me neither." He looked up at Kneale as he stepped out beside them. "You're an arse-hole Kneale. I don't like you one bit."

He dropped down onto the pad. "Who gives a fuck." Then walked away.

Goodman spoke first. "John."

"Yeah."

"He's gonna be trouble."

"I know." Campbell clenched hands with Goodman. "Take care of yourself."

"You too John." Then he got up and followed Landers towards the barracks.

Kneale walked back to Campbell once he was sure Goodman was out of ear shot. "Hey Jock. What's wrong, no-one to go home to?"

"Piss off Kneale."

He stepped closer. "You should have ended it out there when no one was watching. Their gonna do nothing back here. Lets face it pal, she's just another casualty of war. It's over."

Campbell gripped the edge of the deck. "No it ain't, not be a long shot."

"Sure."

Anger welled up in him, over coming his fatigue. "Just piss off Kneale!"

He smiled sadistically at him. "Your a faggot Campbell, she was there waiting for you and you couldn't do it. What was it a limp dick?"

Campbell temper snapped and he leapt at him with a cry, landing two good punches before the flight crews dragged them apart.

"He raped her!" Campbell spat. "Gang raped that girl then killed her."

Kneale lunged at him but was restrained. "You're a fuckin' liar Campbell!"

"It was at Wilhelmsburg. She was just fourteen. And you killed her."

"The Russians did it."

"She was fourteen!"

"She was hiding them!"

"SHE WAS ONLY FOURTEEN!"

McKenzie's stepped between them. "He killed her?" She asked Campbell.

"She was hiding the Russians!" Kneale shouted at her. "I had nothing to do with it!"

"They gang raped her, then killed her. Him and his mates. I want him charged." Campbell demanded.

"What about the others?" McKenzie asked. "Who else?"

"They're already dead. Except for this bastard -"

McKenzie pushed Campbell back. "We'll do this officially. Through the proper channels."

"He killed that girl!"

"Prove it fatboy, you can't prove nothing!" Kneale spat.

She pushed Campbell back again. "Just leave it John. I know okay what they did. I saw her. I know what they did to her. I've told you, we'll do with this officially."

"What's up Campbell." Kneale snorted. "Need the little girlie to protect you."

Campbell surged forward, but McKenzie restrained him again. "LEAVE IT!" She shouted at him.

"He fuckin' raped her, then killed her."

"I know." McKenzie repeated.

"You should have seen her."

"I did. We'll deal with it, okay, through the proper channels."

"Just let me have five minutes with the shit and I'll sort it."

"NO!" She snapped, pushing him backwards onto the ground. "One more step Sergeant and you'll be on a charge as well."

Campbell looked up at her, snarling through his teeth.

"Your still a fuckin' faggot Campbell." Kneale taunted. "You need a piece of fanny to protect you."

"Shut you face Kneale! You're going down for this." McKenzie snapped.

"What's up pussy, what you gonna do?"

She swung round, striking him across the face with the butt of her SA-80. Kneale staggered backwards, blood streamed from his mouth and nose, taken by the quickness of her actions. A knife appeared in his hand. She batted it away with her rifle and he lunged again. His arm went between rifle and strap. She twisted it round and up behind his back, forcing him down onto his knees. She pulled it higher. A cried broke Kneale's lips, but refused to let go of the knife. He thrashed out at her with his free hand, but she was beyond his reach. He fell forward onto the snow; hoping to put her off balance. But she kept hold, yanked her rifle and entangled arm round the wrong way. Kneale cried again as the arm snapped.

She let go and he rolled over clutching his arm.

"Like I said Kneale." She panted. "You're on a charge and you're going down."

She turned to walk away and as she did Kneale kicked out, catching her and taking her legs away. The instant she was down and he was on top of her, pinning her down with his good arm pressed across her throat. She heaved him upwards, throwing him over her head onto the ground before spinning round onto her knees, Kneale met her with his knife ready, but she followed through with the butt of her SA-80 again. Blood spurted out as it tore his cheek open and he slumped back onto the ground. McKenzie knelt there panting for a short moment then stood up and slung her broken rifle over her shoulder. Kneale slowly stood up, taking his time to get his feet. His slashed cheek making him look like he was grinning ghoulishly at her. She pulled her parrebellum and aimed it at his head.

"NO MAC!" Sanders yelled.

"Go on." Kneale taunted. "Kill me."

McKenzie's grip tightened on the pistol grip.

"Come on, right now." Kneale pointed to the centre of his forehead. "Right here."

"No Captain." Campbell told her. "It's what he wants."

"Right here. Right between the eyes." Kneale continued. "Come on pussy. You can do it."

"Captain McKenzie." Colonel Jones shouted from across the pad. "You kill that man and you're on a charge for murder. The system will deal with him."

McKenzie's grip remained firm. Her eye fixed down the pistols sights at Kneale forehead.

"WELL FUCKIN' SHOOT!" Kneale demanded.

"Mac." Sanders quiet voice reached her. She glanced sideways at her. Slowly she lowered the pistol.

Kneale slapped his side. "Shit! I knew it, you couldn't do it could you." He burst out. "You're no better than the others, I thought you had balls 'Kenzie. Guess I was wrong. Your worse than the others, you haven't even got balls, you're just a pussy who thinks she has. A bit of fanny, nothing more then a shagging post."

The pistol came up level with his head again and he shot rang out.

"God dam it, no!" Lieutenant Sanders, disarm her.

She turned to face Jones. "Jesus Charlotte, why'd you do that." He asked.

"Cos he was right, sir. Nothing would have happen about it. You're untouchable while you're out there. We all know it."

"I want to see a full report on this incident and the events leading up to it when I get back. Is that clear Sergeant Campbell, Captain McKenzie."

"Yes sir." Campbell replied

"Good!" Jones' glare remaining fixed on McKenzie. "Lieutenant Mayer, we all set?"

"Rearing to go sir." The Lieutenant replied from near by

"When I get back Charlotte. You've got that long." He turned towards the Warriors and the fireteams waiting beside them. "Lets go then."

Harris walked up to them as they approached. "That looked nasty." He said, handing over a handful of spare magazines for the colt.

"Yeah, for Kneale." He stuck the magazines into his webbing pouches and turned to address the fireteams. "Right, you've all been briefed and you know what to expect. Are there any questions?"

No-one answered.

"Good. Mount up!"

The two teams filed in to their PCs, each man taking their seat beside their stowed kit.

"Not you Karl." Jones stopped his.

He almost looked hurt. "Why not?"

"Louise needs you here."

"Why? Can't she handle things?"

"Make sure this business with Kneale gets sorted. I don't want any loose ends"

"But -"

"She wants you here, Karl." He clambered up onto the Warrior and into the turret." Louise is with Bayard, she'll be needing you there. Look after the place, I'll be back so." He pulled on his headset and spoke into it. The Warriors reared forward out of the Citadel into the city.

Renzetti was angry with Donavon. He had allowed himself to be completely compromised by Jones. The Colonel had been right, he was too inexperienced for this type of work and it had put him in a position that made him feel vulnerable. "Where'd he say?" He snapped.

"Anckelplatz." Donavon shouted back at him, swerving round the remains of two old barricades and turning down a side street. "It's just up here."

"And you said he'll be alone."

"Properly have that Harris bloke with him, but no-one else."

"Knowing Jones, I doubt it."

They slowed down and drove onto the empty road junction. Entey , almost! Donavon jumped on the brakes as he saw it. A lone Warrior waiting beneath the railway bridge. He crunched the gears, searching for reverse as the turret traversed round onto them. He found the gear and checked behind him to find a second Warrior pull across the road, blocking his escape route. The Warrior halted and it's fire team deploying rapidly around it. The first Warrior's engine roared and it backed out from under the bridge towards them, two soldier sat in the open rear hatch with their rifles aimed at the MUTT, a third perched in the turret hatch. The heavy armoured Warrior slid to a halt on the icy surface. The two soldiers stepped out followed by the rest of their fire team.

"What the hell's going on here?" Renzetti shouted, stepping out the MUTT.

Jones appeared from within the first Warrior. "I've got one question Joe." He replied before Renzetti could say any more. "Tell me where the D.I.A. Headquarters is."

Renzetti's glare across to Donavon then back to Jones. "I've told you, the Tonndorf district."

Jones walked across to the MUTT. "Exactly where? I haven't got the time to go looking."

Renzetti glanced back at his driver. "On his own Donavon. You've got a lot to learn." He turned back to Jones. "You got that stuff on Wiste for me yet?"

"I have the file for you." He held out a green folder. "You tell me where their HQ is and you can have it."

Renzetti studied Jones' face. "The Zentraler building on Rahl-au Street. He has the district covered by snipers, so he'll know your coming." Renzetti leaned over the windscreen. "Jones, the file, if you please."

He stepped back towards the MUTT and tossed the file onto the bonnet. Renzetti snatched it up and tore open the front cover.

A photo, three leaf of paper.

Doctor Jane Bayard. (Miss)

Age :- 26

Anglo-Polish decent.

Surgical doctor trained King Collage

Hospital, London.

"Jones!" Renzetti bellowed. "This is not the Wiste file."

"No. The woman I've got back in the Citadel isn't Nina Wiste. Wiste is dead.

Renzetti sank back into his seat. "Donavon, get lost, me and the Colonel have things to talk about."

Donavon reluctantly stepped out and walked over to the nearest Warrior under the watchful eyes of the fire teams.

Jones sat down in his seat. Renzetti glanced round, noticing the two Warriors 30mm Cannons still trained on the MUTT. "I'm listening."

"Are the plans for your withdrawal still going ahead or has this farce had the desired effect?"

"I don't think that is any concern of yours."

"No, maybe not. But it's no secret that my organisation is not in favour of your continued occupation of Hamburg."

"Are you trying to tell me the CIA are responsible for the increase in civil unrest."

"No, you should look to the DIA for that. As you should also look to your own Generals for allowing them to do so."

"We are aware of the conspiracy within our own command structure. And it is being dealt with, as will the DIA. What about the German Government?"

"I can supply the names those people who are responsibly for this operation. I want them exposed."

"Are all these people involved in this operation?"

"No, not directly. They are all DIA sympathisers and their removal will enable us to regain our hold on the German Government, replace Hellor with someone we can rely on."

"And what guaranties will you give me that the new Government will not act hostile towards British Forces."

"Hell Colonel, We both want the same thing. You want to go home, we want you home. If we start screwing around with you guys again, you'll just stay longer."

"You do realise taking out the DIA's Hamburg operation won't kill them off, they'll come back again."

"With Rees out the way, this place will calm down long enough for you and your lot to get out. And with their influence on the Government severely cut back they won't be able to implement such wide scale co-ordinated action for a while. For God's sake I just want you to do to the DIA what McKenzie did to us."

"And what about McKenzie?"

"I've lift her contract. We're not interested any more." Renzetti waited for Jones' reaction.

"And the names."

"Donavon will deliver them to you tomorrow afternoon."

Jones stepped out the MUTT.

"Hey Jones." Renzetti called him back. "Just one more thing. Was Hofler really one of your men?"

Jones paused. "No." He walked back into the Warrior. The fire teams filed in after him, the two soldier perching in the rear door again. The air was filled with the sound of their engines

and they pulled across the junction in front of the MUTT and down one of the road. Donavon stood were the first Warrior had been for a while then returned to the MUTT in silence.

Sergeant Moodie's fireteam moved quickly along side of Rahl-au street. They used every piece of cover they could against the snipers. Corporal Ruther and the other fireteam moved down the opposite side. The two Warriors followed up slowly behind them. Jones watched the two teams from within the safety of the lead vehicle. He took it as read that the DIA knew they were coming. Either from one of their operative within the Citadel; he didn't believe Sergeant Anderson and Meg Riley were the only two, or from one the many snipers that kept watch over the area. If Renzetti was right the three story office block in front of them was their headquarters.

Moodie held up his hand and his fireteam merged into the derelict buildings. Ruther's team followed suit.

"WHAT'S UP?" Moodie's handset crackled.

"I thought I saw movement in the office block entrance." He replied.

Ruther peered through his fieldglasses at the doorway. "I DON'T SEE ANYONE."

"I'm sure I saw Something, on the left hand side."

"WELL IT'S NOT THERE NOW - I'M MOVING UP - KEEP ME COVERED." Ruther waved his team forward.

Moodie followed them up, each fireteam covering the other one as it moved closer to the office block. Moodie's hand went up again. "WHAT NOW?" Ruther asked again.

Moodie snatched his handset up. "Two men in the main doorway, you see them?"

"NO I DIDN'T SEE A THING - ARE YOU SURE?"

"Yeah, two men both armed."

"No. I don't see -" Bullets tore across debris around Ruther's men, cutting him short. "Fuck. Yeah, I see the bastards now. Twat nearly took me head off."

Moodie fired a burst into the doorway. More gunfire was returned onto his position. "Gaz, Leon." He called out. "Through there, try and get a better line on them. Rest of you, with me."

Moodie moved out of his cover, firing as he moved forward. More gunfire, heavy machine gun fire, sent them back into cover.

Moodie keyed the radio again. "Ruther, we're pretty well pinned down here. How are you fixed?"

"SOME - JACO'S COPPED ONE."

"Bad?"

"NAH." More gun fire. "CHRIST! - THIS AIN'T FUNNY ANY MORE."

"Too right."

The two men scrambled back into the cover. "No good Corp. They've got a sniper on the other side."

"Okay. Good work lads." He turned back to the radio. "Ruther, hold tight. I'm gonna call up the C.O."

"TELL HIM TO GET A MOVE ON." Ruther replied between burst of automatic fire.

Jones' Warrior moved round the corner into the line of sight of the fire fight. Cautiously it crawled forward as Machine gun fire from the doorway ricocheted off it's frontal armour. Caution was needed as the Warriors armoured skin was only good against small arms fire. The appearance of a LAW or an RPG would seriously change that. The 30mm Rarden opened up on the doorway, shattering the doors and surrounding woodwork and masonry. The machine-guns fell silent. The two fireteams rushed forward, covering the ground between them and the office block as fast as they could.

Moodie hit the doorway first, immediately going prone in the foyer, covering the stairway in front of them. Two more of his men followed suit, covering the doorways to either side. Ruther's team following them up, ready to take out anything that moved.

The two machine gunners lay dead either side of the main doors.

Moodie keyed his hand set. "Foyer clear. Moving in now." He turned to Ruther. "You take the ground floor and basement. We'll work upwards."

The two fireteams separated, each moving slowly through the shattered building, stepping over twisted steel girders and round lumps of masonry. Moodie pushed his way past a mass of electrical cables hanging down from the false ceiling. "Gaz, take two and check this corridor." The three men disappeared into the unlit corridor and Moodie continued along with the other four.

The sprawling office block reminded Moodie of his old school, a vast twisting building with corridors leading off at all angles to extensions added on to the original building.

Moodie snapped his fingers and two more of the team split off to search another gloomy corridor. Another dozen steps and another corridor to search. Moodie waved his two remaining men onwards while he searched another.

He walked cautiously, keeping close to one wall. His eyes strained to see in the dim light looking for movement. The door at the end stood slightly ajar. He pushed it gently with the barrel of his gun to reveal a large empty room. One of the outside walls had collapsed along with the ceiling above it. Cables hung like vines from broken ducts and smashed furniture littered the floor. Moodie pulled his handset out from his webbing. "Ruther, how you doing?"

"GROUND FLOOR CLEAR - WE'RE WORKING OUR WAY DOWN INTO THE BASEMENT NOW." His replied sounded distant and crackled, the affect of the building. "HOW YOU DOING UP THERE?"

"Clear so far. Just about to head onto the top floor."

"OKAY - AND HEY MOODIE - WATCH YOUR STEP."

"Will do. Out." He pushed it back into it's pouch and headed back to the main corridor.

A distant explosion rocked the building, showering him with plaster and ceiling panels. Choking dust billowed up along the corridor, engulfing him.

"MOODIE - MOODIE!" His radio shouted at his. "MOODIE ANSWER ME!"

"Yeah." Moodie croaked back. "I'm okay. Were was that?"

"ABOVE US - ON OUR FLOOR."

"I figured that much. You keep looking. I'll let you know if I need any help."

Moodie pushed the panels off his legs and picked himself up. The dust was still pretty thick, coating the back of his throat. Somewhere along the corridor he could hear voices.

"'C' SQUAD. SOUND OFF!" He hollered, ticked the names off in his head as his men shouted back. Leon. Ben. The new boy; what was his name. Sal and Jean... "GAZ! SOUND OFF!"

Nothing.

"GAZ ANSWER!" He broke into a sprint, heading towards the corridor he sent him down.

The rest of 'C' squad fell in behind him. He hurtled round the corner into the first corridor, straight into a burst of automatic fire. He collapsed, stumbling head long onto the floor. Leon followed his, tumbling across the end of the corridor into cover. Another burst following him. Jean waved the rest of the squad to a halt.

"Gaz, Dick can you hear me?" Moodie yelled out.

Again, nothing.

Leon crawled up to Moodie. "Do you think they're still alive?"

"Fuck knows. Cover me."

He scrambled away from the wall and dived across the corridor into a doorway. Leon fired a burst from his LSW. A short burst was fired back in reply.

"Gaz. Answer me!" Moodie shouted from the doorway.

Still nothing.

"Corp." Leon pulled a grenade from his pack and showed it to him.

Moodie nodded and held out his hand. Leon tossed it across to him. Moodie caught it, pulled the pin and popped the trigger; "FIRE IN THE HOLE!" and throw it along the corridor. It went off, bringing down more ceiling and dust. Leon broke his cover and charged over the fallen ceiling, firing off short burst from his HK. He leapt over a fallen roof beam landing close to convulsing body. The man lay face down among the debris, his limbs twitched uncontrollably. His broken M-16 lay next to him. "Serge. It's all clear!" He yelled back.

Moodie climbed over the beam. "Jean, Ben in there. Shout up when you find the others. You three down there."

He stopped next to the Leon. "You crazy bastard, you do know you don't get sent home if you get wounded any more."

"Yeah sure Serge." He grinned insanely back at him. "What about this guy?"

Moodie rolled him over. "Leave him. He'll be dead by tomorrow."

"Serge. In here." Jean shouted from a side room.

Moodie joined her.

"They got all three of them. Booby trap on the door."

"You, Ben and the new kid get em back to the Warrior. Then get back up here. No the double." He ordered.

The three bodies were pulled from the rubble as Moodie keyed the radio again. "Ruther. You there?"

"YEAH - WHAT YOU GOT?"

"Booby trap. Got three of my blokes. I guess the Colonel got the right place."

"CERTAINLY LOOKS THAT WAY."

"Yeah well, watch yourself, Out." He pushed the handset away. "Leon, Sal. We've still got the top floor to clear."

They crept to the stairs, Moodie in front moving cautiously, checking the corners. Leon and Sal followed, evenly spaced out. He reached the landing and stopped a few steps short. Crouching so the floor was at eye level and he looked around at the doors. There was more

light up here coming in through the skylights. It looked clear and waved the other two onwards onto the landing. "Sal, that way. Leon down there." He pointed them down two side corridors before heading down the main corridor.

He scoured the rooms leading off the corridor. He kicked an empty cartridge, it rattled across the floor and he froze, watching for any sign of movement. But there was none. He crouched down and picked it up. It was cold and tarnished. It could have been laying here for months.

"Serge?" The sound of Jean's voice echoed around the empty building.

"Up here, second floor." He shouted, walking back into the corridor. Something above him caught his eye. It dropped from the skylight, separating into two. The ball shape grenade hit the top step and rolled over the edge and bouncing down the stairs.

"Jean, get off the stairs!" Moodie yelled out as he dived forward. "JEAN!"

The grenade went off as he reached the top of the stairs. "Jean, can you hear me?"

He rolled over and laid a burst up through the skylight.

Sal joined him. "What happened?" She asked as Leon joined her.

"We've got one up on the roof." He backed away from the skylight, still watching it. "Anyone seen a way up?"

"No." Leon answered.

Sal shook her head. "Did he get anyone?"

"Jean was on her way up." Moodie edged to the top of the stairwell, his rifle still aimed at the skylight. Part of the stairs had gone, collapsed under the force of the explosion. "Jean, Ben. Sound off!"

"Yo Serge." Ben's shaky voice shouted back.

"Ben. What's it like down there?"

"Stairs are gone. There's a good ten feet drop."

"What about Jean?"

"Shit! You had to ask. She copped a bad one, real bad. And the new kids dead."

"What about you? Can you get her outside?"

"Yeah, but I'm gonna need help."

"Get moving then. I'll get Ruther to give you a hand." He backed away from the stair, pulling out his handset. "Ruther. I've got three men down on the first floor. Get them outside."

"YOU'RE GETTING CARELESS." Ruther's distant voice replied.

"Stop getting cocky and jump to it." He pushed the handset away, still looking up at the skylight. "Leon, give me as bunk up."

Leon cupped his hands and he stuck his foot into it and pulled himself up through the skylight. Grabbing hold of the edge of the roof, he struggled out into the open. A shadow loomed above him and a butt of a rifle stuck him across the side of his head. He lost his grip and fell. Sal also saw the shadow, she fired a burst at it as it dived back out of sight.

"I hit him, I fuckin' hit him." She shouted moving forward to where Moodie lay on the floor.

"Give me another bunk up." Moodie picked himself up. He handed her his rifle and took out his pistol.

He clambered back up through the skylight. This time more cautiously. He peered over the edge. A single figure moved quickly across the flat roof, heading for the lift housing. Moodie fired a couple shot after him. Both missed. He hauled himself up onto the roof and rolled away from the skylight. He could see the end of the mans rifle sticking out from behind the housing. He lined up on it as it moved up closer, it turned towards him. Moodie fired. The bullet hit the rifles front grip, smashing it. The man cried out as the rifle flew from his hand and bounced across the roof. Moodie scrambled to his feet and sprinted towards the housing, throwing himself prone as he hit the corner. The man was gone. Fresh blood on both the rifle and housing wall told him he'd hit him. He sat up, looking along both walls.

"Serge!" Sal shouted up from below him. "Get a move on. We've got a fire down here."

Moodie glanced across to the skylight. A thin column of smoke drifted out from it. He stood up and slowly crept along the wall, following the trail of blood. At the next corner he halted and listened. From below deep in the heart of the building him he could hear gunfire from Ruther's fireteam. But there was no sight or sound of his gunman. He peered round the corner. Nothing. He moved round it and along the wall again. Something moved behind him. A man running. Moodie turned back. The gunman was heading back across the roof towards the front of the building. Moodie fired a shot at him, but it missed, then gave chase, sprinting across the roof after him. The man stopped at the edge of the roof and turned back to Moodie, a pistol in his hand. He fire a single shot. It hit Moodie in his right shoulder, taking him off his feet. The gunman turned back, looking to the two whitewashed Warriors below him. He pulled a LAW out of it carrying case. Moodie watched him. The gunman primed the weapon and flicked up the sight. Moodie swapped his pistol over to his left hand and aimed it towards the gunman. Holding it at an odd angle, the pistol felt alien in him left hand. He pulled their triggers. The bullet hit the gunman in his leg causing him to cry out. The LAW missed, hitting the ground close to Jones' Warrior. Both 30mm cannons swung up towards the roof and the figure perched on the edge. Moodie watched the gunman as he tossed the empty LAW tube to one side and pulled a second launcher out of the case. Moodie pulled the trigger again, this time he was determined not to miss, but the metallic clip told him his pistol was empty. The gunman primed the second LAW, then glanced across at him and winked. Below him both Warriors opened up, tearing the edge of the roof to pieces. Moodie ducked back as shells ripped through the roof in front of him. After two or three seconds the cannons fell silent. The gunman's shredded body lay motionless. Moodie lay still for a little longer until he

was sure the Warriors had finished, then crawled forward and pulled the LAW out of his hand before scrambling back to the skylight.

Thick black smoke billowed out the skylight. More smoke drifted out of the top floor window. Moodie wondered whether he'd left it a bit to late to get back down.

"Sal." He yelled down through the skylight.

"Christ Serge. Get a move on." She shouted back from the blackness below. "We're nearly cooking."

Moodie swung his legs over the edge and dropped down on to the landing. Sal and Leon grabbed him almost before he landed and pushed him down the stair. Stumbling out of the thick smoke, they found the stairs down from the first floor had almost disappeared. Below them two of Ruther men were waiting in the foyer. Moodie half fell, half climbed down the collapsed stairs, the other two followed close behind him.

Below them Ruther had cleared the first level basement, a labyrinth of tunnels and boiler room that only seemed to help the defender. His fireteam hadn't got of lightly either. He'd lost three men. Two dead, one wounded to fire from well thought out positions. Now the problem was the next level. A deep stairwell lead down some 30 or so feet below ground to a heavy blast door. So far every landing had been guarded. These men must be suicidal, Ruther summarised. They held the landing until they were killed. Only two were left now. One on the last landing, the other at the blast door. The noise in this confined space was intense. Bullets ricocheted of walls around them, masonry showered down onto them threatening to bury them at any second. Ruther had just about had enough. He fired a burst blindly down onto the landing below him. Above him his men did the same, none of them wanting to risk being shot. Ruther slapped his last mag into his rifle. He'd had all he could take, his patience had run out.

"Mal, chuck me a grenade." He shouted back to one of his men. "Rest of you fall back."

Mal shuffled down a few steps. "You sure about this? I don't fancy this staircase disappearing from under us."

"I'm down to my last mag, how about you?" He glanced back at his men. "I told you lot to fall back."

They moved back up the stairs.

Ruther glanced back at Mal and pulled the pin on the grenade. "You ready?"

Mal shuck his head. "No."

"Too bad. FIRE IN THE HOLE!" He dropped the grenade down onto the landing.

It went off. Rocking the stairwell and throwing up a thick cloud of dust. They leapt over the hand rail onto the stairs below him. There wasn't a lot left of the landing. He leapt over it on to the last flight of stairs. The last remaining guard was still reeling from the shock of the

grenade. Ruther fired a burst into him, dropping him on the spot, before looking around and checking the rest of the stairwell. It was empty, the blast door was firmly shut.

"Mal." He shouted up the stairs. "All clear."

He appeared out of the dust. Ruther tried the door, but it was bolted from the inside.

He glanced across at Mal. "Get our wounded back to the Warriors and tell the Colonel we've found a shelter."

He disappeared back into the dust, shouting orders to his men. Ruther picked up the dead man's M-16 and searched his body, pocketing the spare mags, his pistol and food rations. He looked up at the sound of someone coming back down the stairs.

Jones emerged from the dust, followed by three others. "What we got here soldier?" He asked.

"Blast door Sir." Ruther replied.

Jones looked at it. "Can you open it?"

"No Sir. All ready trying. It seems to be bolted from inside."

"Good." Jones looked down at the body. "What's the body count?"

"Five down here, plus what ever Sergeant Moodie got." Ruther thumped the door. "Why good sir?"

"That mean they're still inside. We've got them trapped." Jones turned back to one of the men behind him. "Can you blow this place?"

The heavily set man walked down a few steps and looked round at the stairwell. "Yes sir. It'll probably take the whole of this place down with it though."

Jones looked at the door. "Well take that chance. Will there be another way out of this shelter?"

The man shrugged. "It looks like a local government shelter. There'll probably a vent shaft somewhere. But that's about all."

Jones nodded. "Right, find it and set charges there as well. I want this place sealed." He turned and headed back up the stairs.

Ruther greeted Moodie with a hearty slap on the back. Both of them looked rough. Moodie's right arm hung in a sling. Ruther's face, hair and uniform were grey with dust.

Jones walked over to them. "You've done a good job men. When we've finished here get your men back to the Citadel."

"Yes Sir." Moodie saluted.

Jones walked back towards the building. The heavily set man walked out to greet him.
"We've uncovered the shaft sir. Everything is all set."

The explosion rocked the shelter. The lights went out and part of the ceiling collapsed. Rees picked himself up of the floor. The last he remembered was sitting at his desk reading the file on Major General Straczynski. Now he was in complete darkness. Pitch black, he couldn't see a thing and thick choking dust clung to his throat. His desk was gone, as was his chair.
"Liddel" He choked.

"I'm over here." She coughed.

"Where? I can't see a bloody thing."

"By the wall. I think I'm trapped. I can't move my legs."

Rees scrambled around on his hands and knee. "Hold on girl. There's a torch round here somewhere."

He knew there was, it had been on his desk next to the filing tray. God knows where it was now.

"God sake, hurry up." Liddel cried out.

He found it and turned it on. It was of little use though. The beam hardly cut through the dust filled air. He crawled forward towards Liddel. She was laid on her back. He could see her now, his eyes were starting to become accustom to the dull light. She was badly cut and a concrete beam lay across her abdomen. It was about a foot square and over six feet long, there was no way he could move it alone.

Liddel grabbed his shoulder. "You've got to get me out of here."

"I can't, the beams to heavy. I've got to get some help." He looked round the shelter, there was a light coming from near the door. "Look hold tight. I'm going to find the other two."

Rees crawled away from her towards the shaft of light. With any luck the other two would be in a better way. But he was out of luck. He found them both buried under the rubble. But worse than that, he found the source of the light. It was a fire, burning fiercely, eating up the air in the shelter and to make matters worse, it was slowly spreading to the ammunition store. Rees turned back to Liddel.

"Rees, What's going on? Is something burning?"

He stumbled back to her side. He could smell the smoke now.

"There's a fire. Isn't there?" She asked him. "I can smell it."

He nodded.

"God sake you've got to get me out of here." She demanded. "I don't want to die in here. I don't want to be burnt alive."

"I can't lift this beam."

"For God's sake, you've got to."

The fire flared up as it reached the first ammo box.

"Rees!"

The second ammunition box caught. A fire ball rolled across the ceiling of the shelter. They both turned away from it as it rolled past them scorching their clothes.

"Please." Liddel was crying. "I don't want to die."

Then fire reached the rest of the ammo.

The ground heaved underneath the Warriors as the shelter went up. Clouds of dust and smoke billowed up through the doors and windows of the building and part of it collapsed in on itself. Jones watched from the turret. Satisfied with the result. With any luck it would keep the DIA quiet till the withdrawal was finished. After that they could do what the hell they liked, he didn't care, he'd be home, in England.

He sat back into the turret. "Okay Lieutenant Mayer, back to the Citadel."

THE TWELTH DAY. Thursday 18th January.

The wind was cold again. It howled straight off the Elbe river and onto the Military cemetery. Karl hated this place more than any other he knew. Yet today it was not duty that called him here, but to her. She'd been born at five that morning and he'd held her as she fought for life with every breath she took.

In the hours that followed he'd scoured every hospital within Hamburg, both military and civilian for an empty incubator, but to little success. Everyone he found was occupied by a baby who had equal need for it as she. He eventually came upon one that was occupied by a small underweight boy that had been born three months premature by caesarian section. The boy wasn't given much hope, his lungs hadn't properly formed and he couldn't breathe

unaided. Karl stood watching him through the clear plastic cover as he cling so desperately to life while he found himself willing him to slip away. He felt like some macabre Angel of Death, waiting for the last breath to leave his tiny body so he could snatch his soul and flee back to hell with it. Instead he took the incubator and fled back to the Citadel. But it had been for nothing. As the morning grow brighter she grow worse until lacked even the strength to suckle or to cry out. Karl watched her sleeping in silence, her sole slipped away to join that of the premature boy.

Samders found the padre sat in his office reading a passage from his battered bible, she all but kidnapped him and dragged him back to the Citadel to baptise her before she died. She too was nearly to late, Emma Bayard died seven minutes after receiving her name.

He spoke her name now as he condoned her body to the frozen soil. Her single thin grave was squeezed in between the multiple graves of the dead soldiers. BAEUR had originally refused to let them bury her here, they said she was a civvie and therefore should be buried in a civvie mass grave. But Sanders refused to let that happen. She woke Bridgewater in the early morning and threatened to take it to Collins if he didn't get them to reverse their decision.

Finally they relented.

It meant she was recorded, nothing more than a name on a piece of paper with a number and a grid reference next to it, but it meant she existed and was recorded as a casualty of this war.

Karl now understood why Jones was so meticulous about the operation reports and especially the casualty lists. It meant they all had existed and would be remembered. He hoped one day someone would erect a monument here for all the dead that lay beneath them. It would bear all their names so they would not be forgotten. And one day, when it was build he'd make sure all their names would be on it. Including Emma Bayard.