

PART I

The Price of War
For the Glory of France

Chapter 1

All the Way, Sir

*Phong Dien, Republic of Vietnam,
near the DMZ
Thursday, 8 May 1969*

First Lieutenant Stan Castleberry, Executive Officer of Alpha Company, and Sergeant First Class Alan Grainger, the Field First Sergeant, turned the corner of the orderly room hooch and spotted their company commander walking at a brisk pace several hundred feet ahead.

“Hey Six, wait up!” shouted Castleberry.

“Alpha Five, Top! Where the hell have you two been?” asked Captain “Kip” Glynn in a slightly agitated voice. “I’ve been looking all over for you.”

“We were down in 1st Platoon inspecting weapons. I thought you knew. Keller came down in a big shitty—said we were in deep shit with the ole man.”

“Keller’s going to be in deep shit when I get my hands on his young ass,” answered the captain, his agitation ebbing a bit. “If he weren’t the best damn clerk in Battalion—not to mention the best typist I’ve ever seen—I’d ship his ass to the field in a skinny minute.”

“What’s up, boss?” asked Castleberry.

“We’ve got a briefing at Battalion. We’re going on a big op-

eration in A Shau Valley, and the op order is scheduled in about three minutes. XO, get with S-4 and coordinate logistics. Top, work out the airlifts and air support with S-3 Air, then go over the fire-support plan with the artillery boys.”

“No problem, sir,” came their practiced responses, almost in unison.

“Sir, I thought the jar-heads cleaned that place out back in January. What the hell are we going in again for?” asked Castleberry.

“From what the S-3 told me about twenty minutes ago, the NVA rebuilt a base camp there—at least battalion size. This is going to be a big operation, probably the whole brigade,” answered Kip.

“Holy shit!” said Castleberry. “This could be the big one. What do you think, Top?”

Grainger gave him a broad grin. “I’m ready to go after those slimy little bastards. We’ll kick their ass all the way back to Hanoi!”

They arrived at the battalion TOC just as the room came to attention for the battalion commander. “Be seated, gentlemen. Three, what’d a you have for us?” asked Lieutenant Colonel Mike Gravel, Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division.

The S-3 started his briefing. Stan whispered to Kip, “Just in time—the ole man didn’t notice we came in at the bell.”

“Pipe down,” answered Kip with an agitated wave of his hand.

“Colonel Gravel, gentlemen, we received orders from Brigade last night to conduct a search and destroy operation in A Shau Valley—to clean out Enemy Base Area 611. Elements of the 3rd Marine Division cleaned out this same area back in January and February. It looks like the NVA are back in force. Gentlemen, this will be a brigade operation, with our battalion as the spearhead. We kick off with an air assault into LZ Purple as indicated on this map at coordinates Oscar Zulu 445417.”

“The enemy situation is as follows. During the past two months, Corps intelligence has detected considerable enemy

activity in the vicinity of Ap Bia Hill (Hill 937) just east of the Laotian border. The Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos has been as busy as a freeway during rush hour. We believe they have at least one battalion entrenched on 937, and another—maybe a battalion minus—just south in this heavily vegetated area. Corps also detected smaller units located here, here, and here. These locations are marked on your overlays.”

After a brief pause, the S-3 continued, “Our mission is to conduct an air assault beginning at 0600 hours, 9 May 1969. First, we’ll go into LZ Purple and secure it as a logistics base for the battalion. Next, we’ll conduct forced marches to LZs Red and Blue located here and here. Both of these are less than a klick from Purple. Brigade doesn’t want to chance three battalions landing on hot LZs at the same time. Upon successful completion of this mission, the battalion will reform at assembly point Bravo-3, just north of LZ Blue at coordinates Oscar Zulu 442389. From here, we’ll conduct search and destroy operations into Area X-ray, just south of 937. When Red and Blue are secured, the 1st Battalion will land at LZ Red, the 3rd at LZ Blue. Until they land, this is entirely our show. Any questions?”

Hearing none, the S-3 continued at a slightly higher pitch, “Alpha Company!”

“Airborne!” answered Kip, matching the S-3’s pitch with a firm commanding voice.

“Alpha Six, you’ll lead the battalion’s assault on LZ Purple. Kip, this is likely to be a hot one—we need your best effort.”

“All the way, sir,” replied Kip.

“Good! As soon as Purple is secure, Bravo Company will land and make their way to Red, followed by Charlie, who will secure Blue. Delta Company will relieve Alpha, secure Purple as the battalion base, and remain in reserve. Now, gentlemen, take a look at the op order being passed out. I believe we’ve included all the details you need. We got the brigade order late yesterday and worked all night to put this together. Let me know if you see any holes.” He paused several seconds, then added, “Gentle-

men, take fifteen or twenty minutes to study the order. Then, company commanders will meet with the colonel and me. Company representatives will meet with the S-4, the S-3 Air, and the fire support coordinator. Any questions?”

“Damn!” exclaimed Stan amid the buzz of conversation, “Looks like we get the short end of the stick again.”

“Not a problem,” answered Kip. “Somebody’s got to do the heavy lifting, and the ole man knows our boys can handle this shit better than anyone else in Battalion.”

“Airborne!” answered Grainger.

“Top, make damn sure we have enough slicks for the whole company to be in the air at one time. I want the first and second platoons, the company headquarters, and the artillery FO in the first wave. That LZ doesn’t look big enough to handle more than half the company, but I want the entire company in the air at once. That’s at least two platoons, plus you, me, the FO, and the kilos in the first wave, with the rest of the company right behind us in the second. Got it?”

“All the way, sir!”

“Stan, I want you to start lining up resupply as soon as we secure the LZ. I want those birds in the air no more than 45 minutes behind us. You know what to bring—all the usual shit.”

“Sure thing, sir.”

“And Stan, you’d better have some dustoffs* standing by. This may be bad. We may need them. OK?”

“OK, sir. I’ve got you covered.”

* Dustoff is the slang term for medical evacuation helicopter.

Chapter 2

Alpha Six is Down

Kip Glynn was the most respected officer in Battalion, maybe even Division. He had served as company commander longer than anyone in the 101st. Normally, commanders rotate to staff positions after six months, but Kip was an exception. His company was by far the best disciplined and most proficient in the division, and everyone from the battalion staff to the division commander recognized his extraordinary leadership. This was his second tour in Vietnam; in three weeks he would rotate back to the States. Most men would have been reluctant to lead a dangerous mission so close to rotation, but Captain Glynn never considered the danger.

Following the battalion briefing, Kip, Castleberry, and Grainger spent the rest of the morning huddled in the orderly room with platoon leaders and platoon sergeants, refining plans for the assault. Except for two fairly new platoon leaders, the entire company leadership had at least one hot LZ under their belts.

Sergeant Grainger secured the aircraft his CO wanted. Battalion had planned to use the same aircraft for the second half of the company, but using Captain Glynn's vast reservoir of credibility, Grainger persuaded the S-3 to ask Brigade to divert aircraft from other battalions, since they would not be used otherwise until all LZs were secure.

The company was so well trained in air assault operations

that rehearsals were not needed, although preparations were thorough in every detail. By noon, platoon leaders were released to work with their men. The CO, XO, and Field First spent the afternoon and much of the evening checking equipment, answering questions, and helping soldiers get mentally prepared. Kip went to bed just before midnight. He slept for a few precious hours and was awakened at 0300 by the company clerk.

“Thanks, Keller. I guess it’s going to be a long day, huh,” said Kip as he sat on the side of his bunk, lacing his boots. It did not take long to get ready. He slept fully clothed, and Keller had lain everything out the night before.

“Where’s my map case?”

“Right behind you, sir.”

“Oh, OK. . . . Oh, Keller, wake up the kilos and tell them to check the radios. I want new batteries—I don’t want any dead batteries in the middle of an ass-kicking contest. And make sure they have us running on the battalion net as well as the air force, the artillery, and the 101st Aviation nets. I want to be able to talk to the air force guys and the ships taking us in without having to switch frequencies.”

“Will do, Captain.”

There were advantages to being in the same job for eleven months. Captain Glynn had high standards and a daily routine so predictable that every member of the company knew what to expect from him. They worked together like a precision drill team. His radio-telephone operators, who were called kilos because their call sign was Alpha Six Kilo, could anticipate commands simply by watching his facial expressions. His company/battalion net operator, a PFC named “Red” Campbell, was extremely precise at issuing orders to platoon leaders. In fact, platoon leaders never thought twice about getting their ass chewed by Six Kilo because they knew it was the CO talking, not some red-headed, freckle-faced kid from Indiana.

By 0445 hours, the entire company was dressed, fed, checked, and sitting on the flight line in two waves. Each wave

consisted of ten groups of eight to ten soldiers. They sat quietly, awaiting arrival of the twenty Hueys that would deliver them to LZ Purple, a 45-minute flight from their base at Phong Dien. They were scheduled to lift off at precisely 0515. At 0500 Kip looked at his watch, then to the skies. He could hear the familiar *whop, whop, whop* of the Hueys approaching the landing strip and their eager passengers.

“Red,” said Kip as he motioned to his RTO, “Raise the lead ship. Tell the pilot I’m going in with him.”

“Roger that,” replied Red. “Iron Eagle Two-niner, this is Avenger Alpha Six Kilo. Over.”

“Six Kilo, this is 29er. Over.”

“29er, this is Six Kilo. My Six wanted you to know that he will be aboard your ship and that he expects to have better cabin service than we had on your last flight. Over.”

“Six Kilo, this is 29er, tell Alpha Six to kiss my ass. Out.”

“Sir, 29er said he’d be happy to have you aboard,” said Red in a calm, serious tone—never betraying his banter with the lead helicopter pilot.

As Kip turned to hear Red, he saw Grainger coming toward them, trooping the line, making one final check of the flight manifests. He reached the CO as the first wave of helicopters landed. Shouting over the din of the Hueys, Kip gave the Field First one last instruction. “Top, get on the horn and let Alpha Five know when we lift off. Tell him to get the second wave loaded and in the air, then get those resupply ships loaded and ready to go, as planned.”

“Roger, sir.”

When the first ten ships landed, Grainger signaled the first wave to mount up. After clearing the flight line, Grainger boarded the lead chopper, where Kip had already donned a headset and was talking to the pilot, CW4 JC Mitchell. “Chief, this is likely to be a hot one. The whole damn NVA is probably waitin’ on us.”

“Let the little bastards wait. They take one pot-shot at my

ass, and I'll blow them to hell." The chief turned to look at Kip as he gave a thumbs up.

"Say, Chief, who's your new cell mate. Looks like you've got a new flying buddy."

"This is CW1green ass Agular. He's about as virgin as they come. He just got in-country last week and has been flying the milk runs, but I'm sure he'll get his cherry popped before the day's over. Right Amigo?"

"Damn right," answered the CW1.

"Hey, Chief, I'm Kip Glynn, CO of this outfit. Glad to have you with us. Whatever you do, don't pay any attention to all the bullshit. I've been flying with Iron Eagle 29er for over eight months, and he talks a bad game. But when the chips are down, he's the best. You couldn't learn under a better man."

"Thanks, Captain."

Kip's seat was back-to-back with the co-pilot. He had been facing forward, talking to Mitchell and Agular since take-off, and when he turned to the rear, everyone in the cabin was asleep. The FO and his RTO sat in the center of the jump seat facing him, with two soldiers from the first platoon flanking them. Red, Grainger, and Grainger's RTO sat next to him with their backs to the cockpit, while two other RTOs sat on the floor, sandwiched between the two rows of seats. As soon as he settled comfortably into his snug little corner, Kip was also sound asleep.

It was a pleasant thirty minutes—so peaceful, despite the deafening sound of the Huey cutting through the dark gloom of the early morning. Kip's worries melted away, and the minutes passed slowly as his unconscious mind took control. He could see himself boarding a spanking new 707. The fatigue of a long year in Vietnam evaporated as he sat reclining in the great white freedom bird, at last on his way home to his beloved wife, Amanda, and their two boys.

In one miraculous moment, the freedom bird swept halfway around the world and touched down at the air base in Oakland. He could see his family just beyond the tarmac near the passen-

ger gate, waiting patiently as he cleared customs. As he drew near them and reached out, they faded away. He entered the passenger terminal, a vast labyrinth with glass enclosures separating the incoming troops from those departing. The long line of departing troops had a pale, ghostly look on their faces. Kip shuddered and quickly turned away.

Then he saw his family in the next hallway—just beyond the glass. He turned the corner and reached out, but another glass wall appeared, separating them once more. He could see their happy, smiling faces, and they waved to him, but he could not touch them—he could not hear what they were saying. He passed through a portal, expecting to be reunited, but they disappeared again, only to reappear behind still another glass wall. The harder he tried to find his way, the more elusive they became. He panicked, wondering if he would ever reach his beloved family.

“Captain! Captain! Wake up. We’re almost there. The Chief wants to speak to you before we go in.”

As Kip shook himself into consciousness, he saw Grainger looking at him in puzzlement. “The Chief is trying to talk to you, sir. Your headset must’ve slipped off.”

“Right. Thanks. Yes, Chief, what’ve you got?”

“Captain, we’re about fifteen minutes out. Since we’re going for surprise instead of pulverizing the place with an artillery prep, we might just get lucky. At any rate, I’m going to swing around in a big-ass circle and come in from the south. We’ll fly low, behind that group of hills off to the left, and with the dense jungle, it might dampen our noise level enough to really surprise them. What’da you say?”

“I say you’re the driver, Chief. I’ll put my money on your horse, anytime.”

“Roger that, Alpha Six. Hang on!”

Kip signaled Grainger to get the troops awake and ready. Within minutes, every man in the ship was alert, checking equipment, preparing mentally as well as physically. Red took the cue

and alerted the platoon leaders in the other craft to prepare for landing.

The sun was just peeking over the steaming jungle when they approached the LZ. “We may hit it lucky,” thought Kip to himself. From the distance, everything looked serene. Just as the ship began to hover about twenty feet above the dense grass, his spirits soared. “I think we’re going to make it!”

The words were no sooner formed in his mind than an explosion of volcanic proportions erupted. The ship shuddered in midair, rotating ninety degrees clockwise and shaking wildly as an ear-piercing blast racked the aft section of the aircraft. Kip could not understand the fine fragments of metal that were blown through the passenger section, or the fine mist of raindrops that splattered his face. Then, to his horror, he realized that the raindrops were splatters of blood. He saw the involuntary jerking of his comrades as their bodies erupted into a bleeding mass of flesh. The fine metal fragments were bits of the aircraft, blown away by the *rat-tat-tat* of machine gun fire coming from the tree line on the right side of the LZ. Everyone sitting near the cockpit had been spared, except for Grainger’s RTO. The soldiers on the floor absorbed most of the shock. The FO and those on the jump seat with him were sliced to pieces by the blistering fire.

“Set this son-of-a-bitch down, Chief,” shouted Kip. Unable to hear his own words, he wondered if he was, in fact, speaking. He strained toward the cockpit, as if moving in slow motion, to gain Mitchell’s attention. But Mitchell could not hear him. He was slumped in his seat, with blood dripping from around his helmet.

Agular struggled to keep the craft in the air. “Get us the hell down, man,” shouted Kip to Agular, but the CWI could not have heard him, even without the steady rattle of machine gun fire ripping through the chopper. His mind was numb with fear, and his reactions were visceral. After several agonizing seconds, Agular found the magic formula, and the chopper began to lift off above the treetops. It moved away from the deadly space that

had, by this point, ripped the life from everyone but Agular, Kip, Grainger, Red, and the door gunner on the far side of the craft.

An endless stream of blood came oozing from jagged orifices in the shattered bodies. The bullets ripped through the center of the Huey. The stray that hit Mitchell in the temple had traveled a solitary path between Grainger and Kip. The two RTOs sitting on the floor were mangled beyond recognition. The FO's body sat slumped against his RTO—his head back, his eyes open in horror, his lower jaw blown away. For an instant, Kip imagined he was in a dream world—this mangled mass of humanity nothing more than a wax display in a museum of horror. His eyes met Grainger's. This was no dream!

The 1st platoon leader, Second Lieutenant Jim Wrenn, observed the carnage from the second chopper. His craft had not been hit, nor had any of the others in the first wave. The door gunners on the right sides of the other nine aircraft opened fire on the tree line, soon suppressing the fire that had all but annihilated the CO's helicopter. Lieutenant Wrenn's door gunner spotted the machine gun mounted in a tree as soon as it opened fire. Unfortunately, he could not silence it until it had raked through the lead ship several times.

As Alpha Six's craft struggled to gain altitude above the tree line, Wrenn's platoon dismounted and made for cover. Wrenn watched the CO's craft disappear far beyond the clearing, trailing black smoke from the engine. He was not sure, but at one point he thought he heard the sound of the helicopter crashing into the dense jungle.

The other craft off-loaded their combatants with precise smoothness. Once in the tree line, Wrenn got on the battalion net in an attempt to alert them of Captain Glynn's fate. "Avenger Six, Avenger Six, this is Alpha Lima Six. Come in, please! We have a hot one down here. Over."

* Avenger Three is the call sign for the battalion S-3, the operations officer. Avenger Six is the battalion commander.

“Alpha Lima Six, this is Avenger Three. * Roger. I’m right above you tracking the whole thing. What’s your situation? Over.”

“Avenger Three, this is Lima Six. Alpha Six has been hit. Over.”

“Lima Six, this is Three. I know about Alpha Six. I saw the whole thing. Alpha Six is down. What’s your situation? Over.”

“This is Lima Six. Roger. Situation under control. No enemy fire. Lima and Mike are deployed along the wood line. It should be OK to send in the second wave. . . . Wait-out.” Wrenn paused to collect his thoughts. Then he continued. “Avenger Three, request permission to organize a search party to look for Alpha Six. Over.”

“Lima Six, this is Three. Negative. You stay put for now, and secure the LZ. I’ll organize a rescue with other assets. It’ll take hours to hack through the jungle to get to Alpha Six’s location. Do you copy? Over.”

“Avenger Three, this is Lima Six. Roger, I copy. Out.” Wrenn slammed his helmet to the ground. “Dammit to hell!” he said. “Dammit to hell.”

The battalion commander lifted off with Bravo Company and was monitoring radio traffic between his S-3 and Wrenn. “Avenger Three, this is Six. I’m *en route* to your location. Can we land a rescue helicopter near the crash site? Over.”

“Avenger Six, this is Three. Negative. Every time I get near the site, I take on ground fire. The canopy is so thick I can’t even see the downed craft. I can see smoke—that’s about it. Recommend we organize a ground rescue. I’ve requested air strikes on the areas where we’re drawing fire, but I can’t get near Alpha Six’s location. Over.”

“Three, this is Six. Roger. I’m going to bring in Bravo to relieve Alpha. Tell Lima Six to stand by. I’ll get Alpha Five out there to take command. Over.”

“Six, this is Three. Roger. Out.”

No sooner had the S-3 signed off than Lieutenant Castleberry came up on the battalion net. “Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. Over.”

“Alpha Five, this is Avenger Six. Over.”

“Avenger Six, I’ve been monitoring your transmissions, and I’m standing by with a resupply helo. What are your orders, sir? Over.”

“Alpha Five, this is Avenger Six. Meet me at Purple. Over.”

“Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. Wilco. Out.”

Turning to the pilot of the resupply Huey, Castleberry said, with unrestrained urgency in his voice, “Get me the hell to Purple!”

Chapter 3

Azimuth 280°

It was early afternoon before Lieutenant Castleberry and Alpha Company hacked their way to the crash site. The battalion commander and the S-3 maintained a constant vigil in the air, and a platoon of assault helicopters was on call to respond to any ground threat. Using smoke grenades to mark the forward element of his column, Castleberry was guided to the downed helicopter by the S-3.

As they neared the crash site, Castleberry observed numerous trails crisscrossing the landscape. “Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. You won’t believe this, but it looks like Alpha Six’s aircraft came down in the middle of an NVA base camp. Over.”

“Alpha Five, this is Avenger Six. Any sign it’s been used recently? Over.”

“Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. Affirmative. They may still be in there, but my guess is they scattered shortly after the helo hit. Over.”

“This is Six. Don’t take any chances. Cordon off the area, and sweep it clean. Keep your eye out for claymores and booby traps. Over.”

“Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. Wilco. Out.”

Just as Castleberry ended his conversation with LTC Gravel, Lieutenant Wrenn came up on the company net. “Alpha Five, this is Lima Six. We’ve found Alpha Six Kilo. He’s alive. Over.”

“Lima Six. This is Alpha Five. Stay put. I’m on my way to your location. Out.”

After an hour at the site, Alpha Company had secured the area and located the downed chopper. They found the bodies of all four crewmen and seven of the ten passengers on or near the helicopter. All were apparently dead on impact, except the left door gunner, who was killed when the craft struck a large tree branch precisely where he was seated. Aguilar, hit by the machine gun fire, either died or lost consciousness just before the chopper crashed. According to Red, there were only three survivors: Captain Glynn, Grainger, and himself. The trees broke their fall, and although they were shaken considerably, they survived uninjured.

“What happened next, Red?” asked Castleberry.

“I couldn’t believe it, sir. We came down on the edge of this base camp. We took cover behind that big log just before the NVA got to us. Then all hell broke loose, and we got into a big-ass firefight with the gooks. We must’ve killed ten or twenty of ’em before running low on ammo. The captain ordered Sergeant Grainger and me to make a run for it back this way.” Red paused as he pointed to the rear of their position in some heavy undergrowth. Turning in the opposite direction, he again pointed. “The gooks came from that direction, and we gave ’em hell. We’da beat the bastards if we had more ammo.”

“Why didn’t you radio your position?” asked Castleberry.

“They blew a big-ass hole in the damn thing. That damn radio saved my ass,” answered Red. “There’s four or five machine gun holes in it. I could feel ’em hit. It’s a weird feeling, Lieutenant, getting hit by a goddamn machine gun and not be dead.” For the first time, Red began to choke up.

Castleberry gave the young man a reassuring, fatherly pat on the shoulder. “It’s OK, Red, whenever you’re ready. What happened next?”

“Sergeant Grainger and me lit out to the rear while the captain covered us. After twenty meters, Grainger stopped. We

listened. The firing had slowed down. Then Grainger said, ‘Goddamn it. I ain’t leaving the ole man.’ He turned and started back, and I said, ‘I ain’t leaving neither.’ Then Grainger said to me, ‘Goddamn it, Red, you get your ass outta here. Hide out in the thick bush and wait for us. Somebody’ll be along later.’ So I ran about four or five hundred meters and hid where Lieutenant Wrenn found me.”

Grainger’s body was behind the log where the three men made their stand. He was hit several times in the head and chest. Everyone was accounted for except Alpha Six, whose helmet was found nearby, creased on the right side by a bullet. There was no blood on the helmet—more than likely, Captain Glynn had been knocked unconscious by the blow to the head, but there was no sign he had been killed. Weapons and equipment had been stripped from the dead.

“Lieutenant Castleberry, over here,” came an excited shout from Lieutenant Wrenn.

“What’ve you got, Jim?”

“Look at these tracks. I bet they dragged the captain off in this direction. He’s alive. They’d never carry off a dead body. They’ve got him prisoner.”

“Dammit to hell,” said Castleberry. “They’re dragging him off to Laos. We couldn’t be more than a klick from the damn border.”

“What are you going to do, Stan?” asked Wrenn.

“Give me two of your squads, and I’ll go after him. You stay here and take charge.”

“Sir, with all due respect, I think we’d be better off if I took my platoon after the captain and you secured the base.” Wrenn’s voice was strong, convincing.

Castleberry considered the plan. “OK, you go, but if you get into any trouble, give me a holler, and I’ll be right behind you. Now get going.”

As Wrenn’s platoon moved out toward Laos, Castleberry shifted his perimeter to fill the hole. He organized a detail to collect the

bodies and to hack a small clearing to accommodate a single helicopter.

“Alpha Five, this is Avenger Six. What’s your status? Over.”

“Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. Area secure. We have twelve KIAs, one MIA, and one survivor. We found a good spot to hack out an LZ just south of my location. We need several sorties to haul out the KIAs. Over.”

“This is Six. Roger. Just pop a red smoke when you’re ready. Break. Who is MIA?”

“Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. It’s Alpha Six. Over.”

“This is Six. I copy. Out.”

Pausing to consider if he should tell the battalion commander of his decision to pursue the trail into Laos, Castleberry opted on the side of prudence. “Avenger Six, this is Alpha Five. We discovered a trail. I believe they dragged Alpha Six away. I’ve dispatched Lima to investigate. Over.”

“This is Six. Which direction? Over.”

“This is Alpha Five. Azimuth 280°. Over.”

There was a slight pause, then the radio crackled with the voice of the battalion commander. “Alpha Five, this is Six. Negative! I say again. Negative! Call off search. Do not cross into Laos. I say again. Do not cross into Laos. Do you copy? Over.”

A tense silence ensued. “Alpha Five, this is Six. Did you copy my last transmission? Over.”

“This is Five. Affirmative. Out.”

* * * *

Later that evening, Campbell, Castleberry, and Wrenn recounted their stories to the battalion commander and his staff.

At one point, after everyone had told his part, an eerie silence fell over the group. Lieutenant Wrenn broke the silence. “Sir, with all due respect, I should have been allowed to go—”

“No, Jim,” interrupted Castleberry.

“It’s OK, Lieutenant Castleberry. I know what he wants to

say. . . . I can't blame him. He was there—so close, and I wouldn't let him cross over. I know how he feels." LTC Gravel paused. No one else dared speak.

"I feel the same way. There's nothing more I'd rather have done than go into Laos and clean out that rat's nest. Maybe we would've found Kip—maybe not, but it's hard to live with not trying." He paused, fiddling with his unlit pipe. "Gentlemen, it's not within our prerogative to cross the border. We can't simply obey the orders we like—we've got to obey them all, and none of us has the right to assume the authority of the President of the United States."

Again, there was a long silence. "This is one of the hardest losses I'll ever have to live with—even if he's a POW somewhere in Laos. . . . I've known Kip's family for more than fifteen years. I served with his father in Korea in 1953. My wife and I crossed paths with Colonel Glynn and his lovely wife several times. I can't think of a more painful duty than to tell them their son is missing."

LTC Gravel paused, his emotions beyond concealment. Then he continued. "Thank God someone else will have to do that. I don't think I could stand to."

Chapter 4

Rudyard Kipling Glynn, Jr.

Columbia, South Carolina
Sunday, 11 May 1969

“Where the hell’s the goddamn newspaper?” It was a rhetorical question, but he roared it loud enough to bring an instant reaction from the equally perturbed but less profane woman who emerged from the kitchen with flour decorating her hands and apron. “Rudder Glynn, you know I don’t tolerate such language in my house!”

“I’m sorry, honey, but do you know where the paper is?” There was no rancor in his voice—he had violated one of his wife’s cardinal rules, and his apology was sincere. This same conversation must have gone on at least once a week for the past thirty years.

“The paper’s on the back porch, sweetie,” answered Millie in a much calmer voice.

“What the he— heck is it doing out there? It’s hot as all . . . heck outside.” Somehow, the word “heck” was not as satisfying as “hell.”

“It wasn’t hot this morning when I got up. In fact, it was nice outside. You should try it sometime.”

“Who in the world wants to get up at five o’clock on Sunday

morning?” he asked. “Would you get the paper for me . . . please?”

Millie Glynn had been waiting on this sometimes brusque, but always lovable man since they were married thirty years earlier. At the time she grew up, it was the fate of Southern women to wait on husbands, and although the world was dramatically different in 1969, Millicent Graham Glynn was of the old school. She was happy with her life and would never consider changing it. She quickly rolled out the last biscuit and, placing it on the pan, wiped her hands on a dishtowel and made her way to the back porch.

Although Rudder took such personal services for granted, he was always courteous. “Thanks, sugar. I love you.”

She pecked him on the forehead and started for the kitchen. Before she was out of the room, he added, “Sugar, could you bring me a cup of coffee, please.” He knew the magic words—they always worked with Millie.

Rudder and Millie Glynn had lived in Columbia, South Carolina most of their lives. She was a native of Columbia; he moved there as a high school junior when his father was assigned to Fort Jackson. They attended Dreher High School and fell for each other the first time they met. They were a natural pair. Rudder was just under six feet tall, strong and muscular, with the physique of an Adonis. Millie was about three inches shorter, quite tall for a woman in those days, and easily the prettiest girl in the school.

The years treated Millie more kindly than her husband. She stood tall and proud, which accentuated her height, and she still retained her girlish shape. She could even wear clothes she had worn in high school. Millie was a fitness nut long before fitness was fashionable. The years added fifty pounds to Rudder’s generous frame, and while he did not appear grossly overweight, it was increasingly difficult for him to restrain his bulging midsection.

Millie still had golden-blond hair, natural, of course, warm

blue eyes, and a disarming smile. Rudder had gray hair and a receding hairline, but in his younger days, his hair was thick and dark. He, too, had a pleasing smile, but the sparkling white teeth of his youth had not retained their luster. The lines in his face betrayed a strain not accounted for by his fifty-three years, and not present in his beautiful wife, yet he was always in good spirits around friends and relatives, and always quick with his winning smile and subtle wit.

Millie and Rudder dated during their last year of high school and throughout college. He attended Clemson; she, the University of South Carolina. They were together every weekend except during the Carolina-Clemson game, played each year on Thanksgiving Day. Carolina and Clemson were bitter rivals in everything, and it was usually a day or two after the big game before they would see each other again.

Rudder was commissioned Second Lieutenant of Artillery in 1938, whereupon he entered the U.S. Army and was assigned to Officers Basic School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. They married the day after Millie graduated from U.S.C. and boarded the evening train for a week-long honeymoon excursion to Fort Sill. Passenger trains were frequent in 1938, and the accommodations were more luxurious than they were in 1969. A large sleeper compartment served as an intimate honeymoon suite, where Rudder and Millie occupied themselves in marital bliss for hours on end as they traversed the countryside. They emerged for meals and to explore local attractions when the train had an extended layover or when they made connections, but otherwise they kept to themselves. It was the most pleasurable week of her life, soon rivaled on the return trip following his graduation from Officers Basic, and again on a third cross-country trip to his next assignment at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Throughout his twenty-year military career, they were separated one-third of the time. Millie lived in Columbia during his unaccompanied assignments overseas, and she dutifully relocated for stateside tours. When Rudder managed to get stationed

at Fort Jackson for his final tour, Millie was ecstatic, while Rudder betrayed no hint of disappointment. To the military elite, Fort Jackson was not a plum of an assignment. To the rising stars in the officer ranks, Fort Jackson was the kiss of death.

Realizing that his military career was at its end, he gradually came to consider Columbia as home, and Millie loved it more than any other place on earth. As he neared retirement, he looked forward to civilian life. They continued, however, to sit on opposite sides of the field during the Carolina-Clemson game.

Rudder settled back into his favorite easy chair and began to peruse *The State*. “That stupid son-of-a-bitch,” he mumbled from behind section A of the paper. “That goddamn bastard is almost as stupid as LBJ!”

Millie could hear Rudder swearing under his breath. She always heard him swear, but part of the unwritten law in their home was that if no one else heard, and if it were something she shouldn’t have heard in the first place, then she pretended not to hear.

“What an ignorant, stupid ass—” In the middle of his low decibel diatribe, the doorbell rang.

“Rudder, will you get that, please?”

“Yes, dear.” He roused himself from the easy chair and crossed through the living room to the front door. As he opened the door, the smiling face of Brad Daniel, a second lieutenant at Fort Jackson and his next door neighbor, greeted him.

“Ah, mon pote, Jean-Pierre, bienvenu chez moi par ce si beau temps ensoleillé. Comment tu vas, diantre?”

“Rudder, why the hell do you always call me Jean-Pierre and speak French when you answer the damn door?” The exchange was a familiar ritual. The question was rhetorical, and no answer was ever given.

Hearing the offending “hell” and “damn,” Rudder gave Brad a cautionary wave of the hand and looked toward the kitchen to see if Millie picked up his transgressions. Hearing no response, he turned to Brad, and with a broad grin on his face whispered,

“Boy, are you ever lucky. If Millie hears you talk like that, she’ll throw your young ass outta here.” Rudder paused a moment, then added, again in a whisper, “What the hell are you doing with that damn cigar in your mouth? You know Millie don’t allow smoking in her house.”

“Hell, Rudder, the damn thing ain’t lit!” answered Brad, mimicking Rudder’s low whisper.

“So what the hell are you trying to prove—that you’re some kind of bad ass?”

They both laughed as Rudder escorted his young friend into the den. Millie called from the kitchen, “Who is it, dear? What’s all the whispering about?”

“It’s just Brad, honey. Who else do you expect to come to the front door?”

The Glynn house, situated on the corner of Tanglewood and Meredith, faced Tanglewood but had a Meredith Street address. The “main” entrance was at the back of the house on the Meredith Street side. Most people used the back entrance, except Brad, who lived on the opposite side of the Glynn house and always came to the front door.

Millie emerged from the kitchen, as Brad stuffed the offending cigar into his pocket. “Hi Brad, how’s Janie? How’s her mother? Was it a stroke, or do they know yet?”

“She’s fine. Her mother’s doing OK, but they’re still running tests. If everything’s OK, Janie’ll probably be home sometime next week.”

“Well, that’s good news. And I know you’ll be happy when she gets home. Too much bachelor life for you, I bet?”

“Yes ma’am,” answered Brad. “Oh, by the way,” he added, “happy Mother’s Day.”

“Well, bless your heart! You sweet boy.” Millie couldn’t resist hugging him and giving him a motherly peck on the cheek. “Since my children couldn’t be with me on my special day, I guess I’ll have to adopt you.”

Brad smiled sheepishly.

“Will you have some breakfast with us, Brad?” asked Millie.

“No ma’am, I—”

“Bullshit,” spouted Rudder, and without catching his breath, “I’m sorry, honey.” Turning to Brad and locking an arm around the young man’s neck, he roared, “Do you think I don’t know why you came over here this time of the morning? Get your . . . butt in here, son, and help me eat some of Millie’s dee-licious Southern fried breakfast.”

“Yes sir, Colonel,” answered Brad, his boyish pleasure evident as he was being manhandled by the gruff, but lovable man who was as much a father figure as a friend.

“Did you hear Nixon’s speech last night?” asked Brad, in a roguish attempt to get a reaction out of Rudder.

“Now Rudder,” cautioned Millie, knowing full well that if Rudder got started, he would release a string of expletives she would be obliged to object to.

“Heck yes, I heard last night on the news, and I read about it in the paper this morning. We should never have gotten ourselves involved in this G.D. war—that’s gosh darn, sweetie.” The three of them exchanged knowing glances, Millie shaking her head, Rudder looking innocent, and Brad enjoying the hell out of it.

“Could we please not talk about the war during breakfast?” asked Millie.

“Yes, dear,” answered Rudder. Brad looked embarrassed.

Brad often tried to get Rudder to talk about the war, simply because he could never quite understand Rudder’s point of view. At times, Rudder was as gung-ho as any red-blooded American. Other times, he was incensed that we were even involved in the war. Rudder had an almost antiwar attitude, although Brad knew Rudder’s opinion of “those antiwar, hippie bastards.” But on this Sunday morning, there would be no talk of war; Millie usually had the final say on such matters in her house.

Even though he had only lived next to the Glynnys for six months, he and Rudder had become the best of friends. Nor-

mally, lieutenants and colonels do not become fast friends, but with Rudder being retired for more than a decade, and in a civilian position as Director for Highway Safety for South Carolina, he had quickly learned the more informal ways of civilian life. Also, Brad, an irresistible guy everyone liked, bore a striking resemblance to a close friend from Rudder's early years in the military. Normally, second lieutenants could not afford to live in a ritzy neighborhood just off Trenholm Road, but the house belonged to a close family friend who got orders for Germany and was more than pleased to have Brad and Janie live there and take care of it.

Brad was a lot like Rudder. Both were extremely likable. Both could put a complete stranger at ease in minutes. Both were good listeners. When you talked to either of them, you knew you had his undivided attention. With Rudder, the rough language was a more intimate form of communication. He only used it among friends, after he knew them well enough to know they would not be offended.

With Millie, his swearing was a game. He would let something slip, and she would fuss until he apologized, after which they would kiss and make up. Millie accused him of getting a boyish pleasure out of shocking people with his "sailor talk." She also accused him of corrupting Brad, who had taken to mimicking some of Rudder's bad habits. Despite the sometimes rough exterior, Rudder Glynn was a sensitive and caring man, traits also visible in his young protégé.

Brad's wife, Janie, was also a great hit with the Glynns. Millie took Janie under her wing and taught her the protocols of being an army wife. In her "retired" status, Millie went with Janie to all the wives' functions on post. They were on the same committees, worked on the same community projects, and attended the same church. Brad and Janie were Rudder and Millie, preserved from the weathering of thirty years.

The Glynns had two children: a son, Rudyard Kipling Glynn, III (Kip), and a younger daughter, Linda. At 27, Linda was un-

married—a source of constant worry for her mother who dreaded nothing more than having an old maid in the family.

Kip was a captain in the U.S. Army, soon to be promoted to major, and serving his second tour in Vietnam. They expected him home in three weeks, a reason for great excitement in the Glynn household. Kip's wife, Amanda, lived with her folks in Columbus, Georgia. She and Kip were married soon after Kip finished Officers Basic at Fort Benning. They had two young sons, Rudy IV, and Ryan.

“Brad, do you want to go to church with us?” asked Millie.

“Sure,” answered the young man.

“We'll meet you out back in forty-five minutes, OK?”

“Sure thing,” answered Brad. Millie was finishing the dishes, and as she turned to leave the room, Brad called after her. “And thanks for the breakfast, Millie. It was great, as usual. I won't have to eat for the rest of the day.”

“You're welcome, honey,” answered Millie as she disappeared into the den.

“Oh sure!” said Rudder in an undertone. “And I bet you'll have a helluva time working up an appetite between now and lunch.”

Brad gave him the sheepish grin. “Hey Rudder, you want to play a few rounds of golf this afternoon?”

“Boy, what the hell's the matter with you? It's hot as hell out there. Are you out of your damn mind? You'll get heat stroke.” The language was OK now, with Millie out of the room.

“Why, you old fart, you're afraid I'll whip your ass again.”

“Son, you have never whipped my ass, and I don't see the day coming when you can.”

“Tell you what,” answered Brad. “Why don't we go out about five? We can have a couple of beers and get in a few holes before dark. What'da you say?”

“You're on, kid.”

Chapter 5

Casualty of War

Rudder Glynn was an anomaly among retired military officers who, almost to a man, supported the war. In South Carolina, the antiwar movement was relegated to the lunatic fringe. The war was especially troubling to Rudder, since he was probably more knowledgeable about Indochina than any officer then serving in the U.S. Army, and all but a few retired officers. There were some in the intelligence community who were as knowledgeable as he, but their numbers were small.

Rudder Glynn was a flag-waving, red-blooded patriot. Even at 53, he was yet to hear *The Star Spangled Banner* without having huge tears run down his cheeks. He was proud to have a son in the U.S. Army, and he could never conceive of Kip resisting service in Vietnam. He thought those in the antiwar movement were cowards and draft-dodgers who feared facing death, rather than men of conscience who were morally indignant at the thought of taking a human life.

Brad shared Rudder's sentiment. He, being as gung-ho about the war as anyone else, knew that sooner or later he would get his turn, but having been married only eight months, he was in no hurry to volunteer. Eventually, his name would come down on a levy.

Rudder's dislike of the war fascinated Brad. Rudder was always circumspect with his comments, but felt close enough to

Brad to share things he never told his own son or Millie. He never said anything to Kip, for fear it would discourage him and put his career in jeopardy. He did not share his sentiment with Millie, who was not the least bit interested in war, politics, or anything associated with Vietnam. Millie supported the war because she had a son there, and she took Rudder's dislike of politicians, from Truman to Nixon, as nothing unusual.

"Tell me, Rudder—I can't figure you out. You're not antiwar, but you hate the war so much. I mean, I agree with you. I don't like LBJ, and I didn't like Kennedy. I don't know about Truman, but if you don't like him, then neither do I. I don't think Nixon knows what the hell he's doing either, but we're in a war now, and we ought to win the damn thing."

"You're right, Brad, we're in it, and we should win it, and I don't want anybody to think I would ever have anything to do with this asshole bunch of antiwar bastards, but . . ." Rudder's words trailed off.

"But what, damn it? Rudder, you do this shit every time we talk about the goddamn war."

"Damn it, young man, will you shut up that foul-ass language! I'm going to tell Millie what a foul mouth you have. She thinks I'm the only one with a foul mouth. She even accuses me of corrupting your sorry ass."

"Bullshit," said Brad, with a wide grin on his face.

Grabbing Brad by the shoulder, Rudder added, "Come on, kid, it's tee time. I'm ready to beat your ass."

"You want to put your money where your mouth is, you old fart?"

By the time they teed off, the temperature had dropped considerably. Despite the high humidity, it was a pleasant time for a leisurely round of golf. They completed the front nine, and as they stopped at the clubhouse before starting the back nine, Brad broached the subject of Vietnam once again. Expecting the same response he always got, he was surprised that Rudder spoke with deadly seriousness.

“Do you know what I did during the war, Brad?”

The question surprised the young man. “I didn’t know you were in the war. I thought you retired before it started.”

“Not Vietnam, dumbass. I’m talking about the big one. You know, the big one, WW II.”

“Oh yeah, I’m sorry. I knew you were in World War II. You were in Korea too, weren’t you?”

“Yeah, I was in both of them, but I’m talking about the big one.”

“What does that have to do with Vietnam?” asked Brad.

“Will you shut up and listen! I was in *the* Vietnam War—the first one—when this damned thing started. Only then, we called it Indochina. I was a lieutenant colonel in the OSS—that’s Office of Strategic Services. I worked with the Viet Minh in the Northern part of Vietnam. We called it Tonkin then.”

“OSS? That’s spy shit, ain’t it? . . . Damn! Are you bullshitting me?” asked the incredulous young lieutenant.

“No son, I’m not bullshitting. I wish the hell I was. I shouldn’t even be talking about this. I’ve never talked about this with anyone, but you keep bugging me, . . . and you’re a good kid. . . . I like you Brad, but you’ve got to promise you won’t breathe a word of this to anyone.”

Brad was stunned at Rudder’s seriousness. “You can depend on me, Rudder. Never a word to anyone.” Brad was moved that this man, whom he idolized, was about to tell him things he had not told anyone else, even his own family.

“Not even Janie?” asked Rudder.

“Not even Janie.”

“Do you remember earlier when you said something to the effect that we are in the war now, and we ought to win it?” asked Rudder.

“Sure, I remember.”

“Well, son, I hate to tell you, but we should never have been in it in the first place, and we’ll never win it—not as long as we

have these stupid-ass politicians and these goddamn antiwar bastards burning the flag.”

“Rudder, you can’t be serious . . . can you?”

“I’m dead serious, kid. I was in Indochina for a little over a year during World War II. I know more about the Vietnamese than any thousand of these politician bastards running the war, and most of our generals. The only way we could win it is to kill every man, woman, and child in the North—completely obliterate North Vietnam from the face of the earth, but we won’t do that. We can’t do that, and I’m damned sure I don’t want us to do that. Brad, the problem is that we don’t have the will to win. The North Vietnamese have nothing but will on their side. We can’t beat them.”

Rudder sat silently for several minutes. Brad had never seen him like this. He didn’t know what to say next. “Do you want another beer, Rudder?”

“No, I don’t feel worth a shit.”

“Are you OK, Rudder?”

“Yeah, I’m OK. I guess maybe this damn humidity’s gettin’ to me.”

“You don’t look OK. Do you want me to call Millie?”

“No kid, let’s go home. One of these days, I’ll let you read the diaries I kept during the war. Shit, I’m not sure I can. Some of that stuff may still be classified.”

“You have diaries?”

“I sure do, and you wouldn’t believe the shit I have in those diaries. Hey, but Brad, don’t—do not—breathe a word of this to anyone, OK?”

“Absolutely, Rudder, absolutely. You ready to go home?”

“Sure, kid, let’s go.”

Just as they reached the door, Mickie, the bartender, called to them. “Colonel Glynn, someone just called from your house. They said you should get home as quick as you can.”

“What was it, Mickie?”

“Don’t know, sir. They said for me to tell you to get home as soon as possible.”

“OK, thanks, Mickie. Brad, you drive.”

By the time they reached the car, Rudder was sweating profusely. His skin was ashen, and he gasped for breath. By the time they turned onto Tanglewood from Trenholm Road, Rudder was leaning toward the air conditioning vent, struggling to breathe the cool air that blasted into his face. When they turned onto Meredith toward the side entrance, Brad saw a Fort Jackson sedan parked near the garage. “What the hell?” he asked.

“Oh, shit,” said Rudder. His voice was weak, his tone desperate. “Oh, God, no!”

When they pulled next to the sedan, a sergeant in army green uniform stepped out of the rear door and came to meet them. As Rudder got out of the car, his otherwise sculpted face was transformed into clay, his booming voice was reduced to a pitiful whisper. He searched the sergeant’s face and asked, “What is it? . . . My God, don’t tell me!”

“Come inside, sir. Major Hillyer’s with your wife. She needs you.”

As soon as Millie saw Rudder, she leapt from her chair. Tears poured down her cheeks—her eyes were swollen and nearly shut, and she could hardly speak. She wept uncontrollably. Major Hillyer stood next to them as they embraced. It was all he could do to hold back the tears.

Brad, standing near the door with the sergeant, was stunned at what he saw. “Their son?” he asked.

The sergeant nodded.

Rudder wavered on his feet. He reached out to catch the major’s arm, but as he did, he lost balance and fell to one knee before the major could react—dragging Millie with him. While struggling to regain his balance, he grasped his chest—unable to breathe. A panicked look came over his face, and before anyone could move, he fell hard onto the floor, striking his head on an end table.

“My God,” cried Brad, now near panic himself. “Call an ambulance, Sergeant! Call a goddamn ambulance!”

The major struggled to get Millie into a chair, while Brad turned Rudder onto his back. He was not breathing. Brad began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, thinking all the time how lucky he was to have recently completed CPR training. The sergeant came over to take care of Millie, while the major and Brad traded off on mouth-to-mouth.

After an eternity, the ambulance came. “Where are you taking him?” asked Brad.

“To Providence,” answered the attendant. “They have the best cardiac unit in town.”

“Major, would you go with them?” asked Brad. “I’ll take care of Mrs. Glynn. We’ll be along as soon as we can.”

“Sure thing,” answered the major.

Several neighbors and Fran Hamilton, Millie’s best friend who lived on the other side of Brad, were now in the house. They helped Millie get ready while Brad waited impatiently. They brought her out, and Fran and another lady sat with her in the back seat of Rudder’s car. A third lady got into the front, and Brad jumped behind the wheel. He backed into the street and roared off toward Providence Hospital.

Rudder was in the emergency room when they arrived. The major met them at the door and escorted the party past the treatment room to a waiting area down the hall. Brad saw several nurses and doctors working feverishly over Rudder before the nurse closed the door. With Millie surrounded by three of her best friends, Brad walked toward the treatment room, pausing briefly in front of the door. He saw the major standing near the entrance. He waited a few minutes next to the door, then walked to where the major and the sergeant stood. He introduced himself. “Sir, what happened?”

“Their son, Captain Glynn, is missing in action. His company had the mission to secure an LZ in A Shau Valley. His helicopter was hit by ground fire. The pilot tried to pull out and

head for home. It was last seen going down in thick jungle about five clicks away. It took hours to reach the crash site—a lot of fire was coming from the ground—and they didn't want to call air strikes too close to the helicopter. When they finally hacked their way in, everyone was dead except two people. Captain Glynn was missing, but his RTO survived."

"They were killed in the crash?" asked Brad.

"Either the crash or the ambush. Everyone died in the crash except the private, the Field First, and Captain Glynn. They landed in the middle of an NVA base camp and got into a big firefight. Captain Glynn provided covering fire and ordered the sergeant and the private to run for it. The sergeant returned to help Captain Glynn, but was killed. The private hid in some underbrush and survived. He reported that the last he saw of his CO, he was still firing. Our boys cleared the area, and accounted for everyone except Captain Glynn. They were within a mile of the Laotian border, so the NVA probably carried him off. They searched the area as best they could, but because this thing was heating up into a major battle, they couldn't cross the border and make a complete search."

"My God," said Brad in disbelief. Then the major's words dawned on him. "That means he could still be alive. He could be alive, couldn't he?"

"He's officially listed as missing," answered the major.

Brad's spirits soared. It was not as bad as he thought—there was a chance Kip could be alive. Just as suddenly, his exhilaration was truncated by harsh reality. "My God," he said, partly to himself, partly to the major. "Colonel Glynn didn't know that, did he, Major?"

"No, I didn't have a chance to tell him."

Brad's mind was racing. He looked down the long hall at Millie. He had never seen a more pitiful sight in his short life. He turned to the major. "I've got to tell Rudder. He's got to know Kip's still alive."

Just as Brad made up his mind to tell Rudder the good news,

a doctor came out of the treatment room and spoke briefly to a passing nurse. The nurse pointed to Millie, and the doctor moved toward her as Brad trotted down the hall after him. He reached the waiting area right behind the doctor just as he said, “Mrs. Glynn, I’m sorry. Your husband is dead.”

Chapter 6

Full Military Honors

The telephone was ringing incessantly when Brad reached his front door. It was past midnight. He had been with Millie from the moment she heard those torturous words. When he answered, he recognized the caller's frantic voice.

"Brad, where have you been? You've had me worried sick. I've been calling since early this afternoon."

"Janie, . . ." His voice trailed off. He could hardly speak.

"Brad, what is it?"

"Janie, . . . Rudder's dead. . . ." His voice cracked as tears choked back the words.

"Oh, please God . . . no! Please God, no! Oh, Brad . . . how did it happen?" She heard him sobbing at the other end. "It's OK, sweetheart. I'm here whenever you're ready."

Both clung silently to the telephone for several minutes until Brad regained his composure. "He had a heart attack this afternoon. I've been with Millie until a few minutes ago. Mrs. LaRue and Fran are staying with her tonight. The doctor gave her a sedative."

"My God, that poor woman. How will she ever live without him? I've never seen any two people as close as they are." She listened for a few seconds, then asked, "Brad, are you OK?"

She could hear him take a deep breath. "I'm afraid that's not all," said Brad.

“Not all! What do you mean?”

“Kip is missing in action.” For a second time, his voice cracked. Janie waited in stunned silence.

Finally, she asked, “When did they find out?”

“Early this evening, just before he had the heart attack.” He paused for several seconds, then continued, “It killed him, Janie. We both knew as soon as we turned onto Meredith. There was an army sedan in the driveway. We both thought Kip was dead. Rudder had a massive heart attack before he could be told Kip was MIA. As soon as he saw Millie, he knew Kip was dead, and he passed out before the major could tell him anything different.”

Slowly, over the next half hour or so, Brad pieced together the events of the day. “It’s my fault, Janie. . . . I should never have taken him out to play golf on a day like this.”

“Brad, that’s not true! It’s simply not true. You and Rudder play golf all the time. The man was a picture of health. How could you know?” Both fell silent for several minutes.

“Brad, he couldn’t stand the shock of thinking his son was dead. Kip was his whole world.” Janie spoke with difficulty through her tears. Finally, she could only repeat herself, “He couldn’t stand the shock.”

They sat riveted to the telephone for several minutes until Brad spoke. “There’s more to it than that.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t say right now. When can you come home?” His voice was desperate, pleading.

“I’ll get a flight tomorrow morning, and I should be home by noon. . . . Sweetheart, please try to get some rest. I’ll see you then. . . . OK? . . . I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

Brad would never tell her what he meant by, “There’s more to it than that.” Fortunately, she would never ask.

As he sat in his dimly lit kitchen staring at the telephone, he had a gut feeling that Rudder’s torment was based on knowledge

more significant than anyone could ever imagine. For the most part, Brad was amused at Rudder's reaction when he mentioned the war, but in retrospect—after the day's conversation—he knew something about the war was eating away at Rudder from the inside.

“Oh, God . . . I feel like a goddamn heel,” he thought to himself. “I'm a stupid son-of-a-bitch for bringing it up—over and over—just to get a stir out of him. What a dumbass son-of-a-bitch I am!”

Guilt hung over him like a menacing storm cloud, absorbing the air—causing him to breathe laboriously. He could not escape the quandary Rudder inadvertently passed to him—no one to talk with—no one to ease the pain. “Rudder's diaries,” he thought. Then, as if to chastise himself for being self-absorbed, he spoke aloud, “Hell, I can't ask Millie about that shit. What the hell am I thinking?”

He tried to purge the thought from his mind. “My God, that woman's been through enough hell today to last a lifetime!” Then he fell silent and prayed to God that somehow all of this would look different tomorrow. He lay restless in bed, wrestling with his tortured thoughts, his sorrow, and his guilt. Finally, in the wee hours of the morning, sleep came, if only for a few precious minutes.

* * * *

The stream of visitors was endless, since almost everyone in Columbia knew Rudder Glynn. Everyone who came brought food. There was enough food to feed an army. Janie stayed with Millie from early morning until late at night. Brad mowed grass, clipped hedges—everything Rudder would have done. The physical exertion was therapeutic—at least he was able to occupy his mind with some of the lighter moments he had shared with his friend. It also gave him a chance to escape the anguish that surrounded

Millie and the rest of Rudder's family. He could not bear to watch their agonizing pain.

In addition to Rudder's death, there was the uncertainty about Kip. It soon became apparent that the battle in which Kip was lost was no minor incident. The media was filled with reports of a great battle that engaged six battalions of the 101st. There was a large NVA force entrenched on Ap Bia Hill, later known as "Hamburger Hill," and casualties soared before it was overrun. In all, fifty-six Americans were killed. The media and the liberal politicians had a field day, calling it a waste of precious American lives. At that moment, anyone who knew the Glynn was inclined to agree.

Although Brad and Janie had only known the Glynn for six months, this was the worst week of their lives. "How," Brad wondered, "did Rudder's seventy-four year-old father and his seventy-two year-old mother bear up under this strain?" And poor Millie—they watched her age ten years in two agonizing days. Millie refused to dwell on the uncertainty of Kip's situation—her faith that Kip was alive and well somewhere in Southeast Asia made it easier to deal with Rudder's death. She could never have survived the loss of both of them.

* * * *

There were actually two funerals. The first was a memorial service on Wednesday afternoon at Eastminster Presbyterian Church on Trenholm Road, a few blocks from the Glynn house. The other was at Arlington National Cemetery on Friday afternoon, with full military honors. Following the Columbia service, the body was loaded on the evening train for the long ride to Arlington. Millie insisted on riding the train carrying Rudder's casket. She wanted to go alone, but finally agreed that Linda could go with her. Everyone else would drive up.

Brad had visions of a black shrouded funeral train, like President Roosevelt's. He was surprised to see the bright, shiny

passenger train that came into view as he slowed to a stop at the Main Street traffic light, directly in front of the South Carolina capitol building. There, beyond Assembly Street and at the bottom of a slight incline, sat Seaboard Coast Line's finest passenger train, the *Silver Meteor*. The train sat astride the main thoroughfare, Gervais Street, blocking traffic as it took on passengers and freight.

It was almost 8:00 p.m., and the brilliant sunset was intensified as it reflected off the top of the *Meteor*. Brad turned into the Seaboard Station parking lot. He could see Rudder's casket, along with other inanimate objects, being loaded unceremoniously onto the baggage car near the front of the train. Dunbar's black hearse was out of place among the odd collection of trucks queued up to deliver their wares. Rudder's military escort, dressed smartly in an army green uniform, afforded a stark contrast to the scruffy dock workers.

"Linda, do you think you and your Mom will be OK? We'll go with you if you like." Brad knew the answer, but he was unable to think of anything else to say.

"We'll be fine. Meet us at the Fort Myer Officers Club for breakfast on Friday. We can make it 'til then. If you get there before too late in the evening, stop by my room at the Army Navy BOQ. We have rooms reserved for you and the others."

"OK, we'll drop by if we get there before 9:30 or 10:00." Looking soulfully at the pitiful figure standing next to Linda, Brad continued, "See you for breakfast on Friday, Millie?"

"That's right, sugar," answered Millie blankly. She took Brad and Janie in her arms. "I don't know what I would've done without the two of you. I couldn't have made it." The tears flowed freely as Janie pulled Linda into their tight embrace.

Everyone was set to leave early the next morning, and with luck, they would arrive late Thursday. Millie and Linda would join them for the trip home after the funeral. Brad drove the new Lincoln, with Rudder's parents and Kip's older son, Rudy. Janie, Amanda, and Ryan followed in Millie's car, also a Lincoln. Janie

and Brad made the seating arrangements so Janie could be close to Amanda, who was going through her own personal hell because of Kip's uncertain future.

Millie chose to ride the train because railroad travel had been one of her most pleasurable experiences. With the loss of her life-long companion and lover, Millie had nothing left but fading memories of their idyllic life together. The last few days had been so hectic, the crush of friends and relatives so stifling, that she needed the solitude of an overnight train to escape the horrible reality. Millie agreed to let Linda come with her, provided she stayed in a separate cabin.

The train's clattering rhythm had a tranquilizing effect as it cut through the lush South Carolina countryside. Although exhausted when they left Seaboard Station, Millie settled into a restful state of semi-consciousness, refusing to abandon herself to sleep—refusing to relinquish control of her fragile memories to the hands of restless slumber. Slipping out of her shoes, she propped her feet on the adjacent seat and covered herself with a warm blanket. It was Rudder's Clemson blanket.

* * * *

Millie's early experiences as an army wife were some of her most pleasant memories. She was disappointed with Fort Sill, but after the long honeymoon excursion, she had enough reserve enthusiasm to deal with any disappointment. She expected army life to be an adventure, and in that regard, it was more than she expected. Their first dilemma came when Rudder reported for duty—there was no place for her to stay. Among the plethora of odd abbreviations and codes on his orders, they soon learned that TDY meant "temporary duty." Officers Basic was an unaccompanied tour—wives were not welcome!

Even though she was not authorized at Officers Basic, they were not alone in their predicament, and suitable accommodations were available. Enterprising developers had built efficiency

apartments along Fort Sill Boulevard in nearby Lawton, five miles south of the post. While the officers were required to stay in barracks at night, they usually visited their wives in the evenings, except for nights spent in the field. And of course, they had most weekends together.

There were four other wives in the same complex, and most of Millie's social life centered around these new-found friends and the Fort Sill Officers Club. Even though they were not officially present, the wives permanently assigned to Fort Sill made a point of searching them out and making them feel welcome. Being an army wife was a career in itself, and the new wives underwent a kind of basic training themselves. By the time they left Fort Sill, Millie was a seasoned veteran.

Their first permanent assignment was with the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington. Since this was a permanent change of station, PCS as opposed to TDY, she was now authorized—unfortunately, so were other young wives. Once again, she and Rudder had to find off-post housing, which conveniently enough was in a neighborhood filled with army families. This time, however, Rudder stayed home at night, when not on maneuvers, and he drew a housing allowance to help pay the rent.

Those precious years at Fort Lewis were the happiest of her life. Their passions never ebbed—Millie may have been a prude about off-color language, but she was no prude about sex, within limits, of course. Their lives revolved around each other until Kip was born on 1 April 1939. Millie relished being pregnant and even enjoyed childbirth. She was the center of attention and loved being waited on. Most of all, she loved pleasing Rudder by giving him a healthy son.

As 1939 drifted into 1940, and 1940 into 1941, the mood around Fort Lewis began to change. Since the 3rd Infantry Division was far from combat-ready, its training was becoming more realistic and intense. While many units still practiced fire drills with wooden artillery pieces and used megaphones rather than

radios, the physical training and forced marches slowly worked the nascent American army into top physical condition.

“Rudder, someone told me the division will be sent to Europe as soon as we get into the war.” Millie paused for a moment then asked, “Rudder . . . did you hear me?”

“Yes, babe, I heard you. It’s a rumor—I have no idea who started it.”

“Do you think it’s true?”

“Honey, I don’t know—you know how rumors spread on an army post.”

“But there’s a good chance we’ll get into the war, won’t we? And the division will be one of the first to go, won’t it?”

“Millie, with the mood of the country the way it is, I don’t think Roosevelt could get us into the war, even if he wanted to. But sooner or later, we’ll probably get in it.”

“Rudder, I couldn’t stand to lose you.” Her tears were flowing freely. “It could happen, couldn’t it? I don’t know what I . . .”

He held her tightly for several minutes until she relaxed. “Millie, we may go to war, and if we do, the division will be one of the first to go. I’ll have to go with them. Even if I were not in the army, I’d still have to go.” He paused briefly. “Honey, there’s always a possibility I may not come back.” She tensed in his arms. Rudder held her tightly. “Honey, a lot of men won’t come back, but we can’t dwell on that.” His calm demeanor reassured her. “There’s absolutely nothing you or I can do about it, and all the worrying in the world won’t help . . . OK?”

She smiled, and with a nervous laugh, nodded OK. She kissed him and hugged him even more tightly. He ran his hands through her hair and gently wiped the tears from her cheeks. “Sugar, if we go to war, the most important thing you can do is to take care of Kip and yourself—I won’t have time to worry about you. I’ll have lots of things to worry about, but I don’t want to worry about you and the baby. As long as the two of you are safe, I’ll have every reason to come back . . . OK?”

“OK,” she answered. “But, honey, . . .” She paused, unsure if she should say what had been on her mind for several weeks.

“What is it, babe?”

“Rudder, I want another baby before you go. I want to keep as much of you with me as I can.”

His emotional calm wavered. “Honey, let’s wait until the baby’s asleep. I’ll call the duty officer and tell him I need to take leave tomorrow . . . family emergency.”

Millie beamed as she wiped away the tears and nodded her approval. She turned, faced the kitchen counter, and busied herself with cooking. Rudder embraced her as she worked, his hands cupping her warm, smooth breasts, his body wedging her against the counter top. “What the hell,” he finally said. “What can they do, fire me? Kick me out of the war? I think I’ll take leave for the rest of the week. This family emergency is more serious than I thought.”

They giggled like school children. “Who’s to say this isn’t a serious emergency?” she asked coquettishly. “Just tell them you have a nymphomaniac wife, and it takes all you’ve got to satisfy her!”

Rudder was stunned at his wife’s boldness, but not to be outdone, he added, “That sounds like a good idea. . . . I’ll call the duty officer and tell him exactly what you said!” She turned toward him, smiling and waving an intimidating butcher knife. “Just kidding, sweetie. Just kidding. . . . But imagine the CO’s reaction if the duty officer relayed that message?” Millie gave him a wicked grin as she slowly rotated her hips against his groin. “Honey, you finish supper, and I’ll put the kid to bed.”

After he got Kip to sleep, Rudder changed into an old sweat suit and returned to the kitchen where he found Millie still standing at the counter, still slicing vegetables. She had changed into a light housecoat. As he locked his arms around her, he noticed she had removed her bra and also detected the faint aroma of his favorite perfume. A wave of excitement rushed through his body. He slid his right hand beneath the thin material and gently ca-

ressed her warm, inviting breasts. With his left hand, he released the loosely-tied belt and slowly moved his hands down her warm body, only to find that she had also removed her panties. “Oh, damn,” he whispered softly.

“Rudder, my goodness . . . such language.” Even her protests were alluring. She turned, and as she raised her arms to embrace him, her dressing gown fell open. She melted in his embrace and pressed her body tightly against him. Their lips met, and he began massaging her soft, rounded buttocks. Without breaking their embrace, he lifted her onto the counter top in one effortless motion, carelessly pushing aside the raw vegetables.

She wrapped her legs around him and surrendered herself. Supper would have to wait. He loosened the tie on his sweat pants, flicked off the light switch, and there in their kitchen, under the soft light from the neighbor’s window, they made love. Supper came much later, followed by a long hot shower and a long night of more serious lovemaking.

On 7 January 1942, one month after Pearl Harbor, Linda was born. Normally, the birth of a second child does not generate the same excitement as the first. However, with the lingering threat of war, an awkward celebration ensued, exaggerated by the undercurrents of harsh reality. There was an apprehension that this might be their last opportunity together in such joy for a long time.

* * * *

As the train rambled toward its destination, Linda waited patiently in her compartment, aching to know how her mother had made it through the night. As the early morning sun peeked over the horizon, Linda knocked lightly on her mother’s door.

“Is that you, Linda?” Her mother’s voice was strong, the strain of the past few days hardly noticeable.

“Yes, Mother, do you want some breakfast? Can I come in?”

“Just a minute, dear. The door’s locked. . . . I’m still dressing. Just a minute.”

Linda waited anxiously as Millie finished dressing. Her mother’s voice sounded reassuring, and she hoped with all her heart that her ears had not deceived her. As the seconds ticked by she prayed to herself, “Please, God, give her some peace.”

When the door opened, Millie looked as relaxed as she had been since her nightmare began less than a week before. “Mother, you look so good. How do you feel? Thank God, you look wonderful. . . . Did you have a good night’s rest?”

“Yes, dear, I rested well last night. . . . It’s OK, I’m ready to let go.”