

Colonel Anthony Devlin sorted through boxes of black and white eight by ten inch photos. He worked with his shirt sleeves rolled up and his collar open, his suitcoat and tie hanging over the back of his leather upholstered chair. His appearance did not matter-- he worked alone with the photos in the Victorian luxury of the wood-paneled office.

Hundreds of black and white prints covered the oak desk and spilled over the royal blue carpeting. Taking a bundle of prints from a box, he glanced at the index code accompanying the photos, then flipped through the sequence. The prints showed scenes photographed from video tapes.

During the day, he and a group of technicians had scanned hours of video tapes, running through the scenes at high speeds. Some taped sequences had excellent panning shots of streets and skylines. The colonel then detailed the technicians to locate the scenes on street maps and to make photos from the tapes.

Panning shots offered long continuous images. However, camera movement created blurs. Broadcast static reduced some images to abstract pointalism. Some pans-- of backlit skylines or glaring mid-day streets-- featured only high contrast images without details. The colonel had instructed the technicians to photograph all the sequences for his personal evaluation. Years of experience with the electronics and computers of photo reconnaissance allowed him to quickly guess what sequences could be enhanced.

Quickly laying out each panorama, the colonel searched for details in the scenes, studying the buildings, the streets, the Arabic-language signs. Where he saw armed men, he checked for uniforms or equipment which might identify the forces,

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marking the images for enlargement. He also marked silhouettes that suggested Soviet ZSU-23-4 mechanized gun mounts-- or any other anti-aircraft weapon. These would be checked against satellite reconnaissance. His aides had offered to stay through the night to do the work. But the colonel took the task himself. A delay in the translation of Arabic and Farsi radio interceptions had stalled the work. Until he had translations of the intercepted communications, he could not proceed. Rather than leaving for home or joining in the all night Situation Room debates on possible actions, he worked on the photo montages.

Devlin had been temporarily transferred from his desk in offices of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to a borrowed office in the Old Executive Office Building. He would work with the staff of the National Security Council for the duration of the counter-strike operation.

Despite the evidence linking Syria and Iran to the bombing of the Marines, the colonel did not believe the National Security advisor would recommend a direct military counter-attack. Both nations shared borders with the Soviet Union. The Soviets armed and advised the Syrian army and air force. An old treaty with Shah Reza of Iran pledged the Soviets to defend Iran in the event of an invasion. The Administration did not want to risk a confrontation with the Soviets.

He anticipated an attack on the gangs in Baalbek-- by Niles and his Marines. Friendship and respect for Niles kept the colonel at his desk this evening, working with the photos. The colonel's aides had the technical expertise to assemble and evaluate the photos. But the aides did not know Niles. To them, the death or capture of the Marines would be regrettable losses of anonymous soldiers in a covert operation. To the colonel, the casualties would be the loss of a friend and several brave young men. When Niles and his volunteers went into Baalbek, the colonel wanted those men to succeed. And survive. A knock interrupted his work. He called out, "Come in--" as he gathered and stacked a panorama of a street.

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Looking up, Devlin saw Phil Carpio. Carpio worked in the bureaucracy of the Central Intelligence Agency. He had been called into the counter-strike planning group to coordinate the flow of information from foreign intelligence sources. A balding, retirement-aged administrator who had flown combat missions as a young pilot in the Korean War, Carpio had worked closely with the colonel throughout the contingency planning.

"I'm sorry to tell you, colonel. But they're shutting us down."

"What?"

"Todd called me. He's not my direct superior in the Agency but I've been reporting to him for the duration of this project. He told me to clean out my office here and return to Langley in the morning. I asked who would take over my work with you. And he said it was over. Reisinger will talk with you tomorrow."

"They've decided to do nothing ...."

Carpio nodded. "Thought you'd want to know first."

"Thanks."

"Stay in touch, colonel. Call me if you need help. You know how I think on all this."

"I will. And thank you again."

Devlin stepped away from the desk. He stared out the window at the sights of the capitol-- the Elipse, the white blade of the Washington Monument rising against the night, the streaking lines of traffic on the avenues, the blocks of lights where clerks and researchers and aides processed the decisions of the government. Had all the history and power of his country come to mean nothing?

Media commentators would interpret the failure to pursue justice for the murdered Marines as a demonstration of the heavy responsibilities of world power. The bureaucratic frenzy to conceal official cowardice behind a screen of prepared statements and leaked memos and press conferences would be seen as a process of

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reassessment-- the balancing of foreign policy with real politik, public outrage with military limitations. The commentators would praise the Administration for wisdom and restraint.

The futility of his work saddened and angered him. His role in the contingency planning of a Baalbek action, his intelligence duties in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the past twelve years of his career-- all for nothing. There would always be overwhelming political reasons not to respond to the terror of gangs and dictators around the world. As a Marine and as a man who had devoted most of his life to the military, he wanted to strike back at the gangs who murdered the Marines in Beirut.

Payback-- a strike against the gangs to demonstrate that the murder of Americans had a price. Yet this would not be justice for the two hundred forty one murdered Marines. The real politik of the superpower confrontation in the Middle East denied any hope of destroying the regimes responsible for the bombing.

But there would be no counter-strike. Only the words of diplomats. He thought of resignation. Twenty-four years of service in the Marines guaranteed a pension. Corporate presidents had already questioned him on his future plans and offered positions in their companies. His new salary-- combined with his pension-- would send his children to the finest universities. He could reward his wife's devotion with a summer home and comforts never possible on his service pay. Could he time his resignation as a protest against the inaction? A final statement against the paralysis of his nation's leaders?

Quitting meant he had no chance to act against the paralysis. Others in the military and government shared his frustration. They had worked together-- exploiting their contacts and technical resources-- in an informal network of alliances. Resigning meant severing his links to officers and bureaucrats willing to act on their principles.

National Security advisor Reisinger had told the colonel that the President

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himself had demanded a counter-strike against the Shiite terrorists. However, Congressional and diplomatic restrictions limited the Administration's response to the gangs to the empty threats of the Secretary of State and the cautious contingency planning of the Secretary of Defense.

He thought of Niles and the volunteers acting on their own against the Hizbullah militia. Armed with Soviet weapons, wearing the uniforms of Syria and the gangs, they had walked into Shiite ghetto and hit the militia.

What if the colonel developed Niles' squad into a covert unit? Not another special operations battalion like the Delta Force, or the Army Ranger companies, or the various commando forces of the Air Force or Navy. None of those covert warfare forces-- because of their size, logistics, and command structure-- could operate secretly. Every department of the government exercised veto power over the special operations commandos.

What if the colonel created a unit so small it could operate independently and secretly? That could be funded without Congressional oversight. That could be dispatched with a phone call. That could exploit moments of opportunity.

If he suggested this to the National Security advisor, the colonel risked the instantaneous end of his career. But so what? Why not risk his career? His career had come to an end. He thought of Niles risking not only his career but courtmartial and prison to act against the fanatics threatening the Marines.

The mass murder of Marines in Beirut, the terrorism against American embassies and civilian travelers-- the crimes demanded a response. Justice or payback-- whatever the word-- but action to stop the criminals from attacking Americans again.

Devlin reknotted his tie and slipped on his coat. At the end of the corridor, an elderly guard insisted that he sign out. He scrawled his initials and went down the polished granite stairs to the lobby, then into the cold air of the night.

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Striding across the lawns and sidewalks, the colonel crossed the narrow street between the Executive Office Building to the northwest gate of the White House grounds. The guards there watched as the straight-backed, gray-haired man approached. The colonel heard a radio in the gatehouse reporting details of an assassination in Beirut.

"Good evening, sir." The guard checked his watch. "Can I help you? Do you have an appointment?"

"I'm Lieutenant Colonel Devlin, Joint Chiefs of Staff, temporarily with the Council staff--" He unclipped the plastic-laminated identification card from his shirt pocket. The card showed his name, rank, photo, and the seal of the National Security Council.

"Are they expecting you, sir?"

"No. Has Mr. Reisinger left yet?"

"No, sir."

"That's the man I want to see. Call him."

As the guard dialed, the colonel scanned the windows of the West Wing. Lights showed in several offices. Limousines and drivers waited at the basement entrance. Secret Service men paced the sidewalks and lawn. Even there-- in the center of the capitol, guarded by thousands of police, thousands more Federal guards, the high technology of the fence protecting the President, and the President's police-- the Secret Service watched for a threat.

"Sir, Mr. Reisinger is with the Secretary of State. But his secretary said to come in if you're willing to wait."

"I'm willing."

"Just a moment, sir. A man will need to walk you to the door."

Obsessive security. He had top clearance and they would not allow him to walk the hundred meters to the entrance. The leaders of the nation demanded near-perfect security-- but what about security for the people?

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As he stood at the gate, he heard the radio announcer report on a new communique from the Shiite gangs of Beirut. The colonel listened. Nothing new. Threats and demands. Remarkably similar to the statements of the Secretary of State.

A young Secret Service man, a walkie-talkie in his hand, came to the gate. Together, walking in silence, they followed the circular drive to the White House West Wing. The colonel heard the whisper of a voice from the earphone the agent wore and the agent spoke quickly into the walkie-talkie, "Colonel Devlin is here."

Perfect security for the leaders. Inside, the colonel faced two more of the Presidential police. He signed the log sheet and waited again. The door of an old elevator slid open. Another uniformed guard stood inside.

"Colonel Devlin? They're expecting you upstairs."

As the old elevator slowly carried him toward the third floor, he reconsidered his decision. Twenty four years in the Marine Corps, all opportunities for work in this Administration, any chance to somehow influence the national counter-terrorist policy: it all ended if Reisinger refused to authorize a counter -strike on the murderers of the Marines.

If the Administration did not strike back, he wanted out.

Teletypes clattered. Stepping out of the elevator, he saw staffers watching the paper roll out of the wire service machines as the typeheads printed lines. The colonel hurried on. Telephones rang in the offices he passed. He heard a printer running. At the end of the hallway, he rushed into the outer office of the National Security advisor. A stenographer at one of the metal desks transcribed from a cassette tape, headphones over her silver hair, her thin hands flying over the keyboard of a desktop computer. A group of staff workers crowded around another desk, their briefcases open on the floor. One young man redlined phrases on a typed sheet while the others leaned over him to read his editing-- aides rewriting a meaningless statement.

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"Who's inside with Reisinger?" the colonel demanded.

An overweight aide stared at him, recognizing his face from a House hearing or a television appearance but not remembering his name or position in the government. The aide squinted at the plastic identification card on the colonel's coat before answering. "Mr. Samuel and his assistant. And Mr. Todd. And some other military men."

The colonel went to the secretary and leaned down on her desk to stop her typing. Pointing to the inter-office phone, he told her. "Colonel Devlin, to speak with Mr. Reisinger."

"He's in discussion with the Secretary of State, sir."

"Interrupt him."

Her hand hesitated over the button as she studied him over the frames of her half-glasses. "May I ask why?"

"Interrupt him."

"There is a Colonel Devlin here to speak to Mr. Reisinger on an urgent matter." She looked up to the colonel. "Would you like to step inside and speak with--"

He took the phone from her hand. "We'll talk in the hallway."

"What is it--"

Hanging up the phone, the colonel heard the inner door jerk open. National Security advisor Reisinger rushed out, the aides at the desk turning around to stare. A tall ex-major in the Army Airborne, Reisinger had gone gray in the service of the President. Long hours and stress had lined his face and taken the tone out of his body. Only fifty years old, he looked sixty. A cigarette hung from his yellowed fingers.

"What is it?"

Motioning the advisor outside, Devlin followed him into the hallway. Teletype clatter and voices continued. The gray-faced, gray-eyed advisor took a drag on his cigarette and waited for the colonel to speak. "When do we hit Baalbek? The



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photo reconnaissance is ready. The agent information on the Beeka is ready. We have Marines in Beirut ready. We're ready to go ahead on the action."

The advisor exhaled his smoke before speaking. "Someone told you that we're breaking up the contingency group. Is that it?"

"True."

"What exactly is it that you mean, 'action'?"

"The armed forces of the United States have the ability to strike back. The question is: does the Administration have the will? Or do the lives of its servicemen mean nothing?"

"You're not talking to a committee, Colonel Devlin. Spare me the rhetorical questions. What's this 'action' you're talking about?"

"I briefed you on the actions of the Marine Recon unit in Beirut. We can send in those same men. They'll target those gangs for air strikes and then get out."

"That's impossible."

"Sir, what is impossible is for me to remain in service to a government that initiates endless studies, issues ultimatum after ultimatums, prepares for every possible contingency-- but does nothing."

"You'd quit? The Council? The Joint Chiefs?"

"And the Marine Corps."

"You feel that strongly about this? I wanted to keep you on as a specialist after this. You could make general. Another colonel did."

"I did not come to discuss that. I want some attempt at justice for two hundred forty one murdered Marines."

Advisor Reisinger smiled. He took a long drag on the stub of his cigarette. Exhaling, he instructed the colonel. "Alright, you're out. Write your letter of resignation. List everything you just told me--"

Silent finally, Devlin nodded. He had gambled and lost.

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The advisor waited for a response. After several seconds, he continued. "Sign it but leave the date open. Bring it to me tomorrow. Just a moment--"

Reisinger rushed across the waiting room. He leaned into his inner office. "Mr. Todd--"

A thin middle-aged man with the round shoulders of a life-long desk worker left the meeting. He had pale features and gray hair. Decades of fatigue had marked dark circles under eyes. His lips cut a gray line across his face. He wore a gray suit highlighted by a black bow tie. Reisinger introduced the pale stoop-shouldered bureaucrat.

"Colonel Devlin, This is Richard Todd, Special Assistant to the Agency's Director of Operations. Todd, the colonel heads the group planning the response to the event of October the twenty-third. He learned that we're writing off any possible response and he's resigning in protest. Convenient?"

Todd extended his hand. "Good. It'll be a pleasure working with you, colonel. I know of your expertise and service. Mr. Reisinger told me about the Recon squad's fighting in the Moslem sections of the city. You and your men are unique. We need all the help we can get."

"As of tonight, we're dissolving your planning group," Reisinger continued. "Officially, any response to the terrorist bombing of the Marine barracks-- air strikes, airborne assaults, whatever-- is politically impossible. Unofficially, covertly, we'll be using your men to chase those murdering sons-of-bitches and put them in a hole. From tomorrow on, you'll be working directly with me. Mr. Todd volunteered the assistance of his staff in the future. I want an oral presentation tomorrow of the options. No American weapons. No tracing it back to the United States. Nothing will be committed to writing. If this goes public, you are gone. You think you can do this? This quick and dirty squad?"

Clattering machines, the phones, the voices in the offices, the couriers and staff

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hurrying through the hall-- all the distractions of the bureaucracy receded. Devlin stood eye to eye with the advisor to the President of the United States.

"I can do it."

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Twenty two years of extraordinary duty in the military had prepared Anthony Devlin for this opportunity.

As young man graduating from Yale, he continued his family tradition of military service by volunteering for the Marine Corps. The Corps offered him a staff liaison position with the N A T O command. He declined the prestige appointment and volunteered for a combat post with a Marine Amphibious Unit on continuous station in the Meditteranean. A battalion commander recognized the young lieutenant's education and language skills-- and assigned him to the Division Intelligence office, maintaining files and processed thousands of routine up-dates of topographical and military details that would be required in the event of a war. He received an excellent rating from his officers but requested retraining and transfer to Force Recon, an elite unit responsible for pre-assault reconnaissance of enemy territory.

Recon platoons operate as extensions of Division Intelligence, a role which requires stealth rather than firepower. The Amphibious Reconnaissance Course trained Devlin to enter an enemy-controlled area, observe the enemy forces, and exit-- unseen and unheard. He learned the basic techniques of insertion and extraction by boat or helicopter. For months his technical instructors drilled him on surveillance, mapping, engineering, communications, and coding. He then went on to scuba training in San Diego. Later, he received parachute training at Fort Benning, Georgia.

But the peace-time Marine Corp of the early sixties could not offer Devlin the action he sought nor the rapid promotion he deserved. Instead, the Marine Corps

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exploited his dual capabilities-- intelligence staff officer and qualified Recon officer-- in the instruction of counter-insurgency forces of Latin America. He learned fluent Spanish as he taught the sons of Colonels and Presidents to fight the real and imagined enemies of their regimes.

After two years, he volunteered for reassignment to the Combat Operations Center of the Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam. He received a promotion and took charge of an office evaluating and summarizing the after-action reports of Marine Recon units fighting in I Corps, the most northern of the military regions of South Vietnam.

Lieutenant Devlin took this responsibility at a time of escalation in the war. Both the American and North Vietnamese strategists had abandoned the tactics of a war fought by small units. American-led counter-insurgency teams no longer faced peasant guerrillas. The infiltration of the North Vietnamese Army had accelerated to thousands of soldiers a month and the Hanoi forces attacked South Vietnamese positions in battalion strength, overrunning villages and bases, driving the South Vietnamese government out of remote areas. The United States countered by deploying battalions of American Marines and Air Cavalry backed by the combined-arms support of a modern army-- jet bombers, helicopter gunships, artillery, armor.

But the North Vietnamese avoided conventional battles. Breaking their battalions into platoons, the Hanoi generals exploited the mountains and forests to hide their forces, regrouping their lightly equipped soldiers to stage an attack, then withdrawing and scattering before the American battalions massed their overwhelming firepower on the N V A forces.

This confronted the Marine forces in I Corps with a war of attrition. The Marine Corps, with the historic mission of launching amphibious assaults on hostile nations and establishing beachheads for the landing of American armies, did not have the

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training or equipment to fight a static, endless war against non-conventional forces. Assigned to defend the American bases at Da Nang and Chu Lai, the Marine battalions suffered hundreds of casualties in meaningless skirmishes as they patrolled the villages outside the base perimeters. Outside the areas of Marine control, the N V A established camps to train intelligence agents, sapper platoons, and shock forces for assaults on South Vietnamese Army and U S M C units. Supply dumps hidden only a few kilometers from Da Nang or Chu Lai provided logistical support for battles staged at the convenience of the N V A generals.

During months of inconclusive battles where the N V A struck then dispersed, Marine commanders evolved a new concept in the employment of Reconnaissance forces in combination with supporting arms. This concept altered the traditional mission of Reconnaissance patrols. In World War II and Korea, Recon Marines preceded amphibious landings, observing enemy forces and defenses, then reporting their observations to Division Intelligence. Intelligence officers interpreted the observations and prepared reports for the Division command, which then directed infantry or artillery or air strikes to destroy the positions. However, the evolving technique in I Corps shortcut the traditional intelligence and command structure to link Recon units operating independently and distantly from their bases directly with artillery and air support.

The Marines based the Recon find-and-destroy concept on airborne insertion. Abandoning their dependence on the slow, short-range cargo helicopters usually employed by the U S M C, the Recon units acquired fast, maneuverable UH-1 helicopters. The U S Army Air Cavalry had already proven the combat value of these helicopters as troopships in the Central Highlands of II Corps. Marines employed the new helicopters to transport Recon units deep into N V A-controlled areas. The capacity of the aircraft-- a Huey troopship carried six to eight armed troopers-- usually limited their patrol strength to no more than twenty men. A twenty man patrol, which

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required four Huey troopships for insertion, could not expect their arrival to be unnoticed by the N V A forces in the area. This led to the deployment of units as small as only four men.

Stealth and patience-- and phenomenal courage-- characterized these Recon missions. As resupply helicopters would betray the presence of the patrols, each Marine carried rations and ammunition for the duration of the mission-- often as long as a week. With the additional weight of the radios linking the patrol to the stand-by artillery and air-support, the Marines could not carry enough ammunition to fight. They depended on silence and invisibility to survive.

After helicopters inserted the Recon units, the Marines searched for the enemy. Sometimes they only waited and watched, observing N V A supply routes or bases from a distance. Sometimes they trailed N V A troop movements-- following so close to the N V A that Vietnamese-speaking Marines listened to the leader's instructions. Marines then radioed target co-ordinates to waiting artillery or aircraft. The Marines adjusted artillery fire for effect or called in new co-ordinates as the N V A units fled.

The units scored remarkable kills on targets-of-opportunity. Often, fire directed by four man Recon units killed more N V A soldiers than days of the combined fire of a battalion of Marines searching for N V A forces.

Lieutenant Devlin foresaw unusual future applications for the Recon find-and-destroy concept. His classified work in the M A C V offices had introduced him to the development of weapons technologies to be introduced later in the war-- radar/computer enhanced bomb delivery, video guided bombs and missiles, remote sensors, electronic scanning, and satellite-bounced communications. All the new technologies would have direct application to conventional warfare in Europe, where American armies and the questionable European allies of the United States confronted the massed armored divisions of the Soviet Army. But he saw no opportunity for rapid advancement in the M A C V bureaucracy. He could only hope for routine

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promotions and eventual transfer to a Marine Amphibious Unit on stand-by station somewhere in the world.

Gambling on emerging role of technology in war, he created a new position in the M A C V bureaucracy for himself: he became the Technology and Innovation Advisor to the Marine Recon units operating in I Corps. Though another junior officer took over the duty of summarizing after-action reports from the Marine units, Lieutenant Devlin continued reviewing the reports. But now he had the authority to fly north to I Corps and personally interview the Recon units. He also had the authority to present the Recon commanders with new weapons and communications electronics. Acting as an intermediary between the M A C V command center and the Recon units, he bypassed the conservative leadership of the Marine Corps Headquarters to expedite the flow of advanced technology directly to the individual platoons.

As his first project, Lieutenant Devlin diverted several cases of the new and still-experimental M16 rifle to Recon platoons. Much lighter than the standard-issue M14 rifle, the small-caliber plastic and aluminum M16 rifles allowed soldiers to carry more ammunition. The lieutenant listened to the comments of the individual Marines and reported their opinions to his superiors. The manufacturer immediately initiated a program to improve the standard-issue rifle. A parallel program developed a special operations variant of the M16.

Another project introduced a passive light-enhancement scope under development for the British armed forces. Devlin distributed the scopes to riflemen of night ambush and night surveillance details. In combat, the Marines discovered the values and limitations of the electronic night-sights. Years later, an American company developed an improved device called the Starlite scope.

Supply flights carried the lieutenant between Da Nang and Saigon several times a week as he initiated and evaluated projects. He became familiar with department heads throughout the M A C V bureaucracy and Recon leaders everywhere in I Corps as

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he searched for weapons development to enhance the effectiveness of individual patrols against the N V A.

The development of ground control radar in 1966 allowed the lieutenant to demonstrate the ultimate destructive power of a single Marine radioman. Up until the summer of 1966, B-52 bombers flying from Guam Island could not be re-directed in flight. A bombing run on a target could be cancelled, but the bombers could not be directed to an alternative target. After his briefing on the new ground control radar, the lieutenant rushed north to Chu Lai. A flight of B-52s had already left Guam and he had only a few hours to instruct a radioman in the frequencies and codes required to lock into the observer-to-ground controller-to-bomber communications triangle.

In Chu Lai, he found a Recon unit already waiting for heli-transport to a drop-zone. He had no time to brief the radioman. Instead, he grabbed a weapon and pack. He went with the squad into the forests of the Annamite Mountains.

Through the electronic optics of a light-enhancement scope, the patrol spotted an N V A platoon scouting an abandoned plantation. Lieutenant Devlin knew he could not justify a B-52 airstrike on only twenty N V A soldiers. He lied to the air controller, reporting that he saw a company of N V A resting in the groves of trees. The other Marines promised to collaborate the lie in their after-action report. However, as they waited, a truck convoy of N V A regulars appeared. The trucks parked in lines, using the rows of trees as camouflage.

Hundreds of North Vietnamese disappeared in the instantaneous devastation in fifty-eight thousand pounds of explosive and steel.

Lieutenant Devlin received promotion to Captain. The Recon Marines of I Corps called him, 'Mr. Marvel'.

But in 1968, the people of the United States elected Richard Nixon to end the Vietnam War. Corruption and political turmoil in the South Vietnamese government undercut the continuing struggle against the North Vietnamese. When Captain Devlin



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completed his third tour of duty in Viet Nam, his superiors transferred him to Washington, D. C. There, as a desk-bound hero in one of the thousands of Pentagon offices, he co-ordinated the disengagement of Marine forces from Vietnam. He tolerated years of paper-processing and Congressional hearings while he waited for transfer to Europe. He married and became a father. As expected, his next assignment sent him to an office in the N A T O staff where he prepared for Marine landings in the coming war with the Soviet Union.

Detente ended, the Soviet subversion of Third World nationalist movements continued, the Soviet Union modernized and reinforced the Red Army in Eastern Europe, but a naive idealist in the White House allowed the American Armed Forces to deteriorate. Underpaid American soldiers armed with obsolete weapons faced the most awesome military machine in world history. Congress voted only minimal funding for the research and development of new weapons technology.

Though Devlin received a promotion to Major, he remained deskbound-- only a commander of clerks-- his ambition for a central role in the future of the Marine Corps frustrated by political leaders in Washington who had surrendered America's role in world events to the Soviet Union. Major Devlin studied law in preparation for a new career as an executive with a defense contractor.

Then came the seizure of the American diplomats in revolutionary Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The inability of American forces to react to the terrorism of the Islamic fanatics or Soviet conventional forces moved Major Devlin to negotiate another transfer, this time to the Special Operations Division of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He tried to organize a covert Force Recon unit. He received a promotion to Lieutenant Colonel but no command of a Marine unit.

When the Army's new Delta Force went into Iran, Lt. Colonel Devlin cursed as the ad hoc rescue attempt disintergrated in the wasteland of the Dasht-e-Kavir Desert.

But in the disaster, he saw a victory for the Armed Forces: the White House amateur

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who had allowed the military to deteriorate to impotency had now demonstrated his incompetence to the nation. The next election installed a President who promised increased support for the Armed Forces.

Hundreds of billions of dollars flowed into the military, raising pay, funding training, buying new equipment, and financing research. But the new strength of the Armed Forces did not protect the United States and its allies. The enemies of the modern world-- the Soviets, the Islamics, the Soviet-backed fanatics in Africa and the Latin revolutionary nations, the fascist oligarchies of Central and South America-- did not directly confront the strength of the American military.

Instead, the Soviets increased their funding of terror. Palestinian gangs waged campaigns of murder against international travelers. The Islamics of Iran formed alliances with the neo-Stalinist Arabs of Syria and Libya to strike European and American embassies. The fascist elites of Latin America dealt drugs with the communist dictators of Nicaragua and Cuba, the profits financing death squads that murdered Latins and North Americans without distinction.

These unlikely alliances of convenience-- the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia with Iraq and Lebanon, Nicaraguans with Palestinians, Colombian bankers with Cubans, Iranians with North Koreans and Libyans-- had one common goal: the murder of Americans in carefully planned but unpredictable acts of terror. The enemies of the United States would not expose their regular armies to annihilation by the Armed Forces of the United States.

The gang leaders sent squads of semi-trained volunteers on one-way missions. Despairing young men, psychopaths, religious fanatics-- their leaders sent them to certain death for the victory of a few American dead and media time.

Colonel Devlin believed that the Third World War had begun. This war would not be fought with armored divisions or airborne battalions or intercontinental ballistic missiles, but by thousands of teenagers with Kalashnikov rifles committing suicide on prime-time television. And it

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would be a war directed by the Soviet Union. Though the Soviets could never exercise complete control of the assault on the western democracies-- to do so risked proof of that control and counter-assault by the United States-- its allies would shame and bleed the United States with every murder of Americans, demonstrating the weakness and vulnerability of mankind's most successful experiment in government to all the other nations of the world.

Without risk of a devastating war with the United States, the Soviets could force America to abandon to the leadership of the world. Fear of terrorism would force Americans to withdraw from international commerce. And the failure of the American military to counter terrorism would show American democracy to world as ridiculous and impotent, a showplace of decadent luxuries but incapable of protecting its citizens and allies. The red star of the Soviet Union would become a symbol of security and order, the Soviet totalitarian system a model for the 21st Century.

Colonel Devlin wanted the Marine Corps to play a central role in the war against terrorism. In testimony for Senate and House committees, he stated that international terrorist groups-- Palestinian, Islamic, marxist, fascist-- represented the shock forces of the Soviet Union and that no conventional American unit could counter the terrorists. Again and again, he told audiences of senators, representatives, academics, department executives, and military officers that the threat required an extraordinary response. This gained the recognition of others in the government with similar views, but in the office of Special Operations, the colonel became known as an extremist. His superiors isolated him from all but the most trivial staff responsibilities.

Despite his hopes for the future, frustrated by desk work and bureaucratic routine, Colonel Devlin considered retirement. Then came the temporary transfer to the staff National Security Council and the opportunity to take action.