

Between the Lines of Drift



The Memoirs of a Militant, Third Edition

Eric Rudolph

Front cover sketch courtesy of Marla Lawson
Georgia Bureau of Investigation

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Maps by Google Maps

Other Writings by the Author

Satires

Melvin and Maude

The Sentence

Essays

Abortion: The Irrepressible Conflict

Crime and Punishment

Feminism

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Pyrrhic Victories

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Tarnished "Heroes"

White Lies: Eugenics, Abortion, and Racism

Allocution and Statements

Allocution (Birmingham court)

Eric's written statement at his sentencing

Statement concerning the Centennial Park bombing

Writings are available at <http://www.armyofgod.com/EricRudolphHomepage.html>



During the bombings and later as a fugitive, Eric spent most of his time in the extreme south-west corner of North Carolina. See the next page for more detail of that area.



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CHAPTER 1

Murphy, NC • May 31, 2003

I rarely shopped at the Save-A-Lot on the weekend. Although the dumpster was often better stocked, police patrols always increased on the weekend. Every hour a police cruiser would circle behind the Save-A-Lot for a burglary check. And the party crowd came out in full force. One Saturday night, I had to sit in the pasture behind the store while two drunks pounded one another to a pulp in the front parking lot. You never knew what you would run into on the weekend.

For the past three summers I'd been coming into town to gather food for the winter. I had a small temporary camp in the woods outside of Murphy, North Carolina. Late at night, I'd collect discarded fruit and vegetables from the lone dumpster behind the Save-A-Lot grocery store. Back at camp the produce was cleaned, sliced, and put out to dry in the sun. After a couple of months I had enough desiccated onions, tomatoes, green peppers, and strawberries to last me all winter. When I was finished, I backpacked the stuff to my winter camp in the mountains.

Saturday, May 31, 2003, was one of those rare occasions. Two nights earlier I'd found a box of bruised bananas in the dumpster. This was the first sign that the store was preparing to dump its entire inventory of bananas. I'd seen it many times before. If my calculations proved correct, I would find a couple hundred pounds of produce tonight. I'd get a good head start on the summer drying if I got those bananas. "It's worth the risk," I told myself. "You have dodged that patrol car a hundred times before. You can do it again."

Rolling out from under my poncho shelter, I wiped the sleep from my eyes and donned my garbage clothes: fatigue jacket, stained pants, a pair of rotten Adidas tennis shoes. There was little moonlight. In the darkness, my feet remembered the trail down the ridge. At the bottom, an overgrown access road led out to the four-lane highway. Murphy was on the far side of the bridge that spanned the Valley River. I looked both ways, watching for headlights, then sprinted across the bridge. Dropping below the bridge, I followed a rutted path to the back of the Save-A-Lot.

Halfway to the dumpster I heard the whoosh of car tires on the asphalt and looked up to see a police cruiser rounding the corner of the building. His headlights were turned off. I was caught in the open. Sprinting for the loading dock, I ducked behind a stack of milk crates, hoping he hadn't seen me. But once I reached the crates I realized that there was no way that he could have missed me. To make matters worse, I had foolishly trapped myself against the building when I should have run the other way toward the pasture and the river.

He quickly positioned his cruiser in front of the crates, blocking off my escape route. He began probing for me with his spotlight. The bright beam of light spilled through the crates. "Come out and show me your hands!" he yelled.

Pinned against the building, I searched for a way out. I had no weapons on me, so resistance was not an option. There was an opening — off the far end of the loading dock. If I ran now I could beat him to the pasture. But something inside me said to stay put: "Stop running," the voice said. "You can take whatever they throw at you." Instantly I felt an incredible calm. I stepped out from behind the crates.

A second patrol car roared up, followed by a third. Pretty soon the alley behind Save-A-Lot was jammed with police cars. Two cops converged on me with their guns drawn; one applied handcuffs. Questions were asked. I gave them a false name and social security number. I said I was homeless and searching the dumpster for food. While one cop went on the radio to check out the information that I gave him, another one held a flashlight in my face.

After keeping the flashlight beam on my face for ten seconds, he turned and hurried over to the gaggle of cops. They huddled together speaking in excited tones.

“Safe-keeping,” the cop said. “We’re going to take you in for some safe-keeping . . . Get you some food . . . See if you need some medical attention.”

Safe-keeping was one of those new devices cops were using to detain people without having to go through the formality of arresting them. Having no weapons or drugs on me, there was no probable cause for an arrest. But I knew why they wanted to take me in, and it had nothing to do with “safe-keeping.” They wanted my fingerprints. Once those fingerprints were put into the system, the FBI would be along shortly. The jig was up.

It had ended pretty much as I always thought it would. The cop did a Crazy Ivan on me. I had watched him pass behind Save-A-Lot on my way across the pasture. It looked like a routine patrol. Usually I’d sit in the tall grass for a few minutes, just in case he came back around, as he sometimes did. But that night I didn’t wait. I hopped the pasture fence and started across the pavement. Meanwhile, the cop had circled around the front of the Save-A-Lot, and then drove back through the alley, this time with his lights out. I never saw him coming. He was on top of me before I knew it.

The convoy of cop cars drove me to the Cherokee County Courthouse in downtown Murphy. At 4:00 a.m. the streets were deserted. The stoplights flashed yellow. I used to wear a handcuff key around my neck for just such an occasion. But that was a long time ago; seemed like ages almost.

Attached to the rear of the courthouse was the county jail. It was a red brick box with rusted iron bars over the windows. Built in the 1920s, the ancient jail looked its age. If not for the police vehicles parked out front you would have thought it was a condemned building.

A dented metal door buzzed open and the cops led me into the booking area where they sat me down in one of the black plastic bus station seats that lined the wall. Three cops stood guard in front of me while the others disappeared into a side room.

It was quiet as a cave in there. The cop in front of me had a big smile on his over-sized face. Then, like a jury returning to render its verdict, the little procession of cops emerged from the side room to congregate in front of me. The congregation slowly parted like the Red Sea to let one of the officers through. In his hand he held a sheet of paper. “Who’s that?” he asked, thrusting the sheet of paper into my face. It was an FBI Ten Most Wanted poster with my name and picture on it. I recognized the photograph as one I had taken with my mother in Times Square back in 1997. The cop grinned real big; black flecks of Copenhagen snuff were wedged between his front teeth, making him look like a shit-eating dog.

Looking at the poster, then back at the cop, I pretended not to understand. “Who does it say I am?” I asked. This made him angry. I was messing up his little Law & Order moment. He thrust the poster closer, almost touching the tip of my nose.

“Look, you’re staying here ‘til we find out who you are. So why don’t you tell us your real name?”

“My name is Eric Rudolph.”

CHAPTER 2

Atlanta, GA • 1996 • Olympic Bombing

In the early morning hours of July 29, 1994, a man named Paul Hill waited outside the Ladies Center Abortion Clinic in Pensacola, Florida, with a Mossberg pump shotgun hidden inside his overcoat. A long-time pro-life activist, Hill had been a regular protester at the clinic, carrying signs, handing out literature, and counseling pregnant women along the sidewalk. But despite all his efforts, the killing continued unabated. That morning was different; that morning Hill intended to put the abortionists out of business for good. When the abortionist, Dr. John Britton and his bodyguard, James Barrett, pulled into the parking lot, Hill stepped to the side of the vehicle and opened fire. Britton and Barrett slumped over dead. Hill calmly sat down on the sidewalk and waited for the police to arrive.

Months later, I watched a jailhouse interview with Paul Hill. He explained his motives in clear, unimpeachable terms. “Dr. Britton was a professional mass murderer,” Hill said. “I intervened to save those twenty unborn babies who were scheduled to die under Britton’s knife that day.” Hill seemed like a perfect anomaly, a genuine American hero in an age of cowardice. I’d read about such people in history books, but I didn’t think they existed anymore. I knew then that the era of hot air was over. People were finally bridging the gap between their rhetoric and their actions. I knew then it was time for me to act as well.

Peaceful efforts to end abortion had failed. In decision after decision the courts had refused to stop the slaughter. Since 1973, over 35 million unborn children had been murdered. Politicians running for office paid lip-service to the pro-life cause, but once elected, they did absolutely nothing. Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush gave wonderful speeches about the “sanctity of all human life.” But during their administrations they appointed three of the Supreme Court justices – Kennedy, Souter, and O’Connor – who were responsible for upholding abortion as a so-called “fundamental right.”

At the same time, the abortion lobby, led by Planned Parenthood, tried to transform abortion into an entitlement. In response, the Republican Party passed the Hyde Amendment, which supposedly prohibited the use of federal tax dollars for abortions. There was, however, a serious flaw in the Hyde Amendment. Although the law made it illegal to use taxpayer money to pay for abortion procedures, the Hyde Amendment said nothing about using taxes to pay for Planned Parenthood’s overall infrastructure. The hypocrisy was nauseating. It was like claiming that they were innocent of a murder-for-hire because they agreed to pay only for the hit man’s hotel room, rental car, and meals, but didn’t spend a dime on the actual killing. The Republican Party assured voters that their taxes were not being used to fund abortions. But every year the federal government, under Title X, (the Family Planning Program passed in 1970) gave Planned Parenthood hundreds of millions for “infrastructure.” Such was the game of politics on Capitol Hill.

Having no one to turn to within the system, pro-life groups like Operation Rescue resorted to direct action. They picketed Congress and the Supreme Court. They stood outside abortion mills and begged mothers not to murder their unborn children. They even tried to close down abortion mills by blocking the entrances.

Washington responded with beatings, arrests, and long prison sentences. Passing the Freedom of Access to Clinics Entrances Act (FACE), the government showed which side of the debate it was on. The new law made it a federal crime to interfere with the business of baby killing. When some left-wing environmentalist chained himself to a redwood tree and managed to shut down an entire logging operation, the government refused to intervene. The logging company was left to its own devices. And after negotiations, the environmentalist would climb down and go on Larry King Live. But when a pro-life demonstrator so much as breathed heavy on an abortionist, Washington sentenced him to federal prison. Pro-lifers had no representation in Washington, no place in the debate. So they began to act.

Paul Hill's actions came at a time of exceptional turmoil in the country. Conservatives and liberals were squaring off over issues from gun control to gays in the military. The catalyst for the conflict was William Jefferson Clinton. In 1992, the Democratic Party nominated Clinton as their candidate for president. His election would signal a changing of the guards. Those who had stormed the beaches of Normandy were stepping down; those who had dodged the draft during the Vietnam War were stepping up. Clinton was the standard-bearer for his generation. In their college years they dropped acid, read Karl Marx, and protested the war in Vietnam. They dreamed of the day when their generation would finally take power from The Man and usher in a truly "just" society, one that was based on the ideals of democratic socialism. They would then redistribute the wealth. Outdated concepts like patriotism would fall by the wayside. The patriarchal family would retire to a museum somewhere. At Woodstock, they had wallowed around in their own excrement. Now they were one step away from the White House. Some people were ecstatic; others were alarmed and dismayed.

True to form, Clinton came bearing a list of "progressive" reforms: homosexuals in the military; socialized medicine; a comprehensive crime bill (Brady Bill), which included a ban on so-called assault weapons. Planned Parenthood gave Clinton its highest pro-abortion rating. His agenda touched off a firestorm that would burn across the American Heartland for eight long years. Clinton's support for abortion and his push for homosexual soldiers angered social conservatives. Socialized medicine angered the doctors and the country-club Republicans. And the Brady Bill infuriated the Far Right.

It was the Federal Assault Weapons Ban (AWB), in particular, that brought old fears to the surface. For decades the Far Right had warned of an impending New World Order. The John Birch Society said global elites at the United Nations were plotting to overthrow the Constitution and establish a global government. "Beware of gun confiscation," they said. "It's the final step in the long march toward tyranny." Then Clinton announced his gun ban, and all their predictions seemed to be coming true. Jack-booted government thugs would soon be kicking down our doors. And then that happened too.

Two months before Clinton took office government, federal agents surrounded the Weaver family in Ruby Ridge, Idaho. Acting on a trumped-up gun charge, camouflaged agents shot the boy Sammy Weaver in the back, killing him instantly. A day later, an FBI sniper killed the mother, Vicky, shooting her in the face while she held her infant daughter in her arms.

The mainstream media tried to bury the story, but word spread in spite of the blackout. On shortwave radio, in small newsletters, in sermons at church – people learned of the Ruby Ridge Massacre.

Like the Weavers, my family had left the big city to live in the mountains. We had given up on mainstream society and wanted to live a simple life close to the land. We raised chickens and potatoes and read a traditional interpretation of the King James Bible. And, yes, we owned guns and dabbled with ideas that the commissars at the Southern Poverty Law Center didn't approve of. Other than that, we just wanted to be left alone.

For those of us who had grown up in that lifestyle, the Ruby Ridge Massacre came as a clarion call. It confirmed our worst fears about the federal government. Washington had no intention of leaving us alone. The government saw people like us as a threat. Washington's treatment of the Weavers showed that it would use any tactic to neutralize us. It would insinuate an informer into our places of worship, set us up on false charges, then send a hit squad in camouflage to kill us.

Clinton was elected in November, and anyone who doubted his malevolent intentions had no doubts after watching his Attorney General, Janet Reno, incinerate 80 members of the Branch Davidian sect in Waco, Texas. Rage on the right reached a crescendo. There was a lot of sympathy for the victims. Like most folks, I was indifferent to the Davidian's heretical brand of Christianity. It wasn't religion that drew my sympathy; rather, it was the way that Washington dealt with the Davidians. The feds had wiped out the Weavers over a sawed-off shotgun. At Waco, they burned 80 people alive because they suspected them of "stockpiling weapons." By most accounts, the local sheriff could have called David Koresh, the

leader of the Davidians, into his office and resolved the matter there. No, that was too easy. Washington wanted to make an example of the Davidians just as it had made an example of the Weavers. The Clinton regime wanted to send a message, a warning to all those dissident groups and individuals out there: you cannot break with our system and build your own private Idaho; and if you try to, we will shoot you in the face, burn you alive, or put you in prison.

I heard that message loud and clear. A lot of other folks heard it too. I thought that the government had lost its last bit of sanity. I thought that a tyrant had taken possession of the White House and had dispatched his psychopathic attorney general to roam the countryside with her own private army.

At such times, it is the duty of “lesser magistrates,” lower ranking government officials, to depose the tyrant and restore law and order. I looked around for the lesser magistrates but saw only fossils and fools. So-called conservative politicians (like Newt Gingrich) talked about a “Republican Revolution,” but it became a hollow revolution. They criticized the Clinton regime. Some even went so far as to condemn the massacres at Ruby Ridge and Waco. They spoke eloquently of the demise of our constitutional republic. But that was the extent of their “revolution.”

While the secular leaders blew hot air, the religious leaders preached quietism. Half the ministries were devoted to the Second Coming, which was expected any day. The other half preached a navel-gazing version of personal salvation. It seemed the Church no longer had a mission on planet earth. “Forget about this world,” they said. “Get saved and get ready for the Rapture.” While Christians gazed expectantly at the sky or at their navels, the Marxists continued to devour our country from stem to stern. Christianity had become a religion without testicles.

The day Washington decided to legalize abortion, it violated the most fundamental requirement of a government: to protect the lives of its citizens. It lost its moral authority. When, after repeated efforts to change this decision, the courts elevated abortion-on-demand to the status of a “fundamental right,” Washington lost its legitimacy. Then the regime began shooting housewives and burning parishioners.

To my way of thinking, we were living in Thomas Hobbes’ “state of nature.” (See Locke’s and Hobbes’ political theories concerning a state of nature.) Civil society had broken down. The church was lost in space. The law of the land was corrupt. We were on our own.

The theologian-philosopher Francisco Suarez wrote about such times. He said that when the government becomes a tyranny, and when lesser magistrates are lacking, each man must act according to his own interpretation of the Moral Law. The simple man must reconstitute society as he sees fit.

I was convinced that an illegitimate government controlled our country. And if all peaceful efforts to remove it had failed, then the only alternative was to remove it by force. Naturally, I couldn’t do it alone. I had no delusions on that score. I had to somehow encourage others to help.

In the spring of 1995, I decided to embark on a mission. I’d carry out a series of high profile attacks against symbols of the regime: abortion mills, Sodomite organizations, left-wing interest groups, and agents of the Washington government. Because it is the most egregious of Washington’s many crimes, abortion would be the main focus of my attacks. The hope was that my actions would push other pro-lifers and Patriots to bridge the gap between their rhetoric and their actions. These attacks were not part of some personal vendetta against abortionists, homosexuals, or government agents; they were acts of war aimed at damaging, undermining, and ultimately, overthrowing the liberal establishment in America. When I heard they were bringing the Summer Olympics to Atlanta, I thought it would make the perfect target.

* * *

Inspired by the ancient Greeks, a Frenchman named Pierre de Fredi, Baron de Coubertin decided to resurrect the idea of the Olympics in 1896. Unlike the Greek games, the underlying purpose of de Fredi’s

modern Olympics was to promote the ideals of global cooperation. Sport was a vehicle toward advancing a socialist model of global governance. Over the years, the Olympic committees and hosts have acquiesced to this globalist agenda while showcasing their national achievements and, with luck, realizing handsome corporate profits.

Governments and corporations had invested close to \$1 billion dollars in the Atlanta games. As a simple American, I despised these elitists. These same entities – the U.S. Government through Title X, AT&T and Coca Cola through annual donations – funneled hundreds of millions of dollars into the bloody coffers of Planned Parenthood, the world's biggest baby killer. In order to hurt these sponsors, I would take aim at their pocket books. Causing them to cancel the Olympics would be a tremendous victory, but beyond my capabilities. At the very least, I knew I could disrupt the games, causing an enormous loss of money and much embarrassment for the powers that be.

I sold my house in North Carolina in the spring of 1996. The money was divided with my mother and two brothers. I quickly turned my share into cash and buried it in the mountains. My furniture and tools – the stuff I wanted to keep – was hauled to Cal's Mini-Storage off Highway 19 in Marble, North Carolina. The rest was sold at auction. In a matter of weeks, I had liquidated my former life and turned it into the fuel needed to power my new one.

No one knew about my plans. At the age of 29, I'd been around long enough to know the pitfalls of collaboration. I figured what people didn't know couldn't be used to hurt me or them. I told my family and friends I was going out West, might "buy some land," or maybe "get a job on a logging crew." When they mentioned Idaho or Montana as a possible destination, I smiled and said nothing. I did, in fact, go out west – about forty miles west to a trailer south of Murphy, North Carolina.

It was early June when I spoke to the landlady about a trailer. She said the rent was \$275 a month, and insisted the utilities remain in her name. I thought that was fine. A woman in her mid-sixties, the landlady had long grey hair pulled into a ponytail. A smoldering cigarette dangled from her mouth as she spoke. Her voice sounded like a dune buggy, as if her throat were made of metal.

I told her my name was Bob Randolph and that I'd come into some money and purchased property west of Murphy. In the coming year, I planned to build a cabin on it to rent in the summer.

"We run a clean operation here," she growled as she showed me the trailer. "We require a \$275 security deposit . . . In case you wreck the place." She spoke as though I was moving into an exclusive gated community. I looked around the trailer and laughed inside. A troop of baboons couldn't have wrecked that place.

Situated above the landlady's whitewashed block house, the trailer looked like the kind of place where alcoholics go to die. The yellow shag carpet was stained and mashed flat, and cheesy flea market quality ornaments added "atmosphere." The bed had a rust-red stain in the middle. And the place reeked of cat piss.

But there was no time to waste ruminating on my lovely new accommodations. The Olympics were only six weeks away. There was little time to prepare. My days were spent experimenting with improvised explosives in the remote hollows along the North Carolina-Tennessee border.

To cool off at the end of the day, I'd drive to the Grape Creek Bridge and swim two miles in Lake Hiwassee. At night, the water was warm and smooth as glass. Fishing boats would come, and I'd dive under the surface and watch them pass over-head.

The original idea involved damaging Atlanta's power grid. Cross-country power lines converged on the city like spokes on a wheel. The lines fed electricity to the substations, which then rationed it out to the neighborhoods. If I could cut enough of the spokes by knocking over towers and destroying substation transformers, I might be able to cause a blackout long enough to disrupt the Olympics.

I experimented with several kinds of explosives. A powerful primary explosive, HMTD (Hexamethylene triperoxide diamine), was the easiest to make. The charges cut through quarter-inch steel like butter. But it was a lot of work to make a couple of the small charges. Making enough charges to disable Atlanta's power grid would take too much time and money. I had neither. The Olympics was fast approaching, and I needed to come up with a new plan.

The new plan was simple. Instead of using hard-to-make high explosives, I decided to use low explosives packed into pipe nipples, what they called pipe bombs. I'd plant a pipe bomb near an Olympic venue, then phone in a warning to 911. Security would quickly clear the area before the device exploded. The next night, I'd do it again. The cumulative effect of four or five such explosions should create a climate of instability in Atlanta. If people felt unsafe, they would go home, taking their money with them. Attendance would nosedive, along with the profits. Although simple, the new plan was dangerous. The warning call to 911 could go unheeded. The bomb could explode prematurely, killing innocent civilians. But I ignored these potential dangers and decided to go ahead with the plan. It was a fatal decision.

I drove 100 miles to Gadsden, Alabama, where I bought pipes, alarm clocks, batteries, and circuit wire. Then I drove a little more, hoping to make my activities hard to track. At a garage south of Rome, Georgia, I had a directional plate cut to fit inside a medium ALICE pack. The All-Purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment – or ALICE – system was adopted by the U.S. Army as a lightweight backpack in an effort to lighten a combat soldier's overall load. Set inside the ALICE pack, the one-eighth inch thick plate would focus the blast where I chose to direct it.

I constructed five pipe bombs. Four were made using a single pipe nipple for each. The last and largest device contained six pipe nipples wired together, then strapped to the directional plate. The thing was a humungous hunk of metal. It barely fit inside an old ALICE pack. I removed the pack's pockets and frame to make it look less like a military backpack. There was one more task to complete before heading for Atlanta.

Working all day and into the night, I buried an emergency cache in the woods above Little Snowbird Creek. I'd never really thought about leaving the country if things went bad for me in Atlanta. To my way of thinking, the fight was here in America, not in Canada. If I was identified, I'd fall back to the mountains and continue the struggle from there. To keep me alive for a year, I packed the cache with wheat, lentils, pinto beans, peanut oil, and rye. I also included a Dutch oven, frying pan, tent, tarps, rope, axe, knife, and numerous other necessities.

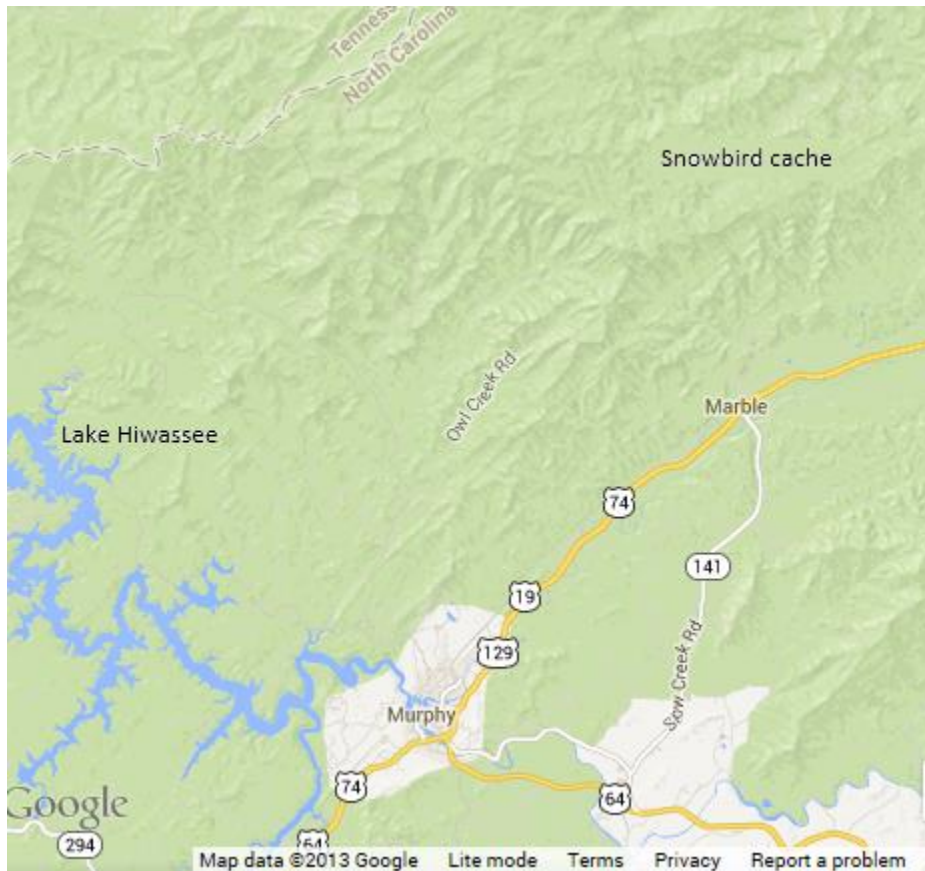


Figure 1 Snowbird Cache

Three more trash cans full of food and gear sat in my back room at the trailer. All I needed was a few minutes to load them onto the truck, and I'd be gone. Together, the caches at my trailer and the one in the woods should sustain me for two years.

Meanwhile, opening ceremonies were only days away, and I hadn't even been to Atlanta yet. Leaving the devices behind in the woods, I drove south through the Georgia foothills. Atlanta was about a two-hour drive from Murphy. The city used to be called Terminus because it was literally the end of the railroad line. Eventually they extended the tracks west and the city became an important crossroads. Since the city's name no longer fit, they renamed it Atlanta after the mythical island of Atlantis in Greek legend. The Yankees burned the city to the ground during the Civil War. After the war, Atlanta sprouted from the ashes to become the largest city in the South, and the worst example of urban sprawl in the country.

On the edge of the sprawl, I found a place to sleep at night. It was a moonscape of dirt berms and pine woods beside I-20, about twenty miles east of Atlanta. The huge lot looked like the future site of a shopping mall. Tiny dirt roads led off the asphalt and wound between piles of roofing shingles and rusted appliances. I parked amid the towering pine trees just as the last drop of light drained from the sky. Like apparitions, a small herd of white-tail deer surrounded my truck. They grazed as if I wasn't even there. This was my poor man's motel: no reservations, no room service, no credit cards, and no problems.

Just about every hotel, store, restaurant, and gas station had video surveillance. So even if you paid in cash to avoid leaving a paper trail, you left behind your likeness. I wanted to avoid leaving anything behind in Atlanta. The camper shell of my Nissan truck served as my bed at night. For meals, I ate food I'd brought with me. And gasoline stored in five-gallon jugs eliminated trips to the gas station.

The Olympic venues were scattered all across northern Georgia. Security around the venues was pretty tight. It would be difficult for me to smuggle a device inside. Then again, I didn't need to get inside a venue to accomplish my purpose.

I zeroed in on a place called Five Points in downtown Atlanta. It was the heart of the games. If I could somehow drive people away from Five Points, the Olympics would fall apart. Five Points looked like a cross between Disneyland and a flea market. The Olympic organizers had told people they could get rich selling junk to tourists. Folks put their houses up as collateral to borrow money from the bank. With the money, they bought vending licenses to sell things along Atlanta's sidewalks. They tried selling everything: cold beer, T-shirts and Beanie Babies. There were tattooed carnies operating amusement park rides in the parking lots.

At the center of this vast flea market, corporate sponsors had set up their own vending booths in a place called Centennial Olympic Park. The park advertised itself with the banner "Global Olympic Village," evoking the atmosphere of a multicultural commune. Underneath the banner, corporations sold their images – profiteers bowing to political correctness, hoping to cash in. Tourists drank over-priced beer in the air conditioned tent at Budworld. Swatch had a pavilion where they sold their cheap watches. There was a Superstore that carried an entire inventory of name-brand products, each one listed as an "Official Sponsor." Seemed like everyone was trying to sell you something. A hippie dressed like Uncle Sam hawked tickets to the House of Blues. And strippers in string bikinis handed out coupons for the Gold Club. The only thing free was the music. After sunset, crowds gathered in front of the AT&T stage and bounced to the rhythm of live concerts. The park reeked of a curious mixture of capitalist greed and socialist idealism.

July in Georgia is hot. The humid air is so thick it feels like you're breathing through a cocktail straw. To keep the tourists from dying of heatstroke, officials had built a water fountain in the center of Centennial Park. Water jets, embedded in red brick in the shape of the five Olympic rings, would squirt water into the air every few seconds. Exhausted tourists waded through the rings of water to cool off. Lights added color to the fountain at night. This was the Atlanta the organizers had advertised to the world – "the City Too Busy to Hate."

Beyond the bright lights of Five Points was the real Atlanta – the Most Dangerous City in the South. Any other time of the year, Five Points was plagued with panhandlers, pimps, prostitutes, and crack heads. Citizens simply didn't go downtown after dark. The Olympic organizers didn't want the tourists coming face-to-face with this Atlanta, so city officials cleared away the street people. They didn't push them too far; only a few blocks. There, in Midtown, out of view of the cops, they continued to ply their trade. Crack dealers whispered to Japanese tourists: "What do ya need? Got the Rock; got the good Rock." Panhandlers fleeced the tourists up and down Peachtree Street. Quite a few wore military fatigues and claimed to have fought in imaginary battles. One guy, who looked no older than 30, swore that he had fought in the Korean War. Another fellow approached me carrying a Bible in his hand; said he was the driver of a church van that had just broken down around the corner. All he required was \$5.00 to fix it. I gave him the money – had to admire his inventiveness.

I planned to enter Centennial Park in order to test the security at the entrances. Careful to avoid the paid parking and video cameras in Five Points, I parked beyond the safe zone, east of Peachtree Street. The side streets were crawling with the derelicts that had been run out of downtown. Leaving my truck parked there was a gamble: I didn't know if it would be there when I returned. The place became even more dangerous after sundown, so I tucked a Smith and Wesson .38 caliber revolver in my waistband holster. However, I didn't want to carry it into Centennial Park. Before entering the park, I stashed the pistol in the bushes south of the Spring Street tunnel. Later, I'd pick it up on the way back to the truck.

Surrounded by an eight-foot temporary fence, Centennial Olympic Park had three entrances. Static cameras covered the entrances and the corporate pavilions inside the park. And virtually every one of the

hundred thousand tourists carried a camera. It was impossible to avoid the cameras. There were simply too many of them.

I would end up on film. The only question was what I'd look like. I wore a light disguise. My jaw line was hidden behind a full beard, my eyes behind sunglasses. At night, I changed to clear lens safety glasses. Wearing a different set of clothes and a different hat on each trip would, I hoped, obscure my profile. No matter what I wore, I couldn't shake the feeling that the cameras would somehow penetrate my disguise. It was absolutely unnerving, like being followed by some unseen force.

Hundreds of security guards and cops patrolled the park. They eyeballed me going through the entrances. But there were no metal detectors, and bags were searched selectively. After sundown the crowds grew enormous. Upwards of a hundred thousand people packed into Five Points. Security at the park became overwhelmed. They stopped searching bags altogether, and the entrances flew wide open. I knew then that I could smuggle in a bomb.

Opening ceremonies came and went, but still I wasn't ready. All the pieces were not in place. I returned to North Carolina. The following day, I packed the bombs in the truck and drove back to Atlanta, where I hid the bombs in the garbage piles in the vacant lot east of the city.

The plan was to put the largest pipe bomb in Centennial Park, then make a phone call to 911. I would plant it near an identifiable land mark, some place I could easily relay to the 911 operator. The benches at the base of the light and video tower in front of the AT&T stage looked like a good spot. The bomb had a fifty-five minute timer. That should give me plenty of time to walk to a pay phone, deliver a short statement to 911, and provide the location of the device and the time of detonation. Security should have a contingency plan for every conceivable scenario, including a bomb threat to the park. By the time the device finally exploded, Centennial Park would be nearly empty. The only people left in the park should be security personnel. It would go like clockwork.

I figured that the first blast would have a lasting echo. The noise and spectacle alone would drive thousands away from the games. The following night I'd do it again: another bomb, at another location, and another warning to 911. I'd continue planting bombs until they either cancelled the games, or I ran out of bombs. That was the plan.

Everything went smooth on the last walk-through. I passed through security at the Baker Street entrance to Centennial Park with an ALICE pack full of food, clothes, and sun block. There was no bag check. Tomorrow night I'd be carrying something else into the park.

When I returned to my Nissan truck, I noticed that the sidewalk sparkled. I neared the truck to find that the passenger side window had been busted out. Glass was sprinkled all along the sidewalk. My clothes and gear were tossed around inside. My luck had finally run out. Thieves had ransacked the truck while I was away in the park.

I searched through everything thoroughly to see what had been taken. But the only thing missing was my Leatherman Tool. Had to have been crack heads searching for a quick score – camcorder, jewelry, cash – something they could fence quickly to buy drugs. Luckily, I kept nothing expensive in the truck. I'd been fortunate; they could have taken the entire truck.

But the thieves had upset my plan. I'd have to postpone the attack until I could repair the window. Couldn't take the chance of being pulled over for a busted window with a big bomb on the front seat. The truck had to be street legal.

I couldn't repair the window in Atlanta. Being seen at a junkyard in Atlanta the day before the bombing campaign was a bad idea. I'd gone through a great deal of trouble to cover my tracks into Georgia. When I finally leave the state after the attacks, I don't want anybody following me out.

I drove north. Day was breaking when I crossed the North Carolina state line. East of Murphy was the Peachtree junkyard. Thunderstorms began early and lasted through the day. The fat grease monkey in the front office directed me to a car in the back of the junkyard. "If you want it, you'll have to get it yourself," he said. It was pouring down rain. Removing the window, I held it to the door frame of my 1989 Nissan. It was too small.

"That's all we got," said the fat grease monkey in the front office. He held up his index finger. "Give me a minute." A burger and fries lay spread across his greasy desk. I'd interrupted his brunch and he wasn't happy about it. He ate leisurely as I stood there dripping on his greasy floor. Finally, he brushed the crumbs off his greasy belly and picked up a greasy phone.

After a minute on the phone, he glanced at me and said, "Gotta winder fur ya, but it's in Cleveland, Tennessee."

I pressed on, forty miles to Cleveland, plowing through the thunderstorms that followed me wherever I went. At a car wash I found a dry place to work on the window. I crossed back over the Georgia line the next morning, July 26, 1996.

The Olympics had started a week earlier. Well behind schedule, I prepared for the attack that night. I went over the plan in my head; everything seemed to fit; I didn't anticipate any problems.

* * *

It was almost midnight, and the streets of Midtown appeared deserted as I drove up. But when I looked closer I could see figures huddled in the shadows of the buildings. An emaciated woman in hot pants and high heels suddenly emerged from the darkness and tried to wave me over to the curb. I drove past and she flipped me the bird. A police cruiser sat at a stoplight up ahead. Twinges of nervous energy fired in my brain. "Watch your speed," I said to myself. "Don't get pulled over now." I hit the turn signal and turned right. The police cruiser turned left. The heavy pipe bomb jostled on the floorboard beside me. I slowed down looking for a place to park.

In front of the Civic Center, I found an open space behind an old Monte Carlo. Two homeless guys were across the street yelling inanities at one another. The bomb was checked one last time to make sure the timer remained inactive. The homeless guys moved off, still yelling. I connected the circuit. It was ready. All I had to do now was wind the clock to set the device in motion.

Concealed inside my old ALICE pack, the huge pipe bomb weighed close to 100 pounds. I carefully perched the pack on the edge of the truck seat, then backed up to it and slipped my arms through the straps. Struggling to my feet, I felt the canvas straps dig into my shoulder blades.

Traffic and pedestrians crowded Peachtree Street. Vendors were selling hot dogs and beer. After another sweltering day in central Georgia, the night air had barely cooled. I began to sweat profusely. My T-shirt became sopping wet. The backpack was heavier than I had anticipated. I lifted weights and swam to stay fit. But even at a muscular 190 pounds, I struggled to walk naturally under the crushing weight of the huge bomb.

Beyond Peachtree, I veered into the Spring Street tunnel under I-85. The lights in the tunnel blinded me. Pedestrians on the side walk brushed past me. I turned my face away to avoid eye contact.

Out of the tunnel, I entered one of the most heavily surveilled places on the planet. In the past week, I'd counted dozens of stationary security cameras. And just about every one of the hundred-thousand tourists carried some form of photographic equipment. There was simply no way to avoid being photographed. My only option was to act natural and hope my disguise worked. It was a light disguise. I'd shaved my beard into a goatee and put on a pair of safety glasses and a tan fisherman's cap. If I kept my head down, I should be okay. But in case things went wrong, I carried the Smith and Wesson .38 tucked in a hide-a-way holster. This time I'd take it into the park.

Along Baker Street people were jammed shoulder-to-shoulder waiting to enter Centennial Park. I lingered in the back of the crowd watching the security guards that flanked the entrance. They were looking over the lines of people filing into the park. But they didn't search anyone's bag. There were simply too many people. I cut into line and tipped the bill of my cap over my eyes as I passed through the gauntlet of guards and video cameras. I tensed up, ready to draw my revolver – but then I was inside the park.

Weaving through the dense crowd, I moved quickly to the large grassy area in front of the AT&T music stage. It was the least surveilled part of the park. Finding a bare spot between the benches and empty beer cans, I put the bomb on the ground and lay against it.

There was an old rock band onstage playing one of their hits from the 1960s: "War / Good God / What is it good for / Absolutely nothing." A pudgy man with long grey hair stood next to me, swaying to the beat, mouthing the lyrics.

The plan was to wait until the park began to clear out after 1:00 a.m. Then I'd move the device to the light and video tower in front of the stage. A three-story structure made of scaffolding and tarps, the tower had a set of benches that ran along its front. I'd stuff the bomb under the benches and set the timer in motion.

Making it through the entrance had been the hard part. All I had to do now was stay out of the camera's eye. The rest would be easy. I was wearing a pair of safety glasses that could pass for prescription eyewear. But the lenses had no tint. With all the cameras flashing in the park, I might end up in somebody's photo album. I'd rather avoid that. I yanked the brim of my fisherman's hat lower over my eyes.

I was in a good location. The picture-takers seemed to focus their lenses on the stage in front of me and on the plaza behind me, where the water fountain in the shape of the Olympic rings spouted its springs. The tourists hovered around the plaza, snapping pictures of their friends, using the fountain as a background.

With my concentration focused on the security guards patrolling the walk paths, I barely noticed a young man kneeling down in front of me. When I looked up, he snapped a picture. The flash stunned me. Like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming automobile, I just sat there dumbfounded, watching him walk away.

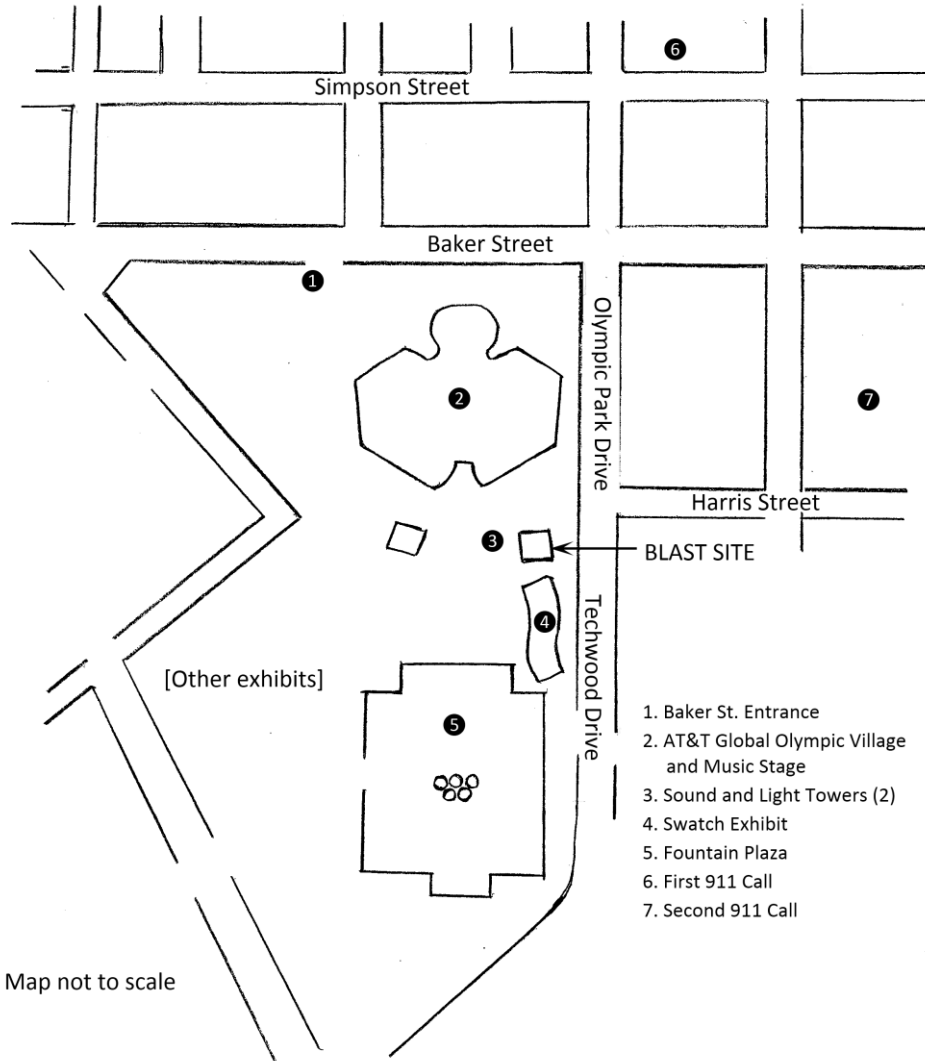


Figure 2 Centennial Park

He had photographed the fountain behind me, but captured my face in the frame. “I cannot go through with it,” I thought. “He got my face. If they ever bring me in as a suspect, this guy is going to have Exhibit A in his photo album.”

Fighting off the strong urge to flee, I tried to examine my options: “If I try to carry the bomb out of the park, the guards might search me,” I thought. “But, then again, if I leave it here, without triggering it, I’ll be in the same predicament as if it had exploded, worse, because I’ll be leaving behind an intact device rather than the pieces of an exploded one.”

None of the options were good. After several tense moments of indecision, I resolved to go ahead with the plan. But the time line was pushed forward. I figured if I didn’t get out of that park fast, I’d end up in someone else’s photo album.

Moving quickly to the green benches in front of the light and video tower, I lowered the heavy pack in front of my knees. Several drunks were wrestling in the grass in front of me. “Wait a little longer,” I told myself. There was a man at the other end of the bench who kept looking over at me. When he turned his head right, I turned my head right. He finally tired of our little head game, got up, and walked away. I slipped my gloves on.

“Now, do it now?” I said to myself. Reaching inside the pack, I twisted the winding key on the rear of the clock timer and felt it begin to tick – tick – tick. Too late to turn back now. My wristwatch said 12:26 a.m. The bomb would explode around 1:20 a.m. I had less than one hour to clear the park.

The ALICE pack was tucked under the bench. The directional plate was placed flat against the ground, which should direct most of the blast straight up into the air. I hurried past the Swatch pavilion, leaving the park at the Techwood Drive exit. Ten minutes – I had ten minutes to get to a pay phone. But the crowd was dense and it was hard to push through. Once I place the call, it should take the 911 operator five minutes to relay the warning to park security. Security should clear the park within thirty minutes. That will leave ten minutes before detonation.

I reached the small lot of thirty pay phones on Simpson Street. A few other people were using phones, but otherwise the lot was empty. I found a phone in the back. Quickly, I stuffed each nostril with wet toilet tissue and slipped on my pair of gloves and pulled a little plastic funnel from my pocket. The tissue and funnel should help distort my voice.

“Atlanta – nine – one – one,” said the woman operator.

“Do you understand me?” I asked.

“Yah.”

“We defy your . . .” suddenly the line went dead. Before I was able to finish the first sentence of my statement the 911 operator hung up on me! The bomb would explode in forty minutes.

“I gotta get out of here,” I thought. It’s routine to send the police to check out 911 hang-ups. Any minute, a black and white might pull up. I had to find another phone.

Turning right on the next block, I saw the Days Inn straight ahead. A line of pay phones stretched along the sidewalk. But the street was packed with people. Groups of tourists shuffled past me. I waited. Agonizing minutes were wasted. A break in the crowd developed. I faced the other way and found a phone. “Make it quick; just a flat warning; no statement,” I told myself.

It sounded like the same operator was on the line. I pinched off my nose with my fingers: “There is a bomb in Centennial Park. You have thirty minutes.” Enunciating each syllable slowly, I tried to make myself understood. This was not a joke.

Lifting my head up, I was confronted by another group of tourists approaching. They couldn’t see me using that particular phone. I hung up the receiver, pocketed the gloves, and walked up the street.

In all the confusion, I’d lost track of the time. I told the operator thirty minutes, but it was probably more like twenty minutes. And I didn’t give the operator the location of the device. I had to traverse back toward the park, had to see what was happening, whether they were evacuating the place.

On Harris Street, I came level with Centennial Park. Techwood Drive, the eastern perimeter of the park, was at the bottom of the hill. The light and video tower came into view. I could see two men down on all fours in front of the tower. One of the men was using a pen-light to look inside the ALICE pack containing the bomb.

“Unbelievable!” I gasped. “These guys are good. I didn’t even need to warn them. They’ve already found it.”

The two men on the ground must have been bomb technicians. I assumed they were disarming the device. Security guards stood around them in a loose parameter, holding the crowd back. They were clipping the circuit wires. I couldn’t stand there and watch though, I had to keep moving.

I circled the block to the south, approaching Techwood Drive near the House of Blues. The building was lit up like a Christmas tree, and music blared from the open second story. I lingered

momentarily, then retraced my steps to the top of Harris Street, where I could see the light and video tower again. There was no one working on the pipe bomb this time. It sat there in the grass in front of the bench. “They must have disarmed it already,” I said to myself. “That was close!”

A feeling of relief came over me. The adrenaline started to subside. I’d just averted a catastrophe. But I’d also given the FBI a wonderful gift. They would have a field day with that intact pipe bomb. They wouldn’t be able to trace it back to me; parts were too common. But they would get a lot of ideas about where to begin looking.

On the other hand, I did accomplish something. Finding that ticking time bomb would put the Olympics on lockdown. Security would tighten. They would be ready for the next bomb threat when I called it in tomorrow night.

I glanced at my watch. It was 1:19 a.m. Instantly, a loud CRACK punctured my eardrums. I looked up to see a ball of fire engulfing the base of the light and video tower and people being thrown through the air like rag dolls. People further away from the blast dropped to the ground like blades of grass being cut down by an invisible scythe. A blue cloud of smoke smelling of cordite filtered through the crowd. Everyone became silent. Then word spread of an explosion. There was pandemonium. People began pushing in all directions. The bomb had detonated at 1:20 a.m.

* * *

Back at the vacant lot beside I-20, I got ready to leave. There was no way I could continue. The blast at Centennial Park was a mistake. I wouldn’t chance that happening again.

I wandered around the piles of garbage in a daze. I couldn’t remember where I’d hidden the other pipe bombs. I couldn’t concentrate for one solid minute. Barely conscious of my surroundings, I walked around in a daze, still seeing the flash of the explosion and the people being cut down in the park. The piles looked different in the dark. The tall pine trees cast spidery shadows, changing the look of the landscape. It took me an hour to finally locate them all.

The timers were set with a fifteen minute delay. I wound the clocks and stuffed them back in the garbage piles. Pulling the truck to the asphalt road, I waited there until the last seconds ticked off – “five – four – three – two – one.” A brief silence followed, and then boom – boom – boom – boom – dull explosions echoed through the pine trees.

At least one camera in the park got a decent image of my face. There might be more. Feds might post them on TV soon. There was no time to waste. Best if I laid low until I could find out more.

I made a brief pit stop at the trailer in Murphy to shower and load the truck with my Rubbermaid caches full of food and gear.

Driving deep in the woods along the North Carolina-Tennessee border, I found the familiar logging trail that led through thick rhododendron along the creek bed. Recent rains had turned the creek’s water brown. I had to get out of the truck once and wench it to the other side of a mud hole using my hand wench. I shut the engine off to listen to the sounds of the forest. A woodpecker was drumming on a hollow log in the distance. The murky creek water was rippling against the rocks.

CHAPTER 3

New Smyrna Beach, FL • 1966-71 • The Early Years

I can still remember playing hide-and-seek behind our old house in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. We had this small sandlot with an old tractor tire in the center, and beyond it the yard bordered a small orange grove. “Go hide!” my brother would yell from the kitchen window, beginning the count, “one-two-three . . .” When I first started playing, I’d curl up inside the big tractor tire, but that hiding place became too obvious, so I began hiding in the orange grove. Every time we played I’d go a little farther into the grove. The search would begin in earnest. My brother would quickly tire of the game. He was older and had better things to do with his time than chase a toddler around the orange grove. But I could never get enough of the game. To me the orange grove seemed enchanted, full of magic and mystery. The trees sagged under the weight of ripe fruit; the air was redolent of citrus. The grove measured less than a couple acres, but in my two-year-old imagination it seemed like a vast wilderness, a place where I could hide and never be found.

* * *

My mother, Patricia (nee Murphy) came from Philadelphia Irish, a long line of stone masons and ward bosses. Assertive and outspoken, “Patsy” had an extroverted personality. The family rudder definitely belonged to her. Mom had a restless soul, always searching for the next church or the next philosophy to change the banality of life. “I’ve got Tinker in my blood,” she liked to say. (Tinkers were Irish gypsies known for their wandering ways.) Fresh out of college, Patsy first considered becoming a nun, but backed out before taking her final vows. The contemplative life didn’t suit her, neither did all that “kneeling and praying.” She wanted to do something extraordinary, like save the world.

In the mid-1950s, Patsy packed her suitcase and moved to New York City where she joined Dorothy Day’s Catholic Workers. A former Marxist-atheist, Day joined the Catholic Church after being impregnated and abandoned by her Marxist boyfriend. She later opened a network of hospices and homeless shelters in the New York City area. The Catholic Workers were pacifists, or “pinkos” as Patsy’s father derisively called them. Besides feeding the homeless, they engaged in various political activities, such as anti-war demonstrations.

While living and working at a Catholic Worker’s commune in Brookfield, Massachusetts, Patsy met a handsome young man from Missouri named Bob. With his blue eyes and dark hair, Bob was the “spittin’ image of Montgomery Clift in *A Place In the Sun*,” said Mom. She was smitten by his good looks and his impeccable manners.

Too old for puppy love and too sure of their feelings to waste time on courtship, the young couple decided to marry right away. They spent their salad years in Missouri, where they planned to start a family, and, if possible, found a Catholic Worker’s commune like the one in Brookfield. The commune never bore fruit, but the marriage certainly did. The babies kept coming Catholic style – one every two years for the next decade. “I lost a tooth for every one of you kids,” Mom said thumbing aside her cheek to display her maternal battle scars. “Babies take a lot of calcium. After every birth – Boom – another tooth would fall out. But it was worth it.”

My father learned the art of fine woodworking while Mom cared for the growing brood. The cabinet shop owner was frugal and didn’t pay well. Dad barely made enough to keep the kids in diapers. Looking for better pay, Dad got on with Trans World Airlines (TWA) at the St. Louis Airport.

My father Bob descended from St. Louis “Dutch,” Palatine Germans who immigrated to Missouri just before the Civil War. Quiet and introspective, Dad worked as an aircraft mechanic, but his real passions were woodworking and music. Learning woodcraft from his German forebears, Dad excelled at making cabinets, furniture, and acoustic guitars. He had a thing for black walnut, and always kept a pile

of the dark lumber behind our house. Wherever we moved, the lumber went with us. He also played acoustic guitar and wrote his own gospel-folk music. Eschewing picks and fancy metal bridges, he was a natural three-fingered picker. He sported a Bohemian goatee and loved sardine sandwiches with thick slices of cheddar cheese. Hunched over the coffee table with his half-glasses perched on the tip of his nose, he would pluck away on his guitar, pausing occasionally to jot down a few notes. Dad came from that generation which always carried a hanky in their back pocket. And it was always well-used. If he saw you with a runny nose, he would whip out that mucous encrusted hanky and come at you like Boris Karloff trying to douse you with chloroform. But he meant no harm, for there wasn't a malicious bone in his body.

In 1965, NASA was in the early stages of the Space Race. TWA contracted with NASA to build its launch pads at Cape Canaveral, Florida. It paid better than his job at the airport, so Dad hired on with the crews at Cape Canaveral.

In the mid-1960s, the coastal communities opposite Cape Canaveral were a beehive of new construction to house all the newcomers. Initially, housing was scarce. The growing Rudolph clan crowded into a tiny one-bedroom apartment on Merritt Island. The children – three boys and one girl – barely had enough room to sleep on the living room floor. And there was another one on the way: me.

Mom had recently become a devotee of the Lamaze method of natural childbirth, so when her water broke on September 19, 1966, Mom didn't even bother to drive to the hospital. She summoned her doctor and delivered me right there on the kitchen table. For years after that, Mom never tired of telling dinner guests about the experience. The more squeamish would slowly push their plate away and sort of stare at the kitchen table, imagining the scene.

After my younger brother Jamie was born in 1969, we finally found a house large enough to accommodate our family. A two-story Victorian with wood floors, the house sat just off Highway US 1 in one of New Smyrna Beach's oldest neighborhoods. The area had Old South flavor: houses nestled under sprawling Spanish oaks. Families had lived there for generations. Their yards teemed with kids, dogs, and fat grey squirrels.

These were the days before milk carton kids and bike helmets. If we weren't in school or in church, we went wherever we wanted. Mom didn't fret as long as we returned in time for dinner. We roamed in packs of 10-15 boys mounted on Schwinn bicycles. The coolest kids rode "choppers" with banana seats. Chopper construction was a fine art. What you did was hacksaw the front forks off an old bicycle and then slide those onto your forks, which would give you an extra two feet on the front end.

We would ride for hours in search of adventure, crossing highways and bridges to reach our destination. My older brothers treated me like a fifth wheel. Possessing no bike of my own, I had to beg one of them to let me ride on the handlebars. At five-years-old, my tiny feet barely touched the axle bolts on the front wheel. I had to curl my toes tight around the bolts and keep a death grip on the handlebars. I kept a sharp eye on the road in front of me, lest a pothole shake my toes loose and send me face-first onto the pavement.

A favorite destination was the New Smyrna docks. There, the fishing boats would tie up and unload their catch. Barnacle encrusted piers jutted out into the water. The swells would slowly rise up under the planks and then rush back out to sea. Finding an empty pier, we would swim and take turns diving off the end of the dock. Every now and then one of the boys would spot a fin – "out of the water!" – the warning was shouted. Scrambling up the ladder, we would emerge from the sea. Standing on the end of the dock, you could see the dorsal fin of a bull shark. He was cruising the shallows in search of fish scraps. As soon as the shark was out of sight, we would dive right back in the water without a second thought.

My brothers hung out with the Wheeler boys. The Wheelers were rednecks, native Floridians who lived in a dilapidated shack buried beneath junk cars. Hound dogs lounged under the sagging front porch. Buicks and Fords sat up on cinder blocks. A greasy engine block hung from the oak tree out front. Despite the clutter, the Wheelers always had room in the front yard for their favorite pastime: wrestling or “rasslin’” as they called it. Every time we went to the Wheelers, they would pair us up by weight class and offer a challenge: “Wanna rassle?”

The extended Wheeler clan would gather on the front porch to watch the show. After being taken to the ground your body became caked with New Smyrna grey sand. My brothers couldn’t whip the Wheelers, for they were a little older and a little tougher. Exhausted and defeated, we would beat a hasty retreat, swearing revenge. The next week the Wheelers would coax us back for a rematch.

At least once a year our family took a trip. My father worked for TWA, which made airfare dirt cheap. One summer we all went to London, England. Another time my siblings got to go to Israel. But mostly we stayed within Florida. Dad would load up the Dodge station wagon with gear and food and we would camp out at one of the parks in the area. Ponce de León Springs was my favorite. Privately owned, the springs lay deep inside an ancient grove of Spanish oaks patrolled by large peacocks. Natural springs bubbled up out of the flat, sandy ground, creating a series of small lakes. The water was ice cold and crystal clear all the way to the bottom. Submerged in the frigid water, our bodies became studded with goose pimples. We had a blast.

The park had cordoned off an underwater cave and posted ominous warning signs. Rumor had it that a team of scuba divers once tried to explore the cave but never made it out. “Don’t go near the cave,” my mom would warn us. But we would sneak over to the cave anyway. I can remember staring down into the cave’s entrance, the blades of aquatic plants around its lip waving gently in the current, wondering if the “scuba people” would ever come out.

Our parents baptized us Catholic, but a few years after moving to Florida, my mother converted to Protestantism. While attending a Pentecostal prayer meeting, she found the Holy Ghost. Dad was skeptical at first. But he soon came around to her point of view. Thus began our ten year odyssey across the Pentecostal universe.

In 1972, my father transferred to Miami International Airport. The family moved just north of there to Ft. Lauderdale. In those years, we practically lived in churches and prayer meetings. Twice, sometimes thrice a week, we attended church services. After that brief encounter with the Holy Ghost in New Smyrna Beach, mother could never quite pin him down again. He kept moving around, and she kept looking. She followed the Holy Ghost into Baptist churches, charismatic tent revivals, and Christian retreats. She did missionary work in Haiti and visited a Christian community in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California. And wherever Mom went, we followed. But that old Holy Ghost never seemed to stay put for very long. “The Spirit is moving,” Mom would say. And shortly after, so would we.

Mostly, we attended informal prayer meetings. Ten to twenty people would gather in someone’s living room. They would read Scripture, sing, dance, prophecy, testify, and speak in tongues. About every summer we would visit a Christian retreat in Bradenton, Florida. Situated on the Manatee River, the retreat consisted of a campground, small guest apartments, game rooms, and stables. Kids could ride ponies, explore the river in a paddle boat, and canoe or go swimming. Families were large. There were always a lot of other kids to play with.

The Catholic service is a pretty structured affair. You say the Rosary, listen to a short sermon, and take Communion. Then you go home. But Pentecostal services are completely open-ended and can last for hours. One fellow might decide to spend an hour testifying about his sinful life of prostitutes and Pabst Blue Ribbon. Ten more folks might need healing (“laying on of hands”). A few backsliders might suddenly decide to renew their subscription to the Resurrection. And the preacher might “come on fire with the Holy Ghost” and preach for three straight hours. Before you know it, the roosters were crowing.

Sitting still for hours is hell on kids. For some inexplicable reason, Mom had decided to dress the boys in our family in disco-era polyester leisure suits. Let me tell you, there's nothing worse than wearing a polyester leisure suit in the hot Florida sunshine, like being eaten alive by African army ants. We would squirm in the pew, pawing at our leisure suits. We waited for the organ music, which was the signal that the service was coming to an end. The organ summoned the sinners to the altar for repentance. If there were no "aisle walkers," the service would finally end. We eyed that organist like dogs waiting for dinner scraps. The organist's slightest movement caused us to lean forward in the pew.

And there it was – the organ music. The adults would stay in the sanctuary to talk ("commune") for another hour. But we were released on the countryside, bursting out of the doors like thoroughbreds at the Kentucky Derby. Our first stop was the rooms, where we would rip off our leisure suits and change into swimming trunks. Next stop, the river.

The Manatee River swirled past the out-buildings, barns, and docks where rows of paddle boats and canoes were tied. Over-fed white ducks shadowed us, begging for a pinch of bread. We had no time for canoes or ducks. Farther downstream was a big oak tree that leaned out over the river. It had a rope swing anchored high in its branches. And next to the tree was a large culvert that jutted out over the water.

The Manatee River was brackish water, the color of strong tea. And, as its name indicates, the river was home to countless manatees, large aquatic mammals that resemble walruses, but without tusks. The braver boys used the rope swing; the "scaredy-cats" used the culvert. Straddling the knotted rope, you would kick off the high river bank and sail out over the river, the wind whooshing through your hair. Twenty feet above the water you let go and fell for what seemed like forever. Splash – the brown water swallowed you up. Like closing the door of a closet behind you, it suddenly became pitch black. A twinge of claustrophobia enveloped you, forcing you to stroke frantically for the surface.

Then you broke through to fresh air, and sunshine and the sound of squealing children welcomed you back to the world.

CHAPTER 4

Vengeance Creek, NC • 1996-97 • More Bombings

After the blast in Centennial Park, the Olympic Games paused for one day. The park itself closed for three days to let the FBI collect evidence. It rained, and they erected a tent over the bomb crater. Somber news crews filmed the evidence-collection team from behind the perimeter fence. The bomb had killed one person and injured over 100 – most were civilians. A Turkish cameraman died of a heart attack while rushing to the scene. It was a disaster.

While planning the blast, I'd completely ignored the potential for civilian casualties. The extensive security arrangements seemed to rule them out. I thought everything would be fine if only I called in a bomb threat. For a couple of years, I had monitored news reports about the security preparations for the Atlanta Olympics. "We're not going to have another Munich," the Olympic organizers said. "There are 30,000 security people to make sure of that. We're prepared for anything." News footage showed tactical teams training to deal with hostage situations on buses, subway trains, and in buildings. Robots were shown disarming bombs.

A bomb placed in Centennial Park, the very center of the Olympic festivities, seemed like an obvious threat scenario to me. Nine-one-one operators would be on alert for the slightest threat. With all that security focused on the park, surely they would have an evacuation plan, I believed. They would remove sections of the temporary fence and use the PA system to clear the people out. It would take no more than thirty minutes. I was certain of it.

But none of those things happened, and there was no one to blame but myself. The 911 operator, the park security, the Olympic organizers – they didn't plant a time bomb in a park full of people. I did that, and innocent people were killed. It was a horrible mistake.

Centennial Olympic Park sent the wrong message. Aimed at Washington and the corporate sponsors, the bombing came off as an indiscriminate attack on innocent civilians. I would see to it that never happened again. From now on I'd choose specific targets. Kill switches would be installed on the devices so I could disarm them if need be.

I waited in the woods for three weeks. My hips ached from lying on the front seat of my truck all day. I switched on the radio every half hour for the news from Atlanta. The engine was cranked twice a day to recharge the battery. Rain rattled on the roof like a snare drum. If they had a good identification, I'd drive my gear to Snowbird and leave it below the buried cache. The truck would be abandoned 30 miles away, and then I'd walk back to Snowbird.

But I couldn't tell if the feds had any solid leads. Unless they need the media's help, they usually keep reporters in the dark. I was pretty sure they didn't have a case-solver, the proverbial smoking gun. But, then again, they had a mountain of evidence to comb through. There were thousands of photographs to look at, miles of video tape to review, scores of witnesses to interview. And thousands of people were calling the telephone hot line that was set up after the bombing. It would take time. The feds were methodical and systematic. If I'd left something behind, they would find it. In the meantime, I had to keep moving forward.

I returned to the trailer after three weeks. From then on, my days were spent looking over my shoulder. My imagination began to play tricks on me. I started seeing unmarked cars in my rearview mirror and strange men shadowing me in the grocery store. I checked the wheel wells and undercarriage of my truck for tracking devices before going out. The mere mention of Centennial Olympic Park on the radio sent my blood pressure soaring. I hung on the news anchor's every word, anticipating the announcement of that "key piece of evidence." Paranoia grew on my psyche like lichen moss.

* * *

Smokeless powder is a lousy explosive; it's actually a propellant and not an explosive. The pipe bomb in the park was a crude indiscriminate device that shot shrapnel to the four corners of the compass. If I was going to continue, I needed better tools to work with. What I wanted was an improvised Claymore mine, a device that I could focus at a specific target without having to worry about collateral damage. Like a shotgun, the Claymore is deadly for those in front of it, but safe for those standing to the rear or sides. But in order to construct such a small, focused device, I had to have high explosives.

I tried making high explosives. In the tiny kitchen of the tiny trailer south of Murphy, I set up a miniature lab. The windows were blacked out with sheets. An exhaust fan to suck out the noxious fumes was installed. I worked all day and night making improvised high explosives: picric acid, RDX, and HMTD. When I finished with a batch, I'd take it to the woods for testing.

It was slow, dangerous work, sweating over the stove in a face shield and rubber gloves. I managed to make efficient detonators using HMTD. But getting together the explosives necessary for the main charge took a lot of time, and I wanted to put together 20- to 30-pound devices. It simply was not worth the cost in time, money and brain cells. At the end of my experiments, the only thing I'd managed to accomplish was to paint my kitchen with explosive traces. The feds would've had a field day in there.

I gathered the refuse of my failed experiments and hauled most of it to dumpsters. The pots and pans and baking dishes were tossed. The tools and spare parts were boxed up in ammo cans and buried in the woods. I'd need them later when ... *if* I got some real explosives. Time for a road trip.

After burying the tools and parts in the woods, I returned to the trailer to plan my trip. As I did every time upon entering the trailer, I checked the tape recorder I kept hidden in the light fixture above the sofa. The recorder was set on voice activation. If someone came in the trailer while I was out, I'd have a recording of the break-in. This time I noticed that the tape recorder's counter had several minutes on it. I'd had visitors, and they were in there for quite a while. I quickly rewound the tape and pressed play. I heard the door squeak open. A voice said, "Hurry, check the rooms." A nervous lump developed in my throat as I listened. I recognized that dune-buggy voice. It was the landlady. She was coaching someone, probably her husband, as he searched the back rooms.

I'd cleaned the trailer. There was no trace of the lab that had once occupied the kitchen. But there were other items that might have raised suspicions. I had guns, walkie talkies, police scanners, and, in the back room, caches full of food and camping equipment.

"Why in hell were they searching through my stuff to begin with?" I wondered. "Do they suspect me of the Atlanta bombing?"

Worrying about the feds weighed on me like a lead albatross around my neck. Now I had to worry about my landlords. Then I remembered something. The last time I went to their house to pay rent I noticed that the landlady had a police scanner in her kitchen. At the time I didn't think anything of it. "Maybe she's a fan of the show COPS," I thought. But after listening to her rummage through my stuff, I concluded that she was one of those self-appointed protectors of humanity, the kind of busybody who tells the cops every time her neighbor turns up the stereo too loud. Needless to say, I had to find out more. It was time to do a little snooping of my own.

The landlady rarely left their house, and the husband seemed to putter around the property all day doing chores. He would begin chugging Budweiser early in the morning. After each sip he'd cluck his tongue and emit a long AH HH. By noon he was shit-faced, shirt open, stumbling around like an idiot. Despite the fact that he carried tools around all day, I could tell he wasn't really working. He was standing watch; over what, I couldn't tell.

One day, I got a chance to search their shed and out-building. I found a lot of gardening tools, fertilizer, and soil conditioner. That was all fine, except they had no garden. I knew those signs: no job, gardening stuff but no garden. Grandma and grandpa were growing marijuana. That would explain the scanner and their search of my trailer. They were running a little grow operation, and they went through my trailer to check me out. I was afraid they were a threat to me, while they were concerned I might pose a threat to them. One big paranoid world. I had no absolute proof, but it was the only thing that made sense.

My fears were allayed somewhat, but not much. I had to assume if they were growing pot so close to their home, they might be selling it locally as well. The local sheriff might have them on his radar. I couldn't stay there long. I had to start searching for a new place, but not yet.

* * *

The road trip in search of explosives took me to rock quarries in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. It was a long tortuous journey with many dead ends and pitfalls. Everywhere I searched I came up empty. A couple of the quarries had security guards on duty. Some had no explosives stored on-site. At other places, I didn't like the feel of things and decided to move on to the next quarry.

One rainy night in Georgia, I groped my way around the back 40 of a rock quarry, guiding on the distant lights of the stone crusher. It was dark as a closet and I could barely see the nose on my face. Following a blasted gravel drive, I walked over a small rise and felt like I was standing on the edge of the earth. "Whoa!" I said. I could sense a huge void in front of me. Kneeling down, I used my hands to feel the sharp lip of a drop off. I tossed a rock in front of me and counted – "one – two – three – four" until I heard the faint sound of the rock clattering on boulders far below. The cliff had to be over a hundred feet. I'd nearly walked right off it. I made for my truck, full speed, and drove on.

After traveling hundreds of miles and visiting a number of quarries, I had not found any explosives. Maybe explosives were no longer stored at quarries after the Oklahoma City bombing. At a couple of places, I found boxes that had once contained dynamite and blasting caps. I noticed one box labeled with the name Austin Powder, a blasting company located near Asheville, North Carolina. "No wonder I haven't found anything," I thought. "The quarries must hire out their explosives work to blasting companies."

If I couldn't find explosives at the rock quarries, then I'd go to the source. I thumbed through the Yellow Pages, and, sure enough, there was Austin Powder, located in Asheville. Though over 100 miles east of Murphy, Asheville was a little too close for comfort. I wanted to keep everything to the south of me. I'd chosen targets in Georgia and shopped for parts in Alabama so as to prevent the feds from drawing a circle around my actual location in North Carolina. Normally, I would've avoided doing anything that might bring the feds into my backyard. But I wanted those explosives bad. Ignoring my better instincts, I pushed on to Asheville.

Austin Powder sat perched on a wooded bluff overlooking the French Broad River. I did my reconnaissance around midnight under a bright, clear moon. Beyond the padlocked gate was a small office and a gravel driveway, which circled back through the woods. Peering through binoculars into the woods, I saw several blast-proof bunkers and an ammonium nitrate/fuel oil (ANFO) mixer. Moving slowly, I searched for security guards, but nobody was there.

The first obstacle I faced was the three-strand cattle fence surrounding the property. That posed no real problem for me. But the bunkers, they were a problem. Made of solid steel, the bunkers looked like aluminum Airstream travel trailers parked at a campground. The doors were solid and secured with two heavy-duty padlocks. To prevent someone from breaching them with bolt cutters, each lock was surrounded by a bell-shaped housing made of solid steel. The locks could only be accessed by reaching up inside the bell. It would take some effort to crack them open.

I returned to Austin Powder a week later ready to work. It was Christmas Eve, 1996; I knew the place would be abandoned. A mass of moist air hung over the mountains like a wet blanket. High pressure was pushing in from the west. The two air masses would collide later that night producing snow. “Infantry weather,” I thought. “God loves the infantry.”

I gulped down a tuna fish sandwich and a half quart of water. Two protein bars were stuffed in my pocket for later. Topping off the canteen, I was ready. I carried a duffel bag with backpack straps and the necessary tools, including a cordless drill with a titanium bit. Strapped to my chest, underneath my Gortex rain gear, was a scanner dialed in to the local frequencies.

I was ready.

I scaled the barbed-wire fence and hurried over to one of the bunkers. I couldn’t see an alarm system, but the wires might run under ground. I decided to run a test.

After drilling the core out of both locks, I cracked open the door, then closed it shut and replaced the locks with two identical ones that I’d purchased earlier that week. If an alarm had been tripped, authorities should be along shortly. I climbed the fence again and crossed a small cow pasture to the trees on the far side. From there, I watched the bunker with my binoculars while also monitoring the scanner, giving it a good half hour. But there was no alarm, no chatter on the scanner. I quickly returned to the bunker and stepped inside.

Fortunately, I’d chosen the right bunker. In the pale glow of my red lens flashlight, I scanned the boxes of dynamite that were stacked against the walls. I sliced open a box to examine the cigar-shaped sticks wrapped in brown wax paper. I’d hit the jackpot.

One 50-pound box fit perfectly in the duffel bag. I shouldered the duffel of dynamite and carried it over the strands of barbed wire and across the cow pasture, where I followed a trail that meandered a quarter mile along the bluff above the river. It was a simple cow path, wet and muddy from recent rain. As I sloshed through the path, my heavy load pushed me shin-deep in the mixture of mud and manure. The sticky mud almost pulled the boots off my feet. At one point, I leaned too far forward and fell flat on my face in the putrid mire. Squish.

Just as I thought things couldn’t get worse, snow began to fall. The ground was warm, and the snowflakes melted on impact. Wet snow truly is the worst for navigating. I’ll take the dry powdery stuff any day.

I followed the cow path to a small picnic area next to the river, just off a two-lane highway. There, I hid the box of dynamite under a poncho. My truck was parked a mile away to keep it clear of the scene while I worked. Once I had stockpiled enough boxes under the poncho, I would retrieve the truck and load up real fast. I had to be careful. State troopers sometimes used the park to ambush speeders. My hope was that they wouldn’t come out here in this weather.

Snowflakes the size of cotton balls fell straight down, producing a solid white-out. Cars on the narrow highway crept along with their headlights barely piercing the wall of snow. After sliding my second box of dynamite under the poncho, I crouched by the side of the highway before crossing back over. I could make out a pair of headlights coming down the road. He looked to be a ways off, and I thought I could make it across before he got to me, so I ran. Halfway across the highway my boot dropped into a pothole and I fell flat on my face like Pete Rose coming in for a slide at third base. The truck was much closer than I’d thought. If I stood, he would see me. With scarcely enough time to think, I rolled forward, reaching the white line just as the truck’s mud tire brushed my back end. In the next heart-grinding minute, I looked up to see if his red taillights brightened, indicating a stop. But the taillights disappeared into the white-out. The snow was so thick, he didn’t even see me – right under his bumper.

Four boxes were already tucked under the poncho. I was moving fast now, despite the muddy cow path. The snow had slackened off. Walking the bluff above the river with my fifth box, I noticed the outline of a car parked below. The headlights of a passing car swept through the park and I caught the reflective decals of a state trooper's car. He was waiting for speeders. "Good thing I didn't park my truck down there," I thought. I crouched in the trees watching him. Twenty feet from his bumper was 200 pounds of dynamite under a snow-covered poncho.

Soaked from sweat and snow melt, I sat there shivering, waiting for him to leave. Breathing the noxious nitroglycerin fumes in the dynamite bunker had brought on a skull-splitting headache. The crushing pain between my temples made it difficult to think, or even breathe. The slightest movement caused a jolt of withering pain.

After a half hour the trooper hadn't budged. But I had to keep moving. It was 2:00 a.m. Traffic would start to increase after 4:00 a.m. If he was still there, I'd have to abandon the dynamite. All that work for nothing. In the meantime, I decided to continue working. I wanted blasting caps and a detonation cord. That meant opening another bunker.

Up the gravel drive from the dynamite bunker, I headed toward a smaller bunker that looked promising. The first lock popped right off. But the second lock wouldn't budge. I drilled until my battery packs for my cordless drill went dead. But the lock still wouldn't crack. I'd jammed the tumblers. I'd have to do without the detonation cord and blasting caps. I could make improvised detonators. Although less efficient, they would work fine. Cold, wet, tired – I was ready to call it a night. Lugging the final box to the park, I saw that the trooper was gone. Thank God.

I hurried to my truck and drove it back to the park. There I quickly loaded all the boxes, climbed into the cab, and started my return trip.

I bypassed the trailer in Murphy and hauled the cargo of dynamite directly to the woods. The nosy landlords made it impossible to do anything at the trailer. Along the North Carolina-Tennessee border, hundreds of miles of gravel roads snaked through the wilderness. I sealed the dynamite in three Rubbermaid laundry tubs, then buried them at three separate locations, many miles apart.

One week later, I began casing targets in Atlanta.

* * *

Planned Parenthood is the biggest baby killer in the world. The organization has a vast network of abortion mills that do high-volume, low-cost abortions. They provide cheap child disposal services for a poorer clientele. Most large cities have at least one or two Planned Parenthoods.

But contrary to current myth, most women who have their kids killed in abortion clinics are not poor teenagers from the inner city. Your typical abortion mother is in her mid-twenties. She's white, single, and from a middle class family. She got knocked up by her live-in boyfriend, or by that dude she met at the college pub. She's healthy and has the mental and material resources to care for the child; she simply doesn't want to. She's got her whole life ahead of her; she's "not ready for marriage" and "not ready for kids." She's either naively in denial that the life growing inside her is human, or she's selfish enough not to care. She's the girl next door, and she's willing to butcher a helpless human being so her life can proceed undisturbed.

Your typical abortion mill is individually owned, or is part of a small chain. It's located in the suburbs in a small professional building, maybe next door to a dentist, podiatrist, or chiropractor. It often skirts the edge of a college campus, where potential clients are numerous. The building has nice landscaping. You might find a BMW or a Mercedes parked in front. It has a euphemistic name like "Women's Reproductive Health Services." Without the occasional protester posted out front carrying a

sign saying “Abortion is Murder,” one would never suspect that dozens of kids are killed there every day. Abortionists have quietly wiped out an entire generation in the past 30 years.

Abortionists have existed in all societies. Many people, doctors in particular, enter the abortion business for money. Killing the unborn child is a relatively simple procedure. One doctor can dispatch 10 to 30 babies in one day. At an average cost of \$600.00 per abortion, it’s a lucrative business.

Others are in it for population control. Believing that large families are the bane of progress, they want to spread the gospel of birth control and abortion to the poor heathens of the world. They believe the sins of poverty, political instability, and environmental depredation will be forever banished from the earth when every 12-year-old girl is put on the Pill.

But the backbone of the abortion industry is the hard-bitten feminist. Most often, one or more feminists own the abortion mill and hire a mercenary physician to perform the procedures. The radical feminist, however, is usually not mercenary; she goes into abortion work for ideological reasons. She believes that woman’s fertility is a liability, that from the beginning of time men have exploited this liability to keep women in subjection. She looks upon the traditional family as a medieval institution similar to serfdom. Ultimately, feminists (such as Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone) envision an egalitarian society without traditional families, where children are raised in collective nurseries. Birth control and abortion, they believe, are fundamental tools needed to finally break the shackles of maternity and achieve equality. They see themselves as liberators, guiding young women to freedom over the corpses of their unborn children.

Once forced to work in secret, like stealth conductors of an underground railroad helping women escape sexual domination, abortionists now proudly announce themselves in the light of day. Fifty years ago when the procedure was illegal in America, abortionists managed to kill an estimated 100,000 babies every year. But today, they kill ten times that number. Abortion is more deadly today because it is sanctioned, funded, and protected by the Washington government. Since 1973, legal abortion has wiped out an entire generation. It’s the most efficient machine of mass murder in history.

* * *

North of Atlanta in the leafy suburb of Sandy Springs, a three-story professional building sat nestled in a moderately busy part of town. White in color with Italianate arches, the building looked like a wedding cake on steroids. There was a Kmart up the block and a Mexican restaurant across the street. In the evenings, the kids from the neighborhood rode their bikes past the white building. On the outside, it resembled any other professional building in suburbia. But on the inside was a scene right out of Dante’s Inferno, for one of the businesses was an abortion mill called Northside Family Planning. Northside butchered between 15-20 babies on procedure days.

I arrived at a vacant lot in the woods north of Sandy Springs on January 15, 1997. The weather was balmy, the sky a metallic grey. I approached an ancient oak tree growing in the middle of the lot beside a ditch. It had rained that day, and the ditch contained several inches of water – along with a bloated dead dog floating on the surface. The stink was overpowering. I held my breath while I stashed my two bombs in the ditch above the waterline, and covered the bombs with the sickening dog carcass.

I knew that next week pro-lifers would gather in Washington D.C. to protest the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the court decree that made abortion-on-demand a so-called “fundamental right.” By now it had become an annual ritual: pro-lifers standing in front of a podium on the Washington Mall listening to hackneyed speeches. It’s usually cold and everyone dresses like they’re at the South Pole. The usual spate of Republican politicians and pro-life activists file to the podium to assure the faithful that the tide of public opinion is turning. The forces of life are “winning the culture war.” “Keep fighting the good fight,” they say. “We are almost to the mountain top.”

But their promises and predictions are as vaporous as their fogged breath. The masters of the media have censored the pro-life movement out of the mainstream of American society. The protesters on the Washington Mall might as well be on the moon as far as most Americans are concerned.

I was planning my own protest for the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. Unlike the other protests, mine wouldn't be ignored. I planned to blow Northside Family Planning off the map.

* * *

I had spent a week earlier that month casing Northside. The photograph of me in Centennial Park had me nervous. I thought a light disguise would no longer suffice, so I brought along a grab-bag of cheap wigs and several changes of clothing. I avoided any place with a camera – like the plague. There was no hideout near the target, no place of concealment where I could sit and scope it out, so I did my scouting on the move. After parking a mile away, I made three passes of Northside each day. I strolled past it at different times of the day, approaching from a different angle and wearing a slightly different disguise on each pass. After each pass I'd find some dead space – behind a grocery store, apartment complex, or hedge – and change wigs and a couple articles of clothing. Then, I'd swing back toward Northside from a different direction. Gathering new information from each pass, I gradually pieced together a plan.

Located on the ground floor, Northside was one of several businesses in the white professional building. There were law offices upstairs and a methadone clinic across the hall. Although the exterior walls were solid concrete, the interior walls were made of flimsy sheetrock. Long slit windows ran from floor to ceiling along the exterior. Northside's operating room was behind one of these slit windows.

The plan was simple. I would use two devices in a mechanical ambush. The first device would take out the abortionists behind the slit window. The clinic closed on Thursdays to allow the abortionists to clean their blood-stained equipment. Two or three abortionists would show up, but there were no patients scheduled for that day. I wouldn't use shrapnel in the first device. Although the concussion might kill one of the abortionists if he was in the operating room, the lawyers and junkies in the other parts of the building would be safe.

Timed to detonate an hour after the first bomb, the secondary device would be hidden in the bushes near the entrance to the parking lot. This bomb would target agents of the federal government. By the time it exploded, Washington's agents would have the scene cleared and taped off. I planned to focus it like a cannon to sweep the west side of the building, toward the crime scene, so that civilians behind the crime scene tape would remain unscathed.

My target wasn't Northside or any particular employee of Northside; my target was the institution of abortion itself. Pro-lifers tend to place all the blame on the abortion doctors, as if abortion is a common crime, with one perpetrator (doctor) and one victim (unborn child). This way they can continue to pay their taxes to Washington and pose as "good patriots" and hide behind such sophistries as the Hyde Amendment. But abortion isn't a common crime; it's an institution of mass murder supported by the full power of the Washington government. The judge who upholds Roe v. Wade, the FBI agent who enforces the FACE Act, the receptionist who schedules the abortion, the nurse who assists in the abortion – they are as guilty as the doctor who performs the actual procedure. All are active participants in mass murder. At Northside, I wanted to send a lethal message to the entire abortion industry and their protectors in Washington: If you work in an abortion mill or provide aid and protection for abortionists, you may end up looking like one of the 5,000 unborn babies who are mangled by abortionists every single day in this country.

* * *

It was just after 10:00 p.m. on the night of January 15, 1997, when I parked in the neighborhood east of Roswell Road. The secondary device was concealed inside a large Kmart bag. Using the hour hand of a cheap alarm clock as my trigger, the bomb was set to explode twelve hours later at approximately

10:30 a.m. The two devices would be planted in reverse order: the secondary device tonight, and the initiating device tomorrow morning. The bomb in the Kmart bag was basically a large Claymore mine – fifteen pounds of dynamite sandwiched between ten pounds of nails and a directional plate. Upon detonation, the bomb would shoot the nails in a concentrated pattern, like grapeshot fired from a cannon. I'd bought several artificial Christmas wreaths to camouflage the thing. The wreaths consisted of green cellophane nettles pinched between strands of twisted wire. (This was the source of the mysterious wire the bomb experts had such a hard time identifying). The wreaths were arranged like a beehive surrounding the bomb, stacking them on top of one another, cutting them to size. It looked like a small bush when I was finished.

Roswell Road was still bustling, the traffic flowing, the restaurant patrons dining. I walked past a man on a bicycle. "How you doing?" he asked. "Great," I responded. Cutting through the Kmart parking lot, I strolled along a small path that led to a small apartment complex. The abortion mill was across the street. I paused momentarily on the sidewalk to take in my surroundings. My heart was pounding fast. I saw that I was alone. I crossed the street, pulled the bag free of the bush-bomb, and set it down carefully among the bushes on the edge of the parking lot. Two seconds was all it took. At the bottom of the hill, I turned right on Roswell Road. "Don't run . . . don't panic," I told myself.

It rained that night. Lightning crashed across the sky. I lay on the front seat of my truck listening to Rush Limbaugh, but the static from the storm squelched the radio signal. I couldn't sleep. The wheels in my head wouldn't stop turning. I imagined myself arriving at Northside and the secondary device had been discovered and the feds were there waiting. I imagined the primary device detonating prematurely on my back. I wondered what it would feel like to be blown to bits. To minimize the potential for civilian casualties, I'd be putting the bomb below the slit window just minutes before it exploded. The timer was crude and inexact. The slightest delay on the way there could prove fatal. I turned off the squelching radio and recited the 144th Psalm, verses 1-2.

Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.

He is my loving God and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and He in whom I trust.

Amen.

I breathed in a calming sigh, and fell asleep.

The morning of January 16, 1997, was overcast. Last night's rain left flooded streets across the north side of Atlanta. Traffic was blocked up for miles on Roswell Road. I worried that I wouldn't make it in time. "Should've taken an interstate," I said, as I inched along in the rush hour traffic. I pulled over behind the Northside Post Office, about half a mile north of the target. It was a little after 9:00 a.m. I'd be cutting it close. I checked my equipment one final time. Then I twisted the winding key on the back of the clock to set the time bomb in motion.

I walked the back streets of the neighborhood east of Roswell Road to reach the Kmart. Hidden in an algae-green book bag, the device had a 20-minute delay. The bomb would detonate five to ten minutes after I set it below the slit window outside Northside's operating room. I worried that the sunglasses and hat looked out of place on this overcast morning. The Heckler & Koch nine millimeter pistol in my waistband itched my belly.

The cold front was blowing through, and icy gusts of wind chilled my bones. I circled behind Kmart on Roswell Road and snuck between two long dumpsters. Without losing stride, I donned a long black wig, a toboggan hat, and a pair of calf-skin gloves. My watch showed 9:15 a.m. I was a few minutes ahead of schedule. I couldn't wait to get the ticking time bomb off my back. In case I didn't make it in time or if people were in the parking lot – I'd installed a kill switch. With the flip of the switch I could disarm the device. Later, I would make a warning call to 911 about the secondary device in the bushes.

Fortunately the parking lot was empty. The abortionists were inside the building. Everything was good to go. Taking giant strides now, I circled behind the professional building. The back lot was empty. I set the book bag at the base of the slit window. On the far side of the building, I passed within yards of the secondary device. It was exactly where I'd planted it last night. The trap was set.

Despite the cold I was now sweating like a ship's welder. Between the two long dumpsters, I shed the wig, toboggan hat, and jacket. Everything was stuffed in a Kmart bag.

The explosion sounded like a thunderous cannon BOOM, then came the shattering of a ton of glass breaking and crashing on the asphalt. Within a few minutes I heard sirens wail in the distance. Ten minutes later, I was on the freeway heading north. Though traffic buzzed past, everything seemed deathly quiet to me in the truck, everything except the sound of my heart pounding like a jackhammer.

I drove robotically, my eyes frozen on the road ahead. Near Blairsville, Georgia, I switched on the radio and heard that the secondary device had just detonated. Snow flurries began falling. As my windshield wipers swatted the tiny snowflakes, I pulled to the side of the road to listen. A news helicopter hovered over the scene at Northside moments after the explosion. The reporter screamed into his headset trying to describe the carnage below. The bomb had caught the agents at the scene completely by surprise.

* * *

I returned to Falls Branch Road and found yet another recording of my dirt-bag landlords snooping in my trailer. I'd had enough. It was time to move.

I rented a house south of Marble, North Carolina. Located on Vengeance Creek, the three bedroom ranch was tucked under a stand of tall poplar trees on the north side of a mountain. Very little sunlight hit the house in winter. Green-grey mold streaked the wood siding. The place smelled musty. The well-water was muddy and worthless for drinking. But the house provided plenty of privacy, and the landlady lived twenty miles away. And besides, I couldn't go wrong living in an area called Vengeance Creek.

A few days after moving to the new house I began planning another attack. The bombing in Sandy Springs had put the nation's abortion mills on high alert. Washington dispatched federal marshals to watch over the baby killers to ensure that they met their daily quota of butchered babies. I would have to shift my sights elsewhere. In Washington, there was talk of bringing the federal "hate crimes" bill back to the floor of Congress. The law would include special protections for Sodomites, elevating them into the aristocracy of official victims. Liberals had been trying to pass the bill since the Reagan era, but until now they were never able to muster the necessary number of votes. I wanted to weigh in on the debate. I flipped through the Atlanta phone book and newspapers looking for a Sodomite organization to make my point.

In the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the Otherside Lounge was listed in the "lifestyles" section as a "Gay/Lesbian Club." One of several Sodomite organizations in Atlanta, the Otherside was located in Midtown, which was a red-light district. Tactically, it was in a good location: heavily travelled and close to the freeway.

* * *

If you listen to the gay rights activists, you'll hear a great deal about tolerance and freedom. "We're not asking for special privileges," they say. "We intend no harm to traditional institutions like marriage and the family. We just want to live in peace." But the real aims of the gay rights movement are much more extensive than their present demands.

As radical egalitarians (the same folks responsible for legalized abortion), the leaders of the gay rights movement believe in what used to be called free love. Socialists and utopians pioneered the free-love philosophy over a century ago. Basically, free lovers oppose traditional gender roles and institutions like marriage and the family. They believe the church and the state conspired to impose an artificial model of

human nature on society by decreeing that male/female sex was part of the natural order, that the only acceptable model of sexuality was marriage for the purpose of procreation. Free lovers want a “sexual revolution.” They want to overthrow this model of sexuality. To them, marriage and family are outdated institutions of oppression. They see no difference between the institutions of marriage and family and the institutions of slavery and serfdom. All are oppressive and must be abolished, they believe.

The long-term goal of the sexual revolution is to replace the old, “repressive” model of sexuality with a new one. The new model says that all consensual sex is natural. Free lovers don’t believe that humans have a fixed nature; therefore, they don’t believe there is such a thing as natural sex. The individual must define his own nature, including his sexuality. Being born, for example, with the body of a human male means nothing. If you believe you are a female, as transsexuals do, then you are, indeed, a female, say the free lovers. All varieties of sexual expression are legitimate; one variety is no better than another. Varieties can include group sex, homosexual sex, sex with animals, sex with relatives, and sex with inanimate objects. And because they don’t believe society has a right to impose its definition of maturity on the individual, free lovers accept sex between adults and children.

Getting society to accept the new model of sexuality is, however, a gradual process. They have adopted an incremental approach. They have tailored their demands to the contemporary situation. Normalizing homosexuality a century ago wasn’t a possibility, so they pushed birth control, open marriage, and liberal divorce laws. But whenever the opportunity presented itself they lost no time in enacting their agenda. In the early days of the Soviet Union (1921) the free-love movement managed to legalize birth control, abortion, and homosexuality. Today, the sexual revolution is almost complete in Europe. In some places, sex between an adult and a child is no longer considered a crime. Child pornography is sold openly in places like Copenhagen and Stockholm. The lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender movement in the United States is a relative of the same free-love tradition.

As with all of the other attacks, the bombing of Otherside Lounge was intended to spike the debate with the socialists, to dig the battle lines deeper.

* * *

Sandwiched between porn shops and topless bars, the Otherside Lounge looked like an Old English pub with its white stucco and thatched roof. As in Sandy Springs, I planned to build a mechanical ambush. The back door of the Otherside opened to an open-air patio. Concealed behind a screen of trees, the patio was seldom used during the winter. I’d bait the trap with a small device planted near the patio. The blast would clear the building and draw a reaction force into the trap, which I’d set for them in the main parking lot out front. There, I’d plant a large device behind a line of bushes bordering the lot.

The main charge would have to be planted during the day, when the place was closed. The owner was usually there early, along with a few other Sodomites. Around noon on February 21, 1997, I cut through the Otherside’s parking lot and slipped the 30-pound satchel charge behind a screen of bushes.

The topless bars and porn shops were jumping on the night of February 21. Hookers patrolled the streets. I carried the 10-pound device hidden inside a large Burger King bag with a large order of French fries on top. I cradled it in my arms, occasionally reaching into the bag to grab a fry. I’d get the bomb in place near the patio around 10:00 p.m.; the secondary device would detonate around 11:00.

My truck was parked in an industrial zone close to the freeway on-ramp, ready for a quick exit. It was 9:45 p.m. I’d given myself 20 minutes on the timer, and five minutes had already expired. “Plenty of time,” I thought. The Waffle House was up ahead, the Otherside Lounge just beyond it.

Cutting through some flea-bag motel in front of Waffle House, I saw something that froze me in my tracks. Across the street from the Otherside was a police cruiser. With his car straddling the sidewalk, he had a decent view of my path to the patio. I walked over to a car and pretended to search for my keys. I placed the ticking time bomb gently on the ground between my feet. I kept one eye on the cop and the

other on my wristwatch, still searching for my imaginary keys. The seconds passed in agony. “Leave, come on leave,” I hissed. But he wasn’t going anywhere. “I’ve got to call it off. Got to hit the kill switch and call in a warning.”

At 9:55, with five minutes left on the timer, I flipped the kill switch. The bomb was disarmed. But when I rose up to look, the cop was gone. Glancing at my watch, I saw I had four minutes left on the timer. Without hesitation, I hit the switch, rearming the device. I strode across the street, the bomb held out in front of me as if it were on fire. Level with the Otherside’s rear parking lot, I ducked behind the cars and headed for the screen of small trees that concealed the patio. The Otherside’s valets stood less than 20 feet away chatting. I slipped past them and zeroed in on the patio, where I set the bomb down. Doing a quick about-face, I moved through the parked cars back to the sidewalk. Almost there.

Like a bolt of lightning, a flash-BOOM-gust-of-wind shoved me from behind. I stumbled forward almost falling on my face. The world went silent. Objects moved in slow motion. Shattered glass and dust froze in mid-air. Then, everything suddenly returned to normal speed. Car alarms were screeching all around me. I dusted myself off and casually walked up the sidewalk.

* * *

My enemies had been lucky. All the devices had functioned, but not according to plan. At Northside Family Planning, the first bomb demolished the operating room. But the room was empty when it exploded. The feds immediately took charge of the scene and cordoned off the area. Civilians were kept outside the crime scene tape. The bomb experts began sweeping the scene for evidence. To make the process easier, they had some of the vehicles moved from the back lot to the front. They parked one of these cars, a Nissan Pulsar, right in front of the secondary device. When it finally cooked off at 10:30 a.m., the blast shredded the Nissan. The tiny car took the full force of the explosion, shielding the FBI and ATF agents in the parking lot. The civilians, gathered on the far side of the crime scene tape, were unharmed.

The feds were on their guard when they arrived at the Otherside Lounge in Midtown a month later. They began searching for a secondary device right away, which they quickly located in the bushes along the retaining wall. After evacuating the area, they sent a robot to disarm it. The bomb detonated during the disarming process. The robot was blown to bits.

The feds found no real leads in either of the attacks. They wasted much time talking to one guy, but he was just blowing smoke. A patient at the methadone clinic in Northside, he claimed to have seen a man in a hooded sweatshirt on the morning of the bombing. He claimed the man was digging with a shovel near the bushes where the secondary device exploded. Digging with a shovel! The feds pounced on this bit of information. They had an artist do a sketch of the “Hooded Man” and put it in all the newspapers. I thought it looked kind of like Uncle Fester from the Addams Family.

All things considered, the attacks were successful. Both Northside Family Planning and the Otherside Lounge went out of business. I’d demolished a lot of expensive property and brought a much-needed focus to the Cause. And I’d pushed some buttons up in Washington. The government created a task force to investigate the bombings. Headquartered in Atlanta, the Southeast Bomb Task Force would have hundreds of FBI and ATF agents working to solve the case.

The media also took an interest in the case. Minutes after the bombing at Otherside, I mailed several letters to the media, explaining the motives for the attacks. I baited the letters with misspellings and grammatical errors. I knew the journalists would take one look at those letters and let loose a torrent of hate. While claiming to be the champions of democracy and the common man, the average journalist is actually an elitist bigot. The ultra-liberal *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* wrote vitriolic editorials, blaming the bombings on the “other” Georgia, those unreconstructed hicks in the sticks. Their cartoonist, Mike

Luckovich, depicted a toothless hillbilly tossing a lit bomb. Here were the voices of “tolerance” and “reason” sounding like country-club bigots. And that’s what they are.

CHAPTER 5

Ft. Lauderdale, FL • Mid-1970s • Growing Up

When you're a kid, you tend to overlook the important stuff and focus on trivial things like Fruit Loops or the latest Nike tennis shoes. My parents couldn't give us those, but they gave us a lot of love, and that should have been enough. In a normal society where teachers and role models help fill in the gaps, it would have been. Unfortunately, late 20th-century America wasn't a normal society. School sharply contrasted against my home life, as meager as it was. At home, I was taught to love; at school, I was taught to hate.

My third-grade teacher Mrs. Weaver was a full-blooded Navajo Indian from Arizona who wore handmade silver and turquoise jewelry. She told us about her "people," how they once controlled a vast territory and practiced advanced forms of agriculture. But then the white man came and stole their land and killed most of her tribe. Forced onto reservations, her once proud people became beggars and alcoholics, only a remnant of their former greatness.

The same white people who stole the Navajo's land were still in power, she said. But things were finally changing. The white people's reign of terror was coming to an end. Courageous leaders were standing up to the evil white people. She showed us pictures of these courageous leaders. On her shirt, she wore the portrait of Muhammad Ali, the militant boxer. And above the blackboard, she posted pictures of American Indian Movement leader Russell Means and labor leader Cesar Chavez. "Heroes," she called them, pointing at the pictures.

Mrs. Weaver spoke with absolute conviction, as though recruiting us for a special mission. My young boyish ears had never heard such talk before, and I intently wanted to understand. We leaned forward in our desks, listening to every word, as she went on eternally about the injustices committed by white people. At least once a week we were treated to another exhibition of Indian artifacts, which launched yet another lesson about the evil white people.

I felt bad about what had happened to Mrs. Weaver's people. I wanted to sock those white people in the jaw. At home, I asked my dad, "Who are these white people? Where do they come from?" Dad didn't understand the questions, so I told him about Mrs. Weaver and the Navajo and the white people. Frowning, he slowly shook his head.

"She was talking about you – about us," Dad said. "We're white people."

Staggered by this revelation, I stood there thinking for a moment. Not sure I understood him correctly, I tried a different tact. Knowing that my father's ancestors came from Germany and my mother's originated in Ireland, I asked if the Germans and Irish were white people.

"Yes," he said.

I ran to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. Sure enough, I was white.

I didn't want to go to school after that. Mrs. Weaver's lectures about the white people sounded different now. What initially seemed like conviction now felt like hate. She hated me. I suddenly understood: she wasn't recruiting me for a special mission; she was scolding me, the way Mom and Dad did when I misbehaved. I felt guilty for killing her people and stealing their land. I didn't want to be white anymore. So I decided to become an Indian like Mrs. Weaver. I couldn't become a Navajo – she'd see through the façade. I'd become an Apache.

I'd seen Apaches before. Dad had recently bought us a collection of Time Life books on the Old West. I sat for hours thumbing through the volume on Indians, studying those famous photographs of Geronimo's band taken in the 1880s. My brother Dan had a leather sewing kit. I begged Mom to buy me a

ragged suede hippie jacket that I'd spotted in the Salvation Army store. Using the jacket as raw material, Dan helped me fashion a pair of Apache moccasins, with leggings and everything. My brother's Schwinn bicycle was transformed into an Indian pony. I became expert with a fiberglass re-curved bow. Using dull target arrows, I was now ready to test my new equipment on the Apache hunting grounds of Ft. Lauderdale.

Large undeveloped fields of ragweed flourished near the elementary school. Early one Saturday morning, I rode my "Indian pony" to the fields. Pretending that I was hunting mountain lions in the high desert of Arizona, I stalked flocks of sand doves with my bow. After loosing an arrow at the doves, they flew off 200 yards and settled in the tall weeds. I stalked up and fired another arrow.

I started hunting in the ragweed fields every weekend. I rarely killed a dove. The doves were too small, the arrows too big. But I felt almost like an Indian. Almost.

Eventually, my Indian phase came to an end. It seemed ridiculous thinking I could transform myself into an Apache with a pair of cheap moccasins, a Schwinn bike, and a fiberglass bow. I had to face up to the fact that I was an evil white person, and there was nothing I could do to change it.

* * *

Our family lived on Gardenia Road in southwest Ft. Lauderdale, a few blocks from Highway 441. The subdivision dated back to the 1950s. The blockhouses had flat roofs, terrazzo floors, and jalousie windows – typical of southern Florida construction. The neighborhood was still mostly Mayberry, but definitely on the way down. Along Highway 441 they started to open head shops and pornographic book stores. Around the corner from our house, the Ft. Lauderdale chapter of an outlaw biker gang lived in a shack with a fenced-in yard containing several vicious pit bulls. The neighborhood school, Meadowbrook Elementary, lay a few blocks west. We kids bypassed the yard with the mean dogs on our way to school.

In the early 1970s the neighborhoods of Ft. Lauderdale were still largely self-segregated. Since most schools like Meadowbrook were neighborhood supported, they remained racially homogenous long after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1953) outlawed mandatory segregation in public schools. The liberal education bureaucrats in Washington were not happy with self-segregation. Blacks and other minorities, they believed, continued to live in economically deprived areas where their children attended sub-standard schools. The bureaucrats argued that, even after federal funds brought parity for all public schools, Americans were still living in two separate countries: one poor and disadvantaged, the other rich and privileged. Different socio-economic conditions produced different outcomes. If parents decided to live in racially homogenous neighborhoods and to send their kids to racially homogenous schools, then Washington bureaucrats would have to take over the role of parenting. They would decide where the children went to school. To create a truly egalitarian society, they would force blacks and whites together at the point of a gun. So began an experiment in social engineering called forced busing.

The bureaucrats took a certain percentage of kids from a predominately black neighborhood and bused them across town to a predominantly white school, and vice versa. During my elementary education I went to the neighborhood school, while black children from Lauderhill were bused in. Every morning, two busloads arrived in front of the school after a 15-mile ride across town. In the fall of 1977, as I started the sixth grade, it was my turn to ride the bus. The rich, white liberal engineers of forced busing wanted us all to "live out the true meaning of the American creed." They prided themselves with "giving birth to a new era of freedom," and the rest of it. They had that luxury because, in most cases, their own kids attended all-white private schools. But to those poor white kids who were forced to ride the bus, their policies looked a whole lot different.

I'll never forget the first day of busing. The kids from my neighborhood gathered in predawn darkness and boarded a flat-nose yellow school bus, which turned north on Highway 441 heading for Parkway Middle School. Located in Lauderhill, Parkway was predominately black. We turned into the

neighborhoods east of Highway 441, passing yards of bare dirt, cars hoisted on blocks, scrawny dogs, urban hell. A deathly quiet suddenly fell over the bus as we realized our fate.

My formal education came to an end at Parkway. Violent intimidation became a daily occurrence. At first, it was name-calling and pushing, but things quickly got worse. I no longer trusted any teachers or authority figures. I no longer listened in class or put my mind to the course work. Schools were detention centers; teachers were prison guards. I focused on survival, just getting through the day in one piece.

The number of kids at my bus stop decreased each week as parents pulled their kids out of Parkway and put them in private school. By January, those who remained had had enough.

I remember the day we settled things. It began like any other day – the usual threats and verbal abuse. Between second and third period I was walking to my next class when I saw a crowd up ahead. A crowd like that at Parkway meant only one thing: a fight. In the center of the crowd I saw something that I'll never forget. There, on the ground, was a human being curled into a tight ball. Some in the crowd took turns kicking and punching the person. Others were tearing articles of clothing off the figure. The crowd yelled "Beat that bitch! Beat that bitch!" A grey cloud of dust hung in the air. The scene instantly reminded me of a pack of hyenas finishing off a helpless gazelle. I came closer. I caught a glimpse of the helpless creature's face; it was Maggie, one of the girls from our bus stop. I froze in horror unable to intervene or run away, transfixed by the scene.

Dean Pearson and a few teachers arrived on the scene to rescue the poor girl. They covered her partially nude body with a jacket and escorted her through the jeering crowd. As usual, no one was punished for the vicious assault; just another day at Parkway.

At lunch, those of us from the bus stop sat there looking at one another without eating or speaking. We didn't have to say anything. We knew exactly what to do. In unison, we stood up and walked out: down the hall, past the overflow trailers, across the P.E. field. We left that God forsaken place behind us. Must have been 15 of us. It was spontaneous and unplanned. Once out of the ghetto, we walked south on Highway 441 headed for home.

I told my parents the truth, that I'd never return to Parkway, regardless of the consequences. And to my surprise they listened and agreed to transfer me to Rogers Traditional Middle School, where I finished the sixth grade without being beaten or intimidated. Something happened to me that day at Parkway. I'd taken a stand against injustice and felt proud of myself. It was the beginning of my real education.

* * *

Despite my experience at Parkway, Gardenia Road still holds a special place in my memory because it was where I first discovered the greatest thing ever invented: baseball. At the end of Gardenia Road was what could only be described as a huge hole in the ground. A former gravel pit, the hole had been turned into a Little League park called Southwest. Down in the hole, the city of Ft. Lauderdale had laid out a few baseball diamonds and one football field. During heavy rains, the hole filled up with two feet of water, but most of the time it stayed dry. I practically lived at the park.

In the fall and winter I played football; in the spring and summer I played baseball. My sister Maura was a cheerleader. Baseball was my game, and I was good at it. I was a pitcher. Coaches and umpires said they had never seen an 11-year-old throw a curve ball like that. Fathers from opposing teams used to stay late to watch me pitch.

I played with the same group of kids every year, so I knew their strengths and weaknesses. I knew which pitches they could hit and which ones they couldn't. Pitching is about control. You control the pace of the game, and more often than not, you determine the outcome. I loved it. To improve my skill, I bought a book on pitching that featured Hall of Famer Bob Feller. The book showed me how to grip the ball properly and use the laces to throw sliders, fastballs, and a deadly curve.

When I got into a groove, I couldn't miss. The ball went where I wanted it. The umpire, the catcher, and I worked as a team, as if our minds were linked together. First pitch: fastball down the middle, trying to get ahead in the count. Second pitch: the curve. Dropping into my curveball delivery, I'd hurl the ball at the batter's hip. You could see his eyes grow bigger as he anticipated being hit by the pitch, but just as he jerked backwards to step out of the batter's box, the torque on the ball sent it over the plate. "Ste-rike!" the umpire howled, jabbing his fist out to the side. The umpire grew more animated with each batter I sent back to the dugout. Ahead in the count, I'd work the corners of the plate with fastballs and change-ups, then back to the curve.

It was my first exposure to art.

CHAPTER 6

Birmingham, AL • 1997-98 • New Woman Bombing

The days are long past when armored knights faced one another in open combat. In modern warfare, combatants attack remotely from a distant place of refuge, hitting their adversaries when and where they least expect it. So-called stand-off weapons dominate the battlefield. Basically, a stand-off weapon allows you to strike your opponent while leaving him little opportunity to strike back. Unmanned drones, for example, can launch missiles at targets in Pakistan while being piloted from computers located in Texas. Nuclear submarines on the bottom of the ocean can wipe out a land-locked country. Infantry men can shoot targets two miles away with .50 caliber sniper rifles. There is no such thing as a “fair arm-to-arm fight” in modern combat.

Today, the poor man’s premier stand-off weapon is the command detonated improvised explosive device (IED). It’s cheap, easy to make, and effective against even the most sophisticated opponent. One guerrilla can plant an IED in the path of his enemies and trigger it with the push of a button from over a mile away.

In comparison, my own tactics and weapons had failed to deliver. My time bomb unleashed itself like a wild beast: once I let it go there was no way to control it. At Centennial Park, the result proved to be catastrophic. At the other two sites, because I couldn’t trigger the explosives on command, the secondary bombs had no tangible effect.

I needed an efficient stand-off weapon. Until I learned how to build one, the beast would remain safely buried in my underground caches.

I was inactive for almost a year after the bombing in Midtown Atlanta. I worked for much of that summer of 1997. In October, my mother and I took a trip up north. I visited Civil War battlefields while my mother explored the local culture. We spent a day in Washington, D.C., touring the Air & Space Museum and the Museum of American History. Our journey ended in Times Square, New York, the crossroads of the world. We posed for a picture together with the famous Grid Iron building looming over us in the background. The next time I would see that photograph, it would be on an FBI Ten Most Wanted poster. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Between jobs and travel, I experimented with remote-control triggers. It was too risky to purchase essential parts locally, so I jumped in my Nissan truck and headed south. I shopped in Radio Shack and hobby craft stores scattered across Georgia and Alabama. In those days, pre-paid cell phones weren’t widely available, so I tinkered with different detonation systems on my own. I bought a home-paging system that had plenty of range, but the receivers couldn’t produce a sufficient charge to trigger detonators. The system I finally settled on was a remote-control model airplane kit. By attaching the receiver’s servo to a simple switch, I could use the transmitter to turn it off and on, sending as much juice as I wanted to the detonator. I bought two receivers, each with its own frequency. The original idea was to set up another mechanical ambush, triggering two sequential bombs by remote control. The trigger worked well in the shop. But I had to test its range to be sure of its effectiveness.

In place of a detonator, I attached a small LED light to the firing circuit. I then stuffed the receiver-trigger inside a brown paper bag. The flat expanse of the valley near the Andrews-Murphy airport was the closest place to test it. West of the airport, there were five grain silos that sat on the edge of a big soybean field. Parking in the farm lane behind the silos, I hid the paper bag containing the receiver-trigger in a hedgerow of briars. From there it looked like my longest line of sight was to the Highway 19 overpass bridge just west of Andrews. It was about a mile away.

Pulling to the side of Highway 19 on top of the bridge, I rolled down my passenger side window to let the transmitter’s antenna poke out. I switched the transmitter on and manipulated the servo controls

and then switched it off. Then I drove back to the silos to have a look. Unfolding the top of the bag, I looked inside to see the orange glow of the LED light. Eureka. I could trigger high explosives from a mile away with the mere flip of a switch. I finally had my stand-off weapon. As long as I maintained line of sight to the target, I could now detonate an IED remotely.

I'd gotten in the habit of moving every six months. It takes about that long before people start to ask questions: what I did for a living, where I go during those long absences, and so on. And skip-tracers like the IRS take about a half year to home in on a change of address or a false social security number. Not that I had any skip-tracers on my trail. I usually avoided leaving a legitimate name behind me. I thought it was better to leave a non-linear trail. If the FBI ever identified me as a suspect, they would have a harder time following me. But to be safe, I moved out of the house on Vengeance Creek in early October and rented a trailer five miles west of Murphy. I rented the trailer under the name "Bob Randolph." Located on Cane Creek Road, the trailer was a run-down hovel squeezed between two low ridges. It was cold and dark during the wintertime, the sun barely breaking above the tree line. But the rent was low. I'd been paying \$500 a month for the big, empty house on Vengeance Creek. Costing me less than half that, the trailer would save me a bundle of money. By December of 1997, I was ready to go active again.

* * *

The 24th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* was coming up on January 22, 1998. Another statement seemed in order. The plan was to find another abortion mill and take out its employees. I'd use my new stand-off weapon.

Having already hit three targets in Atlanta, I thought the feds would be expecting another attack there. So I perused my Rand McNally map to find another city. I placed my finger on Atlanta and traced it westward. It first stopped on Anniston, Alabama. "Too small," I thought. Moving my finger farther west, I tapped the map. "Birmingham . . . that'll do just fine."

I made a trip to the local library. They had a shelf of *Yellow Pages* in the back. At an empty table in the corner, I cracked open the tattered Birmingham edition and jotted down three addresses on a blue Post-It note.

In early December of 1997, I drove to Birmingham to spend a week casing targets. There was always a great deal of anxiety before any job. Such endeavors leave very little room for error. The slightest mistake can land you in prison or in the grave. After the first couple of jobs, a recurring thought weighs on you: "When will my luck run out?" Like a gambler on a winning streak, you had this feeling that sooner or later the dice were going to come up snake eyes.

Thirty miles north of the city, I exited the interstate at Springville, Alabama. Downshifting into second gear, I drove up a steep hill. It was old logging country. Perfect. I could find a poor man's "motel" somewhere close by. Clear-cuts were regrown in 10-foot scrub oak and blackberry briars. Every few hundred yards, an old logging trail penetrated the thicket. Most were muddy and impassible – too much for my puny two-wheel drive. Then I found what I wanted: a dirt trail dead-ended 200 yards into the bramble. There was no construction underway, and the soft red clay on the trail showed no recent tire tracks. A perfect motel.

Birmingham was an ugly town. It owed its existence to iron ore deposits in the area. The city became one of America's early producers of pig iron, prospering until the steel industry closed down in the 1970s.

During the 1960s, Birmingham added fuel to the civil rights struggle. Integral in Martin Luther King's campaign to end segregation, the city became ground zero for some of the more dramatic clashes of the era.

After integration, whites fled the city for the suburbs, and Birmingham lost its tax base. By the 1990s, the north side of Birmingham resembled a Third World shanty town – complete with tarpaper shacks, liquor stores, and crack dens. The city’s infrastructure was crumbling like adobe mud. Those who worked in the city drove to work in the morning and raced back home in the evening. After dark, downtown became a dead zone of empty office buildings. The only people on the street were cops and crack heads.

* * *

On an old logging road near Springville, I lowered the tailgate of my truck and spread my dinner out on a piece of cardboard. The propane stove was fired up and a pot of lentil soup put on the burner. I sliced several thick pieces of wheat bread. Opening a can of tuna, I spooned it out on the bread, then soaked it with a mixture of virgin olive oil and fresh garlic. The soup boiled. I cut the burner off and ate the soup and sandwiches while strolling around the lot. Spent shell casings and broken whiskey bottles were evidence that someone had been shooting there recently. There were piles of grass clippings and construction trash. An old school desk sat off to one side, with names carved into the top and hardened chewing gum stuck underneath. Like a garbage dump, the place reeked of the city’s residue.

I left the lot and spent the afternoon casing out Planned Parenthood of Birmingham. I didn’t like the lay of the land. I’d be using a remote control system, so I focused on finding a place to put the bomb, and a place where I could detonate it from. Like a sniper, I needed line-of-sight to the target.

Next on my Post-It note was a place called The Summit. High bushes surrounded the building, and escorts guarded the only entrance through the wall of bushes. The place had no vantage point from which I could look down into the parking lot.

There was only one address left on the blue Post-It note. That’s where I had to go.

* * *

In the Southside area of Birmingham was the University of Alabama (UAB), the last pocket of civilization in the city. Housing one of the nation’s finest medical schools, UAB had a few state-of-the-art hospitals. A mixed neighborhood south of the campus butted up between UAB on the north and Red Mountain on the south. Actually, Red Mountain was more like a ridge than a mountain. A quarter mile wide and about 300 feet high, Red Mountain runs east-west for several miles. The sandstone and iron-ore ridge was mostly wooded. Along its crest were a trendy restaurant called The Club, two television stations, and Vulcan Park. The park featured a 70-foot iron statue of Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and metal working. Cast by an Italian sculptor, the gaudy statue represented the city at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. Holding a torch in his outstretched hand, Vulcan looked down on Birmingham’s Southside as if he were hailing a cab – “Taxi!”

Red Mountain leveled out at 17th Avenue South, where the Southside of Birmingham began. Although mostly flat at this point, the neighborhood had the occasional dip. One of these dips occurred on the edge of UAB’s campus. Down at the bottom of the dip, I could see a painted brick building with a cranberry colored awning over its front entrance. Quaint and almost homey, the building had a front patio bordered by a white fence with the look of wrought iron. The bright awning and patio seemed to invite people in from the street.

This was the place I wanted. I had to make this one work, or find another city.

Every major university has at least one abortion clinic close by. Like liquor stores in the ghetto or strip clubs outside military bases, abortionists set up shop close to their prey. The white building with the cranberry awning was just around the corner from The Summit. For years, The Summit held a monopoly over the abortion market in Birmingham. Believing that The Summit was too patriarchal and too profit-driven, a faction of feminist rebels broke away and opened their own abortion mill. The rebels called the

place New Woman All Women Health Care Clinic, a place where mothers disposed of their unwanted babies.

* * *

Arriving in the neighborhood of Southside, I searched for a place to park about a mile from the target, preferably an apartment complex, something low-rent with no gates or cameras, the kind of place where folks don't know much about their neighbors.

Circling the block, I walked north on 17th Street toward 10th Avenue. At the bottom of the dip was New Woman. Behind me loomed Red Mountain. I scanned the building for cameras. Stopping next to the sidewalk that led to the front door, I pulled out a packet of chewing gum and pretended to fumble with the packet while doing a slow 180-degree turn. I focused on the mountain in the distance, nodding my head. "That's it . . . I'll trigger the bomb from up there." (For a map, see page 45.)

I made a few more passes of New Woman, stopping long enough between each pass to disguise myself with different articles of clothing.

The Southside neighborhood mixed old and new, commerce and decay. Older houses with porches and dormers lined the avenues at the base of Red Mountain. Painted bright blue, green, or yellow, many houses were rimmed by flower beds, which were currently dormant in the December ground. Fat city squirrels fed on sunflower seeds beneath bird feeders. The asphalt streets were cracked and faded grey.

The residential area ended on the edge of UAB's campus. A Domino's Pizza store sat across the street from New Woman. At the top of the dip was an old abandoned house, its roof caved in, vines climbing the walls, lawn overgrown. Across from the house stood a dentist's office. Behind that was Rast Park – two acres of brown grass, a few wooden benches and a gazebo. And towering over the area to the west was Rast Hall, a student dormitory.

During school hours, the area buzzed with people heading in all directions. After hours, the neighborhood looked like any other lazy suburb: people walked their dogs in Rast Park, fertilizing the brown grass; students ordered dinner at Domino's, and then hauled a load of clothes to the laundromat.

I took pains to avoid standing out or being noticed, but sometimes attention comes when you least expect it. It's in the nature of things. While strolling through Rast Park, I saw a bearded man walking toward me. I veered to the right watching him in my peripheral vision. But he veered too, homing in on me like a heat-seeking missile.

"What's up, dude?" he said. I stopped, but didn't look at him.

"What's up?" he repeated.

"Nothing," I finally said. There was an awkward pause.

"Aren't you Misty's friend?"

"No."

"Dude, I swear I saw you with Misty," he insisted.

He moved up close to get a better look at my face. Before he could come any closer, I brushed past him. "Gotta go, dude," I said.

Some things you simply cannot anticipate, like a dude mistaking you for Misty's friend. It troubled me that such an innocuous encounter could end up being a key piece of evidence against me. I imagined him sitting on the witness stand pointing at me: "That's Misty's friend, dude."

But I shrugged him off, undeterred. The next morning I ventured out again for a better look at New Woman's operating routine. Wearing a book bag, I positioned myself by the low wall near the corner of

9th Avenue, less than a block away from the abortion mill. I got out my book and note pad and did my fake homework. Next to me was a fraternity house.

A prolife demonstrator arrived early and stood across 17th Street from New Woman. He was a heavy-set man with eye glasses. He held a sign at waist level with the stick resting on the ground between his feet.

Precisely at 7:10 a.m. an old brown travel van with a luggage rack on top pulled into the upper level parking lot. A large dark-haired man got out. Wearing a blue uniform, he stood there for a few minutes glancing at the protester. The protester put his hand above his eyes to block the sun. The man in the uniform waved; the protester waved back. The uniformed man walked around the side of New Woman, then back again. He returned to the van and sat inside it.

“A rent-a-cop,” I thought. “He’s driving his own vehicle. They must have hired him from a private security company.”

Moments later, a car pulled up beside the van. A woman in high heels got out and called to the security guard. Nodding his head, he joined her, and the two walked to the door. After she keyed open the door, both went inside. I’d seen enough; time to go.

For the next five mornings, I arrived in the area of New Woman between 7:00 and 7:30 and watched the opening routine. I stayed on the move, approaching from different directions, wearing different clothes. The security guard got there first, followed shortly by an abortionist. Sometimes it was the same security guard and the same abortionist; sometimes both were different.

There were few places to plant a bomb. The building was bare brick, the parking lot flat. In front of the entrance there was a little gravel yard with several small bushes. Starved of nutrients, the bushes were scrawny and dying. I could try to disguise the bomb as a bush like I did at Sandy Springs, but then the bushes at Sandy Springs were lush and healthy. These bushes wilted half dead. Trying to make a bomb look like one of those scrawny bushes was impossible.

The security guard was the key. I had to be ready to detonate the bomb before he arrived to do his perimeter search. If he overlooked the camouflaged device, I could get him and the first abortionist as both walked through the door. But if he discovered the bomb during his search, I’d have to trigger it right away. Having remote control of the device would allow me to trigger it on command. Anyone not in front of that door would remain unharmed. I decided not to make a secondary device for a mechanical ambush. Finding a place on Red Mountain to trigger one bomb in front of New Woman would prove difficult enough; triggering two bombs was too much.

It felt strange planning the deaths of other human beings. During the next month, the employees of New Woman would go about their lives oblivious to their date with death. Perhaps it was better not knowing. But I knew, and that unsettled me. I never wavered in my conviction, though. To me this was war. As the operators of a facility that slaughtered 10 to 20 unborn babies every day, the employees of New Woman were mass murderers. I saw them as enemy targets. Pushing aside any feelings of pity, I proceeded with a clear conscience.

Red Mountain was crucial to the plan. I climbed up the mountain the next day. Cutting across its southern flank was a muddy trail and a line of telephone poles. I walked the trail back and forth, looking for a line-of-sight to New Woman. I was too low. The trees and houses on Southside blocked my view. Frustrated, I ascended to the crest and crossed the guardrail to the road between the television stations and The Club restaurant. I squinted through my rifle scope; it was no good. There were too many cars and too many people, which meant too many potential witnesses. But when I glassed down through the Southside, I finally caught a glimpse of New Woman’s roof. However, I couldn’t see the front door.

Part of the problem, I believed, was the little 8 X 30 rifle scope I was looking through. While on vacation in Virginia, my pair of military-marine binoculars were stolen from me. Instead of replacing them before coming to Birmingham, I brought along a rinky-dink rifle scope. Designed for a .22 rifle, it was the kind of scope that dads give to their 12-year-old sons for Christmas. While good enough for shooting squirrels at 10 yards, the scope was worthless for objects a mile away.

Frustrated, I blamed it on the scope, but the real reason I couldn't see the front door of New Woman was the dip in the terrain. I simply couldn't get high enough on that mountain to look down at the bottom floor of New Woman. Only the upper floor was visible in the lenses of the 8 X 30 scope.

The remote control transmitter had been tested out to a mile, but that was with a clear line-of-sight. Although the device could detonate without me seeing it, I needed to see who was standing in front of it. And triggering it from the crest exposed me to potential witnesses.

On the positive side, the escape route from Red Mountain was perfect. Parked on the other side of the mountain at the apartment complex off Valley Avenue, my truck would be over a mile from the scene. Trails led over the mountain directly to the apartments. I could trigger the device and be at the truck in fewer than 10 minutes. In 15 minutes, I'd be on the freeway. If only I could find a lookout lower on the slope where no one could see me. If only I could bring that front door into focus – it was the perfect set up.

“Oh, how easy it would be if I had a partner,” I mused. “I wouldn't need to detonate it from the mountain. Using a boosted vehicle, I could trigger the thing from a block away and be on the interstate in two minutes.” Though working alone had its advantages, namely, there was nobody to rat me out, it also made a quick execution and getaway more difficult.

Mine wasn't your ordinary case. There was an entire federal task force in Atlanta just waiting for me to make my next move. Once the dust had settled after the blast, the task force would descend on Birmingham and question everyone within a square mile of New Woman. They would ask about any strange persons or vehicles in the neighborhood on the day of the bombing and in the weeks leading up to the attack. Every video frame of store, bank, and ATM surveillance would be looked at closely. Therefore, I couldn't use my own truck near the scene. My best option was to leave the scene in a stolen vehicle, then ditch it two miles away and switch to another stolen vehicle or to my own. With a partner I could easily boost a second car and position both vehicles where I needed them. But working alone made it difficult to move two vehicles, because you have to use a third mode of transportation – taxi, bicycle, or bus – to bridge the gap between the two cars. The more movements I made, the more evidence I'd leave behind.

The other alternative was to keep my vehicle out of the area and leave the scene on a bicycle or on foot. This was the method I chose. Thus it was critical to have as much distance as possible between myself and the target when the device exploded. From atop Red Mountain, over a mile away, I'd have no problem. But if I had to go down there in the Southside, things could go wrong real quick. I had to find a place on Red Mountain.

That night, in the vacant lot near Springville, I sat in my truck thinking. My inner voice told me to pass on this one, to cut my losses and find another target in another city. But I'd fallen in love with that mountain. I just couldn't let it go. I thought I could see that front door, if only I had better optics. Purchasing binoculars in Birmingham, however, was out of the question. I had to stick to the discipline: no stores, no gas stations, no foot prints. I decided to return to North Carolina and buy some binoculars. Then, I'd come back here and make it work.

* * *

Back in North Carolina I prepared for action. I purchased a nice pair of Leupold 10 X 28 binoculars. I waited for a month, allowing memories to fade and surveillance tapes to loop over. I traveled

out to my caches on Copper Creek, where I built the explosive device in the woods. After excavating my bomb-making tools and dynamite, I spread a plastic tarp on a flat spot of ground next to the creek, and went to work. Like the devices at Sandy Springs and Midtown, the bomb I built for Birmingham would function the same as a Claymore mine. I purchased a plastic toolbox from Wal-Mart to contain the device. I thought the steel plates that I'd used in the Atlanta bombs were too distinctive and could conceivably give the FBI a head start in the investigation, so I bought a roll of common roof flashing from Home Depot to make the directional plate. I cut the flashing into a thick plate and used it to line the back wall and part of the side walls of the toolbox. A dozen or so sticks of dynamite were selected. I swallowed a few aspirin to counteract the inevitable headache that would come with handling the noxious explosive. After removing the wax paper from the sticks, I kneaded the dynamite into a thick rectangular block and sealed it in a few Ziploc bags. The block was fitted against the plate of flashing. About 10 pounds of nails were then packed in front of the dynamite. When it detonated, the bomb would shoot the nails in the opposite direction of the plate. All I had to do was point the nails toward the intended target. To make the bomb resemble a bush, I purchased a bunch of plastic foliage from Wal-Mart's Lawn and Garden section. Tied together with bread ties, the foliage was draped around the toolbox. Tent stakes would later be taped to the toolbox's four corners; this to get the device up off the ground and thus maximize its effectiveness. For the journey to Birmingham, I broke the bomb down into its component parts. The key parts of the bomb – trigger, dynamite, detonator – were then hidden in the door frame of my truck.

My confidence started to ebb by the time I left for Birmingham on the evening of January 27, 1998. The more I thought about the plan, the more I didn't like it. The whole idea of casing New Woman a month before the attack was to let the footprints I'd left behind wash away. Memories would blur. Video tape would be recorded over. But climbing all over Red Mountain just a day before the bombing might leave new footprints. Besides, I was beginning to doubt whether I could actually bring the front door of New Woman into view with my binoculars.

"Too late to turn back now," I said to myself. "I've invested too much time and money in this thing."

Perturbed at my lack of confidence, I decided to forget about finding a lookout on Red Mountain. I'd trigger the bomb from the Southside. I'd do it just as I'd cased it – arrive at opening time, set it off, then walk back over Red Mountain.

This turned out to be a fateful, tragic decision for me.

I did one last walk through on January 28. Everything appeared normal at New Woman. That evening at the vacant lot in Springville, I prepared the IED. I found a large sheet of plywood and dragged it back into the thicket. The components were assembled within a half hour. Standing back to examine my work, I didn't like what I saw. The fake foliage surrounding the toolbox made it look, well, fake. If the security guard walked by without looking directly at it, the "bush" would pass. But focusing on it for even a second, he'd spot it as an obvious fake. Placed in line with those scrawny, dead bushes, it would stick out like a sore thumb.

Lights glowed through the drawn curtains of the houses along 15th Avenue South. Traffic had almost disappeared. I parked next to the curb and turned off my headlights. It was 10:00 p.m. The binoculars were looped over my neck and tucked inside my sweatshirt. Slipping on a pair of calf-skin gloves, I grabbed the laundry bag containing the bomb from the back and walked up 17th Street.

It was a quarter mile to New Woman. I attempted to look like a student on his way to do some late-night laundry. The 30-pound bomb was heavy and difficult to carry at my side, so I pulled it around to my chest and cradled it like a bag of groceries. Seeing a car coming, I'd sling it down to my side again.

Domino's Pizza was closing as I neared, the employees driving away. I halted at the top of the dip overlooking New Woman. The street lights cast shadows on empty asphalt. There was a buzz of

electricity in my ears. When I came even with the abandoned house, I ran up the steps and lay down in the tall grass next to the crumbling structure.

The laundry bag was rolled down and the plastic foliage folded over to one side. I opened the toolbox to activate the trigger. To prevent a random radio signal from triggering the device while I was carrying it, I'd installed a simple kitchen timer as a safety switch. The timer interrupted the circuit and would give me a good 20 minutes to plant the device and walk away before the circuit closed. Releasing the catch on the timer, the thing grinded like a can opener. The toolbox lid was secured with a small pad lock; the foliage folded back over.

My polypropylene neck warmer was pulled up over the bridge of my nose to conceal my face. I was ready. I bounded down the steps and marched mechanically . . . 10 paces . . . I pulled the bag free, shook out the foliage, and placed the bomb in the line of bushes in front of the door.

* * *

"It's a cakewalk," I said to myself. "Stick to the plan and everything will go smooth." January 29, 1998, looked like a typical winter day in the South: grey sky over a grey landscape, neither hot nor cold. Despite my confidence, I felt bad about this one. There was something up ahead waiting for me, and it wasn't good.

I double checked my watch. It was imperative that I arrive on time. Having driven the route at least a dozen times, I had allowed 10 minutes on either side of the appointed hour. I was supposed to be just one among hundreds of college students on my way to classes at UAB. I'd park, walk to class, and then walk back to my truck. That was how it had to appear. I had to be walking through the area when they opened the door to New Woman. I'd reach inside my book bag, flip the switch on the transmitter, and keep on walking. Hanging around the scene simply wouldn't do.

Traffic was backed up for miles, and I was running five minutes behind schedule. Droplets of sweat beaded on my worried brow. I looked left and right for an opening in the lanes, but the interstate was a solid river of steel.

As I inched along, I did another quick inventory. Having wiped everything clean of fingerprints, I used the back of my hand. I reached under my coat to feel the HK nine-millimeter pistol holstered inside my waistband. I leaned forward and tapped the two spare magazines in my back pockets. A blue book bag on the floorboard contained the remote transmitter, shirts, hats, gloves and a long brown wig.

Exiting the Elton Stephens expressway, I parked at the intersection of Ashwood Lane and Beckam Drive, next to the Valley View apartments that were tucked into the southern flank of Red Mountain. New Woman was on the other side, over a mile away. Time was of the essence now. Taking the trail over Red Mountain was too slow. It would be quicker to walk the road, through the Red Mountain Gap on 20th Street. I threw the book bag over one shoulder and jogged past McDonald's in the gap. (For map, see page 45.)

There was a small parking lot on the other side of the mountain facing the city and Southside. At one time the parking lot served Vulcan Park. Crumbling steps led from the parking lot up to the statue. Long since out of use, the steps and the parking lot were cracked and covered in trash. A trail led down through a thicket of Kudzu vines to 16th Avenue in Southside. Midway down the trail, in the thick browning Kudzu vines, I stopped and unzipped my book bag. I donned the blue flannel jacket and the long brown wig. The wig was secured to my head with a dark blue toboggan hat. A pair of cheap aviator's sunglasses completed the disguise. I was ready to enter Southside.

I couldn't approach New Woman directly from the south. The plan was to circle around it, approaching from 9th Avenue. The frat houses and parking lots down there afforded me the longest line-of-sight to the front door of New Woman. Triggering the device from there, I'd turn back toward Red

Mountain, only this time making a much wider circle, using 15th Street to reach the yellow apartments at the foot of Red Mountain. From there, a trail led over the iron ore ridge to my truck parked at the end of Beckam Drive.

As I made my way south on 16th Street, I worried that the security guard had already beaten me to the scene. I walked faster. At the last minute, I decided to cut through Rast Park and take one peek over the dip at New Woman. Satisfied that he hadn't arrived yet, I'd skirt through the student parking lot behind Domino's to take up a position near 9th Avenue.

Walking through Rast Park, I could see only the second floor of New Woman. But once I reached the parking lot in front of the dentist's office, the lower floor of the building suddenly came into view. Standing at the front door were the security guard and one of the abortionists. They were less than a hundred feet away. I was too close. The abortionist had her arm outstretched, pointing directly at the odd-looking "bush" sitting ten feet away. The security guard lackadaisically adjusted his belt, walked over to the bomb, and kneeled down next to it. "He's found it!" I gasped. "Gotta do it now!"

I quickly surveyed the scene with one look: People were in the parking lot of New Woman sitting in an SUV. And the prolife demonstrator was in his usual location in front of Domino's. Both were out of harm's way. Without hesitation, I pulled the book bag around to my chest, unzipped the top, and flipped the switch. Dust and debris slammed against New Woman's front – BOOM – like an ocean wave crashing into a seawall. The shockwave shoved me backwards; air sucked out of my lungs; a withering pain pierced my ear drums. The security guard was bitten by the blast and thrown several feet away. The abortionist bounced off the door jam and came to rest on the sidewalk below. Glass rained down on the scene.

"God have mercy on their souls," I said.

I twirled around, zipped up the book bag, and walked through Rast Park. Cops would be on the scene soon, very soon. I was way too close to the blast. An explosion like that draws everyone's attention. Chances of someone seeing me leaving the scene were high. My instinct was to get out of there as quickly as possible. But I couldn't run.

As I walked south on 16th Street, sirens were screaming on 10th Avenue. I looked back up 16th Street to see a police cruiser speeding toward New Woman. Nearing 15th Avenue, I had two alternative routes: (1) turn right, cut over to some apartments at the end of 15th Street and, take the trail over Red Mountain; or (2) turn left and go back the way I'd come that morning through the Red Mountain gap. I chose route number two. It was another mistake.

Ducking into the alleyway behind the Center Garden Apartments on 15th Avenue, I pulled a bundled Wal-Mart bag out of my pocket. The wig, toboggan, and flannel shirt were stuffed into the bag. "Everything is okay . . . Don't panic," I reminded myself. As I came around the front of the apartments, residents were emerging on their way to work or school. I joined the throng, combing my hair with my fingers. I walked east on 15th Avenue. There was a beat up gold Chevy Nova parked on the side of the street. The driver's side door was cracked open and a skinny black man stood there with one elbow resting on the roof and the other on the door frame. As I came even with him, he looked over at me. I could feel his stare. Immediately I sensed something was wrong.

At the end of 15th Avenue, I turned south, climbing a flight of wooden steps that led up to 16th Avenue, the last street before Red Mountain. I turned to see if the skinny man was following me. I waited a couple of minutes until I saw his beat up Nova turn north on 18th Street, pattering away from me.

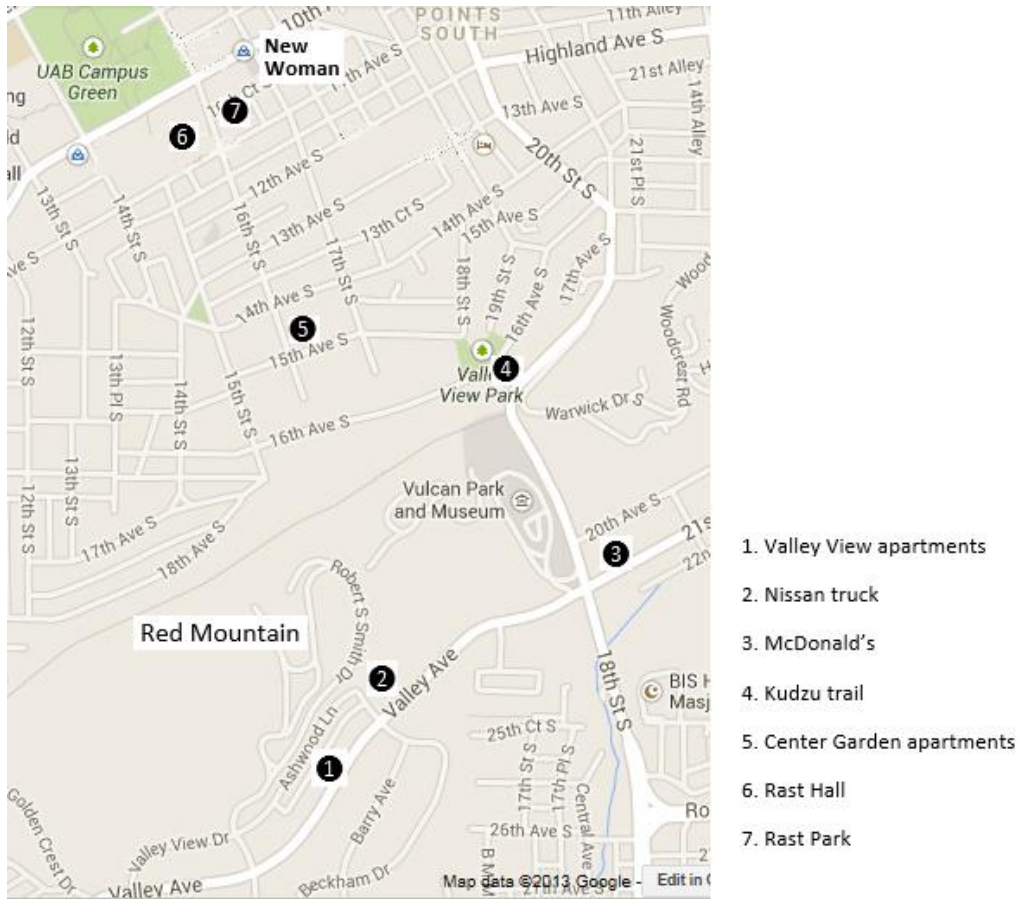


Figure 3 Area around New Woman All Women Clinic.

“Strange,” I thought. “Why did he stare at me like that?”

Crouching down next to the trail, in the thicket of Kudzu, I removed a black cap and green T-shirt from the book bag and slipped them on. The plastic Wal-Mart bag containing the first disguise was stuffed inside the book bag. Unable to shake the feeling that the guy next to the Nova had seen something, I got out my binoculars and scanned the few roads still visible in Southside. There was no one down there.

“It’s just paranoia,” I told myself. “Relax.”

I still could’ve avoided the road. I still could’ve climbed over Red Mountain using the trail. But I saw no reason to. The original plan had fallen apart. And the man next to the Nova seemed odd. But everything worked out in the end. There was no one behind me.

I climbed to the gap. The fear that had been pumping through my system for days began to subside and I relaxed my pace. No cop cars or ambulances sped past me as I walked by McDonald’s near Valley Avenue, nothing that would seem to indicate that a bomb had just exploded. New Woman was now a world away. I’d made it.

I tucked the transmitter in the back of the truck in my toolbox. The radio scanner was placed on the front seat beside me. I took a few swigs of water. The scanner registered on the local frequencies. Garbled voices chattered incoherently. It was the tail end of morning rush hour, but traffic was still heavy. Trying to negotiate the traffic to Elton Stephens Expressway, I didn’t really pay much attention to the scanner. But once I reached the interstate highway, I heard the scanner say strange things, such as “Vulcan Park”

and “McDonald’s,” both of which were nowhere near New Woman. However, they were on the route that I’d taken through Red Mountain gap. I turned the volume up, but then the Birmingham frequencies went dead. Fearing that an errant signal might trigger a secondary device, the police had ordered all first responders to turn off their radios.

My mind started racing from one thought to another. It was hard to focus. I drove to the vacant lot in Springville. The transmitter, scanner, and pistol were hidden inside the door frame. I piled the wig, shirt, boots, and gloves together and soaked them with gasoline. I lit up a piece of paper, tossed it on the pile, and the wig shriveled and gave off a dark cloud of pungent smoke. I topped off the truck’s gas tank. I retrieved a bar of soap from the back, cocked the side mirror out, and shaved off my mustache. Then, I hit the highway north.

“Someone followed you over Red Mountain,” I said to myself. “But who?”

I kept thinking about the guy standing next to the Chevy Nova. He was the only person I’d encountered on the way over Red Mountain who seemed out of place. How that brief encounter could have led to Vulcan Park and McDonald’s was a mystery to me. The last time I saw him he was driving north on 18th Street, headed in the opposite direction away from me.

I desperately wanted to drive faster, expecting a cop to pull me over at any moment, but I had to stay under the speed limit. As fear increased, my foot became heavier. I’d catch myself speeding and would have to slow down. I yo-yoed back and forth for 150 miles.

Then a curious thing happened: I began to doubt what I’d heard on the scanner. “You’re exaggerating,” I said to myself. “No one saw you leave the scene. Don’t worry.” Half of me knew something was wrong, but the other half refused to acknowledge the danger. I was driving in denial.

It had rained at my trailer while I was gone. Long mud puddles gutted the tiny dirt road leading to my trailer on Cane Creek. I gunned it through the brown water, coating the undercarriage with North Carolina mud.

Within an hour of returning I felt the tug of fear once again. Hunkered down in that trailer with those ridges tight on both sides, I felt trapped. I was a fish in a barrel. I had to get out of there. I began preparing the caches in the back bedroom.

The caches had been sitting around for over a year and a half. Batteries were missing. Mink oil for boots had been used and left elsewhere. Food had been eaten. More crucial – my axe, shovel, hand winch and over 300 pounds of hard red winter wheat had been left at Cal’s Mini-Storage in Murphy. Instead of going straight to Cal’s after returning from Birmingham, I’d wasted precious time washing the truck.

I simply wasn’t prepared. By the time of the Birmingham operation I’d become over confident. Atlanta had been different. After the bombing at Centennial Park, I’d spent three weeks in the woods. But I felt stupid for overacting. So after the subsequent bombings at Sandy Springs and Midtown in Georgia, I’d gone back home and ate spaghetti. The caches were there in the back bedroom. If I needed to run, I figured I could load up the truck and be in the mountains in no time at all. But that was then. Now, everything was in disarray.

I dragged the barrels to the porch and loaded them into the back of the truck. Lacking television reception, I had to rely on radio to keep me informed. At the top and bottom of the hour, I’d rush over and listen to the news reports from Birmingham. They were still covering the basics: one dead and one wounded in the blast. The fatality was an off-duty policeman and not a private security guard as I’d previously thought. A dead police officer would intensify the investigation. The radio, however, mentioned nothing about any leads, nothing about Vulcan Park or McDonald’s. The uncertainty festered more doubt, yet I searched for any excuse not to run. The fact that my name wasn’t on the radio seemed to confirm it for me. So instead of going to the woods, I went to the video store.

But I couldn't sit still long enough to watch the movie. I turned out all the lights in the trailer and moved from window to window, peering out into the darkness. I had to go.

With the video machine still running, I drove away from Cane Creek. The cache in Snowbird had a year's supply of food. But it was a long drive to Little Snowbird Creek, and I still wasn't sure I needed to go to the woods. The Fires Creek Wilderness area was closer. I'd scouted the area last summer and planned to bury a cache there anyway. The steep slopes provided excellent cover. I had enough food in the barrels for at least a few months. I'd drop them on Fires Creek. After I had exhausted that food, I could then move over to Snowbird.

It was 15 miles to Fires Creek. Back-country roads led through a small community called Martins Creek. I could avoid town and the main roads and drop everything on Fires Creek. Then, I'd drive back to Martins Creek and ditch the truck there.

Past the first bridge that spanned Fires Creek, the gravel road narrowed and cut into the steep slope. Above the rushing water the air was cool. Ridges towered over the road, leaving only a narrow ribbon of sky directly overhead. A mile from the entrance, the road forked to the left, climbing up Rockhouse Creek. Here, the ridges were steep and covered in thick rhododendron. I could find a decent camp.

Parking in a small turnout, I grabbed the flashlight from the floorboard and crossed the road into the thick rhododendron. It was imperative that no one see me, or my truck, back on Fires Creek. I had to work fast. Popping the light on and off, I searched for a place to set my barrels. I found a nice shelf 10 yards in, and carried my haul one pack load at a time. Continuing to use the flashlight was dangerous, so I killed the light and felt my way forward. It was pitch black as I waded through a sea of bush and branches. I held one hand in front of my face to keep from losing an eye.

I spent that night parked in an overgrown field south of Martins Creek. An old abandoned house lay decomposing beside the road. For-sale signs were posted here and there. I'd lay low for a day or two. There were a few nice places to hide the truck, if it came to that. I didn't need to return to the trailer, but I did need to go to the mini-storage for the axe, shovel, and wheat. I could get there using back roads. By tomorrow night I'd be safe in the woods of Fires Creek.

Listening to the radio that night, I began to doubt myself once again: "The radio has reported no leads in the case," I scolded myself. "You've been running around, thrashing through the bush, lugging barrels, driving like a lunatic – for nothing. Here you are sleeping in a briar patch for heaven's sake."

I returned to Cane Creek in the morning. Everything at the trailer was exactly as I'd left it. There were no FBI agents lurking in the bushes, just an empty trailer with the TV left on. I took a shower and ate some oatmeal. Spooning the gruel into my mouth, I went over to the window, half expecting to see a machine-gun-toting fed running across the lawn. I laughed.

I returned the video and rented another. Later in the afternoon, I drove to Cal's Mini-Storage and picked through the tools to find my axe, shovel, and one-ton Come-A-Long. The hard red winter wheat was in five-gallon buckets, stacked in the back corner. It was jammed in tight by a ton of other stuff. I was tired and didn't want to unload the entire shed to get to the wheat. I stood there looking at it for five minutes, then I left. "Maybe tomorrow," I thought. Another mistake.

As the day wore on, I grew tired of the same old news reports. Plus, my nerves were frayed. I'd been running myself ragged. I turned off the radio and tried to relax.

There's nothing quite like good spaghetti. January 30 was definitely a spaghetti day. I had promised myself that I wouldn't listen to the radio until tomorrow. But, for some reason, I went back on my promise. After switching on the radio, I began to inventory my spaghetti fixings. It was NewsTalk 750 out of Atlanta. The radio started pounding out the little jingle that introduces the news segments. I

stopped to listen. The top story was Birmingham: “A witness saw a man get into a grey truck. Authorities are now searching for that truck . . .”

A jolt of adrenaline shot through me like an armor-piercing bullet. I knew then that they had me. Now it was either fight or flight. I debated whether to run or to fight them in court. I chose the woods.

I went to the bedroom and started ransacking the place like a madman; pulling drawers out and throwing things in the center of the floor. I grabbed shirts, socks, jackets – everything within reach – and piled it into a bed sheet and hefted it out to the truck like Santa Claus. I don’t remember what all I took; most of it was superfluous since I already had the basics in my caches in the woods. I acted instinctively. All the while a voice in my head kept repeating, “Get out of the house now!”

Within minutes I was on the road, speeding back through Martins Creek. The tires squealed as I flew round the corners. It was still daylight. I couldn’t go directly to Fires Creek. I had to wait in the field until nightfall. I mashed the gas pedal. The little four-cylinder screamed for mercy, but I gave it none. Glancing in the rearview mirror, I saw chaos behind me. The camper bed of my truck looked like a dryer on spin cycle. The stuff in the back kept flying through the air, slamming against the sides every time I turned a corner.

I made it to the overgrown field in a matter of minutes. I thought I might be able to carry the good stuff into the woods. But after sorting through it, I realized there was too much stuff. The axe, shovel, and Come-A-Long alone weighed over thirty pounds. I’d have to leave some choice items behind.

There was another option. I could drive another load to Fires Creek after it got dark. I didn’t want to drive anymore, but decided to anyway. I’d make one more run for Fires Creek. And while I was at it, I’d pay a visit to the Bi-Lo grocery store in Murphy. I couldn’t retrieve the 300 pounds of wheat from Cal’s – not in the daylight. And, unfortunately, Cal’s closed before dark. So I’d raid Bi-Lo instead. Pulling the stack of sweaty bills from my pocket, I counted out \$800.00. It then occurred to me that I’d left another \$3,000.00 hidden in a picture frame at the trailer on Cane Creek. I shook my head in disgust. I couldn’t go back there now.

The mistakes kept piling up like cordwood, one on top of another. But dwelling on them wouldn’t do me any good. I’d have plenty of time for that later. Right now, I had to keep moving forward.

The feds in Birmingham had scheduled a news conference for 6:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. I had a sense of what they would say. I switched the radio on at six o’clock. They cut away to Birmingham where agent such-and-such was beginning the conference. He said, “A witness followed a man wearing a wig who got into a truck. That truck belongs to Eric Robert Rudolph.” He enunciated each syllable for effect – the only thing missing was a drum roll.

Although I had anticipated the announcement, hearing my name aloud over the radio froze my blood. In an instant, I became one of the most wanted men in the world. The Great Oz had declared me an outlaw. Millions of eyes would be searching for me now. From this moment forward, everyone became a potential enemy.

My watch said 7:00 p.m. when I pulled into the Bi-Lo center in Murphy. I walked over to the Burger King first and ordered a double Whopper with large French fries. I needed the calories to keep me running all night long. Trying to avoid the clerk’s eyes, I got out my wallet and pretended to count the money.

I gobbled the food down, barely noticing how it tasted.

With a full stomach, I hurried to Bi-Lo. The bright lights in the store seemed to penetrate right through me. The feds surely had my photograph plastered on all the television channels.

On top of everything, I'd forgotten to make a list. Between wondering if the people rolling past me in the aisles had seen my picture and trying to decide what to buy – I couldn't concentrate. I just wanted to get out of there. Trail mix was all I could think of. I grabbed containers of oatmeal, jars of peanuts, bags of dried fruit and raisins. One aisle over, I dumped an arm load of canned green beans and tuna fish into the cart. Some soap and batteries were added. Before I knew it the cart was full, and most of it was cheap oatmeal. It simply wouldn't do to get another cart. Instead of ditching the oatmeal and rethinking what I'd need for a long sojourn in the woods, I went to the checkout counter with what I had.

"Looks like you're making granola?" asked the checkout girl. She slid the items across the bar code register – bip – bip – bip.

"Yah," I said.

"You must like breakfast?"

"Love it . . . Eat it all day," I said.

A pimply-faced kid with a hoop earring and pants sagging over his underwear bagged the groceries. He shot me a contemptuous "gangsta" look, like he was too cool to be courteous. He put one item at a time in the bag, moving in slow motion. It was all I could do to keep myself from pushing Vanilla Ice aside and bagging the groceries myself.

I was able to dump the stuff on Fires Creek and make it out of there without anyone seeing my truck. Driving to Martins Creek road, I turned down a dirt drive that crossed a small field to a wooded ridge. At the edge of the wood line, I dropped the truck into low gear and dumped the clutch. I shoved the truck, wedging it between the trees.

By now the temperature had plummeted, and cold air stung my lungs. Shouldering my pack, I said goodbye to my trusty little truck. The little Nissan had served me well. It felt strange leaving it there like that.

I used several different roads to reach Fires Creek. Although only 15 miles away, Fires Creek wasn't a straight line shot. The many changes of direction made it ideal to create the needed break between me and my pursuers. Hard, dry surfaces like rocks and roads soak up little scent. Walking late at night, I could cover quite a distance and change directions several times before having to duck down in the moist grass on the sides of the road. Ten miles away, and they would never be able to track me with their bloodhounds.

Not expecting to camp along the way to Fires Creek, I'd dressed for speed instead of comfort. My ALICE pack contained only a canteen of water, a sleeping mat, and a poncho. My breath hit the cold air and was transformed into ice crystals. I jogged the first five miles. Despite the cold, I began to sweat profusely.

For decades, outdoor companies have been trying to develop the perfect fabric, one that wicks the sweat away from the body. But even with the best of fabrics, it's smart to keep your exertions to a minimum and rest periodically to keep from sweating too much. While moving, your body temperature remains high. The problem comes when you stop and your body temperature drops. The sweat on your skin lowers your body temperature dramatically. Hypothermia sets in. First, you shake uncontrollably, second you feel a false sense of warmth, third, you die.

I wasn't thinking about any of that as I jogged along the back country roads of Martins Creek. Sweat slowly soaked my clothes. I had changed into winter boots, but I'd forgotten to put on thick winter socks. Instead, I wore thin cotton house socks. The gap between my foot and the wall of the boot was rubbing a nice bunch of painful blisters.

After mile ten my body was wasted. I walked on the outer edges of my feet, clenching my toes so the blisters didn't hurt as much. The double Whopper with French fries had twisted my gut into a painful knot. I'd had enough by the time I reached the gravel road leading back into the Fires Creek Wilderness. And I still had a few miles to go.

My tank was empty. I had one burst of energy left. I used it to crawl to the top of the ridge on the left side of the road. There, I spread my poncho on the ground amid a clump of white pine trees. The sleeping mat was buttoned inside the poncho, creating an improvised sleeping bag. I started scraping up leaves and needles with my boots, but the pain of the blisters was too much to bear, so I dropped to my knees and used my frozen fingers. About a foot of icy leaves and needles were spread over the poncho bag. I took my boots off and climbed inside.

I couldn't sleep. Within minutes my body temperature dropped. I began shaking uncontrollably – the first stage of hypothermia. I mustered up enough strength to strip off my wet clothes. Pulling the poncho up tight, I slid down inside under the leaves and curled into a fetal position. It was warmer now.

* * *

The sun climbed over the horizon. I woke up with my stomach in knots. "Damn double Whoppers," I cursed. I pushed the pile of leaves aside and stood. My clothes were frozen stiff on the ground. After finding a place where the sun's rays came through the trees, I laid them out to dry. I wrapped the wet poncho around me like an Indian blanket and looked around.

There were houses being built to my rear. Roads ran to my front and side. Someone was using a chainsaw to my left. I was surrounded. I'd trapped myself on a hill. My canteen was empty. I had no food. And I couldn't move until dark. It was going to be a long day.

Having no radio with me, I had no idea what was happening behind me. For all I knew the feds had found the truck, and bloodhounds sniffed hot on my trail. I scooted to the edge of the ridge where I could watch the roads. In the afternoon, a Clay County Sheriff's deputy drove up Fires Creek, but he drove right out again.

By late afternoon I needed food and water. I couldn't wait until dark. The delicious sound of Fires Creek flowing at the bottom of the hollow drove me crazy. I licked my dry, chapped lips. My tongue felt like suede leather. I hid behind a pine tree on the edge of the gravel road and, seeing it was clear, ran for the other side.

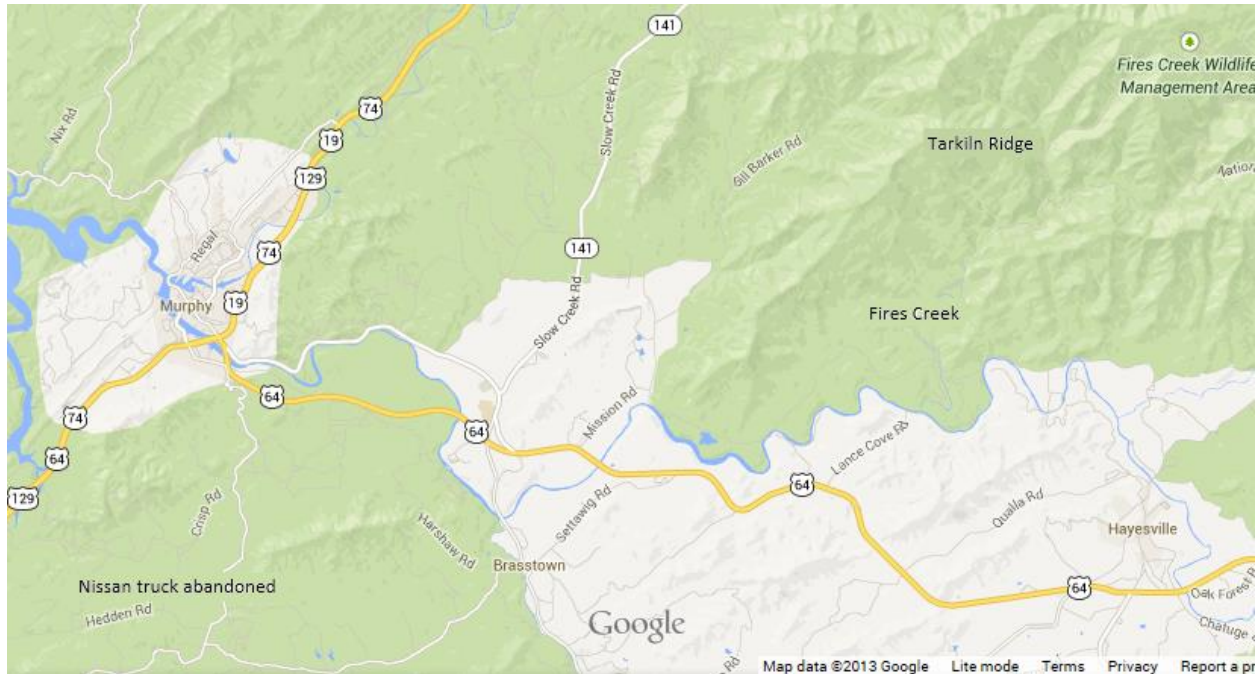


Figure 4 Nissan Truck Abandoned, Fires Creek

Oh! The water tasted like the elixir of the gods. I gulped it greedily and submerged my head in the freezing water. My head started spinning. Houses were upstream, and for all I knew there were privies stretched over the creek. But I didn't care. I drank greedily.

On that last leg of the journey, I was walking like a zombie in one of those old monster movies – arms outstretched, stumbling forward on my blistered feet. I cursed and laughed at the same time. “It’s a cakewalk,” I said, mocking my over confidence. “Stick to the plan and everything will go smooth.” Well, I hadn’t stuck to the plan. I’d improvised. Now, I had no home, no truck, and every cop in the county was looking for me. My only possessions were a gaggle of caches filled with food and camping gear. But I was still alive and I had a lot of fight left in me.

I tripped through the rhododendron with my arms out in front of me. When I thought I was about there, I reached out into the darkness and touched the cold plastic of the caches. My new home.

CHAPTER 7

Homestead, FL • 1978-82 • Combat, and Religion

The torso of Florida tapers down to a point, beyond which a chain of small islands (the Keys) extends like a tail into the turquoise colored water of the Caribbean Sea. Exactly at the point where the torso and the tail meet is the anus of America, a place called Homestead. My family moved to Homestead the fall of 1978. I was almost 12 years old.

The details about the move are sketchy in my mind. Here's what I do remember: Soon after an aborted transfer to the San Francisco airport, my father lost his job with TWA. About that time, we joined up with a con man preacher out of Virginia who was in the process of establishing a new church in Homestead. Fat, flaccid, with fire-engine red hair, Pastor Bez was just out of the seminary. He had already purchased the property and needed investors, or "founding families," as he called them. We went along with him, investing in what would come to be called Rock Church, or later, after Pastor Bez was sued for name infringement, Saleh Tabernacle. Until ground breaking began a year later, Pastor Bez was fleecing his growing flock under an old circus tent that he had set up in a field just north of town.

With much wailing and gnashing of teeth, we kids were loaded into the station wagon bound for Homestead. We drove on the Florida Turnpike toward the nether regions, heading south to become one of Pastor Bez's "founding families." Our faces grew sadder with each mile marker we passed.

With Dad out of work, our family fell into the poor class. We were forced to live among the white trash along 8th Avenue in a puke-green house that smelled of cat urine. It was literally on the other side of the railroad tracks. The place was a hole. Old produce-packing houses sat decomposing next to the railroad tracks. Kids in the neighborhood came from broken homes: an absentee father; an alcoholic mother; a parent who worked part-time at a fast-food place or a nursing home. They lived in filthy duplexes among piles of hamburger wrappers and dirty clothes. The families raised angry kids, many having done time in Dade County's Youth Hall. Drug use was universal. Grass, ludes, coke, PCP – anything they could get their hands on went up their noses, in their veins, or down their throats. We're talking about 12-year-old kids. For kicks, they stole motorcycles and threw cinder blocks off the highway bridge at passing cars. On one particularly boring day, they set fire to a nearby warehouse.

Before cheaper Third World produce priced them out of the market, Homestead's farmers grew most of America's mangos and avocados. The area still grew pole beans and squash and tomatoes, but the old mango and avocado groves were cut down and turned into subdivisions. Irrigation canals crisscrossed the area, bringing fresh water from the Everglades to the thin, rocky soil along the coast. Two miles south were the projects of Florida City, one of the most dangerous places on the planet. When the rains came, the bodies would float down stream.

I remember my first exposure to one of those bodies. I thought it was a blow-up doll floating face up in the canal. My more experienced companions enlightened me. "Body," one of them said. "Smell that? Whoowee!" Just then a powerful smell forced me backwards. Vomit squeezed between my clenched teeth and leaked from the corners of my mouth. Someone went for the cops while we stood there holding our noses looking at the corpse.

A lone metro cop and a coroner's wagon arrived an hour later. They stood next to us on the canal bank, discussing the best way to get the body out of the water. The coroners didn't want to get their feet wet. Frustrated at the lack of initiative, the metro cop finally grabbed a stick and dragged the corpse to the canal bank. He tied one end of a rope around its foot and the other end to his car's bumper. VROOM – VROOM – he dropped the cruiser in gear and dragged the bloated body up the gravel canal bank. It flopped and skidded right in front of me, an unforgettable sight.

We stood there staring down at the corpse. He was a black man – or rather, he was a black man, in his better days. Swollen to twice his normal size from all the water, he was busting out of his clothes, his fingers the size of link sausages. He had a gaping dark hole in his chest, where a knife blade or bullet had penetrated. His grey lifeless eyes stared blankly. Blow flies immediately swarmed to the body, darting in and out of his open mouth.

“What did he die of?” I asked the meat-wagon guy.

“Ugliness probably,” he said with a chuckle.

They bagged the body, strapped it to a gurney, and stuffed it in the back of the wagon. Then they drove away. Just another day’s work. I was still staring at the spot where the body had been and at the flies searching for the missing corpse.

* * *

I’d witnessed racial tension in Ft. Lauderdale, but the conflict remained hidden under the surface. The fault lines between the factions lay farther apart. If you stayed in your own neighborhood you could avoid most problems. Homestead was different. Neighborhoods were closer together, schools were heavily mixed, and racial tension simmered right on the surface.

In the late 1970s, Homestead stood on the border between rural farmland and the ever-expanding suburbs of Miami. The Redlands, an area of farms and middle class whites, stretched all the way out to the dikes that held back the sawgrass swamps of the Everglades. The Redlands were what South Florida used to look like in the 1940s. East of the Redlands lay the new Florida, a patchwork of ethnic-racial enclaves that extended up into Miami proper. Just north of Homestead was a camp of Mexican migrant farm laborers. Black housing projects were located at Florida City, Goulds, and Modello. Cuban and Haitian neighborhoods dominated Leisure City. And smatterings of poor whites were squeezed in between. Every group had its own little identity and hated every other group with a xenophobic passion. This was Miami in the years just before the Liberty City riots.

Like most of the public schools in Dade County, Campbell Junior High germinated a battle ground for the warring factions. The school resembled a prison, a windowless concrete box with steel doors and guards that patrolled the hallways with walkie talkies. Racial gangs controlled their turf, and viciously punished trespassers. To survive, you had to know where to sit, where to walk, and where you were forbidden to breathe.

On my first day of class, I made the mistake of sitting in the black section. The kid sitting behind me wore an Afro and a pair of high-top Converse tennis shoes that he rested on the back of my head. I didn’t like having his shoes resting on the back of my head, so I brushed them off. But he put them right back again and again.

“You got a pencil, white boy?” he asked.

“Yah,” I said, brushing his feet off my head.

“Let me borrow it.”

I thought perhaps loaning him the pencil might go a long way toward settling our little disagreement about his feet. So I leaned back and handed him one of my new, freshly sharpened Number Two pencils. He didn’t try to use my head for a footstool for the rest of the class. “Problem solved,” I thought.

The bell rang for the next class. I packed my books. “May I have my pencil back?” I asked, holding out my hand. He looked at my outstretched hand for a moment.

“You want your pencil? Here!” He thrust the pencil downward, stabbing it into the palm of my hand. I doubled over in agony, staring at the pencil stuck through the center of my hand. I expected the teacher to do something about this blatant assault, but she took one look at the hand, said nothing to the kid, and sent me to the school nurse. I went home instead.

Trapped in yet another horrible school, I began to skip classes. I showed up for attendance call, then slipped out a side door. I waited under a canal bridge until school was over.

I managed to beat them on attendance during the school year, but I couldn’t fake the school work. At the end of the year I’d flunked the seventh grade. But I’d survived, and that was all that mattered to me.

When a truant officer later showed up at our door, my mother almost passed out. She had no idea that I’d missed so many days.

“Why did you skip class?” the truant officer asked.

“Because that school is not a school,” I said. “It’s a prison. There are fights every day. I cannot learn anything there.”

He agreed with me. I couldn’t believe it. My mother couldn’t believe it. He wrote something in his note pad, then warned me that if I kept skipping so many classes someone would report me to the Dade County Youth Hall. “That place is far worse than Campbell Junior, believe me,” he said. He suggested that I attend private school. “Good luck.” Then he drove away.

Although it strained the budget, my parents enrolled me in a small private school on the north side of Homestead. Colonial Christian was your typical Southern Baptist school of that era. After liberal bureaucrats and the teacher’s union destroyed the public school system in the 1960s, conservative Baptists began opening small private schools like Colonial to fill the gap in education. There was a strong emphasis on combating the influences of the counterculture. Before Colonial agreed to enroll me, I had to sign a contract containing a long list of dos and don’ts. I agreed to wear my hair short, to read the Bible, and to salute the U.S. and Christian flags. The list of don’ts included alcohol and drug use, and wearing a hippie peace symbol. The school’s mission was to teach the basic curriculum and instill Christian virtues. Classes were small. The race war that plagued south Florida schools didn’t exist at Colonial because the school was racially homogenous.

In my years of public schooling, I’d fallen way behind my grade level. It was difficult for me to follow the curriculum at Colonial Christian. But I tried. All that first month I expected them to throw me out of school, or send me to rot in the remedial class. After handing in my first English paper, the teacher asked me to stay after school. “Here it comes,” I said to myself. “I knew I wouldn’t last long.”

I showed up after school expecting to get the boot. She sat me down and proceeded to go through my paper, showing me my mistakes and how to correct them. I was completely dumbfounded. Here was a teacher actually taking time out of her schedule to teach me something. Unbelievable!

But I had learned that nothing good ever lasts. My time at Colonial Christian came to an end after only one semester. My parents couldn’t afford the tuition any more. In that one semester, I’d managed to pull my grades up high enough to pass the seventh grade. Next year I’d have to go back to the prisons, unless I could find a way to escape Homestead.

* * *

Homestead wasn’t all bad. Once again, I sought refuge in sports. In that desert of drugs and violence I found an oasis of joy on the baseball diamonds of Harris Field. Situated on the side of U.S. 1, Harris Field attracted a large number of kids from the Redlands and quite a few high caliber coaches. I fit in well. I threw a no-hitter my first time on the mound. Having turned 12, I had reached the upper age

limit for Little League. With more weight and height, I could really put some heat on the ball, and, therefore, I no longer had to rely on my curveball.

The first year, Homestead Little League All-Stars lost in the district. But that next year, in the 13-year-old age bracket, we breezed through the Dade County district. None of the games were even close. It got so bad the coach told us to strike out on purpose so we could get out of the inning. We smoked North Miami 15-0 in the final.

The state tournament was to be played in, of all places, Ft. Lauderdale. Days before our first game was scheduled, Liberty City exploded in the worst race riot in Miami's history. Rioters shot store owners and dragged motorists from their vehicles, beating some of them to death with baseball bats. Entire city blocks were engulfed in flames. Travelling in a caravan of cars, we bypassed Miami using the Florida Turnpike. The team had never played on such a large venue before. Little Yankee Stadium, home of the minor league Yankees, overwhelmed us. The infield grass was perfectly smooth, the baselines perfectly straight, and the bleachers seemed to reach up to the sky. The first team we faced was Oakland Park, one of my old rivals from my days at Southwest. The umpire called an extremely tight strike zone. Our pitchers had a hard time finding it. We fared little better offensively. Pop flies and ground outs put us in a hole early, and we never managed to dig our way out.

While we played, Miami burned. Throughout the game I kept looking up in the bleachers for my mother and brother, who were supposed to come watch us play. But they were not up there. Little did I know they were in the middle of the riots.

Mother didn't follow our advice to drive around Miami; instead, she tried to drive right through Liberty City on I-95. Her luck couldn't have been worse. Unaware that most gas stations in Miami had closed down because of the random attacks on business owners, she couldn't purchase any fuel. Smack in the middle of the riot zone, her Toyota Corona ran out of gas.

Pulling to the side of the freeway, she saw fiery buildings on the streets below. Flagging down a motorist on the freeway proved impossible. Their only hope was to make it to a nearby Holiday Inn, where a phalanx of cops camped out in the parking lot. The motel, however, was down in Liberty City. They had to make a run for it. Down the on-ramp they ran. A pack of club-wielding rioters quickly spotted the duo and gave chase. They ran for their lives. Only paces ahead of the murderous mob, they reached the cordon of cops. Unable to satisfy their blood lust, the enraged mob threw rocks and bottles. The police had their hands full keeping the rioters contained. Mom had to sit tight until daylight before she could retrieve her car.

* * *

At the Rock Church, Pastor Bez preached a brand of humility bordering on self-abnegation. His message was to let the world wipe its feet on you. God will give you justice in the next world, he said. Leave the burdens of this world behind; get saved and get ready for the Rapture; everything else is vanity.

According to the Pentecostal belief, it wasn't enough for a person to accept the tenets of Christianity and to follow the Ten Commandments. Your salvation depended on a supernatural, personal relationship with Jesus that only the initiates could describe. Because everyone's relationship with Jesus was personal, the contents of this relationship were necessarily subjective. One person's Jesus could be a stern taskmaster, while another person's Jesus could be quite liberal, permitting all manner of behavior. Pastor Bez's Jesus apparently had no problems with him committing adultery with his personal secretary and using the money from the building fund to subsidize a lavish lifestyle. Since all men were sinners, there really was no point in seriously trying to obey the laws of God. All you needed to do was mouth the "Sinner's Prayer" and blubber a few confessions in front of the altar, and you were saved. All your sins, past and future, were forgiven. Once you were saved, you were always saved. No matter how many sins you committed in the future, you could rest assured that you had a ticket to the Resurrection. You didn't

have to accept responsibility for your own sins. Jesus did that for you on the Cross. Jesus was the great scapegoat of mankind. The only objective standards for this Pentecostal group were contained in the King James Bible. But since the ordinary believer was qualified to interpret the Scriptures, everyone's interpretation was equally valid. The rational theology of Thomas Aquinas was equal to the ravings of a simpleton. At Rock Church the only litmus test of the "saved" was the "gift of the Spirit."

Pastor Bez seldom taught any doctrine. He never tried to ground his sermons in reason or experience. He rarely discussed the moral dilemmas that confronted Christians in the modern world. And the political and social injustices in America might as well be happening on a different planet, as far as he was concerned. Life was too short for reality. Rock Church was about getting high on the Holy Ghost; it was a spiritual opium den. The services began with singing and music, which quickly led into a short sermon, all of this designed to elicit the "gifts of the spirit." Some folks waved their hands incessantly at the ceiling. Others cried hysterically. Quite a few danced like whirling dervishes. Many spoke in an incomprehensible dialect they called "tongues." I remember one guy who used to run circles around the congregation. And between the pews and all along the front altar, people lay passed out cold – slain in the spirit.

The church attracted the downtrodden victims of society. Seemed like everyone was an ex-something or other: ex-drug addict, ex-Hell's Angel, ex-convict. And brother did they love to talk about their ex-lives. A certain notoriety went with an especially heinous past. "Oh, don't you know Brother So and So?" one would say to another. "Used to be the biggest cocaine dealer in Miami . . . Until he found the Lord . . . That's right, he used to snort lines of coke off the bellies of hookers while tormenting small animals with a blow torch." They talked for hours about the most intimate and embarrassing details of their lives. In their former lives they got high on drugs or alcohol; now they got high on Jesus. After each frustrating week in the real world, they gathered and lost themselves in the ecstasy of worship.

Women formed the core of Rock Church. Pastor Bez may have choreographed the dance steps, but the women called the tune. Usually the women and children came to services alone. If their husbands came at all, it was usually under duress. Clouds of cheap perfume choked the air. The whole thing smacked of a woman's support group, an EST seminar with crosses.

I used to sit there stone-faced, with my arms folded, hating every minute of it. As one of Rock Church's founding families, we gave generously to Pastor Bez's building fund. And we were poor people. Forced to take a construction job at the Metro Zoo in South Miami, my father slaved away in the burning sun. He came home at night looking tired, his face tan as a leather saddlebag. Soon he would develop melanoma. My siblings and I suffered in schools plagued by drugs and violence because we couldn't afford the private school tuition. And here we were giving one-fourth of our income to build Pastor Bez's glorified dance hall. It seemed so senseless.

I wanted to run away. I fantasized about retreating into the Everglades with my Coleman BB gun, where I'd live off rabbits or something. But it was only a fantasy. I had no place to go.

CHAPTER 8

Fires Creek, NC • 1998 • Into Hiding

“Dozens of heavily armed federal agents are descending on western North Carolina,” said the radio, as if the agents were flying down from Mount Olympus. Some agents were apparently searching my trailer on Cane Creek, while others rummaged through my storage unit in Marble. They had not found the truck, yet. That was the only good news. With each passing day, a little more of the scent trail between me and the truck evaporated. But I needed more time.

The feds had been behind me all the way from Birmingham, and I didn’t even know it. My instinct had been right about the skinny black man standing beside the beat up Chevy Nova. He had witnessed something. An hour after the explosion at New Women, the cops sat down with him and tried to piece together his story. At first he made no sense at all. The experience had so unnerved him that he rambled incoherently. Eventually he settled down enough to tell his strange tale.

A college student at UAB, he woke early on the morning of January 29, 1998, to do a load of laundry. He was downstairs in the laundry room of Rast Hall when he heard the explosion at New Woman. He rushed over to the window and saw smoke rising in the distance and a “man with long brown hair” walking away from the scene through Rast Park. Something about the man wasn’t right, he thought, so he decided to follow him. He got his beat up Chevy Nova from the parking lot and drove in the direction of Red Mountain.

The student caught sight of the man near 15th Avenue South, just as the stranger ducked into an alley behind the Center Garden apartments. The student thought he had lost the long-haired man. Stopping in front of the apartments, his car broke down. He hopped out to look under the hood, when, moments later, “another guy came out of the other side” of the apartments. This guy looked different. He carried a big blue plastic Wal-Mart bag in one hand and a book bag slung over one shoulder. The book bag looked empty. Everything about the man was a blur except for his “big ole sunglasses.” As the mystery man passed him standing there beside his broken down Nova, the student looked into the man’s big ole sunglasses. The sunglasses were “looming” at him. Something about those looming sunglasses suggested to him that it was the same guy he had followed from Rast Park.

(For map, see page 45.)

By the time the student managed to get his car started, the man with the looming sunglasses had disappeared once again. Thinking that perhaps the man had turned north on 18th Street heading back toward New Woman, the student began cruising the streets of Birmingham’s Southside. He patrolled back and forth but couldn’t find the mystery man. Flagging down motorists on their way to work, he frantically tried to explain the situation. He said he was following someone who had “burned down a building.” The man had on a pair of big ole sunglasses. He pleaded with them to call 911, but they thought he was crazy and drove off. The desperate student then thought about knocking on someone’s door and asking to use their telephone; he decided against it. People might think he was trying to “rob them or something.”

The student was sure that he had lost the suspect. Nevertheless, he continued to cruise Southside for several more minutes. Finally he gave up. Having lost the man with the looming sunglasses, he decided he had better give his information to the police. But instead of talking to the cops at the scene of the explosion, he drove all the way over Red Mountain to the McDonald’s on 21st Street and called 911 from there.

The McDonald’s was in the morning rush when he burst into the dining area and began yelling like a madman. Someone with “pressed down hair” had “burned down a building,” he yelled. He wanted to see the manager; he wanted to use the phone. Customers began backing toward the exits. The manager

debated whether to give him the phone or to use it herself to call the men in white suits. She finally relented, but told him to come behind the counter and stop scaring the customers.

The student talked to a 911 operator who tried to coach him through his statement. But it was no use; he couldn't string together a coherent sentence. During this one-sided conversation with the 911 operator, he happened to glance through the storefront window. There, through the crowded restaurant, across four lanes of rush hour traffic, was the guy with the big ole looming sunglasses. On the other side of 21st Street, the man was walking in the direction of Valley Avenue directly across from McDonald's.

"Here he comes!" yelled the student to the 911 operator. "I got him! You need to come now!" He jumped up and down and pointed out the window. The customers started backing toward the exits again. The operator pressed for a description. "I'm not exactly sure," said the student. "You gotta come now!"

A young lawyer who was eating his breakfast had been watching the curious scene. Overhearing the conversation with the 911 operator, he began calling out his own description of the man on the other side of 21st Street South: "Brown boots, green plaid shirt, black hat, sunglasses . . ." Before he could finish, the man ducked into the wood line, heading in the direction of Vulcan State Park.

Within seconds a Birmingham Police Detective arrived at McDonald's. He tried speaking to the student, who still wasn't making much sense. "He burned down the Ronald McDonald House," the student screamed. (The Ronald McDonald house was located near the explosion.) The lawyer and the restaurant manager took over. They described what had happened and pointed across 21st Street South to the last location of the man with the big ole looming sunglasses. A quick examination revealed a small trail leading into the woods. On the far side were the Valley View Apartments and the access road leading up to the Vulcan State Park.

Believing that the suspect had walked to Vulcan Park, the detective raced up the access road in his SUV. The lawyer decided to join the posse. Instead of following the detective though, he drove west on Valley Avenue. The frantic student followed in his beat up Chevy Nova.

The police detective found no one at Vulcan, so he coasted back down to Valley Avenue. The lawyer had better luck. He drove past the entrance to Vulcan Park and took the next right turn onto Beckam Drive. He saw a man standing next to a small grey pickup truck. The man caught his eye, but upon closer examination the man looked different from the one he saw walking in front of McDonald's. The only things similar about this guy were his basic attributes: height, weight, and race.

The lawyer made a quick U-turn hoping to get a better look at the man. He pulled in behind the Nissan truck, which had, by then, pulled up to the stoplight at Beckam Drive and Valley Avenue. He couldn't see in the cab of the truck. "Was this the same guy?" he asked himself. He debated whether to write down the tag number. "I really hated to ID someone who had had nothing to do with it," he later told police; but then he grabbed an empty paper cup from the floorboard and jotted down the license plate number: North Carolina KND-1117.

The grey Nissan pickup finally turned left on Valley Avenue and sped through the intersection at 20th Street South toward the Elton Stephens Expressway (Hwy 280). Losing sight of the truck at the intersection, the lawyer flagged down a nearby cop and gave him the coffee cup with the tag number. Meanwhile, the student in the Chevy Nova saw the lawyer talking to the cop on the side of Valley Avenue. He decided not to stop because, as he later told the interviewers, he thought the lawyer might have had something to do with the bombing. It was truly bizarre.

* * *

North Carolina KND-1117 was my tag number, and I was the mystery man that this makeshift posse had been chasing. Through luck or fate, the student in the Nova had stumbled across my path on

three separate occasions as I changed my disguise on my journey across Red Mountain. Each successive description of me was different, but something told him that I was the guy.

He first sighted me while peering out of the laundry room window of Rast Hall. He had no idea what had caused the explosion or the rising smoke; something just caused him to believe the man walking through Rast Park wasn't right.

Next, driving back through Southside, he happened to break down in front of the same apartments where I was changing out of my wig and jacket. A "different guy" came out of the apartments, but again, something about those big ole looming sunglasses told him it was the same guy he had followed from Rast Park. Standing beside his Nova, staring at me, he looked like he had seen a ghost.

He later claimed to have faked the breakdown in order to get a better look at me. But if this were true, then he never would have lost track of me only one block away – where I turned south over Red Mountain while he turned north on 18th Street. I sensed something was wrong. However, when I turned south and he turned north, I put him out of my mind. He was cruising Southside while I was climbing Red Mountain. I had no idea this strange shadow was following me.

And finally, fate brought us together once more when I walked past McDonald's, visible through its front window for fewer than 10 seconds. He happened to be in that McDonald's on the phone, glancing out of that window during those 10 seconds. After I got to the truck, I yanked off my T-shirt, put the transmitter in the toolbox, and drank a little water — which took only a couple of minutes. I thought I had made it. Mission accomplished. But that couple of minutes were all that was needed for that lawyer to turn down that street — the first and only street he turned down — and pull up behind me.

If one thing had happened differently that morning, I would have driven away from Birmingham without a trace. But it didn't happen that way. Whether it was luck or fate that put them on my trail, within an hour of the blast at New Woman, the feds had my identity. They questioned the key witnesses. Later that afternoon, while I was busy washing my truck in Murphy, they issued an all-points bulletin for me. Every law enforcement agency in the country was on the lookout for me, and I went to town to wash my truck.

The feds traced my license to a dummy address in Asheville, North Carolina. Tactical units flew into Asheville and stormed an empty address on January 29. They also questioned my sister, who lived just south of Asheville. She had no idea where I was living. A small army of FBI agents set up camp on my mother's lawn in Bradenton, Florida. She also didn't know where I was living.

The trailer on Cane Creek was rented under an assumed name — Bob Randolph. But I had foolishly opened an account with the local power company in my own name. They had the address for the Cane Creek trailer. The Cherokee County Sheriff knew I had once lived in Nantahala. Acting on a hunch that I might still be living in the area, he did a computer search of local records the day after the bombing. I was probably searching through the storage shed in Marble for my shovel and axe when the Sheriff found the Cane Creek address.

Meanwhile, the FBI was chasing me in Asheville and Bradenton. When the sheriff informed them about the power company record, the feds stalled him. Rather than relinquish the spotlight to some hillbilly sheriff, they told him to wait until they could shift their tactical teams to Murphy before moving on the Cane Creek trailer. During that small window of time, I left the trailer around 3:00 p.m. I was walking the roads to Fires Creek by the time the FBI tactical teams took up position on the low ridges of Cane Creek at 8:00 p.m. By the Grace of God and the skin of my teeth, I'd slipped through their net.

* * *

Five years would pass before I'd learn the whole story. At the time, I knew the feds had a witness, and they had me on the run. I also realized that flight would make their case against me that much

stronger. It didn't look good. I had no illusions about what would happen to me if I ended up in their courts. The liberal media has created an incredible hysteria of right-wing militancy. The feds need only circumstantial evidence to get a conviction against a conservative. Surrender wasn't an option.

I listened to the radio the morning after arriving on Fires Creek. There was no news on the truck – not yet. The FBI would find it eventually; it was only a matter of time.

I quickly began searching for a campsite, some place where the hunters, hound dogs, and helicopters couldn't find me. A place like that is hard to find these days. You need the right combination of sun, water, and cover. I unfurled my topographical map to look at the terrain.

* * *

Two parallel ridgelines form the southern Appalachian Mountains. The main one is called the Unaka Mountain Range. South of Virginia, the Unakas form the border of North Carolina and Tennessee. The other major ridge is the Blue Ridge. It's about a hundred miles east of the Unakas, and its peaks average less elevation. In the western part of North Carolina, several transverse ridges connect the Unakas and the Blue Ridge. The Fires Creek wilderness sits between two of those transverse ridges: the Valley River Mountains to the north and the Tusquitee Mountains to the south. Positioned north of the town of Hayesville and south of Andrews, Fires Creek is one solid mass of protected wilderness. The two transverse ridges join together at Tusquitee Bald, which rises to 5,200 feet, a big mountain by Appalachian standards. One single-lane gravel road winds along Fires Creek for 15 miles before dead ending at the base of Tusquitee Bald. The big horse-shoe-shaped box canyon is cut into several steep cul-de-sacs.

With over 1,500 species of plants and 145 species of trees, Appalachia has more plant diversity in a 40-mile radius than Europe has stretching from Turkey to Ireland. Oaks dominate the forests today. Before blight killed them off in the 1920s, chestnuts were the dominant trees.

Northern timber companies bought most of the forestland in the 1890s. By the early 1920s, the ancient forest had disappeared, leaving western North Carolina with large eroded clear-cut lands. Outside of a few protected areas, like Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest (3,800 acres) near Robbinsville, very little old growth timber remains. Only on the steepest slopes can you still find a few virgin trees. But rainfall in Appalachia is high (40-80 inches annually) and many trees grew back. The government bought most of the mountain land from the timber companies during the 1930s. Traces of the logging operations are everywhere. Overgrown logging trails traverse practically every ridge, hollow, and valley in the highlands. Here and there, you find rusted anchor cables. Today, hunters and hikers use the old logging trails.

By right of eminent domain, the government created the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in 1934. (See map in front of book.) Over 500,000 acres were purchased from the 7,300 settlers, who were given an offer they literally couldn't refuse: accept the payment and leave, or face eviction.

The park straddles the North Carolina-Tennessee border and is about 30 miles north of Fires Creek. The remainder of public land in North Carolina is carved into smaller islands of national forest or wilderness areas like Fires Creek. The Fires Creek Wilderness area is a designated Game Land and a black bear sanctuary.

As a United Nations biosphere, the Great Smoky Mountain National Park carries a much higher profile than a place like Fires Creek. Ten million tourists visit the park every year. It's literally crawling with people. Of course there is no hunting in the park. Dozens of park rangers patrol the Smokies listening for gunshots and looking for signs of poaching. The atmosphere is uptight and Yankee.

Game lands like Fires Creek are different. "Foreigners" (non-locals) are rare, especially in winter. Hunting is legal, which means gunshots are common. On weekends you're likely to find a few Bubbas

around a campfire, drinking beer and firing shotguns at the trees. There are several Game Land areas scattered across western North Carolina, each one the size of Fires Creek (20,000 acres) or larger. Unlike the park, the Game Lands are patrolled by only a handful of wildlife agents. Weeks can pass between patrols. In the dead of winter, Fires Creek is empty, not a soul around for miles. It was the perfect place for me to hide.

Rockhouse Creek splits off from Fires Creek and snakes up through a rugged cul-de-sac where the ridges have just enough pitch to keep the trees and dirt from sliding off. A J-shaped ridge called Tarkiln forms the western rim of Rockhouse. Here, my gaggle of Rubbermaid barrels and I sat. Tarkiln's heavily wooded crest towered over 1,000 feet above me.



Figure 5 Fires Creek, Tusquitee

Trails cut across the ground all around me. And where there are trails there are people. If the feds didn't find me, the hunters might.

Rhododendron, a type of evergreen shrub, covered the northern and eastern slopes. An evergreen shrub with cucumber-shaped leaves, the rhododendron thrives in the dark wet hollows of the mountains. The locals call it mountain laurel. Its smooth branches interlace, creating thickets called slicks that can go on for miles. Some slicks are nearly impassible. Once inside the slick, you lose all sense of direction. You can crawl on your belly for hours just to move a few hundred yards.

On the steepest part of Tarkiln, a rhododendron slick crawled about midway up the slope, an area where trails didn't venture. It was one of those rare pockets of forest where you can still find a few virgin trees. Gravity and wind had pushed over most of the giant trees, but hidden in the slick were several virgin oaks, 10 to 12 feet at the base.

I decided to hide out in the rhododendron slick. It was the only way to deal with the threat posed by trails and hunters. The typical deer and turkey hunter likes to set up in the open woods where he can see game approaching from a distance. And bear and coon hunters let their dogs do most of the work. They strap tracking collars on their hounds and follow the chase on an electronic monitor. Unless the dogs tree an animal in the middle of a rhododendron slick, the hunter will stay on the trails or in their truck. If I could avoid the trails, I could avoid the hunters.

The spurs descended from Tarkiln's crest at regular intervals, smooth and round like the knuckles on a clenched fist. Sunlight barely penetrated the thick canopy between the spurs. But out along the knuckles the slick thinned out, allowing light to poke through the foliage. I found a couple of flat spots on one spur, big enough to hold half a tent and maybe a campfire. The rhododendron and tall white pine trees provided year-round cover. I could cover my trail into the slick and stay there until my food ran out.

A man cannot live on bread alone; he also needs water. The feds searching for me knew that too. They had topographical maps just like mine that marked all the major creeks. Rather than comb every square foot of ground, the FBI would most likely search along the creeks, following their bloodhounds, hoping to intersect a scent trail leading to my camp.

But the smaller springs and creeks are not on the maps. Almost every hollow in the southern highlands has at least one spring. Waterborne parasites such as giardia are rare in these smaller springs. Only the larger creeks, rivers, and lakes carry contamination, mostly from animal dung. The smaller creeks and head springs, where the water gushes from the hillside, are pure and delicious.

Some springs gush out of the ground, travel for a short distance, then seep back underground. A moonshiner's spring, they call it. Moonshiners used to build their whiskey stills next to such small springs so the "revenuers" couldn't locate their still by following the creek. The little springs often hide deep inside rhododendron slicks. I discovered a nice moonshiner's spring in the hollow, just north of the spur.

I set up my tent on one of the level spots, and camouflaged it with hemlock boughs. The empty barrels were brought up first; the food and equipment came second. I plowed a hog trail through the slick. When I finished bringing the stuff up to camp, I went back over the trail, smoothing the leaves flat.

I dug a small cubbyhole under a boulder where I could hide my body heat if the helicopters came overhead with Forward Looking Infrared scopes (FLIR). Concealing my body heat was easy. Hiding the heat of a campfire was more difficult. Even under the dense canopy of rhododendron, my cooking fire emitted an incredible heat signature. My camp sat directly across from Wolf Ridge, which formed the other side of the Rockhouse Creek. An agent standing over there with a FLIR device would easily spot my campfire if I built it out on the spur. I constructed a cooking area north of camp in a dark hollow that curled back into the slope. The rhododendron overhead intertwined into one solid mass. The ground was saturated, sloshing underfoot like a sponge. Fire wouldn't burn on the ground. To get it up off the wet ground, I laid out a little slab of flat rocks and ran a center pole over them. When the rains came hard, I threw a tarp over the pole creating a simple A-frame shelter.

Dark, wet, cold – February is the worst month in the southern mountains. The weather on Tarkiln soon turned nasty. First, it snowed, and then the temperature rose, turning the snow to mush. I slogged through the slushy snow combing the hollows for flat rocks. I burned much-needed calories, and was forced to eat a lot of food.

I never lit a fire at night, never used fire for warmth. Fire was for cooking. At first, I cooked twice a day – in the morning and then again in the afternoon. Cooking only enough food for one meal, I wasted time and firewood. And the fire burned too long, leaving me vulnerable to FLIR devices. Then I started using my Dutch oven (a cast iron pot with a handle, designed to hang over an open flame) to cook two or three pots of food at a time. After a meal, I spooned the remaining gruel into a bowl and saved it for later,

when I would eat it cold. If the gruel froze, I broke it into chunks, placed them into a baggy, and shoved the baggy into my warm sleeping bag to thaw out for the morning's meal.

The excess gruel was stored in a bucket and hung high in the trees. This reduced my cooking time down to a couple of hours a week.

* * *

On the night of February 7, 1998, three local boys out coon-hunting found my truck. The feds were all over Martins Creek the next day. "Bloodhounds and camouflaged agents are combing the woods," announced the radio.

The news report unsettled me. The truck had been sitting there for over a week. Any scent I'd left behind on the roads to Fires Creek had disappeared by now. So why are they combing the woods? My paranoia worked overtime. The 15 air-miles between the truck and me suddenly seemed like 15 feet. And the circuitous route I'd taken from Martins Creek suddenly turned into a straight line. I was at one end; the feds and their bloodhounds were at the other; it was only a matter of time before we came face-to-face.

The FBI must have figured that I fled into the mountains after ditching the truck. By leaving my truck there, I had wanted them to think that I switched vehicles. That didn't happen.

In addition, little rats (former friends) were whispering into government ears. The FBI was building a profile trying to anticipate my next move.

I felt trapped. Precious time and energy had been wasted building that cooking slab when I should have been moving farther away from the truck. Now I had to make up for lost time. I had to move. But I couldn't leave my food and equipment sitting there in the woods above ground – I had to bury it.

Normally when burying a cache I'd choose a permanent terrain feature like a rock-outcropping, something that won't change with time. But in a pinch, a blown over tree makes a decent cache because half the work of digging is already done.

Several oaks had blown over a short distance from camp. Their root balls stood straight up, leaving a small crater in the slope. I enlarged the craters using my shovel. The ground was saturated and the orange mud stuck to my shovel like glue. On flat ground you can dig down four feet before hitting bedrock. On the steep slope of Tarkiln, I hit rock before digging two feet. Without a pick to loosen up the rock, I had to chip and pry my way through the layers of bedrock. It took me two full days to bury the barrels.

After dismantling the cooking slab, I spread leaves and branches around to camouflage the campsite, then filled my pack with three weeks of provisions, and hit the road.

It was a moonless night, black as India ink. The trees, although leafless, closed over the road, making it nearly impossible to distinguish road from ditch. The roaring creek added to my confusion.

Using the single-lane gravel road, I moved deeper into the Fires Creek Wilderness, heading for the high ridges that led up to Weatherman Bald. Weatherman Bald rises just north of Tusquitee Bald. Together, the two mountains form the crux of the horseshoe-shaped box canyon that encompasses the Fires Creek Wilderness. From that vantage point I'd be able to see all of Fires Creek. If the feds moved into the area, I'd move out, crossing Weatherman Bald, and hike to Standing Indian, which was near the Georgia state line. There I'd lay low until the search died down. In the worst-case scenario, I'd circle around to Snowbird Creek where I had my supply of food.

Finding the correct fork in the road should have been easy. But the night was dark and I hadn't slept in days. So instead, I floundered around a while. When I thought I had reached a fork, I stopped to

feel for a Forest Service sign and listen for the adjoining creek. To help find the sign, I pulled out my little Maglight, a flashlight that you turn on and off by rotating its head.

I swiveled the head of the Maglight, and nothing happened. I tapped it on the palm of my hand, swiveled and tapped, but still no light. The blasted thing wouldn't work. I unscrewed the flashlight head and felt for the bulb. It was gone. The only thing left was the filament wire. Tipping the head over in my palm, I felt tiny shards of glass pour into my hand. I'd broken the bulb.

It wasn't the end of the world. I had another flashlight and plenty more bulbs back in the buried cache. But something about breaking that bulb let loose a flood of emotions in me that had been building up over the past week. No sleep, little food, digging holes, dodging the feds – all this had taken a psychological toll on me.

Just when I thought nothing else could pile on top of my head, it started to rain, hitting me like needles.

I needed shelter – right away. There are generally only two places to camp in the highlands: on top of the mountain or at the bottom. I couldn't camp by the road, so I decided to climb to the top of the ridge above the road. Branches gouged at my eyes, briars tore ruts in my arms and legs, and the rain nailed me harder and harder. I closed my eyes tight and plowed through the tangle like a fullback on the one-yard line. I cursed the rain and the briars and the feds. I even had a few choice words for the Maglight Company. At the top of the ridge, I dropped my pack, sat on top of it, and draped the poncho over me. I slept with my head between my knees. It rained all night.

And my efforts at evasion had been for naught. The feds never came to Fires Creek. I spent two weeks camped on Shinbone Ridge staring down at the empty wilderness area through the lens of my Leopold binoculars.

* * *

After returning to Tarkiln, I dug up my caches. Two empty barrels were left buried in the ground. They would come in handy if I had to leave Fires Creek again. My living conditions were improved. I erected a tent out on a tiny rock shelf. A drainage ditch was dug around the tent and a 10-foot pole was run over the top. Driving locust stakes around the four corners, I stretched a tarp over the tent. In the heaviest rainstorms the shelter would shed water like a duck's back. I drove larger stakes around the shelter, tied a latticework of string six inches above the tarp, and interlaced hemlock boughs in the string to camouflage the shelter. Every few weeks I'd replenish the boughs. When I was finished with it, the entire camouflaged shelter resembled the lower part of a hemlock tree.

* * *

While growing up in Appalachia, I'd learned rudimentary outdoor skills. I hunted and fished and spent a lot of time in the woods. But I'd never stayed in the woods longer than three weeks. Now, I had to adjust my thinking and learn to plan like someone who lived in the woods permanently, as opposed to a three-week camping trip. It's a psychological hurdle. This is especially true when it comes to food. I could identify most of the edible plants in the highlands. I knew basic hunting tactics. However, putting those skills into practice day in and day out would prove challenging. When a person subconsciously anticipates returning to civilization after a three-week stay in the bush, he behaves differently than someone who must live out there indefinitely.

But rerouting my mental circuits would take time. For the first year, I behaved like someone who expected to go home. It hadn't fully sunk in that this rhododendron-choked ridge was my new home.

The FBI search and the overarching need to avoid people heightened the challenges I faced. On February 15, 1998, the government added my name to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. America's Most Wanted ran a segment on me, and the news media covered the case extensively. The people of western

North Carolina knew I was there. Virtually everyone became a potential threat, not just the 80 federal agents in Andrews. I had to avoid hunters, hikers, day-trippers, fishermen, loggers, and passing motorists. Anyone who saw me might turn me in — to get the reward, to be a good citizen, to be on TV. By necessity, I was truly on my own.

Honestly, I didn't expect to last long. I figured that a hunter would stumble upon my camp and the feds would capture or kill me. That mindset shortened my survival calendar. "Maybe I'll make it one month," I thought. After the month passed, I'd say, "Well, maybe I'll make it two months," and so on. But I never looked beyond these truncated mental calendars. Consequently, I wore out clothes and equipment that I should have preserved. I ate food that I should have conserved. I passed up acorns and nuts that I should have gathered. Between the need to secure food and the need to avoid people, I concentrated more on the latter.

Luckily, the FBI's search petered out in mid-February. News reports said the ground search amounted to a caravan of SUVs driving haphazardly around the backwoods of Cherokee County. Every few miles or so, the caravan stopped at a random location and let the dogs sniff around. After a few minutes, they piled back in their SUVs and drove some more. A week later they were hanging out at McDonald's.

At the time, the task force had about 80 agents working full-time. Special Agent Woody Enderson was put in charge of the search effort. With no leads to follow, the agents passed the time interviewing anybody who wanted attention: schoolmates I hadn't seen in 20 years, the lady who used to deliver my mail, and a psychic in Mobile, Alabama, who had a vision of me riding in a taxi cab. Droves of people came out of the woodwork with information — virtually all of it useless. The FBI spent millions piling up worthless reports. They drank McDonald's coffee and waited for me to surface. They would have to wait another four months. In the meantime, I had to figure out how to survive.

* * *

In late February, I did an inventory of my food. To my chagrin I had about two months left. With all the digging and running around, I'd burned through a month's supply of food in fewer than two weeks. It was imperative that I ration my food and supplement my diet with hunting.

There are three essential survival items: a fire-starter, a cutting tool (knife, axe, machete), and a rifle. With the first two items you can make fire and shelter and do most things necessary for short-term survival. But to live long-term in the wilderness, you absolutely require a high-powered rifle and plenty of ammunition. I carried an FNC (Fabrique Nationale Carabine) caliber .223 semiautomatic rifle. The .223 round packs enough punch to bring down larger game (deer, boar, bear) but not so much as to shred smaller game (turkey, groundhog, grouse) to pieces.

The prevailing winds blew from the southwest, curling around the toe of Tarkiln Ridge. Stands of oak and hickory located northwest of camp provided forage for animals. Higher up the spine of Tarkiln, boar and deer trails converged on a prominent saddle. And on the other side of the saddle there was another feeding area called Jake Cove. Right on the border between the bedding area and the feeding area, the saddle looked like a good place to hunt. Game moved through the saddle mainly in the morning. I spent the first couple months hunting that saddle and the feeding areas on either side.

Up before dawn, I dressed hurriedly in the cold, dark tent. I piled on layers of clothes: water-repellant fabrics for high-sweat activities and wet conditions, polypropylene (a synthetic polymer used in fabrics to make them durable and water resistant), a wool sweater, military fatigues, and an outer shell of water-proof camouflage. I gulped down a baggy of cold oatmeal and raisins and a quart of water. Slipping on my Danner boots, I grabbed my FNC rifle and hit the trail up Tarkiln. I marched mechanically.

About a quarter mile along the crest, the rhododendron slick gave way to open stands of oak. On a typical day, I took a position overlooking the saddle. Other times, I hiked farther up the crest to another

deer trail. I didn't have a tree stand, and there were few trees that were climbable, so I hunted mostly from the ground. Being winded – having my scent detected by my prey – became a frequent problem. Morning breezes usually hug the ground. If they blew straight, I could stand to one side of the saddle and keep clear of approaching game. Often, however, the breeze didn't blow straight. In the distance I'd hear a deer snort, the signal that I'd been winded.

Trails cut across the ridge farther up the mountain. There was a downed hickory bent over one small trail. The top of the tree had snapped 20 feet up the trunk and folded over to the ground. The trunk made a convenient ladder. I hacked a pathway with my hatchet to the broken elbow, where I made a little seat.

Mornings were bitter cold. After hiking up the ridge, I climbed the makeshift tree stand. My body temperature would drop, and soon the shivers came. Trying to blot out the cold, I daydreamed and stared out at the grey woods, the hickory trunk digging into my freezing flanks. An hour was all I could stand, and then I'd scoot down and stalk upwind, hoping to intercept a turkey or deer.

Always in the back of my mind was the fear that instead of seeing a deer emerge from the morning mist, I'd see a person. I carried two pairs of handcuffs in my butt pack. If I ran into a hunter, I'd cuff him to a tree, and then use his truck to ferry my camp equipment elsewhere. Then I'd ditch his truck and relay his whereabouts to 911 or to his wife. That was the plan. But none of my plans had worked lately. I feared that I might run into a hunter who wanted to be a hero and try to draw down on me.

One morning, I heard something coming up the trail. It had to be four-footed. I listened and strained my ears. "Don't stare at the trees," I told myself. I scanned the open spaces between the trees, trying to catch sight of movement. Then, I saw it, a deer on a trail above me. He was about 50 yards away. I wanted a closer shot, but had to take what I could get. Straddling the tree trunk, I dug my heels into the bark and raised my rifle. There were no props to steady the rifle against. I brought the front sight to bear on an opening in the trees out in front of the deer. Then I gave him two snorts when he came into the clearing — phooph — phooph, using the deer's "language" to get his attention and stop him cold. He froze and cocked his head toward me. Perfect profile shot. I squeezed the trigger. The leaves under his belly exploded. He sprang into the air and bounded over the crest. I'd flinched, and missed.

After a couple more misses, I decided to try my hand at fishing. I gathered a mess of salamanders from the spring and walked to Fires Creek. Two hundred feet up, over the top of Tarkiln, and 1,000 feet down the other side, I came at the creek from the north bank. Smaller creeks fed into Fires Creek from Tom Cove, intersecting at little flat areas. The Forest Service had planted grass and built fire pits for the fishermen who flock to the area in the spring and summer.

The main road ran along the south bank. Because it was the dead of winter, there were no campers or fishermen. But people occasionally park above the creek and walk down to the grassy areas. The rippling creek made it difficult to hear cars on the road. I had to be careful. Someone could walk up to me and I wouldn't even know it.

I reeled out four 20-foot lengths of fishing line, then tied a hook to one end and a short stick to the other. Salamanders were impaled on the hooks. I crept to the water's edge and tossed a line in a good-size pool. The hooked salamander settled to the bottom. Wedging the stick under some rocks, I moved down the creek to the next pool, where I tossed the other lines. Climbing the north bank, I sat in the woods to wait.

An hour passed before I checked the lines. The first two were empty, but the third line pulled taut. I grabbed hold of the stick, and it nearly jerked out of my hand. Pulling and winding the line around the stick, I eased the fish into the shallows. I dragged him to the rocks and scooped him on to shore. The 12-inch Rainbow Trout flapped. His shiny skin sparkled in the early morning sunlight. By the end of the day I had caught five more fish and a half-dozen crayfish.

The fish grilled in peanut oil tasted delicious. First good meal in weeks. My little trip to the creek taught me plenty. I jumped a couple big Jakes (young male turkeys) in the grassy area beside the creek. And I found plenty of deer droppings in the grass. The information was filed away for later use.

Walking down to the big creek took time and energy. It would be worth the expenditure in calories if I could bag a couple Jakes or a deer. But it was too costly for five fish, especially given the risk of being spotted by a day-tripper. I decided to concentrate on hunting the high ridges north of camp. It was closer and safer and the pay-off larger, but only if I managed to kill a deer or a hog.

Soon, I began trailing a gang of wild boar. The hogs were grazing up Tarkiln, through the saddle, and down the other side. Hogs are not delicate eaters. Deer and turkey move like ballerinas in comparison. A wild boar plows through the forest like a tractor. His manner of eating destroys countless acres of forestland every year. He pokes his snout into the topsoil three inches down, and then plows a four-foot furrow, vacuuming up any acorns and roots along the way. He sniffs, and then plows another furrow. Roaming in herds as large as 15, the pigs can tear up a swathe of forest floor 20 yards wide and a mile long in one night. They stop only to cool themselves. Lacking sweat glands, boars wallow in mud to cool down.

Small muddy springs on the trail through the saddle provided excellent wallows for the pigs. Starting at the bottom of Tarkiln, one evening I got behind a gang of hogs. The wind hit my face, so I knew they couldn't wind me. Their sign was fresh: plowed dirt and leaves and well-defined square hoof prints. Seeing the saddle up ahead, I used my binoculars to scan for the boars. Nothing. They were already on the other side. Near the crest I stopped to catch my breath and listen — shirr — shirr — crack — shirr — the boar were up over the saddle. My pulse quickened.

"Relax!" I told myself. Doubt started to creep into my mind as I recalled missing that deer a week earlier. I took several deep breaths before proceeding.

The slope on the other side dropped straight down. Over the lip, I could see the bottom where the terrain flattened out in Jake Cove, but I couldn't see the hogs on the down-slope. There were two options: I could move further out on the slope and risk spooking the pigs, or I could take my shot when they reached the bottom. I chose option number two.

As I waited, the sun dipped below the horizon and light slowly drained out of the forest. I took a position behind a sapling. Every minute it became a little darker, lessening my chance of hitting a target, and still the hogs were out of sight.

When they finally reached the bottom, the boar looked like tiny black mice. I couldn't get a good sight-picture. Nevertheless, I chose the choicest pig and locked on. I grunted loud to freeze him, but the boar was too far away to hear me. Slowly, I squeezed and waited for the kick of the rifle to hit me — BOOM.

The porkers scattered in all directions. "Nailed him!" I exulted. Sliding and climbing down into Jake Cove, I kept my eyes trained on the spot where the bullet had struck. I was excited, finally some real meat. My patience had paid off; wild boar for breakfast.

I examined the leaves closely for a blood trail, grabbing handfuls and rubbing them between my palms, looking for blood. Nothing — not one smudge of blood. Slinging the rifle across my back, I followed his hoof prints down into Jake Cove. But there was no blood trail, no dead boar.

Missing that boar drained the life right out of me. I lay down in the leaves and looked up at the sky. The stars were coming out. My stomach growled and throbbed.

Slowly I rose and headed back to camp, where I crawled into my sleeping bag too tired to eat. My confidence ebbed. A cold front blew into Fires Creek, bringing with it much rain. The weather whittled

me down to a nub. It drizzled for hours at a time, turning the forest floor into a swamp. Droplets formed on the roof of my tent and fell on my face.

After the rain ceased, the winds started. Cold gusts of arctic wind came at intervals like ocean waves. I folded the tarps, bottled some water and bagged a little food. Then I stuffed the bottle and bag in the bottom of my sleeping bag to prevent freezing. Temperatures fell into the single digits, freezing anything left outside.

The winds stopped after two days. I emerged from my sleeping bag cocoon into a deathly quiet wood. The rhododendron leaves lay over their stems. My overhead cover had disappeared. Rhododendron acts as a sort of thermometer. Normally turgid like an open umbrella, the leaves wilt down on the stem when the temperature falls below freezing. When the temperature rises again, the leaves perk back up.

Having missed a day of meals, I put a pot of pintos on the fire. As the flames licked the black pot, I squatted down next to the fire for warmth. I heard the crunch of leaves off to my left. I looked around for my rifle, but then realized I had left it in the tent.

A pregnant doe burst from the rhododendron slick and trotted passed me. Blasts of white frost shot from her nostrils. She didn't dodge to the side or show any fear. She just turned her head briefly and then kept on going. Only eight feet apart, we made eye contact as she went by. The look on her face was almost contemptuous, as if she mocked me.

I felt like frozen crap. After a month of hunting I had nothing to show for it except a clutch of blisters. My morale sank even lower than my food intake. But I pulled myself together and got back out there.

A few days later, I spotted a gang of Jakes working their way up to the saddle from Jake Cove. "This is it," I said. "I'll bag one of those birds, or tear my hair out by the roots." As the sun reflected off their iridescent feathers, the turkeys changed appearance, chameleon-like. Protruding from their chests, their long beards dragged the ground when they bent over to snatch acorns.

I hid behind a fallen tree and threaded my rifle through its dead limbs. I didn't move. The birds came parallel to me, and I slowly squeezed the trigger on the one closest to me. He popped into the air like a jack-in-the-box, furiously flapping his wings. At first I thought I'd missed, but he dropped like a piece of ripe fruit and tumbled down the slope. He was dead. I quickly turned my sights on the other Jakes, but they were gone — all except one. He just sat there like a stuffed Thanksgiving meal. I started to pull the trigger, when the turkey's head fell flat in the leaves. "What?" I wondered. "Is he playing dead?" I went over to look. He wasn't playing; the turkey was in fact dead. I'd killed both birds with one bullet.

I was happy. Forgotten were the missed deer and boar. Gutting and skinning the birds, I hung their carcasses from the center pole over the cooking slab. I ate well for two weeks. In the morning I filled the frying pan with turkey steaks and browned them in peanut oil. With winter almost over, the temperatures climbed during the daylight hours. The warm air brought blowflies to the turkeys. Black with shiny green backs, the flies were relentless. But I wasn't about to give up my turkeys to some stinking flies and let them lay maggots in the meat. Carving the turkeys, I cooked the remaining meat all at one time. Once the meat cooled, I sealed it in Ziploc bags. I lay the bones on the fire. After the fat and meat burned off, I pulverized the bones into a powder to use as a calcium supplement. The bags of cooked meat were placed inside a five-gallon bucket, and the bucket was submerged halfway in the spring. Large rocks held the bucket in place. The bucket made a nice refrigerator.

Spring storms hit the highlands with a vengeance in late March. High winds buffeted Tarkiln. One morning I heard a RUSH coming from the Tom Cove side of the ridge. The tarp over my tent suddenly filled with wind, pulled the stakes right out of the ground, and blew into a nearby tree. The tent flattened on my face, and hail pelted me through the layer of tent. I zipped open the fly and poked out my head. Golf ball size hail bounced off everything, including my head. The huge 100-foot white pine in front of

my tent was bent nearly in half, its branches blowing in the wind like a long-haired lady on the back of a motorcycle. It was too late to take shelter under the rock ledges below camp. I zipped up my sleeping bag and rode out the storm. Rain found its way through all the cracks.

When it was over I crawled out of my soaked sleeping bag to behold a war zone. In places, the woods looked like an artillery barrage had bracketed the ridge. Ancient trees had blown over, flattening long swathes of rhododendron. I heard on the radio that the same line of storms had produced tornadoes in North Atlanta, killing over 20 people. It was one bad storm.

Spring storms are cathartic. They clear out the stale air and bring in the fresh. I dried everything in the sun and went hunting. The sun poured down on me through a baby blue sky. The wind had died down a bit, but the breeze was still brisk. Small sassafras trees were budding all around. The air had a spicy, crisp fragrance. As I walked the trail up Tarkiln, I plucked sassafras buds and plopped them in my mouth. Sassafras has an extremely spicy flavor and makes an excellent anti-scorbutic preventing scurvy. I wasn't really hunting so much as enjoying the scenery and the fact that I was still alive after yesterday's storm.

Midway across the saddle, I looked down at the ground for any animal signs. Fresh turkey scratchings were everywhere. Off to my right I heard the unmistakable sound of the turkey shuffle: shirr – shirr – shirr. As turkeys scratch away the leaves to search for acorns and bugs, they do a three-note shuffle that's very distinctive. At the lip of the crest I heard it again: shirr – shirr – shirr. I saw turkeys' scratchings up ahead. Un-slinging my rifle, I snugged the butt into my shoulder and crept over the lip. The black silhouettes of two turkeys entered my line of sight. One had his head down to the ground pecking at bugs, but the other turkey stood straight up with his long fleshy neck stretched high in the air. He was looking directly at me. I fired – BOOM – and he rolled head-over-heels kicking and flapping. His partner stopped eating and started to strut. His head twisted back and forth trying to locate the source of danger. I sent a bullet through his wing. He tried to fly with his good wing, but he couldn't get airborne. He crashed landed on a logging trail that cut across the slope about ten yards down the mountain. Finding that he couldn't fly, he proceeded to run off the trail. And I do mean run! I dropped to one knee and fired, hitting him solid. He didn't move.

Two more turkeys — I was on a roll. I did a little, actually a lot, of strutting around camp for the next couple of weeks. I cleaned my rifle and sharpened my knife and forgot all about the deer and the boar. I was a regular Daniel Boone.

* * *

Turkey season opened on April 8th. The season lasts exactly one month. The Sheriff of Cherokee County, Jack Thompson, announced on the radio that he would catch me "before May." The FBI had sidelined ole Jack early in the search. He resented being ignored. He wanted to show them FBI city slickers a thing or two about country-boy know-how. My guess is Jack thought with all the turkey hunters entering the woods one of them was bound to run into me. I laughed at his braggadocio: "Catch me before May. Hah! You couldn't catch a cold, you two-bit redneck peckerwood."

Like Sheriff Thompson, I knew that April was turkey season, and turkey hunters would soon be climbing up Tarkiln Ridge. The trail from Roadhouse Road ran along the prominent spur just north of my camp. It was less than 300 yards away as the crow flies. However, I had no intention of running into them. I prepared for a long stay in the slick. The hunters would visit the feeding areas and the saddle, which were north of camp. But I knew they wouldn't come back in the rhododendron. "Let them come," I said. "I'll stay right here in the slick."

That was theory; practice was different. The steep slopes of Rockhouse Creek were home to countless turkeys. The huge oak trees and steep terrain provided excellent forage and roosts for the big birds. It was common to see gangs of 10 to 20 birds. They would fly from ridge to ridge, escaping predators, feeding and, in the spring, mating.

Love was in the air from late March to middle May. Hens enticed the Jakes and Toms with their soft chirping. The Toms and Jakes responded by gobbling. Up high on the ridge, my camp had a good vantage of the hollows to the north. I had an earful of a wide swathe of forest. Practically every spring morning I'd hear a turkey gobbling somewhere out on the mountains. It sounded almost like a dinner bell calling me to chow. Oftentimes a Tom (fully grown male turkey) would start gobbling in the roost at first light, and usually he would keep it up until he flew down to get his first drink of water. If he was within a quarter mile, I could usually make my way through the woods and ambush him before he reached the creek.

I heard a Tom gobbling in the roost a few days after the hunting season opened. I successfully fought off the urge to go shoot him. Next morning, I heard him again, but this time I lost the fight. I licked my lips, remembering those delicious turkey steaks of March, and before I knew it, I was running through the morning woods. I had a bead on the creek where he was headed. I got there before him. He stumbled through the fog expecting a cool drink of water, but instead he ended up sizzling in my skillet. The turkey couldn't staunch my appetite, though. I was addicted.

One morning in mid-April a gang of Jakes serenaded me at first light. They were roosting on the spur across from camp, high in the boughs of some white pine trees. The trail from Rockhouse Road went right under their roost. This was the same trail that the hunters used to climb Tarkiln. It was a Saturday, which made it doubly dangerous to go after the Jakes. But I hadn't heard a hunter's boxcaller or a hooter in over a week. Without hesitation, I started through the woods.

There was a small creek between the gobbling Jakes and me. The sound of their gobbling told me they had descended from the roost and were following the trail down the spur. I thought they would continue their descent to the creek, so I moved to intercept them.

It had rained the night before, and a thick blanket of fog hugged the moist ground. I couldn't see 20 feet in front of me. That meant the turkeys wouldn't be able to see me either. It was perfect. They would walk right into my ambush.

I crossed the creek and took position behind a small white pine tree. There were four or five Jakes, gobbling one right after the other. The sound electrified me. But they were still up on the trail, still descending toward Rockhouse. I decided to set up on the trail itself and ambush them before they descended any farther. I started climbing to the top of the spur and wasn't even 10 yards from the trail when the air exploded – BOOM- Chick – Chick- BOOM. I hit the ground. Several turkeys flew over me, disappearing in the thick fog. I couldn't see him, but I could hear him: a hunter on the trail fewer than 10 yards away. I held my breath. Chick – Chick — he cycled another round into the chamber of his shotgun. I lay absolutely still for another 20 minutes before returning to camp.

Sheriff Thompson had almost gotten his wish. After that experience I went cold turkey. The enticement of gobbling birds couldn't pry me away from camp. I'd learned an important lesson: stay away from trails on weekends and during hunting season.

* * *

Other than turkey and fish, I relied on my store-bought supply of food. The stuff I'd bought at the Bi-Lo grocery was almost gone. At the end of April I had only a tiny pantry of pintos, rice, and peanut oil. At the rate I was eating, I had another two weeks left.

The forest came out of hibernation in April. I began to supplement my diet with wild greens and roots. I picked green briar shoots along the crest of Tarkiln. The Forest Service road in Tom Cove offered enough poke salad for several meals. Sassafras buds and roots mixed with spearmint leaves made an excellent tea. By far the best tasting wild plant in Appalachia is the Indian cucumber, a tiny tuber that grew in the hollows north of camp. Mayapples are delectable, but birds ate most of the fruit well before

May. It wasn't enough. After gathering greens and roots, the bounty harvested vastly trailed the calories that I'd burned picking them.

I came to the woods weighing 190 pounds. By May, I probably weighed around 140 pounds. Climbing up the mountains had melted the fat right off me. Then my body began feeding on my muscle mass. I'd really underestimated the calories I needed to survive. I'd calculated a daily intake of 2,000 calories, but probably burned over 3,000 calories per day, on heavy days 5,000-8,000 calories. There was no need to panic, though. I had a year's supply of food in the Snowbird Mountains. All I had to do was make it over there.

I started for Snowbird in mid-May, after Turkey season ended. Foliage fleshed out the skeletal woods in a matter of weeks. The once bare brown landscape had been transformed into a lush jungle. I waded through a carpet of mayapples (also known as wild mandrake). Their flat green leaves looked like lily pads floating on the forest floor. I rested briefly on a little step of rocks that gave me an incredible view of Fires Creek. Tusquitee Bald rose in the distance, the mountain appearing blue through the haze. In the summertime the mountains have a soft-dreamy texture. The lush canopy seems to conceal mystery. If the Rocky Mountains are the marrow of the world, then the Smoky Mountains are its soul.

My destination at the headwaters of Little Snowbird Creek was about fifteen air miles from Fires Creek. But I'd end up walking double that distance before the journey was over. The Snowbirds were the next range of mountains north of the Valley River range. To get there I would have to descend into the valley between the towns of Andrews and Marble and then climb up and over the Snowbirds on the other side. Civilization was down in the valley. Rivers would have to be forded, highways crossed, houses skirted, dogs and humans avoided. And somewhere down there was the Southeast Bomb Task Force.

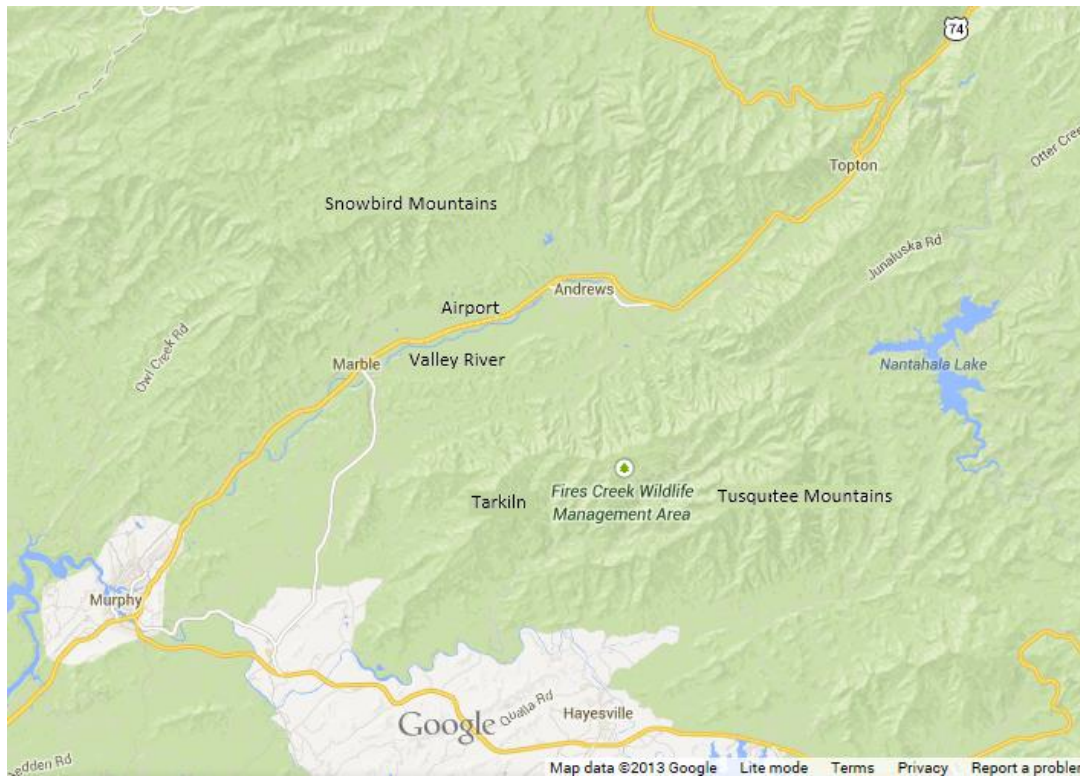


Figure 6 Snowbird Mtn., Valley River

From the crest of the Valley River Mountains, I could see the Andrews-Murphy airport nestled in the fields of new corn. The asphalt runway shimmered in the morning sunlight. The sights and sounds of

civilization had become alien to me. Except for the occasional plane flying overhead or a car on the gravel road below camp, the high ridges of Fires Creek had completely isolated me from human civilization for almost three months. The new stimuli excited me. I relished the prospect of new adventure.

I traveled on logging trails to Fairview, a rural community a couple of miles west of Andrews. A two-lane blacktop creased the horse pastures and cornfields. Finding a blind spot between the houses that lined the road, I sprinted to the other side. The Valley River was up ahead. Open pastures dominated either side of the river, which forced me to wait until after dark before attempting to cross.

Reaching a depth of two feet in the dry months of fall, the Valley River swells to twice that depth in the spring. The river spreads out in spots, making it easier to ford. I wasn't able to scout the river in daylight. I decided to wait until dark and then follow the river's south bank upstream to the railroad bridge near Andrews. On the map, the bridge was a mile away. I was willing to make the trek. I had to travel upstream along the river anyway, so I might as well keep my feet dry.

The sun went down below the western horizon as I picked unripe blackberries on the edge of the pasture. Their bitter taste seemed a fitting indicator of what lay ahead.

Topographical maps are invaluable to the woodsman. Without them, I'd never have been able to move around the mountains the way that I did. But the highly detailed maps sometimes lie; or, rather, they simply don't tell the whole truth. What looked to be open pasture on the map was, in fact, a no-man's-land strung with nature's barbed wire. Dividing the small pastures along the river were thickets of saw briars. Saw briars grow in bunches. Their 10-foot shoots are tough and studded with razor sharp thorns. Run into one, and the thorns will peel your skin off like a banana.

I entered a hedgerow of saw briars and exited the other side missing a sleeve and a patch of skin. Entered the next one and came out missing a pant leg and part of my manhood. I squealed like a baby. It was hell!

At one point, a small ridge blocked my path, forcing me down to the riverbank where I discovered a new obstacle: junk cars. The old wrecks were not on the map either. These cars were stacked one on top of the other like cordwood. An old school bus stood in the middle. I climbed atop the pile and wormed my way through the wrecks. I felt metal slowly crumble beneath my feet, and suddenly found myself up to my elbows in rusted metal. I wasn't feeling very adventurous anymore.

Struggling free of the junk cars, I decided to try my luck farther up the ridge. Just 20 yards up I hit a small farm track path that cut through the ridge to the strawberry fields on the far side. The track path wasn't on the map either.

I sat down on the side of Highway 19 after crossing the railroad bridge. The semi-trucks blew passed me. It's hell when you don't know where you're going.

The next day, I climbed over the Snowbird Mountains and camped high above Bear Creek near Moody Stamp. The following morning, I went to the cache. Buried shortly before the bombing of Centennial Olympic Park, the cache had been sitting there for almost two years. Everything was sealed inside a water-tight barrel, so I had no doubt that the food would be fresh.

Something caught my eye in the leaves up ahead. It looked like a child's birthday balloon, shiny tinfoil. As I came closer, I could see it clearly. My knees buckled and I fell forward on my face. "No!" I gasped.

The object in the leaves was one of my Mylar emergency blankets, torn and pressed into the ground. The lid of the 55-gallon barrel had been torn off the cache and lay nearby. Teeth marks pitted the edge all around. It looked like chewed licorice. The barrel was still buried in the ground with dirt cratered up around it, but was full of fetid water and leaves, and shredded tarps and other gear.

“Bears,” I growled. “Stinkin’ bears.”

I dug through the wreckage and discovered my cooking pot and frying pan; both were rust red but still salvageable. The .223 rifle ammunition survived the mauling, as well as string, rope, and a hatchet. Everything else was gone – chewed beyond recognition, the entire food supply destroyed.

What now? Rather than sink further into despair, I tried to concentrate on the possible. First, I couldn’t stay in Snowbird. Summer growth cut visibility to 20 yards, making it difficult to hunt. Even if I bagged something, the hot weather would spoil the meat within three days. Anything larger than a turkey would have to be turned into jerky. I needed staple food. You can hunt deer and gather greens, but without a staple you cannot survive long-term in the mountains. Acorns provide the only natural staple in the forest. However, by May most of the acorns have either been eaten or have sprouted.

“Where can you find a staple food,” I pondered. There was no food on Fires Creek. I could buy food with the \$800 in my pocket; however, the idea of going to a grocery store didn’t appeal. Another potential source of sustenance were the five grain silos north of the Andrews-Murphy airport, the same silos where I’d tested that remote control trigger back in the summer of ‘97. But like the grocery store, I was leery of going near the silos. In early May the FBI upped the reward for my arrest to \$1 million dollars. The task force in Andrews began asking folks to keep an eye on their vegetable gardens. With no other leads to follow, the feds were staking out every known source of food in the tri-county area. I once read that the FBI had caught some guy by using remote cameras set up at various locations where he might appear. For all I knew the FBI had one of those cameras at the silos for me. Besides that, I doubted whether the silos had any grain in them at that time of year, and harvest wasn’t ‘til October.

I had to acquire food, and if I couldn’t acquire it myself, I’d find someone to acquire it for me. But who? Whom could I trust? By that time the FBI had compiled a short list of family and friends, people I might try to contact. I had to assume these people were under close surveillance. I needed someone who was not on that list. The name that kept popping into my head was George Nordmann.

Owner of a health food store in Andrews, Nordmann was a casual acquaintance. We knew some of the same people and shared some of the same conservative beliefs. The last time we spoke, he was still living alone in Nantahala. Contacting him would, therefore, narrow my exposure to just one person. Best of all, Nordmann had a large supply of long-storage food in his basement. Most of the food that the bears had eaten had been purchased at Nordmann’s health food store. He could easily fix me up with another supply of food. But would he? That was a question I could only guess at. And lately all of my guesses had turned out wrong. Half the battle in any survival situation is psychological. Each setback wounded me deep inside. I felt like I was one mistake away from the grave. I could hear the Valkyrie circling, preparing to decide my fate.

* * *

“Before I go to Nordmann’s house, I’ll try to hold out as long as I can,” I resolved. I followed the trail back to Fires Creek. Struggling to survive, it was a starving time. The thick woods made hunting nearly impossible. The feeding habits of the animals had changed, and the old game trails were empty.

I killed another turkey and managed to snare two groundhogs. But I spent most of my time gathering greens, acorns, salamanders, and crayfish. The acorns were boiled in repeated changes of water to remove the tannins. The salamanders and crayfish were gutted and grilled. My body weight, meanwhile, continued to drop dramatically. In the entire three months on Tarkiln, I didn’t gather one acorn. Now the acorns were mostly worthless. Those acorns that remained were either rotted or wormy. I cursed my lack of foresight.

In the springtime the Forest Service stocks the major creeks and rivers with rainbow trout. I hiked down to Fires Creek to do some fishing. All along the creek, the grassy areas were dotted by dome tents,

and fly fishermen waded in the water. It wasn't worth the risk, so I retreated to the high country and slowly starved. I was trapped in the dark, barren rhododendron.

According to contemporary health experts, the greatest threat to civilization is saturated fat. Food on the grocery store shelves is loaded with artery-clogging fat, they tell us. To stay healthy, people should eat lean meats, whole grains, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. I was one of the millions who bought the low-fat party line. And now, it was almost the death of me.

In nature, fat is your friend and is essential for survival. Over the next month, nature taught me this axiom in brutal fashion. Forced to forage for their daily intake of food, the forest critters carry very little excess fat for much of the year. The animal's primary source of fat is acorns. The acorns fall from the trees in September and October and the critters gorge on the precious nuts. During the fall, the animals pack on extra pounds to sustain them during the cold, lean months of winter. By the time spring rolls around the acorns are all gone and the animals get skinny.

It takes more energy to digest protein than fat or carbohydrate. Eating a protein-rich diet with no fat or carbohydrates can lead to protein poisoning. You can eat an entire deer and starve to death for lack of fat and carbohydrates.

I had no acorns, no cooking oil, no ready supply of carbohydrates, or fat. Consuming mostly greens, lean meats, and salamanders, I became bone thin. The acorns were rotten. My body was wasting away little by little. After chowing down an entire pot of grape greens peppered with a handful of salamanders, I was still hungry. I'd walk all day gathering greens, checking snares, flipping over rocks for salamanders, but I couldn't replace the calories that I was burning. The more I walked, the more calories I burned; the more calories I burned, the less territory I could cover, and the less food I could gather. It was a vicious circle. At night I couldn't sleep. I'd lie awake in my sleeping bag feeling a wild beast try to claw its way out of my belly. It was time to visit Nordmann.

I left for Nordmann's in late June. It was slow going, a full 20 miles to his house as the crow flies, and through the mountains probably closer to 30 miles. The weight of the pack forced me to rest every few hundred yards. I walked up Fires Creek — the same route I'd taken back in February — over Weatherman Bald to the western tip of Lake Nantahala.

Entering familiar territory, I had to be careful. There's very little integration between Tusquitee and Nantahala. Although the same spine of mountains runs through their backyards, Tusquitee folks and Nantahala folks might as well live in different states. Folks in Tusquitee drive south to Hayesville to get their civilization, while folks in Nantahala drive north to Andrews. Those seeking a little more refinement drive a little farther to the Wal-Mart in Murphy. The major roads basically circle the Tusquitee-Nantahala Mountains. The only way through the mountains is by foot trail or by a winding gravel road that cuts through Tuni Gap, a couple miles east of Weatherman Bald. But very few people use the gravel road, and even less use the foot trail.

Living in Nantahala for most of my life, I chose to hide in places like Tusquitee and Snowbird because of their general unfamiliarity. I knew that if the FBI ever questioned my former neighbors in Nantahala, none of them would ever guess that I was hiding out in Tusquitee or Snowbird.

Anxiety plagued my thoughts of crossing the mountains. By leaving Tusquitee, I was shedding my security blanket. My old house on Partridge Creek, where I'd grown up, was less than three miles from Nordmann's back door. And if the feds were still searching in the woods, there was a good chance I'd run into them.

From Junaluska Gap, it was a five-mile hike to the Nantahala River, a leisurely walk for a man in good shape. I huffed and puffed like a fat man climbing stairs. Deer feeding in the grass on the side of the road snorted at me, and ran into the woods. I weakened with each mile. Having no clue what I might run into on the journey, I'd packed enough clothes and gear to deal with a dozen scenarios. It was way too

much stuff for a man in my condition to carry. I was about to keel over by the time I reached the Nantahala River.

The river sliced under the roadway. A single-lane gravel track called Old River Road paralleled the river for a few miles into a heavily wooded area called Appletree. In the outdoor magazines, the Nantahala is rated a decent trout stream. The river attracts fisherman who park along Old River Road and wade the rippling waters trying to look like Brad Pitt in *A River Runs Through It*. River hippies also camp along the road. They come to paddle the rapids in kayaks. Appletree was one of my favorite hangouts in the old days. The FBI knew that, too.

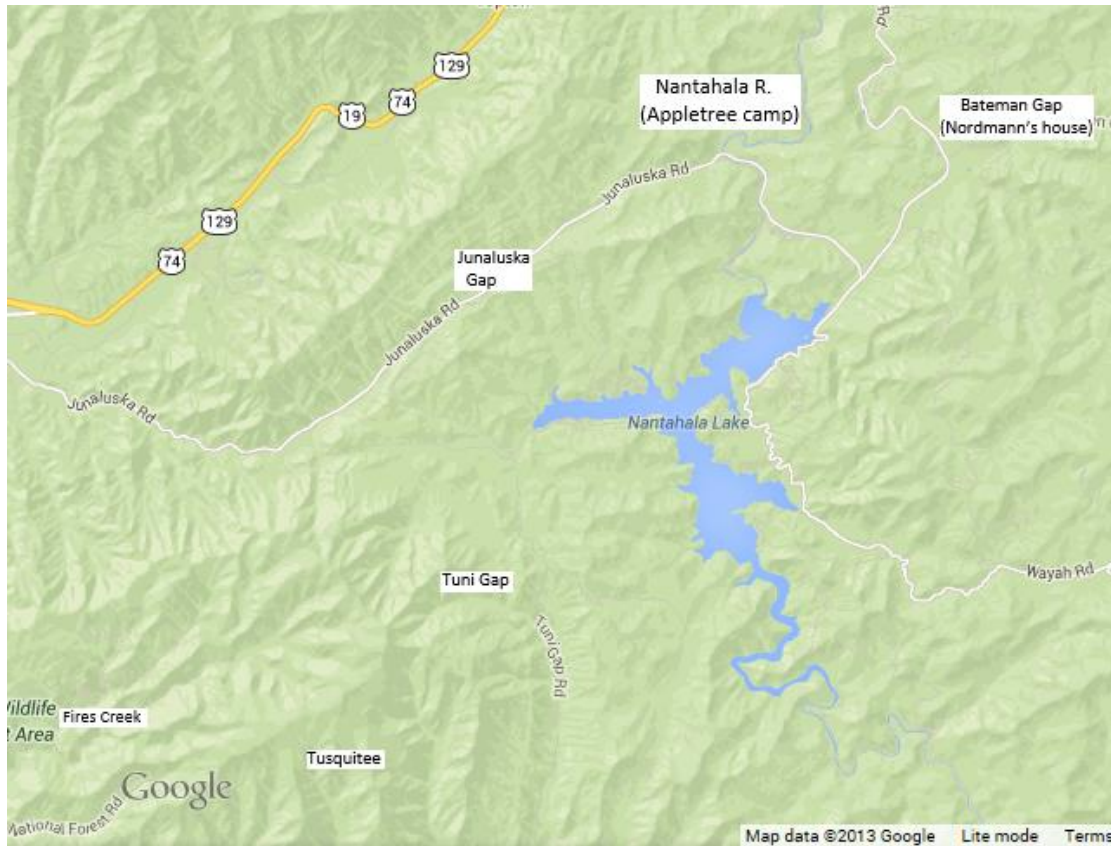


Figure 7 Area around Nantahala Lake.

I turned down the Old River Road before dawn and camped at the foot of Fork Mountain. Hunger had replaced all other bodily sensations. The sun climbed high overhead, its rays flickering through the tall poplars, before I could find enough energy to search for breakfast. I went to the small creek descending from Fork Mountain. Filling my water bottle, I sat down to drink. The plan was to work my way up the creek bed gathering salamanders along the way. I took a few steps, turned over a few rocks, and then sat down again. Ten minutes later I took a few more steps and turned a few more rocks. The trip had drained my last reserves of energy.

I wanted to lie down by the creek and die. I did find a few salamanders, but didn't have the energy to cook them. I simply plopped them into my mouth and sucked them down like strands of spaghetti.

Farther up Fork Mountain, where the creek petered out, the woods opened into a stand of poplars. There, the forest floor had a perfect carpet of ferns. I lay down in the ferns and prayed: "Dear Lord, give me food." Just a simple heartfelt prayer. Nordmann's house was fewer than three miles away, but I didn't feel like taking three more steps. One last meal was all I required to reach my destination.

Meanwhile, the raw salamanders that I'd eaten were stewing in my stomach acid. Up came incredible heartburn and foul-smelling burps. I could have peeled the paint off a battleship with my breath.

Stumbling back to camp, I jumped a doe but was too weak to raise my rifle in time. She bounded into the woods. I hung my head low. Ten yards to the left, I noticed a swarm of flies buzzing above the ferns, so I went over to check. Down in the ferns lay a newborn fawn, dozing. Probably less than a week old, the spotted fawn was too young to run away with its mother. It looked so cute with its tiny head resting peacefully on its tiny hooves.

Without hesitation, I unsheathed my knife. Grabbing it by the back legs, I put my boot over the tiny fawn's head and stretched him tight. I reached down with my knife and the little creature let out a piercing cry Whahh! It startled me. Sounding exactly like a baby, the fawn's cry touched something primal in me, but only for a second. I quickly recovered my focus and ran the knife's blade across the tiny fawn's throat. I had to be hard.

Carrying the lifeless carcass back to camp, I skinned and gutted and prepared Bambi for my palette. Bounding with a new reserve of energy, I moved with celerity. The carcass had no meat on its bones, just a thin layer of pink milk-fat. The carcass was broken in pieces and put in my pot along with a little water. The heart, lungs, liver, and brains were placed in the pot as well. As it cooked it turned into goo. Sipping it gently, I felt great warmth course slowly through my body.

God had answered my prayer. The little fawn fell like manna from heaven and saved me in my hour of need. With a little pep in my step, I covered the last leg to Nordmann's house.

CHAPTER 9

Nantahala, NC • 1974-82 • Lure of the Mountains

Growing up in the suburbs of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, I had never seen real wilderness. Row upon row of cookie-cutter houses, yards of fescue and nursery-raised plants – south Florida was an artificial world. The only places in the neighborhood that my child's imagination transformed into wilderness were the avocado trees in the backyard and the undeveloped fields of ragweed near the elementary school.

Like a lot of young boys, I dreamed of outdoor adventure. When I was eight years old, my family traveled to western North Carolina. We were visiting Tom Branham, an old family friend. It was the summer of 1974. Tom had moved to Nantahala a year earlier. He was building his own house on a six-acre plot of mountain land.

In his mid-twenties, Tom was a husky guy with a Santa Claus beard and size 13 hiking boots. He had been bitten hard by the counterculture and had moved to the mountains looking for a new start. Little more than an adolescent himself, Tom was the kind of guy who would let a 10-year-old kid run a chainsaw or fire a shotgun. We always had fun with Tom.

In those days we took a family trip about once a year. At that time, my father worked for TWA, which made airfare dirt-cheap. This year's trip was to North Carolina. Unlike the usual trip, this time we would be taking along the Hensel family.

A single mother, Carol Hensel had four boys of her own, all approximately the same ages as my three older brothers. Whenever the boys joined forces, there was the potential for mayhem. One of the boys would invariably dare the others to do something, like jump off a freeway bridge into shark infested waters, and bones would get broken, police called, spankings rationed out. It was fun. Now we were going someplace that promised even bigger adventure, the Appalachian Mountains.

We flew into Chattanooga, Tennessee, late at night. Our caravan of cars drove through the darkness, winding slowly along the steep mountain roads. I pressed my face against the window trying to catch a glimpse of the wilderness, but it was too dark to see anything.

Dawn came early after a sleepless night packed together like sardines on the floor of a tiny cabin that Tom had rented for us on Lake Nantahala. After breakfast, our mothers released us upon the countryside. It was a misty morning. A creek ran behind the cabin. The water was clear all the way to the bottom, and icy to the touch. "You can drink out of it," said my older brother. I had never seen a real creek before, certainly not one you could drink from. I jumped in the middle of it and splashed around. I was in paradise.

The women complained that the cabin was too small, so they moved both of our clans up to Tom's homestead. One of three houses at the end of a twisted gravel road, Tom's place was buried deep in the Nantahala National Forest. The acreage along the road was private, but everything beyond it was pristine national forest. The Appalachian Trail was less than a mile away.

Tom had been sleeping in a makeshift barn at night and working on his house during the day. The house was little more than a concrete slab. The barn was built of rough-cut lumber and had rust-red tin roofing. Next to the barn, we found an in-ground outhouse and a pigsty, where two young porkers rooted in the black muck. The women asked when we would be leaving. We boys wanted to stay forever.

For the next two weeks we explored the woods, killed a six-foot copperhead, and built a tree house. At the end of the day, Tom would drive the entire crew to the Nantahala River in his beat up 1955 Dodge Woody. The Woody, which Tom had painted yellow, had running boards and a big rear bumper. Once away from the protective eyes of our mothers, we pestered Tom to let us ride on the outside. Five of us

stood on the rear bumper while two balanced on the running boards hanging onto the side mirrors. Down the road we flew: “Faster! Faster!” we yelled.

The Nantahala River was freezing cold. We didn’t care. We swam until our bodies turned blue. In the tight space behind a powerful waterfall, we stood and watched the wall of water falling five inches from our faces. One at a time, we dove through it. The rushing water pinned you to the bottom, and for one brief second you thought you would drown, but then it pushed you through to the pool on the other side.

After two weeks we flew back to Florida. I knew one day I would be back.

* * *

That day came five years later. This time I traveled alone. Since the trip in 1974 our family had moved south of Miami to the hellhole called Homestead. I begged my parents throughout the school year to let me go to North Carolina during the summer break. Finally they relented. In July, I boarded a greasy Greyhound bus bound for Andrews, North Carolina.

On this trip I came prepared to hunt. My Apache Indian phase had ended. Having recently watched a movie about the James-Younger Gang called *The Long Riders*, I decided to become a cowboy. To play the part, I wore a cowboy hat and a pair of pointy-toed cowboy boots.

I pestered Tom to take me hunting. “Do you really want to go hunting?” he asked playfully. “Yes!” I said.

“Alright, let’s go.” He handed me an unloaded Ruger 10/22 rifle and showed me how it functioned. Waving his hand, Tom motioned for me to follow. At last I was going hunting. I could barely contain my excitement.

The trail ended in front of Tom’s chicken coop at the end of the driveway. I stood there staring at the chickens pecking the bare dirt, wondering what was happening.

“See that white rooster in the middle?” Tom asked. I nodded. “If you shoot him, pluck him, and eat him, I’ll take you hunting.”

As a vegetarian and a non-hunter, Tom figured a little boy from the suburbs wouldn’t have the guts to shoot an animal — and this would cure me of my hunting fever. I chambered a round in the rifle and proceeded to stalk the rooster. The doomed bird seemed to know what was afoot. He clucked and paced to and fro searching for an avenue of escape. But there was no way out for him, or for me. I killed the rooster with one shot.

“Now comes the fun part,” Tom said. “Bring him up to the house.”

Dunking the dead bird in scalding hot water, I plucked his white feathers using the tips of my fingers. Tom watched me closely for signs of squeamishness. Still unperturbed, I gutted him, cooked him, and ate him. Tom was impressed. He didn’t take me hunting, though.

* * *

In the fall of 1981, I started the eighth grade in Homestead. My father had left his job with the airlines to work with the construction crews that were building the new Metro Zoo in South Miami. The construction site was a desert. Bulldozers had knocked over all the trees and scraped away the topsoil, exposing the white coral that forms the sub-surface of much of South Florida. It was like working in a convection oven. I remember Dad coming home looking tired, gaunt, and sunburned.

In those days, no one ever talked about skin cancer or sunscreen. When Dad was diagnosed with melanoma, we didn’t think it was that serious at first. We were quickly disabused of that notion. Melanoma is the deadliest form of cancer. Between caring for my ailing father and my other four siblings,

my poor mother was over-burdened. The eldest, Damian, had left a few years earlier. The Pentecostal church that my family had zealously supported did nothing to support us. Things were falling apart. My mother asked Tom if he would take me in for a while. I hopped another Greyhound bus for the Appalachian Mountains.

Nantahala came as a huge culture shock. In Florida, I had attended an elementary school and then a middle school. In Nantahala there was only one school with about 150 students, 15 kids in each grade. South Florida schools were diverse, and racial conflict was the norm. Nantahala was racially homogenous; fights were rare.

I used to play football and baseball in Florida. In Nantahala there was only one sport. Unfortunately it was the one sport I sucked at: basketball. White kids simply didn't play basketball in Florida. I joined the school team anyway. You had to play basketball to get the girls. I went steady with practically every pretty girl in my grade — all three of them.

Basketball games were a big deal. It seemed like the entire community gathered in the school's gym to watch the games. There were three teams and three games. While the other teams played, we would "go down the hall," to a hidden recess next to the restrooms, with the girl of our choice. It was all very 1950s; I loved it.

That spring of 1982, my father lost his battle with cancer. He was a good man who died too young. Dad was the rock of the family and the steady hand that mother depended on. His death affected all of us, but especially my mother. Our family would never be the same again.

I had promised myself that I would never set foot in another Florida school, but my mother wanted me to stay with her, so I started the ninth grade at Homestead High School. The school doubled as a hurricane shelter. Resembling a prison, Homestead High was a monolithic concrete building with no windows.

Having experienced life outside the sewers of south Florida, I wasn't happy about my new school. Fortunately, I didn't have to attend full-time. A tree service had recently hired me as a "dragger." (One guy ran the chainsaw, while I dragged the limbs he cut.) The work was backbreaking. The job, however, added another paycheck to the family income and allowed me to leave school early as part of my Work Experience class. And anything that got me out of that school early was a blessing.

After fourth period, while most of the other students went to their next class, I sat on a planter in front of the school waiting for my ride to work. One day I was waiting in my usual spot when six guys approached. "Hey, white boy," one said. "What are you doin' out here?" Before I could answer he smashed me in the face. Bright flashes filled my consciousness. The blow knocked me back into the planter. They dragged me onto the concrete and proceeded to kick and punch me. I curled up into a ball to protect my vital organs. Luckily my brother pulled up in his van, thus saving me from an even worse beating.

I survived the assault, just as I had survived others like it. No bones were broken. My organs were still functioning. Being beaten and intimidated was part of the public school experience in south Florida. No biggy. This particular beating, however, seemed to touch a chord. I was sick of south Florida. There was a better life up north. I gave my mother an ultimatum: either send me to Nantahala or call the Youth Authority because I would never go back to Homestead High or any other public school in Florida. She put me on a Greyhound headed north.

* * *

Later that winter my mother inherited a little money from her father's estate. I was 16. At the time, she was living in a trailer park in Princeton, Florida, another hole just north of Homestead. Dan convinced her to invest the money in a piece of land in North Carolina. Next door to Tom's place was a seven-acre

lot for sale. The shell of a Jim Walters house was already built on the lot. With a lot of work we could turn it into a home. It seemed like the answer to our prayers.

Mother agreed to purchase the property, but under one condition: Dan and I had to make the house livable before she would set foot in it. Harking back to Tom's outhouse and pigsty, she was not about to endure the full country experience.

Dan packed his 1966 Dodge step-van full of tools and drove us to Nantahala. Together we began to carve out a homestead in the wilderness. We worked on the house during the day and slept inside it at night. Uninsulated, the house was bone cold in the winter. One entire wall was open to the elements. We had no plumbing or running water. We used a makeshift outhouse and fetched water from a small creek that ran by the house.

One of our first projects involved constructing a water system. On the edge of our property was a small spring. We built a gravity-fed system. A reservoir was put half way and connected to the house and spring with a PVC pipe. The entire system, including the 500-gallon reservoir, had to be buried below the frost line, which in North Carolina was two feet. We did it all by hand.

Dan did most of the work. He was only 21 but already a master at the building trades. I, on the other hand, wanted only to ride my little Honda ATC 110. It was a little three-wheeler, and the local boys had never seen a three-wheeler before. A few of the locals had dirt bikes. On the weekends we went riding. Built for swamps, the ATC was difficult to handle on the steep mountain terrain. I became known as the "Florida boy with the three-wheeler." Wherever I went the first words out of their mouth: "Let me ride it! Let me ride it!" Invariably they would see how far they could drive it up a steep hill before it flipped over on top of them.

Dan finally had the house ready in the summer. My mother and youngest brother arrived soon after. The rest of my siblings remained behind in Florida.

* * *

Nantahala was a tight-knit community. Families had lived in the area for generations. Kin ties were extensive. They descended from the Scots-Irish who had settled on the frontier in the early 1700s. As the Cherokee were pushed out of the Appalachians in the early 19th century, the Scots-Irish took their place and have been there ever since.

Before the lumber companies came to the region, communities like Nantahala were extremely isolated. There were no state roads or railroad tracks. Mountain folks got around on mule trails and scratched a meager living from the hillsides growing corn. Hogs and cattle were let loose to graze on acorns in the primeval forest. Cornbread and pork were the staples. Rickets were common. Families of six lived in single-room cabins. Homemade corn liquor ("moonshine") served as a kind of currency. Tee totaling Baptists later made heavy in-roads in the mountains in the late 1800s. Prohibitionists have dominated local politics ever since; many mountain counties today are "dry." The moonshiners were undeterred. They actually preferred prohibition because it kept liquor prices high and gave them a monopoly of the local market.

During the 1890s, lumber companies bought most of the remote mountain land. They built the first railroads in the region in order to haul the virgin oaks and chestnuts to market. A railroad was blasted through the Nantahala Gorge in 1921. In the 1930s, the government purchased the land from the timber companies. By then much of it had been denuded. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) set out to control flooding and use the area's numerous rivers to generate hydroelectric power. The Nantahala was one of the rivers slated for damming.

When I moved to the area in the early 1980s, most of the men worked in furniture factories, on state road crews, or for the Nantahala Power and Light Company. It was strictly a blue-collar community. The only folks with college degrees were the handful of teachers at the school in Nantahala.

Those who were better off lived in brick or wood frame houses; those who were not lived in add-ons. Originally a single-wide trailer, and add-on had one of its walls cut out and a small area added on.

Highlanders drove pickup trucks – American made of course. Quite a few hunted bear, coon, turkey, and deer in season; most raised chickens, hogs, or cattle. In the summer, they grew a half acre of corn and potatoes. The new staples were potatoes, pintos, soda pop, and Wonder Bread. Tobacco use was nearly universal: young men and women smoked cigarettes, boys dipped SKOAL or Copenhagen, old men chewed plug or twist, and old women dipped powdered snuff. Cancer and heart disease were as common as acne.

There was a distinct generational divide. The younger generation had known only nine-to-five jobs in the factory. They did little farming or hunting and, generally, frowned upon moonshining. When not at work, they sat in front of the television. The Old Timers were a different breed. They were proud, independent, and suspicious of outsiders. Although they'd had steady jobs at various times in their lives, they couldn't see working in the same factory for 30 years. As young men they had lived pretty much as their pioneer ancestors had a 100 years earlier: farming, hunting, and moonshining. The old timer's uniform consisted of overalls, work boots, and a 1930s style fedora hat. They spoke an incomprehensible dialect and never left home without a .38 caliber pistol in one pocket and a razor sharp "fold'in" knife in the other.

Because of the steepness of the terrain, the Cherokee called the area "Nantahala," which in their language means "Land of the noonday sun." Nantahala is not a town; it's a rural community that stretches along the creeks that form the Nantahala River watershed. Our house was at the end of Partridge Creek. We were one of only a handful of non-native families who lived in Nantahala year-round. The locals called us "foreigners," or "Florida people." The beauty of the area was renown among Floridians who were looking for summer destinations. Mostly upper-middle class, these "Florida people" acquired a nasty reputation among the locals. They built summer cabins on Lake Nantahala, drove Cadillacs, and generally treated the poor locals like backwoods rubes. Thus the locals hated "Florida people." Originating in Florida didn't put us in good stead with the mountain people. We had an impossible task trying to disassociate ourselves from the other Florida people. Even after living there for a decade, we were still treated as outsiders.

* * *

Tom was our only close friend; he was a Florida person too. (Actually he was from New Jersey but to the locals all outsiders were "Florida people.") We spent a lot of time with Tom in the early years. His ideal was what he called self-sufficiency. He heated his house with a wood stove. Coils inside the stove heated water for showers and dishes. Goats and chickens provided milk and eggs but no meat because Tom was a half-way vegetarian. Premium coupons provided the means to purchase store-bought items dirt cheap. He sometimes drove 300 miles to shop at a particular grocery store that was currently offering to double or triple the face value of his coupons. Using the choicest coupons from his mail-order coupon business, Tom sometimes had the store paying him to take items home.

Other than buying and reselling coupons via mail, Tom made a little extra cash hauling scrap aluminum. The local power company sold him its scrap wire, and he made a small profit hauling it to a recycling plant in Asheville, North Carolina. On occasion, one or two of us accompanied him. The journey to Asheville was epic.

Tom had an old Dodge pickup truck that he'd modified to haul the wire. The bed had been sliced off and turned into a flatbed. An extra set of springs had been welded on to help take the heavy loads. On

each side of the bed, Tom had an old sheet metal real estate sign, the type used for highway billboards. Eight-foot steel rods provided support for the huge signs.

The coils of aluminum wire were stacked high on the bed. When we were finished, the signs were winched together with a Come-A-Long. The tires on the old Dodge bulged to the point of bursting. The truck was literally buried in aluminum, Beverly Hillbillies style.

On the winding mountain roads to Asheville, we set a blistering pace of 30 M.P.H. Cars stretched behind us for a half mile. Traffic coming in the other direction would slow down and pull to the curb as if they were passing a semi-truck hauling a house trailer. It felt like we would flip over as we rounded the corners. I remember digging my fingernails into the dashboard.

Breakdowns were frequent. Of course, Tom wasn't a member of AAA. One time we spent two days doing major engine repair on the side of the highway, sleeping under the truck at night. Another time a blowout nearly killed us. We swerved into oncoming traffic, cars screeched to a halt, and later, people got out to curse as Tom finished fixing the flat. Tom had a hell of a time convincing me to climb back into that death trap.

Celebration time came after we finally off-loaded the aluminum in Asheville. Tom's idea of a celebration was the all-you-can-eat salad bar at Pizza Hut, and, if we were lucky, a movie at the drive-in on Tunnel Road. After the movie, we unfurled our sleeping bags and snoozed beneath the stars.

It was Tom who told us about the Conspiracy. There were many versions of the Conspiracy; it depended on which newsletter you happened to read. Patriots put out the newsletters, which arrived in plain brown envelopes from places like Arkansas and Arizona. It was all very hush-hush, you see.

The Patriot movement in the 1980s was a scattered collection of groups and individuals sharing common ideas about the state of the nation. The movement grew out of the conservative reaction to the policies of modern liberalism. Beginning in the early 20th century, powerful forces began a systematic assault on our Constitution and the American way of life. Marching under the banner of socialism, progressivism, and liberalism, these forces consolidated their hold over the federal government in the 1930s, the mass media in the 1940s, and the universities in the 1960s. From there, they managed to inject their ideas into every corner of American life. In the 1960s they organized the counterculture, the sexual revolution, and the anti-war movements. American conservatives have been on the defensive ever since.

Populist and conservative leaders reacted haphazardly to the new regime. Huey Long mounted a populist challenge to the liberal Franklin D. Roosevelt. Charles Lindbergh and the America First Committee tried their best to keep America from becoming an ally of the Soviet Union and world Communism. After most of Europe and Asia fell to the communists, patriots like Senator Joseph McCarthy and the John Birch Society attempted to expose the collaboration between the socialists in Moscow and their fellow travelers in Washington, DC. Unfortunately all these noble efforts failed. Long was assassinated in 1935. So-called conservatives stabbed Lindbergh and McCarthy in the back. Realizing that it would take more than an election to unseat the socialists, the Republican Party and "moderates" like Dwight D. Eisenhower worked for an accommodation with the new masters of America. They accepted the social democratic welfare state and ceded the culture to the Left. They turned American conservatism into a stodgy Burckian brand of classical liberalism rather than a real alternative to socialism. They didn't have the testicles to take it to the next level. They marginalized those conservatives like McCarthy who wanted to confront the liberal regime. The Patriot movement is the remnant of those conservatives purged from the political mainstream by the Republican Party cabal.

Patriots believe that the country is already lost, and all constitutional efforts to win back our liberties have failed. America now belongs to a coterie of socialists intent on merging our country into a one-world government, which will be organized under the auspices of the United Nations. Patriots differ only on what to do about this dire situation. Many have decided to retreat into isolation in the hope that

Washington will somehow overlook them. (Tom Branham was this type of Patriot.) Quite a few Patriots expect the return of Jesus Christ any day now. Some still believe that it's possible to elect some outsider populist politician who will go to Washington like Mr. Smith and throw the moneychangers out. And then there is a small minority who want to take back the country by force of arms.

There's a strong Jeffersonian-libertarian influence in the movement, which is precisely why Patriots have never been a political force in this country. Such strong individualism precludes political organization. Whereas teamwork always trumps individualism, whether in football or politics, the Patriots have been unable to organize anything larger than a bake sale.

Large numbers of mainstream Christians joined the opposition in the 1970s over social issues like abortion, homosexual normalization, and the general de-Christianization of America. This greatly increased the potential for a true nationalist revolution. Although they share these grievances with the Christian activists, Patriots tend to focus on issues like the income tax, property rights, and the United Nations. Gun rights are the big issue for the Patriots. Gun rights are not about duck hunting, target shooting, or home protection. The Founding Fathers wrote the Second Amendment for the express purpose of keeping an armed citizenry as a check against out-of-control government. When they wrote that amendment, the founders were thinking of Lexington and Concord where well-armed citizens took up arms against their own government. The Patriots believe that losing our Second Amendment rights is the final step in the Conspiracy. Once the state has our guns, we can do nothing to stop the socialists from dismantling the rest of our Constitution and reducing us to slavery.

Except for Pat Buchanan, very few politicians on the national stage espouse true conservatism. As a result, inertia has set in. Lacking competent leadership, the Patriots have allowed conspiracy mongers to fill the vacuum. Each conspiracy monger publishes his own "bulletin" or "report" documenting the growing Conspiracy. Anyone who has taken the time to study history can see that the cultural-political transformation of America over the past 80 years came about through a combination of academic leftism, judicial activism, and mass media propaganda. You can read the history of America's political revolution in the pages that cover the New Deal to the Great Society. You can follow the history of unconstitutional judicial activism in any law library by looking at those decisions from *Lochner v. New York* to *Roe v. Wade*. It's easy to trace the cultural transformation of the country by examining the counterculture and sexual revolution of the 1960s. Every true progressive celebrates those 80 years of change as the greatest non-violent revolution in history. There is no mystery here. This is conventional history.

But unfortunately, reality is too boring for most people, who typically avoid history books. The conspiracy mongers take advantage of this fact. Their bulletins and reports read like bad mystery or suspense novels. One guy in the 1980s had people believing there were 500,000 Soviet troops on the Mexican border poised to invade the United States. Today it's black helicopters, Manchurian Candidates, and so-called false flag operations. Black helicopters, say the bulletins, are hovering over people's houses with special equipment designed to count how many guns they have. Deep in the bowels of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, they are using brainwashing techniques to create Manchurian Candidates. These brainwashed individuals are programmed to carry out acts of violence like Columbine or false-flag operations like 9/11. Supposedly, these manufactured incidents will give the conspirators a pretext to expand their power in the form of new laws. Concentration camps have already been built to intern those Patriots who resist. Once the Patriots are all rounded-up, the conspirators can safely merge the United States into the world government. Computer chips will then be inserted into your butt cheeks and all your financial transactions will be monitored by some bureaucrat in Brussels, Belgium.

There's a multimillion-dollar industry of conspiracy theorems and a class of professional patriots who specialize in concocting these lies. Some professional patriots sell overpriced "sanctuary land" in Idaho. Others hawk gold, survival food, books, or equipment. Quite a few have discovered the cure for cancer, the one that the Conspiracy doesn't want you to know about. They will sell it to you for the bargain basement price of \$2,995, C.O.D. of course. Most professionals sell half-assed newsletters

purporting to tell the true story behind the latest headlines. The biggest seller 15 years ago was how federal agents conspired with Timothy McVeigh to bomb the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The big seller today is how George W. Bush was really behind the terrorist attacks on 9/11.

Conspiracy theories speak to the American people's distrust of the Washington government. It's a simple way to make sense of history. The same thing happened in the 1760s. The English Parliament's attempt to tax the American colonies was seen by the common man as the first step in a vast conspiracy to take away Protestant liberties. A Catholic cabal of Frenchmen was believed to be behind the plot. Legions of French Catholics were said to be massing in Quebec for the purpose of invading the colonies. The difference between then and now is the complete lack of responsible leaders to give form to the people's distrust. Instead of channeling these irrational fears into effective activism, a thousand conspiracy mongers make a living concocting new and more bizarre conspiracies. The fear and distrust continues to grow, but no one has a plan to solve the real problems.

The tentacles of the Conspiracy reach everywhere, say the professionals. No one can be trusted, not even those calling themselves Patriots. Folks who become steeped in conspiracy theories have been politically neutralized. Their enemies need not fear them. The Conspiracy has no need to round them up and put them into concentration camps. Remember, the purpose of a concentration camp is to remove potential political opponents from society so as to prevent them from forming an opposition. But these Patriots, primed on conspiracy theories, are incapable of organizing anything. They have built themselves a virtual concentration camp.

Patriots have lost faith in the future. They hope some miracle comes along to save them. The more religious put their faith in the Second Coming of Christ; others believe in the Collapse. There are a few versions of the Collapse fantasy. One school of thought says it is a deliberately engineered crisis, usually economic in nature similar to the Great Depression, the purpose being to bring about a cashless society. Another school has the Collapse being triggered by a war, a pandemic, or a terrorist attack such as 9/11. This will provide the pretext to declare martial law and start the big round-up. Still others contend that the Collapse will be so devastating it will lead to the breakdown of social order. Ultimately it will consume modern society, including the Conspiracy itself. This is the Omega Man scenario. Small groups of Patriots will then band together and live like the pioneers in early America.

Tom Branham was on the extreme libertarian wing of the movement. Actually he would've resented being labeled a libertarian, or anything else for that matter. Too cool for anyone's school of thought, Tom was his own little country. He was also a firm believer in the Collapse, the Omega Man fantasy. Civilization would crumble while Tom and his goats and chickens came through it without a scratch.

CHAPTER 10

Bateman Gap, NC • 1998 • Finding Food

I squatted in the mallow weeds scoping George Nordmann's house through my binoculars. (For map, see page 75.)

"He isn't home," I muttered. "Probably at work." His place looked more like a junkyard than a residence. Junk cars lined the driveway. The carport was jammed with oil drums, engine parts, old appliances. Rhode Island Red chickens roamed around the piles of junk. What little ground that wasn't covered in junk had ragweed growing out of it. The summer sun baked me in the high weeds. The cicadas were buzzing, which always seemed to make it feel hotter.

Before making contact with Nordmann, I had to formulate a contingency plan in case he freaked out and ran to the FBI. I was in no condition to run; I could barely walk. The fawn I'd eaten was enough to get me here but I'd need much more fuel to outrun the feds and their bloodhounds. I decided to fatten up for a week before trying to make contact with Nordmann.

Recently paved, Long Branch Road cuts through Bateman Gap, and Nordmann's house sat on the north side of the gap just above the road. There were a few houses down the road, but the gap itself was heavily wooded, making it easy to approach Nordmann's house directly. He had two gardens and a few scrawny fruit trees poking out from the piles of junk.

I slowly circled the house to the garden below the road where Nordmann had planted a few rows of potatoes. I inched out into the patch of corrugated orange dirt and laid down between the rows. Using my knife, I dug into the row and filled a side pocket with radish-sized tubers. They were immature. I replaced the excavated dirt and backed out of the garden, covering my tracks along the way.

An aluminum ladder lay propped against one of Nordmann's scrawny fruit trees. From a distance the tree looked bare. Moving in for a closer look, I could see thousands of shiny red cherries. "Ah, the Garden of Eden," I said. I scrambled up the ladder and plucked and ate and filled my remaining pockets with the glorious fruit. In Nordmann's chicken house I found four beautiful eggs. "This should make a fine meal."

Having enough for a couple of meals, I built a small cooking fire in the thicket on the ridge above the gap. Normally potatoes and eggs need a little something extra to render them palatable, whether mayonnaise, salsa, or just a pinch of salt. I had nothing extra. I peeled the boiled eggs and mashed the boiled potatoes and ate them plain. When I bit into that first smoking hot egg, my palette exploded in an event horizon of flavor that words cannot explain. It was truly the best meal I have eaten in my life.

The eggs and potatoes were merely appetizers. However, I couldn't keep digging in Nordmann's garden for potatoes. And he would notice if I kept snatching eggs out of the hen house. I had to have a wider selection of food to feast on. And there was only one place I could find that: in his house.

* * *

Like us, the Nordmanns were one of the few non-native families living in Nantahala when we moved there in the early 1980s. We lived a few miles away on Partridge Creek. Leaving north Florida in the 1970s, Nordmann and his family of seven girls and one boy settled in Nantahala for the same sort of reasons we had: to raise their children in an environment free of the cultural toxins of the big city. The Nordmanns owned a health food store in Andrews, which was about 15 miles from Nantahala. For the most part, the Nordmanns kept to themselves. We were never very close. I went to school with the older Nordmann girls, who were quiet and shy. We rarely spoke. My mother was a health food enthusiast and became a frequent customer at Nordmann's store. For many years that was the extent of our relationship to the Nordmann family.

The Nordmanns were traditional Catholics, members of the Church who resisted the changes resulting from the Vatican II Council. After the Second World War, liberalism and secularism were waxing while conservatism and traditionalism waned. Under pressure from liberals within the Church, the pope called a Church council to soften those aspects of Catholicism that were obnoxious to these new trends. As a result of what came to be called Vatican II (1962-1965), the Church dumped the Latin Mass. The Catechism was rewritten to be more “tolerant” of other faiths. And screening procedures at seminaries that had been designed to weed out homosexuals and pedophiles were relaxed.

The consequences of Vatican II were far-reaching. Marxists, pedophiles and homosexuals entered the seminaries in droves. These new priests advanced in rank, causing the sex abuse scandals we see today. Under the influence of these new priests, the Church stands poised to change its teachings on homosexuality, contraception, abortion, and women in the priesthood.

A minority of conservative Catholics protested Vatican II. Their protests, however, were largely ignored, so they formed small congregations of their own. They teach from the old Catechism and perform the Mass in Latin. Some of the more outspoken have been excommunicated, while others maintain tenuous ties to Rome.

Although I was born a Catholic, my family had left the Church in the 1960s and became heavily involved in Pentecostalism. For several years, I never spoke to Nordmann about politics, or religion, or anything else for that matter. To me, he was the guy who ran the health food store where my mother shopped.

In the mid-1990s, when I was living alone at the old family home on Partridge Creek, I became a frequent customer at Nordmann’s store. He sold freshly baked wheat bread, and I would stop in once a week to buy a few loaves. We got to talking about religion and politics. At the time, Nordmann was attending Latin Mass in Tennessee at a small traditional Catholic church. He asked me if I wanted to go. I said yes. I attended Mass maybe two or three times.

Nordmann was a Patriot from way back, a voracious reader of bulletins and reports. He always had the latest hair-brained conspiracy theory on tap. Every time I’d drop in for some bread, I’d get an earful of the goings on of the Bilderbergers. Looking around furtively, he’d slide a little pamphlet across the counter as if the fate of the free world depended on its contents. He railed against the Council on Foreign Relations and the Illuminati. We did occasionally discuss real issues, such as abortion. He shared my opinion that it was murder. But mostly he talked about nonsense conspiracy theories.

Nordmann was no militant, though. To look at the guy you would think he had never fired a weapon in his life. Nordmann believed in the imminent return of Christ; he was also a big fan of the Fatima prophecies. And he believed in the Collapse, an apocalypse in which organized society falls apart and people, such as himself, are forced to live like the Swiss Family Robinson. Nordmann was ready for it. He had a whole basement full of food.

There was a deep sadness about George. Melancholy hung around his neck like a scapula. Sometime in the mid-1980s, his young son died of pneumonia. The boy had been the wife’s favorite, and she was devastated by the loss. I don’t know the whole story, but soon after the child’s passing she left Nordmann and entered a monastery.

I believe Nordmann always expected his wife to come back to him. She never did, though. That really put the hooks into him. His children grew up, moved away, and got married. A couple still lived in the area and occasionally came to visit poor George. His big plan had been to lead his family through the Collapse like some Old Testament patriarch. But the Collapse never came. Now he was alone with his health food store and his 20-year supply of food in the basement. His dreams, along with his food, grew stale with each passing year.

My plan was to put Nordmann's food to good use. The Collapse was a fantasy. But by helping me, he'd have a unique opportunity of doing something truly patriotic. However, I knew that he wouldn't want me hanging around his house. For all his talk against the government, Nordmann had his limits. But I also knew that his distrust of the government would make him highly reluctant to rat me out. The last time we talked, he went on for an hour about the Waco Massacre. I was betting that he would want to get rid of me without having to involve the FBI. But to get rid of me, he'd have to sell me some of that stale food in his basement.

It would have been a simple matter for me to take Nordmann's food by force. But I was civilized back then. With a little convincing, I thought Nordmann would sell me the food.

* * *

Nordmann trailed away from his house in his Toyota Corolla around 8:00 a.m. I waited in the weeds for a good hour to make sure he didn't come back. Then I searched for an entrance to his home, one where I wouldn't be seen. Virtually everything was wrapped in tiny cobwebs and dusted in a fine layer of chicken manure. Buried behind a pile of dusty junk, I found a side door. It had no knob or handle, so I pushed it gently, and a stack of boxes on the other side slowly gave way.

Nordmann's clutter found its way into the house, though inside he kept things relatively clean and sanitary. Stacks of boxes reached all the way to the ceiling, and old newspapers sat piled on the floor. I thumbed through the papers; all were copies of *The Spotlight*, which was the *New York Times* of the Far Right. The house was closed up tight and filled with cool air.

Seeing a latched door in the rear of the house, I popped it open. A dark stairway led down to the basement. I hurried down the steps.

"Now, that's what I'm talking about," I said with excitement as I gazed at the treasure. Along the walls of the basement were makeshift wooden shelves stocked full of beans, tuna fish, corned beef, coffee, and a hundred other things. The floor space was solid with buckets and barrels containing wheat, lentils, mung beans, pintos, split peas – enough food to hold a family of ten for a decade. I'd struck the mother lode.

Dates written in Magic Marker on the containers indicated that Nordmann had been sealing several containers every year since the 1970s. I examined some of the older stuff. None of the grains had been vacuumed packed. It looked stale but otherwise edible. He had treated it with diatomaceous earth to keep the bugs at bay. I ran my fingers through the grain as if it were gold dust.

I loaded my backpack full of wheat, corned beef, tuna, honey, and beans. Then I retreated to the ridge to gorge. My worst fear was that someone would see me before I was strong enough to run. So I ate. While I ate, I planned. I had to prepare for a footrace. Who knows, Nordmann might decide to run to the feds. With the feds hot on my heels, I couldn't use the roads to break my scent trail, especially if the chase took place in daylight.

I needed other options. According to the map, the terrain was suitable for backtracking.

Halfway between Nordmann's house and my old camp on the Nantahala River was White Oak Creek. Excellent for fishing rainbow trout, White Oak Creek was also large enough to mask the scent of a sweaty fugitive. The FBI headquarters was 15 miles away. If alerted to my presence, it would take them at least a couple of hours to begin a search. By then I could do a backtrack.

The plan was simple. If spotted by one of Nordmann's neighbors or if Nordmann decided to spill the beans, I'd cross White Oak Creek and follow the trail back to my old camp on the Nantahala River, making sure to string the trail all the way to the river's edge. Then, I'd do an about-face and follow my footsteps back to White Oak Creek. Moving downstream, I'd use its frigid waters to reach Otter Creek, which spills into White Oak Creek from the east via a huge culvert that tunnels under Wayah Road. I

could walk up Otter Creek to Tellico Gap. Within a few days, I'd be 30 miles away in the Cowee Mountains, north of Franklin, North Carolina.

If everything worked as planned, the bloodhounds would trail me to the Nantahala River. Thinking that I'd used the river to conceal my scent, or crossed over to the other side, the feds would search along the banks of the Nantahala River, which would take them to the west. Meanwhile, I'd be on the far side of Tellico Gap, heading east.

From the ridge west of Bateman Gap I could clearly see the intersection of Long Branch Road and Wayah Road. If Nordmann or anyone else brought the FBI up to Nantahala, they would likely come through that intersection. I'd have a mile head start on them. That should give me enough time to string the trail to the river and then backtrack to White Oak Creek. I was hoping it wouldn't come to that, but if it did, I had to be in good shape.

I boiled pots of bulgur wheat and broiled slabs of corned beef. Gobs of peanut butter were mixed in the wheat, and butter was slathered on the beef. I ate until my stomach bulged. Then I lay down in the mallow weeds and read old newspapers.

Like clockwork, Nordmann went to work in the morning and returned in the evening. I figured with a store to look after all by himself, I didn't have to worry about him coming home early. Why spend so much time cooking in the woods, when I could be cooking my meals inside the house?

Soon I was preparing my meals on the stove in George's kitchen. Under the influence of food, I couldn't help myself. The food made me lethargic and bold. At first, I cooked enough for three meals and took it back with me to the weeds to eat cold. Then, I started eating in the house. The food was a gateway drug; before long, I was washing my clothes and taking baths in the house. I even watched videos. Nordmann had a grainy copy of *The Great Escape*, the one with Charles Bronson and Steve McQueen. It seemed apropos. One video on survival techniques demonstrated how to sprout grains like wheat and mung beans in gallon glass jars. Sprouting instead of boiling, apparently, increased the quantity as well as the quality of the food. I took note of the technique.

During that time, I mapped out my strategy. First, I'd try to buy the food from Nordmann. I had \$800.00 in my pocket. Failing that, I'd have to take it. He wouldn't be happy about it. I'd cuff Nordmann to the ceiling support in the basement and requisition the needed supplies. After doing a thorough inventory of all the food, I made a list of the items I required.

Lurking in the back of my mind was an idea I'd been nursing since February. As my food supplies dwindled, and my long-term prospects dimmed, the idea had faded. But now with a full belly it was back again. The idea was to carry out an attack on the FBI task force in Andrews, to turn the tables on my pursuers.

I had the gear to pull it off. The dynamite and triggers were buried in caches on the Tennessee border. With what I had there I could construct one command detonated device and a few static booby traps. It was over 30 miles to the Tennessee border. Hauling a load of food back to Fires Creek was my first priority. But if I used Nordmann's car, I might be able to move the food and the explosives. All I had to do was drop them near Andrews. Nordmann could pinpoint the task force headquarters for me. After burying the food on Fires Creek, I could make a move on the feds in Andrews.

Nordmann's maroon Corolla appeared to be the only working vehicle in the junkyard. There was a small 1973 Datsun parked next to the chicken coop. The tailgate and much of its frame had rusted through. The seats had rotted away, leaving only bare springs. There was a hole in the floorboard big enough to fit your foot through. The truck looked like it hadn't been on the road since the Nixon administration. But, astonishingly, it had valid plates and a valid inspection sticker. I couldn't believe it.

I scratched my head and thought for a minute: “If I can get this heap running, I might not need Nordmann’s car. I could load up the food and leave him some money. It would be quick and painless. And I wouldn’t have to worry about Nordmann running to the FBI.”

After hotwiring the Datsun, I cranked the engine. Vroom – Vroom – it sounded hollow and guttural, like it had no muffler. The truck was suffering from some internal malady, maybe a bad water pump. I doubted that the truck would make one mile. No, I had to talk to Nordmann, had to get him to loan me his Corolla.

* * *

After a week at Nordmann’s, things were becoming too comfortable. Someone would eventually see me if I stayed any longer. The food had worked its magic. My strength was back. I had to go. It was time to talk to Nordmann.

The next morning I was preparing breakfast in Nordmann’s kitchen. I had packed everything and was ready to go. As soon as Nordmann got home that evening I’d make contact. I spooned a gob of coconut oil into the hot frying pan. It slid across the black metal sizzling. Eggs were laid out on the counter and bread was sliced. Then I heard a car engine. “Must be passing on the road,” I thought, as I moved over to the front door to have a look. I saw a minivan parked out front and Nordmann’s daughter walking up the driveway fewer than 20 feet from the door.

I bolted down the basement stairs and out the back door. I hurdled the junk in the backyard and made my way to the upper garden, where I squatted down in the tall weeds. “Whoa! I just made it out of there in the nick of time.” Then it hit me: I’d left the frying pan sizzling on the burning stove.

Suddenly I heard a car door slam and an engine race. Wheels churned gravel and barked as they hit asphalt. Boom – she was gone in a flash. I was left standing there with my mouth open looking around like an idiot.

The basement door was cracked open, and I knew I’d shut it behind me on my way out. I pushed it open and examined the dust on the basement floor. In the brown dust her little sneaker tracks told the story. They led to the back door at a normal gate. Then, there was an abrupt about-face, a violent spin, and the tracks spread far apart as she sprinted back up the stairs. The stove in the kitchen had been turned off, the frying pan set aside on another burner. I’d been had. “Well, there goes plan A,” I said.

Retrieving my backpack from the ridge, I stuffed it full of canned tuna fish, corned beef, coconut oil, peanut butter, whey protein, and vitamin-mineral supplements. “Fat, protein, and vitamins,” I repeated. I placed a \$100 bill on the kitchen counter next to the frying pan.

Following the backtrack plan, I huffed up the ridge line to the spot where I could see the intersection of Wayah and Long Branch. The woods were hot as a sauna, and soon I was drenched in sweat. Flecks of bark peppered my sweaty arms. The happy time of eating and lounging was over.

Halfway out on the ridge, I veered off the trail to find the spot I wanted. I dropped my pack and pulled my binoculars out for a better look.

Doing some rough calculations in my head, I figured it would take Nordmann’s daughter 20 minutes to reach Andrews. It would take another 30 minutes to tell her story to the FBI. The feds would waste another hour making a decision, then another hour spent gathering everyone for a search. I had about three hours. “Plenty of time,” I thought.

Laying out my map, I pulled out my compass, plot sheet, and protractor – might as well go over the escape route one more time. The distances and degrees were written down. In the pitch black night I’d be using a pace count and compass to make my way through the woods. I snapped off an appropriate number

of twigs and put them in the appropriate pocket for each leg of the journey. Two hundred yards at such and such degrees – two twigs; four hundred yards – four twigs.

Staring down at that intersection, I started to think that Nordmann's daughter might not run to the feds after all. One hour slipped away; then two; then three; still no feds.

"She didn't go to the FBI," I said, as I looked down at the lonely intersection. "Now, that's a good girl."

She probably went to Nordmann's store first, and he told her to keep quiet. But I couldn't be sure. She might have gone to the task force; the feds might sneak in and infiltrate surveillance teams to keep an eye on Nordmann's house.

"No," I thought. "Woody (the agent-in-charge) is a heavy kind of guy. Surveillance teams lurking in people's backyards aren't his style. If he comes, he'll come in heavy with everything he has."

Ten hours had elapsed since my encounter with Nordmann's daughter. The sun went down. Traffic was normal at the intersection. Nordmann didn't return home that night or the next morning. All the while I waited anxiously. The following day, however, Nordmann resumed his regular routine. And there were no FBI Suburbans. My estimations of Nordmann had proved correct. He didn't want the feds up there any more than I did.

In case the FBI did come in the back door and set up surveillance teams on Nordmann's house, I thought it prudent to come in the back door myself. I crossed Long Branch Road and climbed up Otter Mountain, which rises to the north of Nordmann's place. From there I circled around and approached Bateman Gap from the opposite direction. If the feds were watching Nordmann's house, they would likely be somewhere on the slopes of Otter Mountain. I stalked up and down and back and forth on Otter Mountain for a week. There was no sign of the task force.

A few things looked different at Nordmann's house. He had installed a new deadbolt on the side door, the one I'd been using to enter the house. I resolved to speak with Nordmann at the first opportunity. He was gone over the July 4th holiday, but returned soon after. I prepared. If things started to get strange, I'd take him down immediately, cuff him to the pole in the basement, and use his car to ferry the food to Fires Creek.

* * *

Nordmann was alone when he pulled into the driveway on the evening of July 7, 1998. The sun was down and daylight faded as I crouched behind the chicken coop watching him. The Kevlar bulletproof vest under my fatigue jacket was suffocating in the summer heat. Mosquitoes buzzed my face, searching for a bare patch of skin to attack. The chickens were slowly filing into the coop, cackling nervously at my crouched figure. I propped the rifle against the side of the coop where I could easily retrieve it if necessary.

Nordmann was carrying groceries into the house. On his return trip to the car, I stepped into the open.

"Hey George," I called in a low voice. I held my hands out to both sides to show him I was unarmed.

He jolted backwards, like he'd stuck his finger in a light socket. He turned toward me with fear in his eyes.

"You have to go," he stammered. "They're . . . looking for you."

"I won't hurt you, George," I said. "I'm starving. Need food bad."

I tried to sound as pathetic as possible. This seemed to put him at ease. He looked at me, then back at the road. For a second I thought he was going to bolt, but he walked toward me, motioning to go behind the chicken coop.

Huddling over a stack of wooden pallets, we spoke for about a half hour. In his early 70s, Nordmann had a full head of salt and pepper hair slicked back with palmade. His face narrowed to a point like a hatchet. He had an ugly white growth on his left eyeball which made it impossible not to stare. Slung around his neck was a pair of librarian bifocals.

“They’re looking for you,” he reiterated. “Agents are all over town.”

“I know, I know George. Calm down. I’ve been here for a week. No one knows I’m here. I really need some food. One of my food caches was destroyed. Been living on salamanders and acorns, less than 500 calories a day.”

I was exaggerating. Actually I had no idea how many calories I was consuming. It wasn’t enough, I knew that much.

“Have the feds been around to see you?” I asked.

“No.”

“Good,” I said. “They’ve been talking to Randy. Do you know Randy Cochran?”

“No, I don’t know him.”

“Well, I used to hunt with him,” I said. “Heard on the radio that the feds were searching one of the areas where we used to hunt. Figured it was him that told them.”

“Don’t know him,” Nordmann repeated.

I tried making small talk, hoping it would calm him. But it did no good. George was in no mood for conversation.

He interrupted me, pointing at the house: “I’ve got food here. Take it – and leave.”

“I have a place in the mountains where the FBI will never find me, George,” I said. “But it’s a long way from here. Too far to carry that much food on my back. I need your car for one night. I’ll bring it back in the morning. Here, I have money, I can pay . . .” I reached inside my pocket to retrieve my wad of sweaty bills.

Nordmann stopped me: “No, no, we’ve been doing good at the store lately,” he said. “Don’t need your money. Where is the drop-off point? Tell me where to drop the food and I’ll drive it there myself.”

He was moving way too fast. He wanted me gone and was saying whatever he thought I wanted to hear to get rid of me. This was a bad sign. I paused for a few seconds, thinking. This wasn’t going to work. As soon as he could, he’d go to the cops. “Take him down now,” I said to myself.

But I persisted in my plan, saying, “No one knows that I’m here, except you. No one knows where I’ve been hiding. It’s better to keep it that way. The less you know about my location, the better off you are. There’s no need to rush this thing, George. Look, it’s better if you let me use the car. I’ll have it back to you on the same night.”

My suggestion shook him to the core. He walked to the corner of the coop and examined the road. When he came back I tried changing the subject.

“I went into your house. Hope you don’t mind. I needed food. Did you get the 100-dollar bill I left on the kitchen counter?” George nodded. “I didn’t mean to scare your daughter. Is she okay?”

I asked about his family, about old friends. I was trying to feel him out, see if I could trust him. Nordmann wasn't paying attention, though. He wanted this experience over with. He was scared shitless. When a guy is scared that way, he's unpredictable. My instincts said to take him down. But I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

"What do you want?" Nordmann finally asked. "There's food in the basement."

I reached inside my top pocket. "Here's a list of things, most of which are here at your house. I saw pintos, wheat, coconut oil, vitamins. But there might be a few items you'll have to get at the store. The important things are the dry grains, coconut oil, and beans. Here, look over the list. Take your time. Fill the car's tank with gas, put the stuff in the back and park it in the driveway with the keys in the ignition. Is everything working? Tires? Lights? Engine?"

"The car is fine," said Nordmann. He perched his horned-rimmed glasses on the tip of his nose and pretended to read the list. But I could tell he wasn't reading it.

"It will work," I assured him. "Just relax. Take your time. Don't worry." I held up a pair of hand cuffs with the key. "Listen, I'll give you these cuffs. If they catch me in your car, they are going to come back here and ask you some questions. Before they get in the house, cuff yourself to the center pole in the basement. Tell them I handcuffed you and stole the food and car. Make sure you swallow the key before they come in. Okay?"

"No! No!" He shook his head vigorously. "I don't want them." The hand cuffs scared the shit out of him. He shifted nervously from foot to foot as if he were standing on hot coals.

"Okay. No cuffs, just a suggestion. When do you think you'll have the car ready?"

"Take the truck," Nordmann blurted out, pointing at the rusted Datsun parked a few feet away.

"It's broke down. I've already checked it."

Nordmann looked surprised that I knew about the truck.

"No, the truck has a bad water pump," he explained. "But it will run. Used it the other day to go to town."

"I don't want to take the chance of breaking down. I think . . ."

"Alright, take the car, then," he interrupted. "Thursday night . . . Two days from now. I'll park it in the driveway. Wait till I go to bed. If you're not back by morning, I'll report the car stolen."

Up to this point he had said nothing about going to the cops. His statement worried me, but I didn't push it.

"Ah, what about giving me four or five days before reporting the car stolen?" I asked. "Maybe going to the police is not such . . ."

"Two days – I'll give you two days, then I'll report it missing."

"Sure you don't want the handcuffs?"

"No!"

"Give me a sign that the coast is clear when I come on Thursday night," I said. "If the car is loaded and ready to go, leave the light on in the back bedroom. If you're not ready, leave it off . . . Understand?"

When he didn't respond, I repeated the signals again. Nordmann nodded. The last bit of daylight disappeared and fireflies started to circle.

"Where have you been sleeping?" Nordmann asked.

“Up there, on Otter Mountain,” I said, pointing in the opposite direction from my actual camp.

“Let me get you some food to hold you over until Thursday.” Before I could say anything, Nordmann rushed inside the house. While he was gone, I remembered something. I got out a piece of blank paper and a pencil. He returned shortly with a paper bag full of food. I put the food aside, thanking him.

“You said the agents are all over town. You mean Andrews, right?” I asked.

“Yah.”

“Where exactly?”

“Oh, they’re right downtown, on the same street as the post office,” Nordmann said.

I drew a small square representing the post office on the piece of paper and sketched in the streets in the area. I tapped the pencil on the improvised map. “This is the post office. Where is the task force headquarters?”

He leaned over the map. Grabbing the pencil out of my hand, Nordmann drew a little X. “Right there,” he said.

I folded my map and put it in my pocket. I thought he might ask about my little map, but he didn’t.

Nordmann suddenly became pensive, as if he was about to say something important. “You only have to hold out for another year. The computers are going to crash on New Year’s Day, 2000. It’s called Y2K.”

“The computer thing, right,” I said.

“When the computers fail, the whole system is going to collapse,” Nordmann said, waving his hand like a tree falling over.

Y2K was the latest Collapse theory on the market, and true to form Nordmann had bought it. Professional patriots and fools like Art Bell had been selling Y2K pretty hard lately. To save space on computer hard drives, software had been programmed to recognize only the last two digits in the year. All those bank and credit card codes had to be rewritten in time for the “roll-over” from 1999 to 2000. The professional patriots speculated that the task wouldn’t be completed in time, and the entire banking and credit systems would collapse, dragging the rest of society with them.

“Sure George,” I said. “I’ll be ready for it. But first I need some food.”

Nordmann then took out a pair of rosary beads and gave them to me. “Been saying your rosary?” he asked.

“Yah, sometimes.”

“Here, let’s say a few Our Fathers and Hail Marys.” He pulled his own beads out and proceeded to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thou name . . .”

I mouthed the words, but couldn’t concentrate on the prayer. Something about his demeanor wasn’t right. After finishing the prayer, Nordmann made the sign of the cross and walked away.

“See you on Thursday,” I said. But he never turned around.

Following the ridgeline out to the overlook, I watched the intersection for the next two days. Something definitely wasn’t right about Nordmann. Whenever I sense deception, I get a little warning signal. That rosary felt almost like the kiss of Judas.

Yet Nordmann seemed to be following the plan. “It’s just nerves,” I told myself. “Don’t worry; he’ll keep his word; everything will work out fine.”

* * *

The night of July 9, 1998, was sultry. Thunder showers had passed through earlier in the day, and the earth and air were heavy with moisture. I took note of the time when Nordmann arrived home: 7:00 p.m. I sat on my hindquarters in the mallow weeds watching him through the lens of my Leupolds. He went inside.

From my position across the road, I could tell that the car was empty. With all that food I'd ordered, his tiny Corolla should look like a circus lady was sitting in the back seat. But the car was high on its springs. Dark was coming, and still no movement over there. I waited in the weeds, watching the empty car, wondering when Nordmann was going to begin loading the food.

A jolt of anxiety shot up my spine like electricity. The anxiety then turned to anger. I'd sacrificed my life for the Cause, and here this so-called Patriot wouldn't even sell me a couple hundred pounds of food. "Coward! Dog!" I said. "Enough with the Mr. Nice Guy routine! They're going to find this milquetoast cuffed to the pole in his basement with a load of shit in his pants."

I slid the bolt back on my FNC rifle to chamber a round. Crossing the road in the gap, I circled through the upper garden. The light was on in the back bedroom – the good-to-go signal. The basement door was wide open, releasing a beam of light that illuminated the hillside.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of Nordmann. He was walking to his car in the driveway. I pulled out my binoculars for a better look. His pale image stood next to the driver's side. He looked around furtively as if he knew I was watching him. Then he hopped into the car and sped away.

"I knew it! I knew it!" I kept repeating as I trotted to the open basement door. The door at the top of the stairs was locked from the other side. Several large plastic garbage bags were stacked next to the basement door. And on a nearby work bench was a note written in Magic Marker on a piece of plywood that had been nailed to the bench: "God said no on the car. Here are a few things. Use the truck or take them on foot. I will give you two days to bring the truck back, then I will go to the sheriff."

I paced back and forth, so angry I could puke. I had a feeling Nordmann would do something like that. I read his cowardly note again, this time aloud: "God said no on the car." The coward called on God to justify his actions when it was actually fear of being charged with aiding and abetting a fugitive that caused him to run away.

Well, I had two days. There was no way I could carry the food on my back. I had to use that piece-of-crap truck. I also needed more stuff inside the house, the items in the basement being insufficient. I jimmied open the bathroom window. The lights in the house were all switched on. I grabbed more vitamins, three gallons of honey, and fifty pounds of rye.

Out front, I hotwired the Datsun and backed it up to the front door. The bed was filled first, then the front seat. I poured five gallons of gasoline into the tank. After loading everything in the truck, I noticed that it leaned to one side. The right rear tire was pancake flat. Rummaging through the dusty junk in the carport, I found a hand-pump. The truck slowly rose as I pumped air into the tire.

One more thing I had to do before hitting the road. Nordmann had been kind enough to leave me a note. I thought I'd return the favor. I scribbled "Sorry you were unable to master your fear. God said the feds will never find me. I'll try to return the truck, but if I don't make it back, I'll call you on the phone and tell you where to find the truck." Reaching into my pocket, I took out five \$100 bills and laid them on top of the note.

I pulled the headlight knob on the way out of the driveway, but nothing happened, only the yellow running lights worked. Turning right, I headed down Long Branch Road, still fiddling with the light knob. The first turn was sharp. A large four-wheel drive was coming the other way partly in my lane. I swerved to get around him, then cut the wheel hard to make the turn. Crash – the load in the back shifted, nearly

flipping me into the ditch. I discovered yet another thing missing on this heap of rusted metal: spring support.

I had a bag of clothes hanging in a hemlock tree near my old camp on the Nantahala River. I'd left it there to lighten my load, and also to bait the feds if I had to do that backtrack. I could have left it there; I had plenty more clothes at Fires Creek. Why I decided to retrieve that bag of clothes is a mystery to me.

Parking in a turn-out off Old River Road, I entered the darkening woods in search of the bag of clothes. I zigzagged through the woods searching for the hemlock. There were several hemlocks and all of them looked the same in the dark. I climbed up the boughs feeling for the bag – empty. After four or five trees I was about to give up. But for some reason I kept searching. Finally I found it, but not after wasting a half hour of precious time.

The tiny Datsun's engine strained to make 20 MPH climbing up to Junaluska Gap. I downshifted into low gear. The engine roared; my Lord that truck was loud. I looked out the window and saw a firefly pass me.

(For map, see page 75.)

There was no moon to speak of. On the open road I could see okay without the headlights, but when I started up the narrow gravel road to Tuni Gap, the trees closed over the road and the only thing I could make out was a small patch of yellow gravel in front of the running lights. I got out my flashlight and drove with one hand on the wheel and the other out the window shining the light.

On the other side of Tuni Gap I discovered yet another problem with the truck: the brakes didn't function properly. I pressed the pedal and it went to the floor. Gravity took over and the engine raced. I thought for sure it would blow up. To get the brakes to work I had to pump them three times: First pump sent the pedal to the floor, second pump grabbed a little at the bottom, and the third pump slowed the death trap a little. Pumping furiously with my foot, steering with one hand, shining the flashlight out the window with the other hand – I was like one of those one-man-bands you see at the carnival.

The truck suddenly lurched into the ditch; the left half fell sideways. The axle plowed the edge off the gravel road flat – SCHHH! – creating a horrible noise. Buckets in the back tumbled out into the ditch. By some miracle the road switched back and the tires rolled onto the roadway. A few buckets lost, but still rolling.

The roads of Tusquitee were deserted. Almost there now. Rockhouse Creek Road forked off the main Fires Creek Road and immediately crossed the creek over a small concrete bridge. On the other side of the bridge, a small turn-out forked off to a landing that fishermen used for a campsite. As I approached the bridge, I could see a Coleman lantern hanging in a tree. The bright white light showed the outline of a dome tent. As I blasted over the bridge, I glanced over. There, a lone figure lay stretched out on a lawn chair.

The truck had been seen. Bad! Very Bad! If Nordmann did in fact run to the FBI, they'd put out a description of the truck to see where it went on the night of July 9. Loud enough to wake the dead, the truck would be hard to forget. The lone figure in the lawn chair was a potential witness.

There was nothing I could do about it now, no way to move the food and my equipment elsewhere. The truck had already gone beyond its limits. At any minute it could break down. I'd be lucky to make it back to Nordmann's before sunrise. That seemed like my only hope – make it back to Nordmann's house to keep him from going to the cops. Then, I needn't worry about the lawn chair guy.

I stopped in the same turnout that I'd used back in January, and hefted the buckets and boxes into the rhododendron. I coasted back down Rockhouse, trying to conserve the Datsun's dwindling fuel supply. As I went by the fisherman's camp, I looked over. The lawn chair was empty.

I felt better about the situation as I inched up the southern flank of the Tusquitee Mountains to Tunni Gap. The truck handled better without the load. During the entire journey, I'd expected the water pump to seize up. Every mile was a victory. The finish line was within sight. Hopefully, I could make it all the way to Nordmann's house, but at the very least I had to get the truck on the other side of Tunni Gap.

The gap was the dividing line between Nantahala and Tusquitee. It was imperative that I get the truck into Nantahala. If I broke down on this side of the mountains, the FBI might conclude that I was hiding somewhere in Tusquitee, somewhere in Fires Creek, which was only 10 miles west of Tunni Gap. On the other side of Tunni Gap it was a short drive to Junaluska Gap, and from there all downhill to the Nantahala River. If I could make it to the river, the feds would find the truck near my old campsite. They might concentrate their search in Nantahala, never suspecting that I was camped 20 miles away on Fires Creek.

Tunni Gap was less than a quarter mile away when the water pump seized up. The engine quit. I touched the hot wire to the bundle – whirr – whirr – whirr – but the engine wouldn't start. I was deep in it now. "With the truck broke down here the feds will certainly search Fires Creek," I thought.

I waited ten minutes before trying it again. No luck. The truck was dead. It was time to find a place to bury the carcass. To my right was an empty campground called Bob Allison. I dropped it into gear and cranked the starter – whirr – whirr – whirr. The truck slowly inched off the road into a grove of white pines, where I lodged it between two trees. On the dashboard I left a small note: "Truck broke down. Call George Nordmann at Better Way Health Foods in Andrews, North Carolina."

Dawn was bearing down on me like a freight train. I was 20 miles from the nearest phone. Calling George was no longer an option. In two days he would go to the sheriff. The sheriff would then call the task force. Concealing the truck a little better would burn up what little darkness was left. I decided to move. Having dumped everything on Fires Creek, except for a few day's supply of food, I was traveling light. I'd try to make it back to Fires Creek before the FBI started a search. Burying the food and equipment as fast as I could, I'd leave the area. But first, a little misdirection.

Going straight through the mountains to Fires Creek was suicidal. I'd try to lead their bloodhounds out of Tusquitee. It was probably a futile effort at this point, but I had to try. I shouldered the pack and ran up the road to Tunni Gap. I paced myself, breathing through my nose. Every few hundred yards, I lunged to the side of the road and rolled in the leaves, then jumped up and ran some more. Down Tunni and over Junaluska – I smeared a scent trail for their blood hounds to follow. The wet grass on the side of Junaluska Road soaked up scent like a sponge. The trail should linger for a week.

The sun bleached the darkness out of the sky. Cars raced up Junaluska on their way to work. I barely made it over the gap before traffic forced me into the woods. I hiked a small trail that ran parallel to the road as far as Appletree Campground. The Nantahala River was on the other side of the campground. I'd have to wait until dark before completing my scent trail to the old camp below Fork Mountain.

(For map, see page 123.)

I climbed the bank and hunkered down in the laurel where I could see the road. Soaking wet and tired, I wanted to sleep. But it was imperative that I monitor traffic. If federal vehicles started moving into Nantahala, it meant that Nordmann had already spilled his guts.

I had a couple of miles to go in order to string the trail back to my old camp on the Nantahala River. The idea was to convince the feds that I was hiding near the river camp in Appletree. Following the scent trail back to Appletree, they would think that I had dropped the food there on the night of July 9 and then drove to Tunni Gap to ditch the truck. There was already a well-worn path from the river camp to Nordmann's house. Their bloodhounds would quickly locate that and follow it to the river; then the trail

from the truck. Both trails converged on my old camp. That was the plan. If it worked, the entire task force would concentrate its search effort in Appletree instead of Tusquitee.

I had to break the trail at some point. After finishing the trail tonight, I'd backtrack up Junaluska Road, but instead of turning toward Tuni Gap I'd stay on Junaluska Road all the way to the outskirts of Andrews. I hoped that, while following the scent from Tuni Gap to Appletree, they'd miss the branch-off to Andrews. From Andrews, I'd cross the Valley River range into Fires Creek.

It was critical that I not leave the asphalt once I got past the turn-off to Tuni Gap. Keep in the tire treads the whole way to Andrews. Late at night there would be little traffic. This should sever the scent trail. My scent left in the grass on the side of the road would last for a week; scent left on the asphalt would last only an hour. The plan, however, was useless if Nordmann went to the feds today, or if the guy in the lawn chair reported the truck seen in Fires Creek. They would be hot on my trail by nightfall.

Thanks be to God I had food. Without the calories I'd stored up over the past two weeks I'd never have made it this far. At every opportunity, I refueled with bread, peanut butter, corned beef and oranges, probably consuming 5,000-8,000 calories in a 24-hour period.

Finally, I saw it: Nordmann in his Corolla. He was heading for his house. I held my breath, waiting for a tail. No FBI Suburbans – he hadn't gone to the cops, not yet. I had one more night at least.

After it grew dark, I walked to my old Nantahala River camp, where I waited 'til midnight, then retraced my steps to the top of Junaluska Gap. I went slow, trying to conserve my energy for the downhill trek into Andrews. Once past the turn-off to Tuni, I jogged. It was hell jogging downhill. The pack slammed into my lower back, slowly rubbing off a layer of skin. I bent my knees to reduce the jarring; soon my legs felt like Jello. I was on the verge of collapse.

No one came by, not one car. I made it to the bottom of Junaluska without having to step off the asphalt once. Up ahead the houses in Andrews crowded close to the roadway. The road bent into a sharp curve and crossed a small bridge that spanned Junaluska Creek. I jumped off the roadway into the gravel embankment that formed the bridge's abutment, taking care to step on the rocks leading into the creek. The water came up to my knees. The rocks were slick as ice. I waded upstream, each step threatening to submerge my exhausted carcass. When I had traveled far enough from the bridge, I found a large rock to perch on. Putting my head between my knees, I waited for daybreak.

My sweat-soaked clothes turned ice cold and I shook like a Spanish maraca. Then dawn came – time to move. Easing into the frigid water, I waded upstream. My body was stiff as a board.

Three thousand feet above me loomed Sassafras Knob, a prominent pimple in the Valley River range. Fires Creek was on the other side. As I began the ascent, feeling slowly returned to my extremities. It was a brutal climb, made worse in my exhausted condition. Climbing the dark northern slope, I clawed my way through the dense foliage. The shrubs served as handholds. One slip and I'd tumble 200 feet.

The trail on the crest looked used and littered with fresh piles of horse manure. I felt exhilarated being back on familiar ground. "Now, if Nordmann keeps his word, the plan should work," I told myself. "Thank God it's over." But the ordeal wasn't over; it had only just begun.

Every muscle in my body ached when I roused the next morning in Fires Creek where I'd stashed the food. My clothes were filthy and wet. On the outside I smelled like a dead dog rotting in the sun. But on the inside I felt good. I had food. Now I had to haul it 800 feet up Tarkiln Ridge and bury it. I inventoried my take. It was a decent heist: 100 gallons of rolled oats, 10 gallons of split peas, 50 pounds of rye, 15 gallons of bulgur wheat, three gallons of mung beans, five gallons of pintos, two pounds of cayenne pepper, three gallons of honey, canned corned beef and tuna fish, coconut oil, and a wide assortment of vitamins and minerals. I was looking good.

Part of me, the naïve part, wanted to believe that it was over. “Nordmann will see the wisdom of not involving the feds,” I thought. “The Forest Service will find his truck, phone him, and he’ll retrieve it – no problem. Trucks break down all the time in the mountains. Besides, George’s truck isn’t worth 20 dollars. I doubt if he’ll miss it. I’ve given him 600 dollars, which should cover all expenses. Why go to the cops?”

I rested and refitted on July 12. The next morning I began the laborious process of freighting the food up to camp. After dumping a load at camp, I spent a few minutes scanning the radio dial for news. About noon I dumped a pack load, then turned the radio on to hear “Federal agents are back in the woods of western North Carolina searching for fugitive Eric Rudolph after he reportedly stole a truck and a supply of food from a local man.”

I fell to my knees and prayed. “Lord, don’t let them win. Give me the strength to beat them. Blind their eyes, stop their ears, wreck their helicopters.”

The adrenaline started pumping again as I worked non-stop. The sweltering hot weather wasn’t helping. The muggy doldrums of summer had set in with a vengeance. For the rest of the day and long into night I lugged full packs of food up to camp, periodically stopping to listen to the radio. Bad idea, for the reports grew more sensational by the hour. “Hundreds of heavily armed agents are combing the woods looking for the 31-year-old survivalist,” said the reporter. There was that word again – “combing.” They must teach it in journalism school or something.

“Move!” I yelled. “Move faster!” After freighting the food up to camp, I went back over the trail and covered it with leaves and branches. It was 3:00 a.m. when I stumbled down to the spring for a quick wash. I stripped off my clothes and poured icy water over my body, lathered with soap, and rinsed off the filth. I put on a fresh pair of clothes and dry socks. I ate a “hydraulic” breakfast, pressing the food into my mouth and washing it down with water. Then it was back to work, hauling the supplies laterally along the slope to the caches. Those holes that I’d dug back in February now proved critical.

Early that morning the radio reported that the feds had found the truck in Tuni Gap. They were close now. The radio, however, left out important details. It did not mention when the feds had found the truck or where they were “combing” the woods. Those missing details were vital to me. Nordmann could’ve gone to the sheriff on July 11. After the sheriff alerted the task force, the feds could’ve located the truck on July 12. At that moment they could be “combing” the woods around Tuni Gap and Bob Allison Campground, fewer than 10 miles east of Tarkiln Ridge. If that scenario was correct, then they were one day behind me. “Tomorrow their helicopters will be right over my head,” I said.

An overwhelming frustration gripped me, like in a dream where danger shadows you, yet you can’t seem to run away. Your legs won’t pump fast enough. I realized how vulnerable I was. The FBI had hound dogs, helicopters, heat-seeking equipment, and hundreds of heavily armed agents available to search around the clock. I, on the other hand, could only move so fast and so far. Trying to keep myself fed, watered, and sheltered was difficult enough. Add to that the FBI’s search effort, and I was overwhelmed. Invisibility remained my only advantage, keeping outside of their search grid my only option. My one hope for staying alive was to stay several days ahead of them.

I packed about 50 pounds of food in my ruck, enough for a couple months. Plus equipment, I’d be carrying well over 120 pounds. By tomorrow I’d be long gone – on my way across the Valley to Snowbird. The plan was to lay low in the Snowbirds until the search died down. Thunderstorms should obliterate most of my scent in Fires Creek. Storms were a weekly occurrence in July; it was only a matter of time before another gully-washer pushed through.

Lying on my sleeping mat, I stared up at the sky. The heat was unbearable, but at least I was ready to leave tomorrow morning. There came a sound out of the south – twoock – twoock – twoock – twoock. I cocked my head sideways to get a better angle on the sound. I recognized it immediately.

“Huey,” I cried. A green Huey helicopter brushed the trees on the ridge to the south aiming straight for me. I ran for the rock shelter and slid underneath just as the Huey blew over my camp at tree-top level. But he didn’t stop. He flew over the Valley River Mountains toward the town of Andrews.

Back on my sleeping mat, I returned to reading one of Nordmann’s old Spotlight newspapers. I heard the crunch of dry leaves. Someone was walking up the trail from my spring. My adrenaline level was still high from the Huey, now this. I thought the helicopter and footsteps coming up the trail were connected. I couldn’t believe they had located me so fast. I wasn’t going down without a fight, though.

Grabbing my rifle, I eased the safety off with my two fingers so it wouldn’t click. Heart pounding, I took aim at the trail. A big black shaggy head came into my sight-picture: black bear. I exhaled slowly and relaxed my shoulders. I set the rifle aside – I had no time to dress a bear and no inclination to fire a shot, so I sat back and watched.

He was a young bear walking so slowly his four legs sounded like two. Having poor eyesight, bears rely almost entirely on their sense of smell. The wind sat still as a corpse. Although I was fewer than 15 feet away, the bear was unaware of my presence.

He looked as hot as I was. His shaggy under-belly was matted and dripping water. He had probably soaked in my spring before climbing the spur. Pausing momentarily, the bear stuck his brown snout up in the air and vacuumed in a huge lung-full of oxygen. I thought he had finally winded me. But he smelled something else. The bear turned and walked over to a rotten stump. Using his left paw to push and his right paw to pull, he began tearing large chunks out of the stump. A small chipmunk suddenly sprang from the stump, hanging in midair for a split second, his tiny legs pumping furiously, before falling to the ground. Fast as lightning, the bear swatted the chipmunk, pinning him where he landed. The creature emitted a high-pitched squeal. Without fully releasing pressure, the bear stuck his mouth down to his paw and cocked it up slightly, like a poker player checking his hand of cards, enough to scarf the chipmunk. His eyes rolled back in his head with ecstasy as he chewed. The chipmunk’s bones crackled like potato chips.

The bear returned to the stump and greedily tore more chunks. Out popped another chipmunk. The bear trapped and ate him in the same manner as before. He then got this look on his face that said: danger. He sniffed the air to his left, to his right, then right in my direction. He scented me now. Ever so slowly the bear turned and tippy toed – that’s right, tippy toed away. After moving 10 feet, he turned his head back to look at me, and then continued tippy toeing off the spur. It was almost human, like watching a small child sneaking cookies from the kitchen cabinet. When he was over the spur and out of sight, he ran for all he was worth.

* * *

When I started for Snowbird on the morning of July 16, I heard helicopters beating the air ahead of me. The task force was using Andrews-Murphy airport to refuel its birds; throughout the day the OH-58s came and went. Activity increased the next day as I made my way across the valley. That night, I found a good spot to watch the air show. Buzzing the runway a few feet off the tarmac was a dark blue FBI heli. He settled next to a large white fuel tank that sat between the hangers. The pilot and several men in dark T-shirts and camouflage pants hopped out. The fuel tank’s fuel line was snaked over to gas the bird. They stood around talking for a few minutes. The engine came to life with a high-pitched whine that turned into a roar as the blades began spinning. The heli once again flew the length of the runway and then lifted off into the night sky, its tail light strobing at one second intervals. He flew over Andrews and then veered east.

“Junaluska,” I said with a big smile on my face. “He’s following Junaluska Road into the Nantahala Mountains. Looks like the FBI has followed my backtrack after all.”

As I climbed into the Snowbird Mountains over the next two days, I stopped frequently to monitor the activity at the airport behind me. Like bumble bees returning to the hive, the task force helicopters refueled at the airport, then flew back into the mountains, using the same flight path: Junaluska Road. They were keeping a continuous coverage in the air somewhere back in Nantahala. “By God, the plan is working,” I thought.

Halfway down Horse Range Ridge, I pitched camp for the night. The search was far away now, the sound of the choppers muted by the Snowbirds to my rear. The past two months had burned a layer of fat off my soul. It was skinny and bare now. I’d come full circle. Starting out for Nordmann’s house not too far from where I was camped, my stomach was empty; my plan to live off the food in the blue barrel was a bust. After looking into that barrel full of fetid water, I thought I wouldn’t make it another month. Now I had a full belly and six month’s supply of food. I’d paid a heavy price for it, though. Most of my money was gone and now I had a couple hundred FBI agents on my tail.

For dinner, I peeled open a can of corned beef and stirred it into a pot of boiled mung beans and bulgur wheat. I sniffed the earthy gruel and blew on it to cool it down. “Thank you Lord.”

CHAPTER 11

Shell City, MO • 1984-86 • Church of Israel

“Focus on the front sight post,” said the range instructor. I settled in behind the heavy rifle. A small metal disc cut from the end of a water heater, the target was about 100 yards down range. “Now, breathe naturally and take your shot at the respiratory pause, the point between exhaling and inhaling.”

BOOM – the M-1 rifle punched me in the shoulder like a bully in the fifth grade. The target jolted. Excitement filled my breast as I realized that I’d hit it. Laying the rifle aside, I ran down range to have a look. The metal disc had a dime-size hole in the center. I poked my pinky finger through it and felt that the metal was warm. “Bulls-eye!” I said triumphantly.

The Patriots said there was a war coming, that traitors in the government were conspiring to surrender our national sovereignty to the United Nations. The traitors would then declare martial law and confiscate all our firearms and ration food. Those caught hoarding food or possessing “illegal” firearms would be rounded-up and thrown into a concentration camp. Everyone else would be starved into submission. The cities would descend into chaos. We had to be prepared, they said.

In the early 1980s, the Patriot Movement was rather small. Your typical group consisted of fewer than 50 people. Some groups held annual retreats, usually in the summertime. Affiliated members and guests camped out for a week, held meetings, and shot guns. Such gatherings totaled maybe a couple hundred people.

I remember attending this particular retreat in the summer of 1982 when I was 15. The group’s leader was a former board member of the John Birch Society. He had a beautiful 300-acre spread in the foothills of east Tennessee. We camped in an open field and cooked over an open fire. As was true of any Patriot gathering, there was a wide variety of individuals: vegetarians, survivalists, folks who paid for everything with gold and silver coins, renegades driving around without license plates on their vehicles, tax protesters, and home-schoolers. One guy, dressed like a cowboy, taunted the advantages of pre-modern technology. He had a horse and a pack mule and wore a pair of black-powder pistols. Said he never used a flush toilet.

In the evenings, we gathered in a half-built sheet-metal building to listen to lectures on gun rights, the United Nations, the income tax, and farm foreclosures, which were sweeping across the Midwest at that time. There was a short Sunday sermon. It was a muscular kind of Christianity, nothing like the hand-waving sob-sisters of Rock Church.

There were training exercises almost every day. They had set up stations around the property, where young men dressed in camouflage fatigues taught skills like primitive shelter construction, hand-to-hand combat, and pistol and rifle shooting. These guys were pumped. “Come down hard with the kick and shatter your opponent’s knee cap!” the hand-to-hand combat instructor yelled at an out-of-shape septuagenarian. It was almost like boot camp.

The week-long retreat was capped-off with a shooting competition. With targets placed at various ranges, the contestants fired four shots at each target and then moved on to the next one, earning points for both speed and accuracy. Everyone gathered near the back of the range, while the shooters pushed spongy yellow plugs into their ears and went through the range one at a time. Finally, it was my brother’s turn.

The previous contestants had used .223 caliber rifles (AR-15’s and Mini-14’s), jogging slowly from target to target with their muzzles safely pointed skyward. My brother was firing an HK-91 (7.62x51 NATO), a big bear of a rifle that throws out a large chunk of lead. The first station was concealed in a wood line to our right. When my brother squeezed off four rounds – BOOM – BOOM – BOOM – BOOM

– the people glanced at one another as if to say – “Is it safe?” Almost like he was shot out of a cannon, my brother burst from the trees running hard, rifle held at the ready. In unison, the spectators took a step back. At the next station, which was directly in front of the crowd, he dove into the prone position and loosed another volley of bullets down range. Up he sprang and on to the next station. He was pumped. We all were.

* * *

At 15, I wasn’t really up on my politics. I’d never seen any evidence of an impending United Nations takeover, but what did I know? I had, however, done a tour of duty in south Florida’s public schools where the teachers taught us guilt and self-hate, where drugs and violence were the norm. I no longer trusted the System. The Culture War that the Patriots spoke of was something I’d experienced first-hand. Unlike the Pentecostals, who told us to become doormats, the Patriots talked about resistance. Talk of a coming war intrigued me. For the first time in my life, I felt like I had a purpose. Preparing for the coming conflagration held an incredible attraction for me.

I grew up hating school. For years I loathed books and anything having to do with education. Sometimes I thumbed through a book, but only to look at the pictures. To me, schools were places of detention and teachers were prison guards. It was my exposure to the Patriot movement that changed my outlook. It opened my mind to the possibility of knowledge. Although most of the Patriot literature I looked at lacked depth, it raised questions that I wanted answered. If our country was in the hands of traitors, who were those traitors and how did they come to power in the first place? More importantly, what exactly was our country supposed to look like, and where did I fit into it?

These were questions I’d seek to answer when I returned home.

My neighbor Tom Branham kept a small library of books in the back room of his house. Some were organized on wooden shelves that lined the walls; the rest were in boxes stacked on the floor. Tom had started buying books at the flea market years earlier, collecting them like some people collect hubcaps. Tom never read the books, nor did he collect books on certain topics. The catalogue was an eclectic mix of everything from Chinese poetry to animal husbandry.

We didn’t have a television back then, so I spent my free time reading Tom’s dusty books. The first book I read cover-to-cover was the war memoirs of Colonel William Blackford. Scion of an old Virginia family, Blackford rode with General J.E.B. Stuart’s Confederate cavalry during the War Between the States. His was a tale of high adventure. Outnumbered and outgunned, Blackford and the grey troopers literally rode circles around their Union adversaries. Time and time again, they beat long odds to bring vital intelligence to Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. For some reason, I felt an instant attraction to the southern soldiers. They had a style and élan that was lacking in their northern opponents.

The tattered volumes revealed the world to me. Fiction didn’t interest me. I wanted to know how the world worked; therefore, I read history and biography. Reading was about more than acquiring knowledge; it was a spiritual awakening. I read about George Washington’s army at Valley Forge, freezing and starving while most of their fellow colonists looked on with indifference; about George Rogers Clark crossing hundreds of miles of swamps and wilderness to defeat the British at Detroit; about Daniel Boone fighting off Indians to open the Cumberland Gap; about Stonewall Jackson outflanking the Union Army at Chancellorsville; about Jim Bridger, the mountain man, calmly sewing his scalp back into place after having it ripped off by a grizzly bear; and about George S. Patton storming through the hedgerows of Normandy. I connected with these people on a spiritual level, and in the process discovered my true identity: I was an American, and proud of it. All the hate and guilt and lies instilled in me by Mrs. Weaver and a dozen other public school teachers disappeared. In comparing these giants (Washington, Jackson, Patton) to the pygmies (Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X, Betty Friedan) they tried to idolize, I understood where their hatred came from. It was the kind of hate that the weak have for the strong, the

mediocre have for the exceptional, and the lazy have for the industrious. In comparing what America looked like in its healthy heyday to the rotten carcass of modernity, I was able to begin my real education.

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When I turned 18, I bought a broken-down 1973 Corona from an old widow who lived in a clapboard shack down in Marble, North Carolina. Buried in the ragweed behind her house, the rusted out yellow Toyota looked ready to haul to the junkyard, but I shelled out \$150 to drag it back to my house. Determined to resurrect it from the dead, I plucked its engine out and put it on the kitchen table, where it sat for two long months. It took me a little while to figure things out, but eventually I rebuilt the thing and got it running.

With a fresh set of wheels under me, I was ready for a road trip. In the fall of 1984, my brother Joel and I set out for Nashville, Tennessee. Joel had an old friend in Nashville, or so he thought. There was a disagreement, and within a week, we were out on our butts. With no job and no place to stay, we started camping on the outskirts of Nashville at Percy Priest Lake. During the day, we swam in the lake and hung out with the Bubbas who drag raced their muscle cars across the Stones River Dam. In the evening, we dined on Dinty Moore stew with the hobos at a rest area on the side of I-40. Every Tuesday, we bought a Trader Post at the Kwick Sak to scan the Help Wanted section for jobs.

“Cooks Wanted,” the advertisement read. Having worked at my brother-in-law’s Sizzler Steak House in Florida, Joel and I had extensive experience slinging hash. The restaurant owner was a tall gelatinous man named Leon. Recently retired from managing a commercial trucking company, Leon decided to invest his retirement nest egg in fried chicken. Poor Leon probably knew a lot about commercial trucking, but he didn’t know squat about restaurants. Folks never took a shine to his chicken, even when he started giving it away for free. We were unemployed within the first month. But there were plenty of jobs in Nashville. Soon, we hired on with a construction crew that was hanging sheet rock at a day care center.

One day, Mother showed up at our apartment, her Datsun station wagon sagging under the weight of traveling bags. She said she was on her way out west to “celebrate the feast days with a tribe of Israelites.” She asked if we wanted to accompany her. Joel demurred. I said yes. Waving good-bye to Joel, I joined Mom’s convoy. Our destination: the Church of Israel in Shell City, Missouri.

A tiny farm town, Shell City sat on the western edge of the state near the Kansas border. It was in the heart of guerrilla country during the Civil War. Confederate guerrillas under William Quantrill and “Bloody Bill” Anderson played havoc on Union outposts, banks, and trains. After an especially devastating raid on Lawrence, Kansas, the district commander ordered his men to put the entire region to the torch. Folks were told to pack a wagon and clear out. The five counties south of Kansas City were laid waste to punish the people for providing food and shelter to the guerrillas. Every house and barn was put to the torch. Forever after, the area was known as the “Burnt District.”

The Church of Israel espoused a doctrine called Christian Identity. Identity was one of the latest ideas to take hold of the Patriot movement. Although most Patriots practiced some form of traditional Protestantism or Catholicism, a growing number were beginning to believe Identity. An off-shoot of an earlier movement known as British Isrealism, Identity combined elements of Protestantism, Hebrew ritual, and eugenics. Essentially, they believe that Northern Europeans are the true descendants of the tribes of ancient Israel.

The patriarch of the Shell City Israelites was Bishop Dan Gayman. At that time, Gayman was considered by many to be one of the more erudite Identity preachers. Well-read and soft-spoken, he didn’t fit the profile of the violent right-wing ideologue. Avoiding appearances of militancy, Gayman geared his ministry toward spreading the Identity message into the mainstream. He had an extensive audio-tape ministry, which is how my mother came across his teachings. After listening to some of his tapes, she

decided to visit the church for the Tabernacles Feast days. She had no commitment to Identity at the time. To her, this was just one more brief stop on her “spiritual journey.”

The church and school sat on top of limestone bluffs overlooking the muddy Osage River. The Gayman family had farmed the land since the Civil War. After the parents passed away, the farm was divided in King Lear fashion among the four Gayman brothers. Regular attendance at the church was around 30 people, half of whom were Gayman’s relations. Through his tape ministry, Gayman had managed to acquire a modest following. When we arrived, there were maybe 300 people gathered for the feast. Actually, there was little feasting. Mostly, we listened to long-winded lectures on obscure Bible verses.

During one of those interminable lectures, I noticed a lovely young lady sitting to my right. She had hazel eyes and golden hair, and this way of flipping it over one shoulder and gently twisting it with her delicate fingers. I resolved to make her acquaintance at the earliest opportunity.

Upon introducing myself, she smiled dismissively. She wasn’t impressed. Who would be? I was the driver of a 1973 Corona.

Her name was Joy. She had started coming to the church with her grandmother a few years earlier. Her grandmother was a fellow traveler in Far Right circles, a personal friend of the late Gerald L. K. Smith. Joy liked poetry, particularly John Donne and the early Elizabethans. Right away I could see that our paths were heading in opposite directions. She was on her way to Colorado College to study English Literature, while I was on my way to another dead-end job hanging sheet rock or cooking fried chicken. But I was smart and determined to win her over. Perhaps all those dusty books I’d read would come in handy after all.

Joy’s father had just bought her a Fiat convertible as a high school graduation gift. Parked in front of the church, the little white car gleamed in the autumn sunlight like a mother-of-pearl music box. Joy’s white blouse and white slacks and white-frame sunglasses matched the little white sports car.

“Cute car,” I said. “Mind if I look under the hood?”

Joy shrugged at this odd question. I popped the hood and stared into a black abyss. The Fiat’s rotary engine was coated with about a quarter inch of burned motor oil. Pretty as a peach on the outside, the Fiat was a lemon on the inside. I saw my opening.

“Ever check the oil?” I asked. Again, she shrugged, and flipped her hair. I pulled out the dip stick. It was bone dry, not a drop of oil on the stick. From a nearby tree, I snapped off a branch and pruned the leaves. I probed the engine block for oil. Feeling it hit bottom, I pulled it back out. There was maybe a half inch of muddy oil in the bottom of the pan. Her pretty little car was running on piston shavings and glue.

“Your engine is going to seize up on you if you don’t put some oil in it – soon.”

“What?” Joy gasped. “Oh no! . . . I don’t have any oil . . . What should I do?”

Retrieving a quart of motor oil from the trunk of my car, I poured it into her engine and then suggested a solution: “You’re still gonna need some clean oil and a new filter. Why don’t we drive into town and buy the stuff. I’ll change it for you when we get back.”

The closest auto parts store was in Nevada, Missouri, a good 30 miles away. “I’ll have plenty of time to make my move,” I thought. As we buzzed along the back roads of rural Missouri, I spun my little web. I told her I preferred Mozart and Shakespeare over rock ’n’ roll and Hollywood movies. I played the part of the frustrated autodidact in a world full of boors. Admittedly, it was mostly bull crap, but she seemed to be buying it, and that was all that counted in the first round of love.

The car's top was down and Joy had forgotten to put her hair up. The wind played havoc with her lovely locks. She was having a hard time trying to look cute with her hair plastered to her face. I reached over and gently gathered her hair into a ponytail and held it behind the nape of her neck. She looked over and smiled. I knew I had her.

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After the feast days, my mother returned to North Carolina. Joy went off to start the fall semester at Colorado College, and I stayed behind in Shell City, ostensibly to learn more about Identity, but actually to wait for Joy, who was expected to return in the spring for the Passover Feast. Gayman put me up in a run-down trailer parked near the corner of his property. With the Feast Days ended, the tiny church community resumed its regular routine.

Only a handful of people lived on the church property. At first, Dan had me doing odd jobs with his son Tim. Dan, however, had other plans for me. Despite having sired six kids, Dan had no one to carry on his ministry. The two oldest sons – Tim and Doug – had no interest in preaching. Both were notorious Bubbas, known for their SKOAL-dipping and pull-my-finger jokes, not the sophisticated image that Dan wanted to project. Dan seemed desperate to find someone to carry on his legacy. Little did I know, he had his sights set on me.

To be honest, I was flattered when he offered to train me for the ministry, not because I wanted to be a preacher, but rather because no one had ever offered to train me for anything. I didn't say yes, but I didn't say no either. Dan started me out as a go-for in the office, a small trailer next to the small church. I made copies of Gayman's sermons on cassette tapes and mailed them out. At night, I studied theology. The material was a mix of Identity and High Church Protestantism. There were volumes on cosmology, epistemology, Biblical exegesis, and so forth. About a month into the course I started skimming through the books, but the subjects didn't interest me. My interests ran to politics and history. Soon as I found myself nodding off to sleep, I'd push aside the theology books and pick up my copy of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*.

A thin balding man with bad posture, Dan spent most of his time at his desk, which was squeezed into a small room in the back of the office. He reminded me of a monk in the Middle Ages. Illuminated by a small reading lamp, his desk was piled high with books and papers. He sat hunched over a huge reference Bible, slowly turning the pages, pausing occasionally to underline a passage or to make a notation in his sermon book. Using a mixture of one part ancient symbolism, two parts obscure history, and three parts "creative" Biblical interpretation, he was slowly building a religion.

According to the official record, the armies of Assyria invaded Samaria in 750 B.C. and carried away the ten northern tribes of Israel. All that remained of the original 12 tribes were Judah and Benjamin. After being sold in the slave markets of Nineveh, the people of the 10 lost tribes were assimilated into Assyrian society. The 10 lost tribes disappeared from history, say the historians.

Not so fast, say the Identity believers. The 10 tribes were not lost; they merely walked to northern Europe. On the way there they somehow forgot their Israelite heritage and became the pagan Celtic-Germanic tribes of northern Europe. Three thousand years had to pass before folks like Gayman uncovered the true "Identity" of the 10 lost tribes.

Identity is actually a new version of an old idea. Heavily influenced by John Calvin's doctrine of "election," American Protestants have always thought of themselves as a chosen people on a mission from God. Our Pilgrim Fathers had a special fondness for the Old Testament story of the Israelites, how they were cast into the wilderness and fated to wander for forty years before God would finally lead them into the "Promised Land." The land, however, wasn't free. The Israelites had to fight for it; they had to conquer the nations that occupied the Promised Land, which took them centuries to accomplish. It was a bloody ethnic-religious war, as the Israelites sought to cleanse the land of foreign influence, especially the

worship of foreign gods. The Midianites, Moabites, and Canaanites were ruthlessly assimilated or extirpated at the point of the sword. When it was all over, the Israelites built a mighty kingdom that stretched from the hills of Lebanon to the deserts of Egypt. It was an underdog's story of a little people overcoming long odds to become a powerful nation. To the Pilgrims, America was both a wilderness and a Promised Land, and the Indians, French, and Spanish, whom they had to fight for possession of the land, were the Canaanites, Moabites, and Midianites.

Seen within the context of American Protestantism, Identity is an attempt to recast the contemporary racial-ethnic conflicts of America in the mold of the ethnic-religious wars of ancient Israel, with whites in the role of the Israelites, and non-whites playing the part of the Canaanites, Moabites, and Midianites. Like their ancient Israelite ancestors, the white "Israelites" of America should resist integration with the foreigners and carve out a homeland of their own, say Identity believers.

I never bought into the Identity message, not only because the history to support its 10 lost tribes theory was shoddy, but also because its reliance on the outdated concepts of eugenics made its conclusions highly problematic. I'd read and seen enough to know that our genetic make-up has little to do with forming complex personality and character traits. Genetically speaking, racial characteristics are largely cosmetic, there being no important physiological differences among the races.

Race, as we know it, is an idea, a primitive form of self-identification. However, since man uses his mind and not his genes to define himself, ideas become all important in building his worldview. And because most men live on a primitive level, the primitive idea of race remains one of the most powerful ideas in history, and only a fool would ignore its influence. Nevertheless, the key ideas of our time are ideological, political, ethical, and cultural, namely the conflict between the Left and the Right, the ideas of the French Revolution versus tradition. As I saw it, the problems in our country were being caused primarily by white liberals, a fact that the racialists have never been able to explain. Given the fact that whites espouse very different ideas about religion, politics, economics, ethics, and what have you, what is the proper "white" position on these crucial subjects? How can a white Christian nationalist have "racial solidarity" with a white socialist atheist? If the racialist responds that there are no important differences in espousing either Hinduism or Christianity, democracy or autocracy, socialism or capitalism, relativism or objectivism, then obviously his views are better suited to the study of animals rather than people because in the world of people, ideas and beliefs are paramount.

To ease me into the pulpit, Gayman asked if I would lead his congregation through Morning Prayer. On Sundays, I put on this ill-fitting suit and 1980s style skinny tie and read from the pulpit. They used the standard Book of Common Prayer. Gayman, however, had made some alterations to the text. He had gone through all the books and taped over the English words "Lord," "Jesus," and "God," and inserted the Hebrew words "Yahshua" and "YHWH." I thought it was petty. If "Lord" and "God" were good enough for Archbishop Cranmer, the author of the Book of Common Prayer, then they were good enough for me. But I agreed to lead the prayer.

* * *

I eagerly awaited the Passover Feast, when Joy would return to the camp. When it finally arrived, her visit was a complete disappointment. Throughout the entire Passover Feast she barely spoke to me. Something had happened since the last time I saw her, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Whatever we had was over. If we had no relationship, then I had no reason to stay at the Church of Israel. I planned my escape.

The Sunday after she left, I led the prayer as usual, standing before the congregation in my ill-fitting suit and skinny tie, reading from the Book of Common Prayer. Only this time, I used the Morning Prayer to announce my goodbyes. After looking at the words "Yahshua" and "YHWH" pasted into the text, I thought, "What a ridiculous act of desecration." I ignored protocol and read the words the way they

had been written 400 years ago by Archbishop Cranmer. Each time I read the word “Lord,” a gasp emitted from the pews: “Blasphemy!” It was delicious. And I was on my way out.

The whole experience with the Patriot movement taught me an invaluable lesson about the limitations of organized resistance. I saw clearly that many of the Patriot leaders were not serious people. All their talk about “taking back the country” was just talk. And their groups were crawling with government informants. In the future, as I became more militant, I decided to keep a safe distance from any organized group. I maintained loose contacts with a few individuals in the non-Identity Patriot movement, but never again associated with any particular group. (This was one of the reasons I remained active for so long.)

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Back in North Carolina, I enrolled for fall semester classes at Western Carolina University (WCU), a small college outside Sylva. Another menial job didn’t seem appealing, so I thought I’d try my hand at education once again. It was 1985. Dan Marino was shattering NFL records and Ronald Reagan was a year into his second term. I rented a flea-bag apartment off the Sylva strip and commuted to class every day in my ’73 Corona.

I came to WCU in search of knowledge. Inspired by the books I’d read, I couldn’t wait to delve into the vast archive of Western Civilization. For some reason, I thought college would be different from those worthless public schools that I had attended. I was naïve. No one at WCU cared about learning, least of all the students. Expanding their knowledge was the last thought floating around their pickled brains. To them, earning a degree was about getting a better job in order to make more money so they could buy a lot of stuff. Maintaining a high grade-point average was a purely quantitative endeavor. Besides punching their ticket into the middle class, the college experience was about inebriation and fornication, an orgy of mediocrity.

The instructors at WCU followed a rote curriculum, their lectures sounding like insurance seminars. The only time they deviated from the script was to add an extra measure of indoctrination. The instructors had graduated from college in the late 1960s, when they had imbibed the radical politics of the New Left, along with a great deal of LSD. Decked out in clogs and a ratty granny dress, Mrs. Schwartz was typical. About every week she treated us to a foaming-at-the-mouth diatribe on the evils of Ronald Reagan, corporations, or Christianity.

Howard Zinn was all the rage back then. His book *A People’s History of the United States* had just come out and quickly became the standard text for teaching “progressive” history. A Marxist, Zinn believed that the history of all societies is the history of class struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. Invariably, it is the oppressors who write the history of any era. American history, Zinn argued, is largely propaganda written by rich white Europeans to cover up the many crimes they committed against Indians, blacks, Jews, Asians, women, and workers.

According to the oppressors, Columbus discovered America and brought civilization to a backward, barbarous continent. And, later, men like George Washington and James Madison created a nation that now offers individuals unprecedented freedom and opportunity. America, the country that put a man on the moon, represents the pinnacle of human progress.

Fairy tales, said Zinn. Rather than being uncivilized barbarians, the Indians created cultures that were far more advanced than the greedy, brutish culture of Europe. The typical Indian lived in a village or city cleaner and more complex than squalid cities like London or Paris. Because of their superior hygiene and overall passive demeanor, Indians produced populations in the Americas that numbered 75 million. (Zinn and others like him deliberately inflated the Indian population in order to make their reduced numbers in the post-Columbian era seem like genocide.) Tribes like the Iroquois even practiced a form of democracy while Europeans still espoused the Divine Right of Kings. Indian society was strictly

communist, there being no such thing as private property. Tribal warfare was rare. Unlike the Europeans who never tired of trying to dominate nature, the Indians “lived in harmony with nature.”

Ten thousand years of paradise came to an abrupt end when the Europeans arrived in the New World, wrote Zinn. Motivated by greed for gold, the Europeans enslaved the natives and stole their land. Schooled in the habits of peace, the docile natives were no match for the warlike bearded Europeans. Those natives who were not murdered outright died of the European’s smallpox and measles, diseases that were deliberately spread among the natives to reduce their numbers. Tens of millions died in the holocaust, Zinn claimed.

Our class at WCU was assigned to write an essay on Zinn’s first chapter, the one dealing with early European-Indian contact. I went to the library and found an old biography of Columbus, as well as several old volumes on American history. I prepared my essay carefully.

Zinn’s book is a pack of lies, I wrote. From start to finish, Zinn distorted the facts in order to suit his purpose. As a propagandist, he chose to use only those facts that fit into his anti-European agenda and discarded the rest. The early European explorers and settlers were certainly not choirboys, but, then again, neither were the Indians. Furthermore, the New World was hardly the egalitarian paradise described in Zinn’s book. The Indians were anything but pacifist tree-huggers.

When Columbus’s fleet dropped anchor off the coast of San Salvador, I wrote, they met members of the Arawak-speaking Taino tribe. Originally from the South American mainland, the Arawaks had invaded the Caribbean Islands about a century earlier, conquering the Siboney people. As was true of most tribal warfare, the invaders killed most of the Siboney men, taking the women and children as slaves. By the time Columbus showed up in 1492, it was the Arawak’s turn to be conquered, not at the hands of the Europeans, but, rather, by another tribe of warlike Indians called the Caribs. The Caribs were capturing one island at a time, killing, enslaving, and sometimes eating the defeated Arawaks. The Arawaks of San Salvador were actually happy to see the Spanish. Seeing the power of the European muskets and cannons, they hoped to enlist the Spanish as allies in their war against the Caribs. It seems that Zinn’s paradise was lost long before the Europeans arrived.

And so it was throughout the rest of South and North America – tribal warfare was the norm, I wrote, and all the major tribes acquired their territory through naked conquest just like the Arawaks and the Caribs.

And what about hierarchy, slavery, and economic exploitation? These were as common in the New World as in the Old World. Every tribal group captured slaves, traded slaves, and kept slaves. The Aztec emperors, for example, basically owned every man, woman, and child within their domain. Even the lowliest serf in Europe enjoyed more rights and protections than an Aztec nobleman. War was not only frequent for the Aztecs, it was part of their religion. The emperors maintained a constant state of war in order to ensure a constant supply of war prisoners. They had no concept of ransoming or exchanging their captives, as was common practice in Europe. Instead, they used their war prisoners as human sacrifices. The Aztecs believed that the smoke from burning human hearts pleased their gods. Without a constant plume of such smoke, their gods would grow angry and cause their crops to fail, and the world would come to an end. Bound and gagged, the prisoners were led to the altar where the sacred fire was kept burning. The priests then smashed open their chests with an axe and cut out their still-beating hearts and toss them onto the flames. Those enlightened Aztecs!

Nor did the Europeans steal the land from the Indians or take it through outright conquest, I continued. In nearly every instance of initial contact, the Europeans formed trading agreements or purchased the land from the Indians – agreements that both sides considered beneficial. As the Europeans became more numerous and more powerful, frictions arose. The agreements broke down. Responding to real or imagined abuses, the Indians often attacked European settlers. No one was spared in such attacks. Men, women, and children were ruthlessly slaughtered, their bodies oftentimes mutilated. After

Jamestown's founding in 1607, the English colonists lived in relative peace with the local Indians for over a decade. This abruptly changed when the Chief Powhatan died. His brother Opachancanogh, who never liked the colonists, became chief. His first act as Chief was to organize a surprise attack on the colony. Almost half the colony's population – 347 men, women and children – was horribly slaughtered. Such terror tactics were common in Indian warfare, the strategy being to strike fear into the hearts of the enemy. What had worked against other Indians only infuriated the Europeans, who retaliated with overwhelming force. The Indians were invariably defeated. As a result of each Indian war, the Europeans acquired more territory. This was a pattern repeated dozens of times during the next three centuries. This is how the United States came into being.

Despite having it in their power to actually exterminate the Indians, the Europeans never did so. Instead, our country has made the Indians into a privileged social class. Indians now control more land per capita and receive more government hand-outs than any other group. That's a far better deal than the Arawaks gave to the Siboney, or the Caribs gave to the Arawaks, or the Aztecs gave to the Mayans. No other culture has taken such pains to deal magnanimously with their defeated enemies.

The fact of the matter is that every square foot of ground on this planet has come down to its present owner through war and conquest. Had Zinn argued that the Europeans were the latest conquerors in a long line of conquerors to take possession of America, he could have retained some measure of credibility. But to cast the Indians as the "innocent victims" of the "evil" Europeans is a lie. As for me, I thank God that it was my ancestors who were victorious and the New World now belongs to a culture that produced the U. S. Constitution and put a man on the moon, rather than the culture that kept a bonfire of burning hearts in order to appease their gods.

I received a "C" on my essay. The research and writing alone deserved an "A." Giving me that grade was clearly an act of bias, and not even concealed bias. The instructor said my essay amounted to "hate speech" and warned me not to engage in such heresy ever again or I would be reported to the Dean for possible expulsion. I couldn't believe it. I'd always been told that the university was a place that encouraged free speech. What a fool I was.

The experience with Zinn's book opened my eyes. I'd heard these same lies my whole life, going all the way back to the third grade, listening to Mrs. Weaver ramble on about the Navajo and "Brown Pride" and Muhammad Ali. But I'd never really seen these lies articulated until I got to college and read *A People's History*. The book is pure communist propaganda. And I had no idea that they were imposing these lies as a form of thought control.

It's natural for people to embellish their past, to accentuate the merits of their ancestors and ignore their faults. This is true of families as well as nations. Historians often conceal their nation's dirty laundry in order to protect the reputation of their kinsmen. Liberals argued that Zinn was trying to air out America's dirty laundry, to tell the unvarnished truth about our past – the good, the bad, and the ugly. No, this wasn't what Zinn set out to accomplish, because the poisoned pen that he wielded so viciously against Europeans was never once lifted against the non-Europeans. His book is one long polemic, with rich, whites, capitalists, Christians, and Europeans always in the role of villains; and poor, non-whites, labor unions, socialists, and non-Europeans always playing the part of the victims.

On a deeper level, Zinn's book is a genocidal assault upon the American people, a premeditated attempt to destroy the American identity. They say that a man who suffers amnesia loses his identity, that until he recovers his memory he can never truly be himself. Just as the individual's memory constitutes the most essential aspect of his identity, a people's history is the essential part of its identity. When a people loses its history, it loses its identity. Zinn set out to erase our cultural narrative and replace it with a false one. The communists have used this same tactic in every country where they have come to power. They erase the nation's traditional history and replace it with dialectical materialism, rich versus poor, black versus white, women versus men – history seen through the prism of class warfare.

I used to scoff at those Patriots who said that communists had infiltrated our country. As it turns out, I was looking for the wrong kind of communist. I had this stereotypical image of a communist from watching movies like Rambo and Red Dawn, in which commies roamed in drab uniforms shouting slogans and carrying AK-47s. Zinn looked nothing like that jackbooted caricature. Despite appearances, Zinn was an enemy within our gates. I realized that he posed a far greater danger to America than the guy with the AK-47. He looked like any other American, and as such, had no reason to hide. The Constitution that he despised so much provided him ample protection. Having open access to the institutions of our society, he was much more dangerous than a million guys with AK-47's, a far greater threat to the nation than a fleet of Soviet submarines. Why? Because Zinn was an open enemy of the Constitution and our way of life, and yet here he was, a respected professor of history, designing the curriculum that was being taught to an entire generation of Americans. It was unbelievable.

Now that I knew what to look for, I began to notice Howard Zinns everywhere. Zinn, as I discovered, was a common type in academia: frustrated communists destroying capitalist society from within. Another Marxist academic noted for his outspoken hatred of America was professor of linguistics Noam Chomsky. Zinn and Chomsky were actually old comrades. Back in the 1960s, they organized anti-war demonstrations. While American boys were dying by the thousands in Vietnam, Zinn and Chomsky paraded through the streets of Manhattan waving a Viet Cong flag. Both were prominent figures in the New Left and very influential in shaping the minds of the men and women who now occupy the highest offices in the land. Another enemy within our gates was Harvard professor of law Lawrence Tribe, considered by many on the Left to be the nation's foremost "expert" on the so-called "living Constitution." These were not maverick professors on the fringe of an otherwise conservative establishment. On the contrary, Zinn, Chomsky, and Tribe were and are representative of the establishment in academia today.

It was clear to me that a college education had little to do with learning and a lot to do with indoctrination. The communists didn't have to take America by force; they were taking it slowly through a process of reeducation. A new orthodoxy was being promulgated in the schools. Left-wing ideologues like Zinn, Chomsky, and Tribe were building a new nation in the minds of the youth.

If you wanted to avoid this Marxist indoctrination, you had to study business, engineering, or science. I didn't want to study business, engineering, or science. Finishing out that semester at WCU, I registered for classes in the spring, but after the holiday break I never went back. My college education was over.

* * *

Joy had started writing again. The relationship that I thought was off apparently had wandered back on again. Every day I checked the mailbox for Joy's perfume-scented lavender letters. Her father owned a business in Arkansas. To earn extra money, Joy worked there during the summer break. She asked if I wanted to come out and help. Of course, I said yes.

After selling my beat up Toyota, I bought a new Yamaha Seca 550. Fast, sleek and red – the motorcycle definitely improved my image. Fitted out in my black leather jacket and full-face helmet, I looked like "Mad Max." Built for sport, the motorcycle didn't travel long distances very well. By the time I reached Arkansas, I was walking like Evel Knievel after a particularly hard jump.

Nestled in the Ozark Mountains, Eureka Springs used to be a famous resort town back in the 19th century. The area is rich in mineral springs. Wealthy flatlanders flocked to Eureka Springs to "take the cure." By the early 1980s, the town had become a smaller version of Branson, Missouri. Evangelical Christians came to visit the local Passion Play and a 100-foot statue of Jesus. Country music fans came for the live shows at one of several music halls in town.

Joy's father ran a boarding house outside of town that catered to the church groups that came for the Passion Play and the big statue of Jesus. Behind his house were four or five dormitories furnished with bunk beds. It wasn't the Marriot, but the place was clean and, for the same price as a handful of motel rooms, a church group could rent a dorm big enough to hold the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. In the morning, a continental breakfast was served, on the house.

Joy cleaned the dorms and prepared breakfast for the guests. I did maintenance work, fixing old picnic benches and unplugging stopped toilets. During our down time, we explored Eureka Springs together on my bike. She would squeeze me tight when I leaned into the curves, so I took a lot of curves. On Independence Day, we went to see the local fireworks show. We spread a blanket on the grass and laid there on our backs watching the fireworks explode overhead. I rolled over and gave her a kiss. It was young love in high season.

Some mornings Joy didn't come in to work and would sleep most of the day. I didn't know that much about mental illness, but it was obvious that she suffered from depression. One day she was bouncing off the ceiling, happy as a hamster on a wheel, and the next day she curled up in bed, depressed. It was a Jekyll and Hyde thing. Like tripping a switch. Bipolar, they call it.

Joy's parents had divorced when she was a little girl. It was an acrimonious split, ending in a joint custody arrangement. In those days, Joy lived with her mother in Ohio during the school year, and with her father in Arkansas during the summer break. The divorce was a constant topic of our conversations. She obsessed over the idea that neither parent truly loved her, that both were using her to get back at the other. About half of my peers were children of divorce. Most seemed to compartmentalize the divorce, to bury the pain deep inside. Not Joy – she picked at it like a scab, as if she were to blame for her parents splitting up.

Before I left for North Carolina, we swore our undying love for one another. We talked about marriage, not a formal proposal, just a vague commitment. The depression was something I was willing to deal with. We were in love and that was all that mattered.

That winter the lavender letters stopped coming once again. Joy had severed communications. When I tried calling her at Colorado College, her roommates made excuses why she couldn't come to the phone. A few silent months passed, then out of the blue she sent me a small note announcing her intention to visit me in North Carolina.

After flying into Charlotte, Joy rode a Greyhound Bus over to Asheville, where I picked her up at the Tunnel Road bus station. I remember it was raining that day, and the smell of diesel fuel was thick in the air. Excited to see her, I went in for a kiss but she quickly turned her head, leaving me with a face full of hair. It was a bad sign.

Joy stayed with us at the house in Nantahala for a couple of days. We hiked up to Lowing Bald. She didn't say a word the whole way there. Reaching the summit, I boosted her up into a gnarled oak tree so she could have a better view. I climbed up, and we sat in silence looking at the grey winter mountains. She was waiting, and I knew what for. She would deliver the fatal blow on the last day. But like a condemned man, I kept hoping for a last minute reprieve. It never came.

The next morning she sat beside me and told me it was over, that we "lived too far apart," that "long distance relationships never work," that it was "time to move on." Tears streamed down her cheeks, and I wiped them away with my thumb.

As she boarded the bus for Charlotte, I said goodbye, but she never looked back. It was the last time I ever saw Joy.

Joy later married and had two children. She was happy for a while. The young couple fell on hard times, which seemed to exacerbate Joy's depression. One day, she loaded her two little boys into the car

and drove to a state park in Louisiana. Parking in a secluded spot, she attached a garden hose to the car's exhaust pipe and snaked it through a crack in the window. She locked the doors and left the engine running. Park Rangers found the bodies the next day. Her father wanted them buried together, so he had a special coffin built. Flanked by her two children, Joy was laid to rest at a cemetery in Skokie, Illinois.

Over the years, girlfriends came and went, but relationships were never quite the same after Joy. My skin thickened a little, enough to stop tender sentiments from getting inside. I guess I never trusted love again.



Clockwise from left: Eric's mother and father on their wedding day, 1958; Eric, age 3, with his older brother Daniel in New Smyrna Beach, Florida; Eric camping out in a truck tire.





Clockwise from above: The Rudolph family, with Eric on the right in front of his mother; Eric at bat, age 12; The Rudolph kids romping with the Hensel boys on a visit to Nantahala, 1974 (Eric, age 8, is in the front row, far left. "I was in paradise," said Eric); Family friend Tom Branham.





Clockwise from above: Eric's first chicken hunt while visiting Tom Branham in Nantahala; In 1981, the Rudolph family purchased their Nantahala home, which Eric helped Dan renovate; Their first winter in the new homestead (*left to right:* Dan, Mom, Eric's younger brother Jamie, Eric).



The perfect couple: Eric with lovely Joy in Shell City, Missouri.



Eric later bought a Yamaha and headed to Eureka Springs, Arkansas, to be with Joy.



Eric in the army, Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, 1988. *Below:* After the army, Eric settled back in Nantahala, shown here with his brothers (left to right: Joel, Eric, Dan).



Clockwise: Eric and his mom visited Jamie in New York, late 1997, shortly before the Birmingham bombing (this photo was used by the FBI on its Ten Most Wanted poster); Eric and Mom in Times Square; Eric in his cell in the federal supermax prison in Florence, Colorado.





Above: Snowbird Creek. *Below:* Grain silos and Airport Road near Andrews.





Above: Fires Creek. Below: Tarkiln Ridge.



CHAPTER 12

Snowbird, NC • 1998-99 • Vexing the Southeast Bomb Task Force

All I needed was one good storm to obliterate my scent trail from Fires Creek. But very little rain had fallen since I'd left George Nordmann's truck at Tuni Gap. I looked up at the sky like a dirt farmer in the desert. Once or twice the clouds mounded and darkened, wind swished through the tree tops, and tiny rain drops peppered the bone dry leaves. But that was it. The clouds blew away and the sun came out. I desperately needed real rain, a gully-washing Appalachian thunderstorm.

Little did I know western North Carolina was entering its worst drought in recorded history. My luck couldn't have been worse. Not only did I need the rain to cover my tracks, I needed it to grow acorns to eat and to fill the small springs that I depended upon for water. In the summer of 1998, a bubble of hot, dry air settled over southern Appalachia. In an area that averages 60 inches of precipitation every year, less than half that would fall in the years ahead. The drought plagued me like some ancient curse. It would severely affect my ability to survive.

My camp in the Snowbirds was approximately 11 straight-line miles across the valley from Fires Creek. I could feel the feds breathing down my neck once again. I could've moved farther away, but I didn't want to. From the crest of the Snowbirds I had a bird's-eye view of Andrews and the task force operations. I felt safer knowing what they were up to and where they were searching. I made a temporary camp on the north slope of Horse Range Ridge above Eller Mill Creek. From there it was a relatively short hike to the main ridge. On the southern flank of Billy Top, a sharp spur hooked down into the valley like a crooked finger. A large oak tree with a limb jutting out toward Andrews provided an excellent observation post.

The floor of the valley crawled with activity. Traffic jammed Main Street in Andrews. Media satellite trucks were parked bumper-to-bumper in the Save-A-Lot parking lot, their retractable antennas extended skyward. The task force headquarters was over the horizon somewhere downtown. Low ridges obstructed my view of the airport. Every so often a chopper emerged from behind the ridge, flew over Andrews, then veered southeast up Junaluska. "Still in Nantahala," I said. "They're not searching Fires Creek, not yet."

On the fourth day I watched an old Huey blast over the Valley River range. He descended into the valley and disappeared behind the low ridges. I recognized it as the same helicopter that had buzzed my camp on Fires Creek. The ancient Huey lifted off a few hours later and flew south. "Not a searcher," I concluded. "Probably a shuttle from the FBI's main office in Atlanta."

* * *

Relying on tiny fragments of information gleaned from the radio, I was able to piece together a rough picture of the task force's operation. They were concentrated in Nantahala; I knew that much. The details were fuzzy, though. It was only after my arrest in 2003 that I was able to fill in the details of what happened during those hectic days in the summer of 1998.

As it turned out, Nordmann had kept his word. He waited two days before calling the sheriff on July 12. The sheriff, of course, called the task force. The FBI hauled Nordmann in and grilled him for two days. He told them everything, except the part about his agreeing to wait two days before reporting his truck missing. It was an important omission, and I thank him for that. For those two days allowed me to escape.

The day after the FBI questioned Nordmann, a Forest Service agent found the broken down Datsun at Bob Allison Campground, just west of Tuni Gap. The search began in earnest. Bloodhounds were put on my trail. I don't know whether they followed the trail from the truck or the trail from Nordmann's

house, or both, but either way, the hounds led them back to my old camp on the Nantahala River. Their entire force converged on the site, exactly where I wanted them. The fresh scent I'd left on the night of July 9, thrashing through the dark woods searching for that bag of clothes tied up in the Hemlock tree, convinced the dog handlers that I was somewhere nearby. That fresh scent, which I hadn't planned on leaving, sealed the deal.

To the trackers, those fresh trails zigzagging in the woods seemed to indicate that I had hastily unloaded the food there and then drove the truck to Tuni Gap.

The FBI established a field headquarters just down the road at Appletree Campground. They hauled in trailers, erected tents, and cleared a helipad for their choppers. They blocked off the Old River Road and posted sentries at both ends. The feds saturated the area with manpower and machinery. Hundreds of agents were tasked to run the ground search. To reinforce the trackers, they flew in the notorious Hostage Rescue Team, the same unit that had murdered the Weavers on Ruby Ridge. North Carolina Fish and Wildlife agents acted as guides. The local sheriff's department provided deputies to man roadblocks and patrol the roads of Nantahala. In the air, the task force had several choppers (OH-58s) using Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) to penetrate the forest canopy. The helicopters hovered above the trees, scanning the ground for camp fires and body heat. The whole thing resembled a military operation.

In what was to become a daily routine, the Southeast Bomb Task Force held a press briefing at a gazebo across the street from their Andrews headquarters. Slated to retire soon, Agent-In-Charge Woody Anderson basked in the limelight. Washington had assigned Anderson to head up the search effort as part of a hearts-and-minds effort to win over the locals. With his frequent use of barnyard metaphors and coon hunting analogies, Anderson spoke the language of the rural South. At the briefings, Anderson always sounded cocksure and confident: "We're 24 hours behind Mr. Rudolph . . . He has used up all of his luck . . . We were brought here by Eric Rudolph. We will leave here when we leave here with him."

The FBI opened up a hotline and conducted a new round of interviews. Anyone wanting to talk had a couple of agents willing to sit down and listen. Mostly, it was just blabber. The search was the biggest thing that had ever happened in Nantahala. Many folks were not going to miss the opportunity to get involved. But a couple of the interviews caused the agents to sit up and really listen. One old schoolmate, whom I hadn't talked to in over 18 years, claimed to have accompanied me on "survival training exercises." He claimed that I had "underground shelters" already prepared for the day when I "planned to run from the FBI." His interview was a complete fabrication, but the feds bought every word of it. Another neighbor told the agents that I was particularly fond of fishing and hunting along the Nantahala River, near where the task force was searching (which was true).

Anderson and his profilers gathered all of this information together: (1) trails leading from the truck and from Nordmann's house to the campsite on the Nantahala River, (2) fresh scent left at the campsite while looking for that bag of clothes, and (3) tales of survival exercises and underground shelters. They concluded that I was somewhere in Appletree. When their helicopters and bloodhounds couldn't find me above ground, they suspected that I must be hiding below ground in one of those underground shelters. Everything seemed to suck them into those empty woods along the Nantahala River. I couldn't have planned it that way. God was behind it.



Figure 8 Main Area with FBI Locations

Each day they didn't find me roused the feds to redouble their efforts. They trucked in more men, more machinery, and more dogs. Trainees from the FBI center at Quantico were choppered in to Andrews, suited up in camo and sent into the woods. Freelance "wilderness experts" hired their services to the task force. When the number of dog crews in the woods was thought to be insufficient, the task force asked the Georgia Department of Corrections to loan them 80 officers and several bloodhounds. National Guard Medivac helicopters joined the effort. Within a couple of weeks, Enderson had over 200 people involved in the manhunt.

Meanwhile, the media increased its coverage. Like Enderson, they were certain I wouldn't last long. But when the search went into its second week, the media became intrigued. The media began to speculate that accomplices and local sympathizers were helping me. How else could I have avoided such a massive manhunt? Must be hiding in someone's basement. Satellite trucks packed the narrow streets around the gazebo. Reporters anxiously awaited Enderson's daily briefings. The tiny town of Andrews had never witnessed anything like it.

Enderson realized his mistake after two weeks of fruitless searching. He wasn't 24 hours behind me. His tone then began to change. He was no longer cocksure or confident. His sound bites became downright equivocal: "The woods we are searching are so thick it's hard to see five feet in front of your face . . . Mr. Rudolph has specialized knowledge of the terrain . . . It could take us months to find him."

Enderson's early statements and the massive build-up had committed the FBI to catching me sooner rather than later. "The FBI always gets its man," said their famous motto. Well, the FBI hadn't gotten its man, despite having unleashed a fleet of helicopters and an army of agents. The credibility of the bureau was on the line. And now millions of people were following the progress of the search on TV. The task force couldn't just pack up and return to Atlanta. They had to find me at all costs.

Out of desperation, the feds called on the public's help. Early in the search, Enderson had cautioned civilians to stay out of the task force's search grid. But as the air went out of his early bloated pronouncements, he changed his mind. Now, he encouraged people to get directly involved. Enderson

pitched the \$1 million reward for my capture. He emphasized that in order to collect it, a conviction was unnecessary. The government would pay out \$1 million for my apprehension – no questions asked.

The reward was unusual for modern times. Typically the government obtains a conviction before it pays out a reward. The reason for this is to prevent suspects turning up dead before trial. This was common practice in the old days when a reward was posted on a suspect under the phrase “dead or alive.” Bounty hunters found it convenient to kill suspects on sight rather than risk having them escape on the way to the jail house. To ensure that the suspect ended up in the courthouse rather than the morgue, authorities started paying rewards only after a conviction. In my case the government ignored that common practice. They were offering \$1 million, dead or alive.

Dozens of so-called bounty hunters descended on Nantahala. Search teams began to run into Bubbas bearing double-barrel shotguns and wearing Lynard Skynard T-shirts. An accidental shooting seem inevitable.

Far more troubling for the task force were the many open expressions of sympathy for me. Back in February, at the beginning of the search, many brave people told reporters that they supported my actions against the abortionists in Birmingham. One guy sold T-shirts at the Murphy swap meet that read “Run Rudolph Run.” As the search and media coverage intensified in late July, such sentiments became commonplace. Locals on the streets of Andrews told reporters that defending unborn babies from abortionists was justified. My surfacing to get food caused quite a few folks to offer their assistance: “If Rudolph came to my house, I’d give him food,” said one of my former neighbors. The marquee of a restaurant asked people to “Pray for Eric Rudolph.”

Such widespread sympathy for someone who had attacked the sacred “right” of abortion frightened the liberal reporters. Nothing scares liberals like armed rednecks in the Heartland expressing incendiary ideas. The media commissars in New York ordered their flunkies on the scene to spin the story “correctly.” Pretty soon the reporters started talking about “mountain culture,” how the hill folk were “clannish and hostile to outsiders.” Resistance to authority was part of the culture. It had nothing to do with abortion. “Rudolph is a local boy who has run afoul of the law, and naturally his kinfolk are coming to his side,” they said.

To coincide with the media spin the task force designed its own disinformation campaign. The FBI profilers suggested various public relations strategies to change the perception of the case from that of a politically motivated attack on abortion to that of a common crime. They acknowledged that there were a lot of people who “celebrated” the bombings of the abortion clinics and the gay night club. “Rather than seeing Rudolph as a criminal, many think of him as a kind of folk hero,” the profilers said. Most troubling for the investigation, the folks “expressing such sympathy are not violent extremists.” For the most part “they are ordinary citizens. George Nordmann is typical in this respect; by all accounts he is a devout Christian, a family man, a law-abiding citizen. Yet because of his opposition to abortion, he felt motivated to help Rudolph.” Obviously, such anti-abortion sentiment could work against the investigation.

To win over the locals, agents had to be on their best behavior, the profilers said. “Agents have to realize that they are diplomats as well as investigators.” Serious consideration should be given before serving search warrants and subjecting people to harsh interrogation methods. The profilers suggested that the task force work closely with the media. If the media did a human interest story showcasing a local law enforcement officer it could work wonders, or a hillbillies and hound dog piece about one of the dog handlers. Put a picture of him and his dog in the local papers, they suggested.

The profilers also suggested using the media to demonize me. After my encounter with Nordmann, an FBI sketch artist sat down with him and did a composite drawing. The drawing, which incorporated many of the physical changes that I had undergone since becoming a fugitive, was quickly released to the media.



Releasing the sketch was a mistake, said the profilers, for it made me look “handsome” and “sympathetic.” Pictured with long hair and a full beard, I “resembled a common likeness of Jesus Christ.” Since the “evidentiary value” of the sketch was negligible, the profilers suggested making “subtle changes” to the composite. With a few strokes of a drawing pencil, the artist could alter the likeness to “emphasize malevolence.” Then, the updated sketch could be released to the public. (To his credit, Enderson never adopted this particular suggestion).

People were confused by these mixed messages. On the one hand, the media was suggesting that Appalachia had an endemic outlaw culture. On the other, the task force was trying to appeal to the law and order sentiments of the community.

Actually, the people of Appalachia are extremely patriotic and pro-law and order. Practically every family has at least one member in law enforcement or serving in the military. In the 1990s you could’ve counted the number of real outlaws in Cherokee County on one hand. The highlanders, however, do have little tolerance for big government. Very few take welfare. But this independent streak doesn’t include tolerance for common crime. Thieves are universally despised. Consequently, doors are left unlocked and keys are left in car ignitions. And the murder of a police officer during the commission of a crime will elicit no sympathy from the mountain people.

The highlanders, however, do have a long history of resisting unjust authority. The Over Mountain men gave the British Army its comeuppance at King’s Mountain. Mountaineers fought against the coal and timber companies. In the 1990s they were fighting intrusive environmental laws and pettifogging zoning laws. The “don’t tread on me” credo is part of highlander DNA.

The reason why so many folks offered to give me food and shelter, in defiance of the law, was their hatred of abortion. Anti-social behavior among the mountain people is rare, but hatred of abortion is nearly universal. Conservative Southern Baptists have dominated the highlands for generations. For the most part the folks offering to help me were tax-paying, law-abiding, church-going citizens. And that was precisely what worried the FBI and the liberal media.

Half of the agents in the task force believed I was hiding in an underground shelter. The other half thought I was hiding in someone’s basement. These latter agents knew that Nordmann had lied to them about the truck. He knew more, and they wanted to squeeze it out of him. They wanted to charge him with aiding and abetting a fugitive and threaten him with prison. Enderson and the profilers said no. Nordmann was well liked in the community. Threatening or arresting him would turn local sentiment against the task force. The benefits of playing good cop far outweighed the benefits of turning bad. Be nice, they counseled. Show the locals that the government was the good guy here. And if I was hiding in someone’s basement maybe they would hand me over to the task force.

In the back of Enderson’s mind, he saw Ruby Ridge and Waco. He feared another incident. Having recently handled the Montana Freeman stand-off without shooting any women or burning any children, the feds were determined to bring me in without causing any collateral damage. But each day that they didn’t find me caused them to expand their search grid. Soon they were searching in people’s backyards.

Anonymous tips sent heavily armed agents into people's homes. Choppers hovered over houses, spooking cattle and horses. The locals were afraid. Sooner or later someone was going to get shot.

* * *

In late August, the embassy bombings in Africa forced the task force to downsize its operations. Agents returned to Washington to cover the posts of those agents assigned to the African investigation. This gave Anderson and his profilers an opportunity to try a different strategy. Having no luck finding me with helicopters and hound dogs, they thought perhaps someone could talk me out of the woods. But who? They knew I wouldn't listen to an FBI negotiator. They needed a Judas Goat, someone to lead me to the slaughter. Trying to recruit my mother or brother got them nowhere. Both turned them down flat. Eventually they called Lieutenant Colonel Bo Gritz. He had managed to talk the Weavers off Ruby Ridge back in 1992. Maybe he could work his magic with me, they thought.

A Vietnam-era Green Beret, Gritz had a history of political theatrics. He was a consummate bullshit artist. Back in the early 1980s, Bo and several of his friends were arrested in Thailand after staging a mission into Laos, purportedly to rescue U.S. POW's that they believed were still being held by the Vietnamese in remote jungle prison camps. Gritz's stunt created an international incident. The operation was his brain child. Being a natural pitchman, Gritz received funding from a variety of sources, including celebrities such as Clint Eastwood and William Shatner.

But according to a few of those involved, Gritz never intended to go through with it. He gathered men and equipment in Thailand but made no serious operation plans. And authorities were mysteriously tipped-off about the "mission." Thai police swepted in and arrested several of Gritz's team. The team made speeches in court and did media interviews, not about the phantom jungle camp that Gritz had supposedly identified, but about the POW MIA issue in general. Many felt that Gritz had staged the whole thing to pressure the State Department to reopen the issue with the Vietnamese.

Politically, Gritz's mission failed. But the idea of Vietnam veterans returning to the jungles of Southeast Asia to rescue their comrades intrigued millions of Americans and provided inspiration to dozens of Hollywood screenwriters. Hollywood produced a spate of films based upon Gritz's mission. *Uncommon Valor*, for example, has Gene Hackman's grizzled Colonel leading a band of burned out vets into the jungles of Laos to rescue his POW son. Rambo goes in search of the phantom jungle camps, but finds a CIA cover up instead. And Chuck Norris takes a crack at finding the camps in *Missing in Action*.

A decade later, Gritz suddenly appeared at Randy Weaver's cabin on Ruby Ridge, Idaho. It was the summer of 1992 and the surviving members of the Weaver family were surrounded by FBI snipers. The snipers had already killed Randy's wife and son. They waited in the woods to finish off the rest of the family.

Randy Weaver had committed the heinous crime of attending a church that the Washington government labeled a "hate group." An ATF agent had infiltrated the church and talked Randy into selling him a sawed-off shotgun. Charged with a federal firearms violation, Randy was given a choice: either act as another informant inside the church, or face the maximum penalty. Randy refused. When it came time for trial, Randy didn't show up in court. Normally, selling a sawed-off shotgun is a relatively minor offense. But because of Weaver's connection to the so-called hate group and his refusal to become an informant, the feds sent a commando squad to take him down.

The family dog found the camouflaged machine gun-toting commandos at the spring box and began barking. Thinking that the dog had perhaps cornered a cougar, Sammy Weaver and family friend Kevin Harris grabbed their rifles and went to have a look. The commandos opened fire, killing the dog and Sammy. Kevin returned fire and a commando went down. Everyone retreated to the cabin, and a stand-off ensued.

The rules of engagement for law enforcement afford suspects the reasonable assumption of innocence. Officers are permitted to use deadly force only if they believe that the suspect intends to use deadly force against them or others. On Ruby Ridge, the FBI's agent-in-charge Larry Potts rewrote the rules of engagement. He declared Ruby Ridge a free-fire zone. Everyone in the Weaver cabin was declared an enemy combatant and presumed to be engaged in hostilities against the government. Therefore, if any of them stepped outside the cabin, agents were instructed to shoot them on sight. These were the rules of engagement for warfare, not law enforcement.

Randy was the first to step outside. Attempting to retrieve the body of his dead son, Randy was shot in the back. It wasn't a kill shot, though. Seriously wounded, he ran for the safety of the cabin. His wife Vicky saw him get hit and went to help. Cradling her baby girl in her arms, Vicky opened the cabin door to let Randy inside. Vicky had no idea she was being tracked by an FBI sniper. Those in the cabin heard a loud crack; Vicky fell dead, shot through the face by a hollow point bullet.

Word of the Ruby Ridge Massacre spread. Neighbors gathered at the FBI roadblocks and pleaded with the agents not to kill the rest of the family. Now that so many people were watching, the feds had to rethink their plan. Evidence of the rewritten rules of engagement was destroyed; an effort that was ultimately unsuccessful. (Potts was later reprimanded for those actions.) Randy Weaver was a former Green Beret. The FBI called retired Green Beret Colonel Gritz to see if he could talk Randy into surrendering, which Gritz succeeded in doing.

The Ruby Ridge Massacre touched a chord in the Patriot movement. Gritz became an instant hit. He traveled the country telling the story of Ruby Ridge, and how he alone saved the Weavers from certain death. His reputation soared. In 1992, he ran for president on the Populist Party ticket. Overnight he became the self-proclaimed leader of the Free Militia.

Gritz happened on the scene just as the Patriot movement was spreading into the mainstream. With the election of Bill Clinton, the movement grew into a major force overnight. The ban on so-called assault weapons really revved up the Far Right. Fears of an imminent gun roundup caused an unprecedented growth in Patriot groups. In the 1980s you could have counted the number of Patriot groups on one hand. Within a year of Clinton's inauguration, there were dozens of groups, most of them calling themselves militias.

Gritz arrived in this heated atmosphere. I watched him from afar, wondering what he would say and do. "Is he a leader?" I asked myself. "Or just another professional patriot, hawking holistic cures for cancer and books on the Bilderbergers?" He started his S.P.I.K.E. (Specially Prepared Individuals for Key Events) training courses and I had my answer: Gritz was neither a leader nor a professional patriot. He was something far worse: he was a neutralizer.

S.P.I.K.E. was an overpriced survival course, and, in this respect, Gritz was just another professional. Teaching Boy Scout skills to housewives and accountants, Bo and his team held classes at various spots in the country. Andrews was one of Bo's stops. Nord Davis, a professional patriot, helped Gritz organize the classes in our area. About every three months the Patriots would come out of the hills and for \$1,500 a pop, Gritz and his team would teach them how to pack a mule or tie a bowline knot. A long-time friend of Nord Davis, George Nordmann attended the S.P.I.K.E. courses.

The S.P.I.K.E. classes were usually held on Saturday. Gritz sometimes spoke the night before at one of the local churches. He charged a \$5 entrance fee. I didn't have \$1,500 to waste on the mule-packing classes, but I did pay the \$5 to hear Bo speak on a few occasions. I liked Bo. He had a barrel chest, a military demeanor, and a sheath knife that he strapped horizontally along his belt, like an operator. He was what they call "Old Army." Speaking extemporaneously, Gritz's deep booming voice projected all the way to the back of the hall without the use of a microphone. Bo talked about the United Nations, Bill Clinton, the Brady Bill, and the Ruby Ridge Massacre. He told war stories from his tours in Vietnam.

But it wasn't difficult to see through Bo's words. Although sharing many of the same beliefs as his Patriot audience, Gritz was a loyal subject of the Washington regime. And the reason for his sudden appearance on the Patriot scene was to neutralize the growing anger.

When he spoke at the S.P.I.K.E. meetings, Bo's thinly disguised message went something like this: "I understand that the government in Washington is a pile of socialistic crap. It is true that 1.5 million babies are murdered every year through abortion. And certainly the dominant culture today makes it virtually impossible to raise decent God-fearing children. Most likely, your daughter will become a tattooed, belly-ring wearing whore and your son will reject his upbringing and, instead, adopt the values of a gangsta rapper or a degenerate Hollywood actor. Because of unimpeded Third World immigration, America will resemble Haiti and Mexico in 50 years. But you will be dead by then, so why do you care? You can still live out your own life in relative comfort and ease. America is not China, not yet anyway. You can still vote, still get tried by a jury of your peers, still own a firearm, still read your Bible. That's something right? Stop all this talk about taking your country back. Put your guns in the closet and go watch TV," Gritz said.

In August of 1998, the tender for another incident like Ruby Ridge was being gathered together in western North Carolina. Heavily armed federal agents combing through the houses and yards of frightened mountain folk equaled a combustible situation. The only thing lacking was a match. Gritz was called in to neutralize the situation.

* * *

Landing at Murphy-Andrews airport in his twin engine Beachcraft, Colonel Gritz announced to the throng of waiting reporters: "I'm forming a search party to save Eric Rudolph. Together we will form a safe corridor for Eric to enter the system."

"What makes you think you will succeed where 200 FBI agents have failed?" one reporter asked.

"Mental Judo," Gritz said. "I'm going to use a little mental Judo on Rudolph."

Bo called on 40 friends and followers, some of the same people that he was fleeing through his S.P.I.K.E. course. While they gathered, Gritz huddled together with the FBI profilers and went over the details of their plan. The profilers were students of an outdated theory called behaviorism. Based on animal studies, behaviorism says that man is a biological machine; he vacuums up stimuli and spits out behavior. If you know the in-going stimuli, you can predict the out-going behavior. The theory denies the existence of the mind, consciousness, and free will. When applied to animals, or persons who behave like animals, their formulas often work. But when applied to someone who uses his mind, their formulas look ridiculous.

The profilers' plan to coax me out of the woods resembled a comedy skit. During their search of my Cane Creek trailer, the feds had found dozens of books on the Civil War. And interviews with my friends confirmed that I was a bona fide Civil War buff. The profilers looked at all this Civil War "stimuli" and concluded that my hiding in the mountains was a form of role-playing. Starring in my own Civil War fantasy, I was a lone rebel fighting for the Lost Cause, and the task force was a Yankee army out to capture me. To talk me into surrendering, they needed some of my rebel comrades to convince me that the war was over and it was time to lay down my arms. Colonel Gritz and his crew were assigned the role of my rebel comrades. They were there to "rescue" me from the Yankee horde.

On August 16, the task force pulled out of the woods while Bo and his rebels went in. They had to look the part, so the FBI profilers dressed them in white hats with the word "REBEL" stenciled in red letters across the front; and around their neck each rebel wore a Confederate flag bandanna. Gritz announced with excitement: "If Rudolph comes in voluntarily, I'll give the \$1 million reward to his mother – to use for his legal defense. It's the best deal he's going to get. His only other option is a bullet in the neck."

Bo's band of rebels pitched camp down in Tusquitee, north of the town of Hayesville. Beginning at Bob Allison Campground – the place where I'd abandoned Nordmann's truck – they worked their way west into the Tusquitee Mountains. They walked the trails, blowing whistles and yelling "Eric, we're here with Bo Gritz to save you." They searched for a week.

Once Gritz realized I wasn't coming out of the forest, he resorted to prayer. In the field next to their camp, they joined hands and prayed. Curious reporters held microphones to broadcast the performance, for my benefit no doubt. But prayer didn't work either. Bo and the profilers' bag of tricks was empty. His time eventually expired. Before boarding his plane back to Idaho, Bo dropped the act and sent a parting shot my way. He told reporters the reason why I didn't surrender was probably because I was guilty. Ouch! What a gesture of solidarity from my rebel comrade.

I lost it when I heard on the radio that the profilers had dressed Gritz's clowns in "REBEL" hats and Confederate flag bandannas. I laughed so hard I think I broke a rib. My side ached for weeks afterward. But it wasn't all comedy. The fact that Bo had searched the Tusquitee Mountains west of Bob Allison Campground concerned me. Fires Creek and my food cache were right on the other side of those mountains. That the FBI had put Gritz there told me that Fires Creek was somewhere on their search agenda. How far down on that agenda, I did not know.

I will never understand men like Gritz, why they serve a government that spits on them. Serving three tours of duty in Vietnam, Bo poured his life into the jungles of Southeast Asia. He watched several of his buddies die fighting in a war they were never allowed to win. And for what? So a bunch of Harvard dilettantes in Washington could play geopolitical chess with their counterparts in Moscow? And when veterans like Gritz returned home there were no brass bands, no "Welcome Home" parades. Instead, a grateful nation sent a bunch of hippie punks to the airport to spit on them. Rather than being rewarded with positions of honor, Vietnam veterans were shunted aside as just another victim class. Meanwhile, those hippie punks who spat on them – who carried around Mao's Little Red Book, who joined the Students for a Democratic Society, who did everything they could to see that men like Gritz came home in metal coffins – got the honor and positions of power. Bill Clinton cut his political teeth organizing anti-war demonstrations in the 1960s. Such was the case with Clinton's entire administration. While Gritz was dodging Vietcong bullets, these hippie punks were waving a Vietcong flag at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968.

But the government called Colonel Gritz to Andrews in the summer of 1998, and he came running like a good little soldier. And I could say the same for the agents of the task force. Many were veterans. Like Gritz, some had served in Vietnam. And I guess that most had a conservative worldview. Yet, here they were serving as guard dogs for commie pimps like Bill Clinton and Janet Reno, people who deep down would like nothing better than to spit on them. I will never understand that.

In all fairness to Gritz and his FBI handlers, they could have offered me \$1 billion and I still would not have turned myself in. I had a different plan, one that didn't include surrender or being shot in the neck.

The entire FBI operation wasn't about me; they didn't muster this huge force to take down one "Lone Wolf." It was about the guy selling "Run Rudolph Run" T-shirts at the Murphy swap meet; it was about the restaurant owner who put up a "Pray for Eric Rudolph" sign; it was about those millions of pro-life people who secretly cheered when I lit up that abortion mill in Birmingham.

Millions of Americans say "Abortion is murder," but very few of them act like it is. My actions in Atlanta and Birmingham, my hiding in the mountains were meant to encourage proliferators to bridge the gap between their rhetoric and their actions. As the defenders of the nation's abortion industry, the FBI had to stop me. They had to make an example out of me lest other like-minded people follow in my footsteps.

The situation in North Carolina looked like another Ruby Ridge or Waco. With all that FBI firepower, everyone predicted my imminent demise. Agent-in-charge Woody Enderson said I was committing “suicide by cop”; Gritz said that I’d be “shot in the neck”; and the media predicted that I’d “die in a cave.” The FBI had to prevail, that much was certain.

I was thinking of Ruby Ridge and Waco as well. I was thinking about what would have happened if, instead of succumbing to federal firepower, someone had really fought back. I knew a little about weapons and tactics. And I knew that the feds had to be vulnerable in Andrews. I planned to find that vulnerability and attack it with high explosives.

* * *

Every plan requires a full stomach, though. In the fall of 1998, my stomach was still pretty empty. Finding and processing food took up most of my time. First, I built a camp with better concealment. Up on the steep slopes above Little Snowbird Creek, I dug out a terrace big enough to erect a poncho shelter. Twenty yards away I excavated another small terrace to hold a cooking fire. I floored the cooking area with flat rocks and lashed a center pole over the top to hold a tarp. For a helicopter shelter, I scooped the dirt from a nearby hole left by a fallen oak tree. Cut poles were laid across the top and covered with dirt to a depth of three feet. The camp had nothing on the conveniences of Fires Creek, for it was dark and wet and steep enough for a family of mountain goats. But it would do for a season.



Figure 9 Lookout near Little Snowbird Creek

The camp was located in a box canyon. Having its head waters below Hanging Dog Mountain, Little Snowbird Creek formed a good sized watershed. However, like most of the larger creeks in Appalachia, Little Snowbird had a road next to it.

I’d picked a good hiding place. The country between the Snowbird Mountains and the Tennessee border is one of the most rugged areas east of the Mississippi River. The Cherokee Indians had hidden here 175 years before me.

An Iroquoian tribe, the Cherokee made their living by farming and warfare. After being defeated by the Delaware tribe, they were forced to leave their ancestral home near the Great Lakes around the

time Columbus set sail for the New World. The Cherokee pushed south along the Appalachians, conquering the Algonquian and Muskogean peoples of the region. At the height of their power they controlled a vast domain comprising much of the Southeast.

English settlements sprouted up along the Atlantic coast in the 17th century. Like the Cherokee who preceded them, the English came in search of land. A century of warfare ensued. The English gradually pushed inland, encroaching on Cherokee lands. Every advance of settlements brought Indian raids. In 1713, the Cherokee attacked settlers in Georgia and South Carolina. The English struck back, sending Major George Chicken on a punitive expedition against the Cherokee towns along the Hiawassee River, near present day Murphy.

Hoping to finally halt the on-rushing American colonists, the Cherokee decided to ally themselves to the British in the War of Independence. It was a fatal mistake. Huge war parties fell upon the settlements of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The angry colonists responded in 1776, dispatching General Arthur Rutherford and 2,400 militia. They killed Indians and laid waste to 36 villages. The chastised Cherokee quickly sued for peace. The price of peace was high. In return for their continued independence, the chiefs were forced to cede most of their lands east of the Blue Ridge.

When the Cherokee, along with the other eastern tribes, decided to side with the British and carry out those massive raids, which killed 1,000 men, women, and children, they signed their own death warrant. After defeating the British, the Americans were in no mood to be magnanimous to the Indians, who eventually lost all of their lands east of the Mississippi River. The Cherokee's time came in the 1830s when Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. The Act ordered the Cherokee to move out to Oklahoma. Initially they refused to go, so the government sent in the army. General Winfield Scott built Fort Butler as one of the staging areas for the removal. A muddy log enclosure, Fort Butler used to stand where McDonald's and Fatback's Citgo stand today in Murphy. The captured Cherokee were later herded out to Oklahoma. The army didn't stockpile enough food and blankets along the route. Of the original 15,000 Cherokee removed, 4,000 died on the Trail of Tears, as the Indians called it.

About 1,000 Cherokee were never captured and removed. They hid in the mountains. One large band hid in the dark hollows at the head waters of the Oconaluftee River. Another smaller band, under the great war Chief Junaluska, laid low in Snowbird. For nearly a decade, the renegades avoided the army. Then, in the 1840s, President Polk finally recognized their presence and set aside reservation land. The Oconaluftee band settled on a large reservation near present day Cherokee, North Carolina. And the Snowbird band received a sizable chunk of land just a few miles west of my camp. Living in the most isolated part of Appalachia, the Snowbird Cherokee speak the purest form of their native tongue.

* * *

Right away, I saw plenty of acorns and animal signs. The acorns hadn't fallen yet, but when they did I'd be ready to gather them. I dug up my old blue barrel and cooking pots left behind in the spring. The barrel would hold the acorns; the pots would be used to boil the tannins out of them. The barrel lid needed fixing. It resembled chewed licorice. Locating a pine tree with rivulets of hardened resin bleeding down its trunk, I used the edge of my hatchet to scrape it into a poncho. Placed in the pot, the resin was mixed with a little water and heated to the consistency of honey. I smeared it on the lid and let it dry – barrel rain tight.

Arriving in late summer, I was a little too early for the acorns. They were still forming on the trees. It would be another month before they began to fall.

September brought on new anxiety, as it always did, for I knew the trees would shed their leaves soon, stripping me of my security blanket and leaving me vulnerable to the prying eyes in the sky. During spring and summer, the mountains are covered in a thick coat of vegetation. Appalachia is just short of being a tropical rain forest by a few inches of rain. Movement is easy. Staying concealed is a cinch. Using

my topographical maps, I could pinpoint most of the houses, roads, trails, and barns. It was a simple matter to avoid contact. Walking slowly through the forest, I skirted trails and roads where people worked or camped only yards away. I'd make camp, literally, in people's backyards, drinking from their spring box and eating out of their garden. Dogs were the only real concern.

In mid-October the mountains lost their leaves, and the landscape changed from a jungle into a rolling vista of skeletal trees. I felt naked and wanted to dig down into the earth. White pine, mountain laurel, hemlock, and rhododendron are the only evergreens in the highlands. Rhododendron slicks became my winter home.

I had brought over enough food from Fires Creek to last me one month. Together with the turkey and wild food, I managed to stretch it into two months, but had to return to Fires Creek soon. No substantial rain had fallen in August or September. One good thing: the FBI was still in a holding pattern since Gritz's fiasco in August. They continued to fly back into Nantahala, apparently still searching the empty woods of Appletree. I calculated that another load of food from Fires Creek would carry me into December. By then, the feds would have exhausted their resources and returned to their Andrews headquarters, I hoped.

When I returned to Fires Creek, I saw it was quiet, no sign of the task force. The caches were unmolested. Stuffing my pack with enough provisions for one month, I hit the trail down Buckhorn Ridge and made camp in the Snowbirds inside of three days.

* * *

Bear hunting season opened in late September. The hunters would bring more dogs into the woods. This season would be different with the FBI task force in the woods. Before the season opened, the feds invited hunters to a briefing. Hunters crowded into the task force's headquarters in Andrews one evening. Hoping to enlist them in the manhunt, Enderson put on his good-ol'-boy hat and gave the gathered Bubbas a briefing. He pulled out maps, pinpointed last-known locations, and outlined the areas where the task force believed I was currently hiding. He handed out a list of the food items I'd bought from Bi-Lo and George Nordmann.

"Rudolph is armed and dangerous," Enderson warned. "Don't try to bring him in on your own. If you run into him or if you find a discarded tuna can, immediately contact the task force headquarters."

Trucks cruising the roads and dogs baying on the ridges above camp let me know that hunters were in the woods. I stayed close to camp for the first week.

Bear hunters usually work in crews of five or more hunters using half a dozen dogs. The hounds are kept starved for most of the year, tethered to a doghouse. Let loose in the woods, the dogs go crazy.

Bear prefer the high country far away from houses and dogs. In early fall they scour the old logging roads where the poke weed grows thick with berries. Poisonous to humans, poke berries are a delicacy to black bear. The shaggy beasts push the poke over and vacuum up the berries.

The hunters "set" their dogs early in the morning. They lead them along the logging roads, hoping to intersect fresh bear scent left from the night before. The more experienced dogs "hit" the scent and howl with ecstasy. If the scent is fresh, the hunters unleash the hounds and the chase begins. The dogs are fitted with tracking collars. The hunters monitor the chase using a receiver. A couple hunters follow on foot, paralleling the dogs as best they can using old logging trails, while the hounds plow through the thickets. In the beginning, the dogs emit a relaxed Brrrrh! – minutes pass - Brrrrh!

Driving trucks and ATVs, the other half of the bear crew tries to stay in front of the chase. The chase can last for hours, sometimes days. Bear can cover 20 miles of rough country in one day. As the hounds close the distance, their baying intensifies – the intervals become shorter - brrrrh! brrrrh! brrrrh! Hunters out front lie in wait, hoping for an ambush. Or the bear might "tree." Tired of running, the bear

will climb a tree to escape the hounds. The baying turns to rapid barking – ruff – ruff –ruff – ruff. Hearing the blood lust of the dogs, the hunters move in for the kill shot.

That's the ideal bear hunt. More often than not, the dogs quit the trail early and wander around the woods. The hounds are rarely well-trained. Let loose in the mountains after a year of being cooped in a barrel, the dogs are sometimes not in the mood to trail bear. Instead, they trail deer, boar, or ground squirrels; or they run around looking for human food, and end up 40 miles away digging in the trash at Burger King.

Bear hunters, therefore, spend most of their season trying to locate their unruly mutts. On any given day during bear season, there are several scrawny hound dogs from several crews roaming the highlands. Trying to find them, the hunters blow whistles, yell, and bang chunks of metal together.

I wasn't worried about the bear hunters finding my camp. They were trail-bound. Unless a bear happened to tree next to my shelter, which was extremely unlikely, the hunters would remain on the trails and roads.

As the season progressed, I noticed dogs from two crews hunting the high ridges above camp. Hounds came through camp and I'd check their collars to take note of their owner's name and address and phone number – in case I had to handcuff the owner to a tree and call his wife. Then I'd shoo the dog away and never see him again.

One morning, I was squatting over the fire cooking gruel when I heard something coming down the slope. A redbone hound had come by earlier. I thought perhaps he had come back. I grabbed my rifle and took aim at the overhang of rocks above my cooking fire. A spike (young male deer) poked his head over the rocks. I fired. BOOM. The bullet tore through his throat. He tumbled forward head over hooves aiming right at me. He flailed at the air with all four legs. I jumped aside just in time to avoid his blows. The deer proceeded to destroy my cooking operation. He kicked my pot over. Flipping into the fire, his fur flamed up, producing an acrid cloud of smoke. I couldn't go near him. I wasn't going to risk losing another shot, so I stood there watching this burning, kicking deer.

He finally bled out. I dragged him out of the fire, his fur still smoldering. Coals he had kicked into the leaves were starting fires. I doused everything and gutted the smoking deer. He was cut in two and hung from the center pole. I feasted on venison that night.

Before dawn the next morning, I heard a bear hunter calling his hounds on the ridge above camp – here – here – here. I threw on my clothes and walked to the cooking area. In the low light, I saw something tearing at the deer carcass. A scrawny hound dog was latched onto the hindquarters of the deer attempting to yank it down from the center pole. Wearing a tracking collar, the hound was the same redbone I'd chased away earlier. I reared back and booted the dog across the rump. He yelped and scampered away but then turned and started yanking on the carcass again.

Here – here – here – the hunter called. He was closer now, maybe 100 yards and closing. He was honing in on the hound's collar. I looked around anxiously. Rearing back, I booted the dog again, harder this time. He yelped and ran away.

Here – here – here – the dog had gone but the hunter was still coming. Running to my shelter, I snatched a pair of handcuffs. With my rifle at the ready, I hid in the thicket above camp. "Cuff him to a tree, use his truck to haul your stuff to Fontana," I said to myself.

Any second he would walk through the trees. I hadn't heard him call in several minutes. "He should have been here by now," I thought. Here – here – here – I jolted, then calmed as I realized that he had climbed back up to the crest. Apparently the dog was moving toward Little Snowbird, and the hunter was following. The sound of his calling grew faint and eventually faded away.

* * *

About every two weeks, I'd climb the path to Moody Stamp, cross to the other side of Billy Top, and watch the task force down in Andrews. Air activity had slackened off since August. "That's it," I thought. "They've given up." But the feds hadn't given up; they were just waiting.

On October 14, 1998, Attorney General Janet Reno held a news conference. She added the three bombings in Atlanta to the indictment against me. And she announced a renewed search effort: "The search for Eric Rudolph is not over," she said. "It has only just begun. We will continue searching until we find him."

Soon after Reno's news conference, Woody Enderson, head of the task force, said a major operation would begin in November after the leaves fell: "With better visibility and cooler temperatures, we should have better luck locating Rudolph," Enderson said. "The search will be bigger, better organized, and will continue until he is brought to justice." Ominous words; they took the yeast out of my bread.

The Southeast Bomb Task Force moved its headquarters out of the crowded streets of downtown Andrews to a more commodious building on the outskirts of town. I'd noticed helicopters landing near the Save-A-Lot. I decided to go down and have a closer look. Through the yellowing leaves, I spied an old Huey settle behind a large grey sheet metal building. Half the size of a football field, this was their new headquarters.

I watched their operation through my binoculars. Looked like over 100 agents down there (actually it was closer to 200 agents). Guards dressed in black fatigues manned the front gate. Behind the building, the feds had erected a large canvas helicopter hangar. I marveled at the size and scope of the operation.

Meanwhile, walnuts and hickory nuts fell. I had expected the ground to be carpeted in acorns and nuts. I was sorely mistaken. Very few trees shed edible nuts. Nevertheless, I worked hard to fill the barrel, but fell short by over half.

The Big Search began in late October of 1998. The feds put several search teams on the ground and three to four helicopters in the air. The search went 24 hours a day. They returned to the same general area that they had searched back in July. This time, however, they greatly expanded the search grid to include Partridge Creek and Otter Creek – my old neighborhood. After months of compiling data on me, the profilers concluded that I was hiding in a cave or an underground shelter somewhere near my old house on Partridge Creek.

They were certain that I was underground. How else could I have avoided their choppers and bloodhounds? This time around they were going to search every square yard of dirt using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). Looking like a lawnmower on steroids, the GPR searches for anomalies in soil compaction. If, for instance, someone has been digging, the GPR will pick it up. But you have to hold the device right above the ground. The task force agents dragged these things over several square miles of forest, negotiating rocks, briars, creeks, rhododendron thickets, and logs, looking for that underground shelter.

That I might try to stay out of their search grid seems never to have occurred to the profilers. That I might find a hiding place that no one from my past knew about didn't fit into their formula. People are territorial animals, said the formula. When threatened they run to relatives and friends and old familiar places.

Trapping myself in a cave or an underground shelter while hundreds of FBI agents combed the woods above me was the last thing I wanted to do. I'd planned to stay out of their search grid at all costs. And if they came my way, I'd move as quickly as possible, even if I had to abandon food and equipment.

While Enderson added manpower and equipment to the manhunt, he subtracted hot air from the radio. Back in July and August, he spoke to reporters almost every day. Now he said nothing. Between

November of 1998 and March of 1999, I don't recall hearing Enderson once on the radio. He must have felt foolish after his over-blown pronouncements in the summer. Enderson would let his actions do the talking now.

The task force ran into resistance a couple of weeks after the start of their Big Search. One night, I heard the sound of many choppers over the valley. It was a grinding sound that started in the evening. I dressed, tore down the poncho shelter, packed everything, and got ready to move. The roar of the helicopters continued for hours. It sounded like the task force had every one of their birds in the air, circling from one side of the valley to the other. I sat there staring up at the Snowbird Mountains, wondering if the choppers would cross over into my territory. But they never did.

In the morning, I heard on the radio what had happened. On the evening of November 11, 1998, several shots were fired at the task force headquarters in Andrews. One bullet penetrated the wall and parted the hair of a seated FBI agent. Airborne in fewer than 10 minutes, the task force choppers spent the remainder of the night searching for the shooter or shooters. But they didn't find any suspects. The media immediately speculated that perhaps I had done the shooting. The FBI knew better, though. Their fears had come true. The shooters were local, and, more than likely, their only connection to me was their opposition to abortion.

Surrounded by low-lying hills, the headquarters was a relatively easy target for someone with a rifle. The feds scoured the hills for evidence and discovered eight shell casings from a 7.62 caliber rifle. The FBI offered a reward for the arrest of those responsible. Costly Kevlar panels were screwed to the walls and ceilings of the Andrews headquarters. Then the whole episode was forgotten.

The shooting contradicted the government's lone-wolf theory. That local people, with no connection to me, would shoot at the feds wasn't easy to spin. Weeks before the shooting, the media ran a story about low-flying FBI helicopters disturbing folks in Nantahala. After the shooting, they returned to this theme. "People have been angry about the low-flying helicopters," one reporter said, when asked to speculate about the motive behind the task force shooting. It was hard to believe that someone would shoot at federal agents, risking life in prison because they were angry about low-flying helicopters. Obviously their motives went deeper, but rather than discuss those motives, the media stopped running stories about the shooting.

* * *

I inventoried my food supply in early December. There was enough to last a little while longer, but not enough to carry me through the dead of winter. I had to go back to Fires Creek.

The shooting had upset the task force's search plans, but only for a few days. They soon got back into the mountains. From my vantage point on top of the Snowbirds, it looked like they had all of their resources back in Nantahala. I wished they would stay there all winter. But that was wishful thinking.

The task force search plan included two "priority" areas, the primary one was Nantahala, which was where they were now. Little did I know, the second priority area was Fires Creek.

I arrived on Fires Creek in mid-December 1998. Excavating the caches, I measured out enough vittles to take back with me to Snowbird. I'd carry a much larger load this time. Tired of crossing the valley, I wanted to make this the last load before spring. I was tuckered out from the journey. I hadn't noticed any signs that the task force was in Fires Creek, so I decided to rest up for two days before heading back.

Around noon the next day, I heard a buzz. I twisted my noggin back and forth, trying to get a better fix on the sound. But it was gone. Several minutes passed, then the sound came back, this time louder, like a lawnmower. "OH-58," I said, as I spotted the small helicopter hover around the southern tip of Wolf Ridge, directly across the gorge from my camp.

I grabbed my binoculars and tracked the chopper through the sprawling branches of white pines. Gold-brown in color with a fish-bowl bubble front, it was the same chopper I'd seen several times at the task force headquarters. It was searching for me. Starting at the lower end of Wolf Ridge, the OH-58 worked its way to the upper end of the ridge, flying at tree-top level. On its return trip, I looked closer and picked out the FLIR (forward looking infrared) attached to the nose of the bird. Piling hemlock boughs on my pack, I burrowed underneath my rock shelter.

The helicopter's rotors grew louder as it flew across the gorge and began searching Tarkiln Ridge. Icicles attached to the bottom of the rock poked my face. In the gloom I noticed my warm foggy breath slowly seeping out of the shelter into the sunlight. "Oh no, it's going to detect my breath," I said. I held my breath for as long as I could stand it. At the point of passing out, I exhaled and then took in another breath. The chopper was right above me now.

It hovered to the left, back to the right, then to the left again, but returned to hover right above my shelter. It had something on its FLIR scope. Flying from side-to-side, it was trying to get a better angle on the heat signature. Luckily, I had piled a berm of dirt around the shelter's opening. It couldn't get a straight look at my body heat.

I took another deep breath and held it. When I could hold my breath no longer, I exhaled. Then it occurred to me that maybe the chopper was pinning me under the rock until the ground crew could reach me. The thought completely unnerved me. I felt helpless, like a treed bear waiting for the hunters to move in for the kill shot.

I was on the verge of panic, ready to grab my rifle and start pumping rounds into the helicopter, when suddenly it became extremely quiet. I listened hard for the helicopter, but it was gone. As I began to breathe normally, blood returned to my head and I could think clearer. And I could hear the helicopter faintly. It had flown over Tarkiln Ridge into Tom Cove. I stayed put for another half hour in case it came back.

Slipping out from underneath the rock, I brushed the icy dirt from my clothes. "I'm still here!" I shouted in defiance.

* * *

It's not easy living in the wilderness, even when you do have a staple of supplies. Back in Snowbird, I had to struggle to keep food in my pot. Up before dawn, I made my way through the darkness to a game trail. If no luck after a couple of hours, I'd spend the rest of the morning processing acorns or looking for fresher game trails. Last spring, I would sometimes sit on a game trail for a week, waiting and waiting. Now, if after a few days of waiting I hadn't killed anything, I'd set up elsewhere or I'd try hunting the same trail at a different time of day, in the evening for instance. The new strategy paid off.

By hunting several trails and expanding my territory, I managed to kill at least one large game animal (turkey, deer, boar) every two weeks. Last year, I would bag something big and sit around camp until I had eaten every last morsel. Now, I started a new hunt the day after a kill. Quite often I had a carcass still hanging from my pole when I dragged in another one. Sometimes, I had to throw away spoiled meat, however, more often I turned it to jerky.

I didn't discriminate. I was an equal opportunity hunter, killing does and bucks, hens and gobblers, sows and boars, and young and old animals. I killed anything larger than a squirrel. From then on, I had an abundant supply of meat. Some evenings, I ate too much meat and paid for it with diarrhea.

Always, I thought about striking back at the task force. The closest weapon caches were buried on Copper Creek, on the Tennessee border. Traveling the ridge line of the mountains to the north, I could reach Copper Creek in a couple of days. Building and detonating the bomb was the easy part. The hard part would come after it exploded. Hitting the task force would stir up a hornet's nest. It would make the

Big Search even bigger. Was I ready for that? I made a mental assessment of my situation. My food supply was tenuous. I had a couple months' worth of staples in the Snowbird Mountains. The rest of my food was buried in Fires Creek, where the task force was then searching. I wasn't ready yet. The plan would have to wait.

I postponed my trip to Fires Creek for as long as possible. By now the trip down Webb Ridge and across the valley had become routine. It took me one day to reach the bottom of the valley, one night to make it across, and another day to climb the Valley River Mountains into Fires Creek.

On my return trip to Snowbird, I was really looking forward to warmer weather. I daydreamed about blackberries and Indian cucumbers while the frozen ground crackled under my boots. It was a clear cold night. The winter moon painted the valley in pale light. My breath froze on my beard and pull-over.

Before crossing the river, I shucked off my boots and clothes and stuffed them in my ruck. Then I eased into the frigid water and waded across, the water scraping my scrotum. By the time I reached the far bank, my body was shaking. I quickly donned my clothes and continued on my way. Just another night.

* * *

In March of 1999, the task force made one final push before spring growth reduced visibility and brought the Big Search to a halt. The major news networks ran a segment on the radio. It was the first news about the search in months. I remember listening to the broadcast. Live at the task force headquarters, a reporter delivered the story with a helicopter lifting off in the background.

I hadn't smiled in a long time. Listening to the radio that day, I felt my lips stretch into a glorious smile. I was reminded of the 37th Psalm: "I have seen the wicked in great power: and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found."

During the winter of 1998-99, the Southeast Bomb Task Force had over 200 people working for it. After March, they cut the force to 100. The manhunt would continue, but it would be a different manhunt. Over the past four months they had spent millions of dollars searching a corner of the woods, thinking they had me cornered. Now they had no idea where I was.

In late March, I returned to Fires Creek, where I had a couple more months of food left in the caches. I hunted and planned. I couldn't believe that I was in the same predicament as last summer. Once again, I needed food but had no idea where to get it. I couldn't contact anyone. The experience with Nordmann had put the FBI on to that move.

At night, I lay awake in my tent running different scenarios in my mind. I'd given Nordmann most of my money. I had fewer than \$200, not enough to buy the food I needed. I set my sights on a huge supply of food this time – five to ten years' worth. A couple hundred pounds of wheat and beans wasn't worth the trouble I'd gone through last year. "But where to get it?" I wondered.

Although isolated on rural roads, convenience stores stocked mostly perishables and junk food. Besides, I didn't want to rip off some local boy's store. Chain stores: towns in the area had at least one. Larger stores would have alarms, though, which added complications. Farm silos: there were two in Tusquitee and five in Marble. Silos were less problematic than stores and had potentially a bigger pay-off. The two in Tusquitee were too close to Fires Creek. "What about those five in Marble?" I thought. "The task force is right down the road. They might have them under surveillance with one of those remote cameras." Remote cameras were one of my pet paranoias. I imagined them everywhere. Then again, the task force had spent the last eight months searching in Nantahala and Fires Creek. In our automobile age, people tend to think that someone on foot cannot get very far. Actually, a healthy man can walk 10 miles of rough country or 25 miles of road in one day. My guess was that the task force was still focused on

Nantahala, probably expecting me to contact another former friend. They would not expect me right next door to their headquarters.

CHAPTER 13

1980s • The Cause

Aristotle said that man had both an animal nature and a rational nature. Unlike the animals, man has the ability to use his reason to overcome his animal nature. Escaping the determinism of his heredity and environment, man can build culture, cultivate himself, and improve his environment. Reflecting on what he is and what he has the potential to become, he is able to discern his purpose in life, purpose reflected in the roles that he must fulfill as a social being, as a citizen, as a member of a family, as a servant of God, and so forth. He sees intrinsic value in these practices, whether it be bricklaying or parenting. Fulfilling one's role properly is good and leads to happiness; failing to fulfill one's role is bad and leads to unhappiness. There is thus an objective, rational basis for morality. Ethics is the science that teaches a man how to make the transition from man-as-he-is to man-as-he-could-be. And virtues, such as friendship, moderation, honesty, courage, loyalty, piety, and justice are those qualities of character that, if cultivated, enable a man to achieve happiness.

Derived from Aristotle and perfected by the Christian Church, these ideas formed the core of Western ethics for a thousand years. Young men and women were taught the classical virtues. The ancients believed that a man required discipline in the virtues before he could tell right from wrong. Whether or not something felt good was irrelevant. Reason was the guide to correct conduct, not emotion. Men courted women for the purpose of marriage and family. Fidelity to your family and country were expected. Adultery, incest, pedophilia, and homosexuality were condemned. Murder, infanticide, and abortion were inherently evil. Theft, lying, and taking more than your fair share were considered injustices. Work was considered a blessing, an expression of a man's worth to his family and his community. Patriotism was the highest social virtue, military heroes the most revered members of the community. And no life was thought to be complete without showing proper piety to God.

Of course, not everyone lived up to these standards. In fact, most folks fell short. But human frailty aside, Western society accepted these standards of moral value for a millennium. There was an ideal, and you were expected to try to live up to it.

When I came of age in the early 1980s, America was in the last stages of undoing these basic ethical concepts. A thousand years of Western Culture was being thrown in the trash. The movement was aptly named the counterculture, and its acolytes were the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s. Like a virus, the counterculture spread through society, sickening families, schools, universities, and governments. Western Culture had gotten it all wrong, said the hippies. The problem isn't nature, rather, the problem is culture. We must rid ourselves of all these laws, rules, and virtues. We need to return to nature. Man doesn't need discipline, for he is naturally good. Unshackle man from reason, religion, and culture, and man will live peacefully.

The hippies were not the first people to articulate these ideas. The ideas originated during the radical Enlightenment. Way back in 1760, Jean-Jacque Rousseau had called for a return to nature in his famous essay "Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men." Rousseau said that "man was born free but is everywhere in chains." Rousseau himself was a perfect example of his ideal man, which he called the "Noble Savage." Eschewing steady work, he lived off of the charity of rich old ladies, sugar mommas who took him in and gave him free room and board. When he wasn't scribbling nonsense about the "Noble Savage," Rousseau was busy spawning illegitimate children by one of his servant girls. He had no time for the responsibilities of raising children, though. Nature would presumably do that, or more precisely the foundling hospital. Fathering a grand total of five illegitimate children, he promptly deposited each one on the doorstep of the local orphanage. Great guy that Rousseau. The father of modern ethics!

Rousseau gave birth to a whole family of ideas. The core idea was that a man's life was primarily determined by his heredity and/or his environment. Man was an animal driven by uncontrollable desires. Reason is purely instrumental, said Charles Darwin; it's merely a weapon that man uses in his struggle for existence. Man has no purpose other than passing his genes on to future generations. He is the product of random gene mutations and natural selection. Sigmund Freud said that free will is an illusion, that man is driven by subconscious sexual compulsions that he cannot control. Karl Marx wrote that socio-economic forces determined everything about a man. Instead of thinking of man as able to escape his animal nature, the new school of thought wanted to return him to nature, man-as-he-is rather than man-as-he-could-be.

In keeping with Rousseau, the followers of the counterculture called for a moral revolution. Parents, preachers, and teachers are all liars. You cannot trust anyone over 30, said Abbie Hoffman. Ambition is a "power trip." Education is "brain-washing." Dignity is a "hang-up." Man has been living under the tyranny of reason for too long, they said. Let emotion be the guide and the new motto be "If it feels good, do it." Man doesn't have a rational nature; therefore, it is up to the individual to define his own ethical standards, according to his own desires. This includes sexuality. Monogamy, marriage, and strict heterosexuality are unnatural. Man is naturally promiscuous, they said. If you are into boys, toys, dog, or children – it's okay, as long as all parties are consenting. Patriotism is a con job that the rich use to convince the poor to go fight its imperialist wars for them, like Vietnam. Real heroes burn their draft cards, or proclaim pacifism, or flee to Canada, or, better yet, they join the anti-war movement and advocate the cause of the Viet Cong "freedom fighters." Christianity is a bunch of fascist fairytales designed to distract the poor from their own oppression. You cannot find true "spirituality" in the West, the hippies said. To receive spiritual enlightenment you must follow the Beatles to India and bow before the Maharishi. However, even after enlightenment, you cannot achieve true freedom until you "free you mind," and the only way to free you mind is through drugs, said Timothy Leary.

My generation caught the second wave of the counterculture. By then, the hippie dream of planting a new Garden of Eden had turned into a nightmare. By the mid-1970s, millions of Americans were addicted to hard drugs. Crime rates had tripled since the early 1960s. In 1975, nearly 50 percent of marriages ended in divorce. Abortion rose from around 200,000 in 1960 to 1.2 million in 1980.

Rousseau and the hippies had promised that once man was free of the "shackles" of culture he would live in peace and harmony. But the reverse had happened. The counterculture's attack on traditional morality gave rise to an explosion of anti-social behavior, which, in turn, caused society to pass tougher laws and hire more policemen. Rather than a society without laws, the counterculture gave birth to the "War on Crime" and the "War on Drugs," the present-day American police state.

My generation's role models were mostly icons of the counterculture: Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, and Jim Morrison. The hippie tenets were nearly universal. My Pentecostal upbringing could never quite drown out the siren song of the Sixties. Those kids who accepted the counterculture were "cool"; those who did not were "dorks." The hippie pretensions about receiving enlightenment from drugs had become passé. My generation took drugs not for enlightenment, but to get stoned. Unlike the hippies, we didn't listen to rock 'n' roll for its political commentary. We listened in order to "jam out." And we didn't drop out of school to resist conformity, as Timothy Leary had recommended; we dropped out because we were lazy. After dropping out, the cool guys got a small apartment and a menial job cleaning pools or flipping burgers. On the side, we sold drugs. We drove jacked-up muscle cars with mag wheels and a sound system loud enough to make your ears bleed. In the living room of our tiny apartments, we had bean-bag chairs and an immaculate album collection containing the complete catalogue of Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, and Creedence ClearWater Revival. We had girlfriends on the Pill, whom we never intended to marry because relationships were about getting laid – nothing more. If by chance she became pregnant, she had an abortion. Like going to the dentists to have a bad tooth pulled, abortion was no big deal. Our one overriding ambition was to "Party." Instead of the Garden of Eden, the counterculture gave us a jungle.

Within one generation the counterculture succeeded in taking us back to the Stone Age. We were modern-day cavemen who lived only to satisfy our base desires. We lacked discipline, ambition, or purpose. We hated all authority figures. We were incapable of acting from motives of patriotism, duty, or anything that went beyond the next bong hit.

Like most of my peers, I partook of the poison. When I was 12, I learned to roll a joint. Before I turned 20, I was growing marijuana for a living. It started as a lark, a few seedlings planted on a hillside to see if they would grow. Not only did they grow, the plants thrived. Heavily wooded with plenty of summer sunshine, the Appalachian Mountains were ideal for cultivating marijuana. As the plants grew bigger, I realized that I could make money farming the forbidden weed.

A labor-intensive plant, marijuana doesn't "grow like a weed," as most people assume. It requires a lot of hard work. I was young and strong and not afraid of hard work. And I knew the mountains better than the local sheriff's department.

I grew it for the money, for the freedom. I grew it because I could. For someone with a blue-collar education, Appalachia can be a tough place to earn a living. Unless you were lucky enough to get on with the local power company or the Forestry Service, you had to find work in Asheville, Atlanta, or Charlotte. Marijuana was a cottage industry, something I could do close to home. Growing it in the National Forest, I worked within 30 miles of home, and I made my own hours. What attracted me was the sense of satisfaction that comes with accomplishing something on my own without a boss standing over me.

I never sold hard drugs, and I generally avoided people who did. But when you sell one kind of illegal product you are bound to run into the other kind. One night I watched a mother snort a line of coke off a coffee table while her 11-year-old daughter looked on. It was all very casual, as if she was putting on her make-up. She had just got done telling me that her other daughter, who was 15, had recently had a birth control device implanted in her shoulder. The girl had had one abortion already, and the mother didn't want to pay for another.

For a while, it was easy to rationalize my actions. But eventually I began to loathe the lifestyle. I couldn't help thinking that I was wasting my life and contributing to the problems that were destroying the country. I hated my place in the world. I was just another greasy cog in the counterculture wheel.

Through the years I watched as the casualties piled up around me: friends died of drug overdoses, were killed in automobile accidents involving drugs and alcohol, went to prison for dealing, or contracted hepatitis from sharing dirty needles. But most survived into adulthood, if you want to call it that. They found mediocre jobs in the System, got married, had a couple of kids, and got divorced. But none of them ever grew up. They remained perpetual adolescents; adult children who could recite the lyrics to over 100 rock 'n' roll songs but could not string together a coherent sentence about history, politics, religion, philosophy, art, science, or anything substantial. Not counting the overdoses, auto-accidents, and incarcerations, the lost potential was incalculable. Young men and women capable of becoming doctors and professors ended up cleaning swimming pools or waitressing tables. Two generations were lost to bad ideas.

Growing up in this cesspool culture, I developed a profound sense of alienation. At times, it felt like the very air that I breathed was toxic. Unlike most of my peers, who succumbed to the social pressures of conformity, I began to question the values of the counterculture. Because the dominant ideas of the counterculture were liberal in origin, I acquired an early attraction to all things conservative. My readings in history taught me that life in America was very different just a short time ago.

* * *

All stories have a beginning, and the story of America begins 500 years ago when the pilgrim ships of Plymouth, London, Amsterdam, and La Rochelle set sail for the New World. Northern Europe erupted onto the world scene with an energy unprecedented in human history. Empires were carved out; colonies

were planted. New science and technology revolutionized the human condition. The world we live in today is built on the solidified lava left over from that massive eruption. America is a colony of that creative act.

America was founded by the Western European Christian people who believed in liberty and limited government. Because of these foundations, America became the greatest nation on earth. For most of our nation's history, the foundation remained intact, and America remained great. But by the late 20th century, the foundations were crumbling. America had been transformed into something different: a bankrupt multicultural, secular nation of welfare dependents prostrated before an all-powerful central government. How we arrived here is a story that every liberal celebrates, and every conservative laments.

Socialists, anarchists, positivists, free lovers, Freudians, and liberal-progressives began building the engine of destruction early in the 20th century, finally breaching the inner sanctum of power with the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the arena of foreign policy, he took the unprecedented step of allying America to the cause of world communism. Extending diplomatic recognition and lend-lease supplies to the Soviet Union, Roosevelt ensured the survival of Stalin's regime and the subsequent spread of communism through Europe and Asia. On the domestic front, he laid the foundation of the welfare state. Relying on an unconstitutional interpretation of the commerce clause, his administration started taking power away from the state and local governments and consolidating it in the federal government. As the federal government provided more security for the average citizen through welfare programs, it began to demand more and more obedience. By the late 1960s, the federal government regulated every aspect of American society.

Judicial review was the primary weapon used to subvert the Constitution. Instead of interpreting the laws passed by the legislators, in keeping with their constitutional mandate, liberal judges began to write their own laws, laws that didn't originate in the text of the Constitution or in the wording of any piece of legislation, but rather, in their own arbitrary will. America ceased to be a nation governed by the law of the land and instead became one governed by the law of judges. In decision after decision, these commissar-judges changed American society in fundamental ways: giving the federal government unlimited power to regulate business and private property (*Wickard v. Filburn*, 1942); upholding the Wagner Act, which empowered labor unions to extort employers; usurping the constitutional authority of the states to organize and hold local elections (*Baker v. Carr*, 1962); outlawing Christianity in the public square (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962); creating the legal landscape for the discriminatory policies of racial quotas, euphemistically-called "affirmative action," and set-asides (*Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 1971); inventing the so-called "right of privacy" (*Griswold v. Connecticut*, 1965), which the courts gradually expanded to protect all manner of behavior formerly criminalized by the states, such as sodomy, pornography, and abortion. And on and on.

During the 1960s, the revolution spilled out into the streets as the leftist anti-war movement tried to undermine America's commitment in Vietnam. The sexual revolution and the counter-culture attacked the family and traditional morality. Homosexuals and feminists joined in the fray, organizing their own assault on society. The Luddite environmentalist movement declared war on America's industrial plants. In Washington, the Johnson administration's Great Society expanded the welfare state to unprecedented levels, setting America on the path to bankruptcy. The liberal-dominated Congress reversed a long-standing preference for European immigrants when it passed the Immigration Act of 1965. The act basically closed America's doors to Europe and opened them to the Third World. The revolution pushed forward on many fronts, but no attack was more successful and more devastating than in the realm of popular culture, for none of the unconstitutional initiatives would have succeeded without the help of Hollywood. An early ally of the liberal-progressive cause, Hollywood popularized its ideas and spread them into the living rooms of America. But all this is academic. Every conservative, from William F. Buckley, Jr. to Patrick J. Buchanan, agrees with the foregoing. Disagreement comes on what to do about it.

A nation can survive a handful of corrupt politicians and bogus court rulings. A nation can tolerate ethnic, religious, or racial minorities without losing its national identity. And quite often, political dissent can lead to necessary reforms in government. But what happened in America between the years 1900-1970 was a revolution. Taken as a whole, the consolidation of power in the executive and judiciary, the Supreme Court's use of substantive due process to write new laws, the left-wing dominance of academia, the cultural wars of the 1960s, the rise of Hollywood – it all constitutes a usurpation of our constitutional system. Those liberal judges, politicians, activists, and filmmakers overthrew our Republic just as surely as if they had landed an army on our shores and seized the capitol. In fewer than three generations, America went from being a constitutional republic of rugged individuals to a socialist nanny state of welfare dependents.

* * *

In any other nation, the forces of tradition would have fomented a civil war a long time ago. But here in America our so-called conservative leaders handed over the country after a few lost elections and a handful of bogus Supreme Court decisions. It's incomprehensible. Committed to a cause they saw as larger than themselves, the liberal-progressives completely out-classed their conservative opponents. Without effective leadership, most Americans were unaware that a quiet revolution had taken place. Today, we live in the aftermath of the greatest nonviolent revolution in history. Talk to any partisan of the progressive cause and he will tell you the same thing: America was a very different country just 80 years ago. And it was.

The sons and daughters of the counterculture dominate the institutions of power in America today. Using these institutions – especially those responsible for shaping popular opinion, such as the schools and the media – they are capturing the majority of each new generation. Slowly but surely they are molding a country into their image and likeness.

Lied to by the Republican Party, conservative Americans perceive the present conflict between liberals and conservatives as an in-house affair, a set of policy disputes between two factions of the same political establishment. Cowardly Republican Party politicians have convinced them that one election, one Supreme Court decision will turn the tide. And for their part, the liberal-progressives in the Democratic Party have done an excellent job of disguising their radical agenda behind the façade of republican government. The facts tell a different story, though. What goes under the name of “liberalism” today is actually a form of democratic socialism. If history is any indicator, socialists never tolerate opposition; they don't dispute policy with conservatives. Socialists believe that policies are either progressive or reactionary. Conservatism, by definition, is reactionary. All elements of reaction must be eliminated as a pre-condition of progress. Liberals may talk about bi-partisanship, but unless you adopt their position you will be labeled an extremist and driven from the mainstream. They may talk about equality before the law, but what they really want is a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power, a purge that will last indefinitely. They may pose as the champions of free speech and free press, but they are doing everything in their power to institute the most elaborate system of social control in human history. They may fly the flag of liberty, but they intend to build a nanny-state that will micromanage your life from cradle to grave. When it suits their purpose, liberals wrap themselves in the Constitution, but in their books and classrooms they refer to the Founding Fathers as “racist-classist pigs.”

Entrenched as they are, the new rulers of America will never relinquish power after a lost election or another other constitutional device because deep down they never really recognized those bourgeois forms of government. Their long-term goals envision a fundamentally different social contract than the one found in our Constitution. This is what they mean when they use phrases like “living Constitution,” because when it gets done “growing,” it will look more like Karl Marx wrote it rather than James Madison. Winning elections and court decisions were merely means to the end of creating a socialist society. And now that they have the means, they will never give them up without a bloody fight.

There is, however, still time to turn the boat around. Unlike Western Europe, America still has a sizable conservative opposition. Unfortunately, it is divided into hostile camps, and no large faction has even considered using armed struggle to take back the country: (1) the most powerful faction consists of the neoconservatives, although I hesitate to call them conservatives because their philosophy propounds ideas that are incompatible with conservative moral values. Many openly support abortion and homosexual normalization. They worship the god of money and believe in the religion of capitalism and listen to the prophets of selfishness, Ayn Rand and Milton Friedman. They want lower taxes, limited domestic spending, and an aggressive foreign policy to protect Israel and the interests of multinational corporations. Individually, they are selfish and hedonistic and care nothing for future generations. Having already ceded the culture to the Left, they want only to slow down the socialists long enough to get through their own lives. What America ends up looking like in 50 years is a matter of complete indifference to them. (2) Made up mainly of blue collar folks, the populist-patriot faction focuses its attention on issues such as globalization stealing jobs, the United Nations eroding American sovereignty, liberals taking their guns away, and the IRS and Federal Reserve taking everything else. They are handicapped by their own Jeffersonian-libertarian ideas. Add to this extreme individualism a healthy dose of bizarre conspiracy theories, and you have people who are nearly impossible to organize. (3) Called social or national conservatives, the third faction is more concerned with the moral-cultural collapse of the nation. Many espouse a traditional form of Christianity and want to protect traditional institutions such as marriage, the family, and the church from the corrosive effects of abortion, homosexuality, pornography, divorce, free love, and feminism. Similar to the other factions, social-national conservatives hamstringing themselves with debilitating ideas. Many of the churches have adopted pacifism and become little more than self-help cults, practicing a form of New Age religion where its devotees make it up as they go along. They have cut loose of the Old Time religion and look on indifferently at the moral collapse of the country. And millenarianism has bewitched millions of otherwise decent Christians into expecting the imminent return of Christ. They have given up the battle for the public square. While gazing up at the sky, they have let their enemies take control of the institutions of our society. What is to be done?

By the late 1980s, I saw the handwriting on the wall: America was doomed unless some radical solution was found very soon. Constitutional methods wouldn't work; no election or court decision would turn back the tide. Why? Because the problem that liberalism (socialism) poses to any society is fundamental. The question that must be answered is existential: How can you live side-by-side under the same constitutional system with people who want to destroy your way of life? In other words, how can you live in a house with a pyromaniac? For me, the answer was simple: I could not. Because every time you provide a socialist the shelter of the Constitution he will use it to undermine the constitutional system; because every time you lie down to sleep, the pyromaniac will try to burn the house down.

Writing in the *Federalist Papers*, James Madison warned posterity that the Constitution wasn't a "suicide pact." What he meant by this phrase was that the Constitution wasn't designed to protect those who were openly committed to its destruction. To allow them such protections was analogous to committing suicide. But this is precisely what we have done in the past 80 years by allowing the forces of the radical Enlightenment to shelter under our Constitutional roof while they light the fires that will ultimately consume us.

I knew that America needed a nationalist-conservative revolution. Unlike the majority of Patriots and conservatives who were content to see America gradually collapse, I gravitated toward that militant minority who wanted to confront the liberal regime with force. At the time, it was irrelevant to me which particular issue – taxes, abortion, gun rights – ended up being the spark that ignited this revolution. This was a war between two entirely different world views, not just a policy dispute over one or two issues. If, for example, the pro-life movement were to get its way and *Roe v. Wade* were overturned tomorrow, the liberals wouldn't stop polluting our schools with homosexuality, they wouldn't stop flooding our country with Third World aliens, they wouldn't stop trying to sell out our country to the United Nations.

Extinguishing one of the pyromaniac's fires would not solve the underlying problem. You must first remove the arsonist from the house before you can sleep at night.

At the age of 20, I dedicated my life to the national resistance. Being young and naïve, I thought I could best serve the Cause in a militant capacity. Surely, I thought, the American people would rise up to reclaim their country. I wasn't content with waiting around for the "Collapse," or the UN to take over and "round-up all the guns." I asked myself what would George Washington do? He would fight! I saw a war coming on the horizon, and I wanted to be ready for it. So, in the spring of 1987, I walked into a recruiter's office in Franklin, North Carolina and joined the U.S. Army.

Needless to say, I harbored no illusions about whose orders I'd be serving under. As far as I was concerned, the Constitution had been overthrown decades earlier and the central government was in the hands of traitors. Those who issued the orders at the political level were not my leaders. The plan was to acquire knowledge about weapons and small unit tactics – get as much training in as short an amount of time as possible – and then get out. When the real war came, I'd be ready.

CHAPTER 14

Andrews, NC • 1999 • Staple Foods

A soft rain slipped through the saplings like flour through a sieve. I followed the drops as they slid along the brim of my hat and fell to the ground. Oblivious to the downpour, cows grazed in the pasture behind me. The smell of wet earth was redolent of cow dung. Semi-trucks blew past me adding diesel fumes to the pungent mixture.

I stood under a hedge of small trees on the side of Highway 19 watching a small car lot. On the outskirts of Andrews, Buy Rite Motors had once been a gas station but was now a used car lot. Cars and trucks were parked haphazardly where the gas pumps used to be. The lot was closed, it being after midnight.

My belly growled. I hadn't eaten in two days. In my food-deprived imagination I saw a pizza with green peppers and onions waiting for me over there at Buy Rite. I licked my lips and sprinted across the four lanes of empty asphalt. With my blood pumping I felt a slight tingle of warmth, which seemed to add to the anticipation. I headed for the awning between the car lot and the furniture store, where several garbage bags lay piled underneath. Grabbing four bags off the top, I hustled them to the wood line behind Buy Rite. The anticipation of food was exciting. I carefully worked loose the ties on the Hefty Bag, making sure not to rip the plastic. No one could know that I was digging through their trash. The sound of rain pelting the bags reminded me of someone crumpling sheets of paper. With the first bag open, I sorted through office paperwork, McDonald's food wrappers, and empty Dr. Pepper cans. Nothing – no food. Inside the next bag I hit pay dirt: three Styrofoam containers with the leftovers from lunch. "Now I'm eating," I said.

I scarfed down a half-eaten club sandwich and some soggy French fries. Marlborough Light cigarette butts were doused in a gob of ketchup. I wiped the condiment off the cigarettes and slipped them inside my top pocket – for later. The food was cold, soggy, and greasy but to me it was gourmet. After endless days of eating beans, rye, and bitter acorns, I yearned for precious processed food, saturated in gorgeous fat.

I carried the opened bags back under the awning after carefully tying them shut. Four more were taken to the wood line. I discovered a nice breakfast croissant. It wasn't inside a Styrofoam container, and it had a jagged bite taken out of one side, but so what? I swallowed it without a second thought.

Then I noticed a peculiar taste, or rather a peculiar aftertaste. I raised what was left of the croissant to my nose; it had a peculiar smell as well. However, I hadn't eaten a croissant in years, so I shrugged it off.

Cracking open the bag a little wider, I went fishing for more goodies. Deep down into the Hefty Bag I felt something soft and warm. Actually, the bottom of the bag had several of these soft, warm objects. I pushed the stationary and paperwork aside and pulled one of these objects to the surface to have a closer look. A wave of revulsion welled up inside me. I'd found the source of the peculiar taste and smell: soft, warm soiled baby diapers.

The thought of the croissant marinating in used baby diapers overwhelmed my gag reflex. I fell to my hands and knees and a high-pressure stream of vomit spewed from my mouth like a firehouse. Every last morsel of the club sandwich and French fries came forth. I crawled around the wet grass for a few minutes dry-heaving. And I'd expected pizza.

* * *

I'd spent a hard winter in the mountains hiding from hunters, helicopters, and hound dogs. Once again, hunger had forced me out of the forest in search of food. This time I wouldn't settle for a beat-up

truck and a dozen buckets of beans and rye. I was determined to heist a huge pile of food or get busted trying.

In mid-June of 1999, I hiked out of the mountains and pitched camp near the foot of Webb Ridge, just north of Andrews, North Carolina. The campsite wasn't ideal. The ridge was a sun-drenched thicket of scrub oak and mountain laurel, but it afforded overhead cover, and there was a spring nearby. And town was less than a quarter mile away.

From the ridge, I had a bird's eye view of the task force headquarters. To the west, Andrews-Murphy airport sat in the fields of new corn. A meandering dirt track led down the ridge to a house beside Airport Road. The track continued on up the ridge where there was a forty foot metal tower. Designed to warn airplanes away from the sharp ridge line, the tower had a red light bolted to the top, and it turned on after dark.

During daylight, I remained hidden in the thicket. Using my 10X28 Leupolds, I scoped the valley, memorizing the lay of the land before going out after dark.

With a population of fewer than 1,000, Andrews was at the eastern end of the valley; Murphy was at the western end; and Marble sat right in the middle. Andrews was a small mountain town. It had one main street, one high school, and one post office. It used to have one factory, but that closed down in the early 1990s. Running through the fields of corn and soybeans was Highway 19, the major highway in that part of the state. Before they built Highway 19 back in the late 1970s, Airport Road was the major thoroughfare in western North Carolina. Hugging the northern rim of the valley, Airport Road was now a lonely stretch of blacktop used mainly to access the small airport. Just beyond the airport were the five grain silos – my primary target.



Figure 10 Webb Ridge, Grain Silos

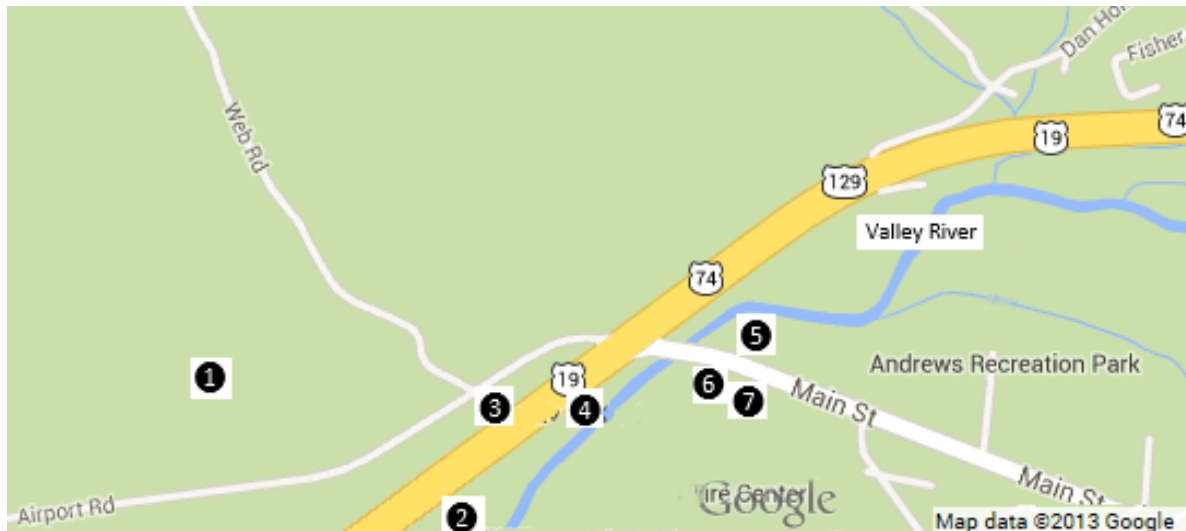
Rain fell every day for the first two weeks on Webb Ridge. The sun would rise in a cloudless sky, but by noon, the clouds were forming thunderheads and the rumbling began. From the top of a scrub oak, I could see the length of the valley to the west. There, a dark blue mass was gathering force. Flashes of lightning appeared in the midst, and sheets of rain drifted my way. I couldn't do anything but tie the poncho shelter closer to the ground and ride out the storm.

Your typical spring storm lasts half an hour and then pushes on. These storms lasted an hour. Out on the pimple of the ridge, the lightning struck close, nearly blasting me into the next world. More rain fell in those two weeks than in the past four months. The river quickly reached flood-stage. The newly planted corn fields resembled rice paddies.

I was down to my last baggy of beans when I arrived on Webb Ridge. It was enough for only a few days. My weight had dropped dramatically during the winter. I was hurting for a good meal but the storms held me under the poncho. Finally, I could wait no longer. I went to Buy Rite Motors in search of pizza but found baby diapers instead. My spirits sank into the mud.

Dumpster diving was new to me. I didn't know where to find the choicest garbage yet. Other than Buy Rite Motors, the only other stores on my side of the swollen river were at White's Plaza. This was a small strip mall a few hundred yards east of Buy Rite. The owner, Ray White, was one of those good old boy entrepreneurs who grew up in a tarpaper shack but made it big through hard work and shrewd practices. Ray started with a small gas station and expanded into construction, earth moving equipment, and restaurants. White's Plaza was a hodge podge of businesses, backhoes, and bulldozers. There was a Subway and a Chinese restaurant in the plaza. It was a beehive of activity both day and night. Too risky to get food there.

I believed the best place to start searching for food was across the river in Andrews proper. On one side of Main Street was Save-A-Lot grocery and Papa John's Pizza. On the other side was a McDonald's. While I was over there, I'd see if it was feasible to break into the Save-A-Lot for the big food heist. I had to be careful. Only yards away from Save-A-Lot was that grey metal building – the task force headquarters.



1. Webb Ridge 2. Buy Rite Motors 3. Gardens 4. White's Plaza
5. McDonald's 6. Save-A-Lot 7. FBI Task Force

Figure 11 Andrews

One night, after the rains had ceased, I crossed the cow pastures to Highway 19 and walked in the drainage ditch to the bridge that spanned the Valley River into Andrews. Sodium vapor lamps spotlighted the bridge at both ends, making it too dangerous to cross. It was a good 20-yard sprint in full view of Main Street. If I wanted to cross the river, I'd have to swim.

The river was booming. I stripped to my skivvies and stuffed my boots and clothes inside my backpack. The current swept me off my feet. My knees knocked against old concrete debris left in the river from the old bridge they had torn down in the 1970s. Traveling twenty yards downstream, I reached the far bank below the bridge in a tangle of saw briars – my old friends the saw briars.

The town went to bed at 10:00 p.m., and it was now after midnight. The streets were empty. Street lamps buzzed and moths darted in and out of the frosty white light.

Save-A-Lot was a “discount grocer,” which is a nice way of saying that they sold off-brand merchandise to poor people. If you didn’t care about such things as quality, you could fill the bed of a pickup truck with moonpies and white bread for \$5.

I hugged the tree line behind the stores. Save-A-Lot had four green rubber trash cans and one grimy dumpster. I discovered some expired eggs and a few bruised tomatoes. That was it. I couldn’t believe it. I’d smashed my knees in the river and ran a gauntlet of saw briars for a few rotten eggs and some soft tomatoes. “The store must have had a trash pick up today,” I thought. “Bad luck.”

Papa John’s was the only other place on that side of Main Street where I might find something to eat. But the pizzeria was at the far end of the L-shaped shopping center. There was no tree line on that side of the shopping center, and the FBI HQ lay right in front of me. At that hour, the headquarters parking lot was nearly empty, only two cars. But I knew there were always two gate guards on duty. Their little guard shack sat on the other side of the parking lot in the shadows. That pizza called to me. Its seductive siren song pulled me in. I decided to risk it.

Before going down to Papa John’s I wanted a look at the back of Save-A-Lot to see if it was feasible to get inside. The building was old and made of sheet metal, the type of cheap commercial construction commonly seen in the rural South. The doors looked pretty solid and were probably alarmed. I examined the walls. Over the years the building had taken a beating from delivery trucks. Sections of dented sheet metal dangled loose. I grabbed a piece of sheet metal and pulled it aside – ERRCH – a God-awful finger-nails-on-the-chalkboard sound pierced the still night air. I quickly retreated to the wood line and watched for movement over at the task force headquarters. Nothing was stirring over there. I waited for a few more minutes before starting for Papa John’s.

Keeping close to the back of the shopping center, I weaved in and out of the trash cans and AC units. Papa John’s was actually in a small trailer that was detached from the end of the shopping center. Main Street and the entrance to the shopping center were to my right. I proceeded to rummage through the Roll-A-Waste can next to Papa John’s. It was worth the risk. Half a cheese pizza lay on the top – in the box, no bites taken out, no baby diapers – as if someone had left it there just for me. Deeper in the can, I found the cook’s bag, which contained small packages of pepperoni, green peppers, onions, and olives.

“Tomorrow I’ll feast on pizza,” I thought. “I’ll make a broiling rack for it; carefully brown the crust and decorate it with toppings.” The thought of it caused saliva to pool in the corners of my mouth like one of Pavlov’s dogs.

I was lost in these culinary thoughts when I saw two Andrews Police Department cruisers whip into the parking lot. Their headlights were off. I ducked behind the garbage can as one police cruiser blew by me with his tires squealing. The first cruiser drove around the far side of the shopping center while the second came around my side. Both were headed for the same place – Save-A-Lot.

I could see the cruiser on my side spotlighting the rear of the building as he neared Save-A-Lot. “Holy Smoke, I’ve been burned,” I gasped. I ran for the far side of Papa John’s and crawled under a bush. I stayed still as a corpse. An SUV with its headlights off slowly pulled into the parking lot and came to a halt 10 yards in front of my bush. Two men in plain clothes hopped out and stood between the open doors. The driver had a holstered pistol. Both had their eyes trained on the front of Save-A-Lot.

“FBI,” I said to myself. They were covering the front of the shopping center while the two town cops searched the back. One of those gate guards must have heard me pull aside that sheet metal. My situation was dire. I couldn’t go back the way that I’d come; the town cops were blocking my path. I couldn’t cross Main Street; the two feds would see me. I was trapped. They would have a K-9 unit here soon. And I’d left my rifle back at camp.

Panic welled up inside my chest. I couldn’t believe they were going to catch me after only my second outing. I couldn’t concentrate. Blood rushed to my face; my ears tingled. Run – my first instinct was to run before the dogs got there. I’d sprint across Main Street and head for the river. I’d make it a footrace for the Snowbirds. I might be able to lose them in the maze of roads on the other side.

As I pushed up and prepared to run, one of the FBI agents said something to the other. Both hopped into the SUV and drove around back of Save-A-Lot, where the two cops were still searching. Here was my opening.

Running for all I was worth, I sprinted across Main Street, praying that no one would drive past me at that very moment. In the middle of the street, I glanced both ways. No cars. I ran behind Gibson’s Furniture store, zeroing on the river. Splash – I didn’t have time to undress. Backpack against my belly and boots pointed downstream, I let the current carry me under the bridge and past White’s Plaza. Emerging from the water near the old railroad bridge, I jogged across the four-lanes of Highway 19. Filled with water, my boots sloshed. In the cow pasture, they picked up great gobs of mud. It felt like I had two bricks tied to my feet.

After hastily packing my things, I wormed my way through the thicket to the light tower on the pimple of Webb Ridge. I climbed the metal tower above the tree canopy to have a look at my pursuers. Andrews spread out before me. I glassed Save-A-Lot, Papa John’s, Gibson’s Furniture, and along the banks of the river. The cops and feds were nowhere in sight. They hadn’t brought a K-9 unit after all. Once again, they’d missed me by inches.

Rummaging through the trash a week later, I came across an *Andrews Journal* newspaper from late June of 1999. Back at camp the next day, I was thumbing through it when I came to the weekly police calls, which are listed in the back. One of the calls read “Suspicious person behind Save-A-Lot.” I chuckled.

* * *

I decided to stay on this side of the river for the time being. I steered clear of the grain silos as well. I had a nagging suspicion that my run-in with the cops at Save-A-Lot wasn’t an accident, that maybe they had stake-out teams and remote cameras watching every grocery store, burger stand, and grain silo from here to the Tennessee border. I prowled the valley west of the airport where I found a small garden of beets, cabbage, and green beans. Slim pickings. No meat or fat. The rain fell almost every night, which seemed a fitting punctuation on a couple of miserable weeks.

“I can’t survive here,” I thought. “I’ll move down to Murphy. Maybe I’ll find food there.”

Then, my luck changed. On my previous forays, I’d been using the four-lane highway to look for food, and I’d been returning to camp through a cow pasture directly across from Buy Rite Motors. It was full of cows and cow crap. I always seemed to step in a pile on the way across and returned to camp with my boots caked in cow crap. One night, I thought it might be shorter and cleaner to hop the highway fence directly opposite White’s Plaza. Airport Road lay just beyond what appeared to be a small patch of woods. Twenty yards into the patch of woods, I discovered paradise – an immaculate garden. And a short distance down the road was another immaculate garden. Two well-tended gardens side-by-side. It was a real find.

(See map on page 148.)

Cultivated by the folks who lived right across the road, the gardens were over-flowing with every kind of vegetable you can imagine: corn, tomatoes, green peppers, potatoes, mustard greens, habanero peppers, and so forth. No bigger than a quarter of an acre apiece, these small plots would keep me in veggies. The gardens had been sitting right under my nose. I'd been using Highway 19 to move between Andrews and Marble so I walked right by the gardens in the dark.

I brushed the dirt over my Vibram boot prints as I backed out of the garden with a bag brimming with veggies. I was climbing the small embankment to Airport Road when out of the darkness I heard a growling dog charge at me. Snarling and claws scraping on asphalt, I figured it had to be a pit bull or a Rottweiler. I drew my Cold Steel knife and spun around to face the beast. In the dim light I saw a dog about the size of a Nerf football dancing around my feet. I sheathed my knife and laughed at myself. But this little dog was creating enough noise to wake the dead, and that was no laughing matter. "Shoo!" I hissed. "Shoo!" I threw air-kicks and air-punches at the vicious little bastard, but he just hovered there out of arm's reach like a trained prize fighter, all the while raising a tremendous racket. I tried to outrun him, but he followed on my heels. Little sucker was a nuisance. He finally returned to his lair only after I reached the drive leading up Webb Ridge.

I had plenty of fresh vegetables. Now I needed protein and fat. By now, I had convinced myself that the feds had no idea who was behind Save-A-Lot that night they almost caught me. The sheet metal had alerted one of the gate guards at the task force headquarters. They called the town cops and sent an SUV over to back them up. Whatever the case, if I was to survive on Webb Ridge, I'd have to rely on the dumpsters of Andrews. I thought about killing one of the cows down in the pasture. Too risky. The farmer might call the sheriff. Folks would be on the look-out for a night prowler.

It was time to cross the river again.

This time, after sloshing through the cold water, I searched the other side of Main Street. I worked my way through the cans behind the movie theatre and Gibson's Furniture and finally McDonald's. The two dumpsters at McDonald's were easily accessible and concealed inside an enclosure, which allowed me to work in private. The dining room trash consisted of empty wrappers and melted ice. The kitchen trash bags were heavy with unsold burgers, chicken sandwiches, and Big Macs, all wrapped in waxpaper. I carefully unwrapped a cheeseburger and tore off a monster-size bite. The processed cheese washed over me like warm, soapy bath water. Delicious!

It had taken me two miserable weeks, but I'd finally located a reliable food source. I developed a routine: once, sometimes twice a week, I'd go shopping for Big Macs and bell peppers. I'd stop off at the gardens first, then cross the river to McDonald's. Usually I'd climb back under my poncho shelter by 3:00 a.m.

New discoveries came almost every week. One rainy night, I took shelter in the cab of a truck before crossing the river. It was an old blue flatbed parked at the corner of a tobacco field just west of Buy Rite Motors. The farmers used it to spray fungicide. Rain spilled over the windshield. The cab smelled of motor oil and hard work. Empty oil cans and rusted wrenches lay on the floorboard. Popping open the glovebox, I sorted through fertilizer receipts and candy wrappers. In the back of the glovebox, I found an old book.

I swiveled the head of my penlight for a better look. It was a New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs included, the kind of pocket Bible that evangelicals hand out to strangers on the street. Missing its cover, the little Bible was severely dry-rotted. I hadn't read anything substantial in over a year. I figured I needed it more than the farmer, who probably had a better Bible at home. I carefully slipped it inside a Ziplock baggy and tucked it in the inside pocket of my ALICE pack.

I examined the pocket Bible the next morning. It had had a rough ride. The pages crumbled to the touch. Too brittle to read, the Bible was put aside until I could find a way to repair it. Not long after I

came across a roll of packing tape in the Roll-A-Waste can beside Gibson's. I went to work on the Bible, painstakingly taping the pages like some ancient manuscript restorer. It was well worth the effort. I started reading in the mornings. Pretty soon I was reading all day.

The pocket Bible scratched an itch I'd had for over a year. In my rush to leave the Cane Creek trailer, I'd forgotten to pack any books in my survival kit. And, once again, in my rush to quit Nordmann's house that night in July of 1998, I'd neglected to carry away any books. I never understood why I did that. Reading had always been one of my favorite things. That year and a half without books was excruciating. Those endless winter days staring up at the nylon roof of my tent nearly drove me insane, especially when the wind was blowing hard. For entertainment I used to watch the tiny spiders that took refuge in my tent. They would spin webs along the fiberglass supports and I would follow their daily routine, which consisted of eating tiny gnats and otherwise remaining motionless for hours at a time. Big fun! Other than the spiders, my only diversion was the radio. However, I rarely used it for anything except weather and news reports.

The Bible triggered an obsession in me. Pretty soon I started searching garbage bins for magazines, newspapers and anything with the printed word on it. A regular stop on my weekly outings was Gibson's Furniture, where I sometimes found a couple USA Today newspapers.

Little by little, I improved my conditions on Webb Ridge, and life became bearable in the thicket. I made a couple springboxes using five-gallon buckets. Holes were dug into the stream bed deep enough to bury the buckets up to their lids. The lids were sealed shut and large rocks placed over the top to blend them into the stream bed. Inside the buckets, my Big Macs and burgers stayed cool and dry.

The only stream on Webb Ridge ran next to the dirt track that led to the house beside Airport Road. Sitting beside the road, a large concrete reservoir brimmed with stagnant water. The owner had, apparently, used the head spring as a water source at one time, but probably abandoned it after a couple of dry years. It was too dangerous for me to fetch water during the daylight, so I did my business at the stream at night. Without a flashlight, I bathed and hauled water up to camp.

The rains ceased in mid-July, bringing drought to the highlands once again. Very little precipitation would fall in the coming months. The summer of 1999 would prove to be the driest on record. The once-flooded fields of corn dried up. Deep spider-web cracks developed in the orange soil. I baked in the sun on that exposed ridge. It was hot; we're talking Africa-hot, Mississippi-hot, drive-you-out-of-your-mind hot. At intervals throughout the day, I would hydrate: guzzle a half quart of water, strip to my underwear, and pour the other half over my body.

The heat never seemed to staunch my appetite, though. I became a firm believer in eating; starving people tend to get that way. I cooked in the morning, boiling a pot of beans, greens, potatoes, cabbage – whatever I had available. On a cutting board made from the lid of a garbage can, I sliced fresh vegetables for sandwiches. The chilled Big Macs, burgers and chicken sandwiches were carefully disassembled. I scraped off the soggy condiments and vegetables, then used an improvised broiling rack made out of a section of cut highway fence to brown the buns and patties over the fire. I built skyscraper sandwiches. Every piece of green pepper, every slice of tomato had its proper place, lest the massive structure come tumbling down. Finished eating breakfast, I'd recline on my sweat-stained sleeping mat to read my taped pocket Bible. In the evening, I'd eat again, this time the cold left-overs from that morning's feast.

* * *

In the spring of 1999, the task force started to slowly bleed excess manpower. In July, I read in the papers that there were fewer than 60 agents still posted in Andrews. Woody Enderson announced his retirement in August. Special Agent Steve McCraw took over the Southeast Bomb Task Force. I predicted that McCraw would try to run a more low-key operation. Gone were the boastful news conferences, the

army of agents, and the squadron of helicopters. Despite the new approach, the feds were still in Andrews, still searching the mountains, still a threat.

With my camp smack in the middle between the FBI headquarters and the airport, the task force choppers buzzed over the top of me. On occasions, I would climb the tower at night to have a better look at my adversaries. I took note of their comings and goings. Activity had fallen off since winter. Looked as if they were simply spinning their wheels, going nowhere. I guess with no new leads to follow, they were wondering what to do next.

I was wondering the same thing. My original plan had called for a quick turnaround. I'd locate a stash of food, heist it, and then haul it back into the mountains. I figured it would take me two or three weeks. Consequently, I didn't bring much gear with me – no winter sleeping bag or winter clothes. Then my plan changed. I felt comfortable that I could survive on Webb Ridge, living off garden vegetables and McDonald's burgers. There was no need to rush things. I'd take my time searching for a big score. The Save-A-Lot grocery store was pretty much scratched off my list of potential targets. Next on the list were the five grain silos in Marble.

The silos sat bunched together on the side of Airport Road. Behind them were corn and soybean fields. Tucked into the tree line just across the road was an old wood-framed building. No markings or crosses decorated the outside. To me, it looked like an old church or a Masonic lodge. It was a strange place late at night. The only inhabitants were owls and mice. For a couple of weeks, I watched the place. After midnight, I'd walk the mile on the railroad tracks and sit and watch the silos from the safety of the soybean field. I looked for any tell-tale sign of an FBI presence. Human visitors were frequent, but none appeared to be connected to the task force. Parking behind the silos or next to the church, they would stay for a little while and then leave. Some came to smoke pot; others to make love. Occasionally, a state trooper would park next to the church to ambush speeders on Airport Road.

I had to go to the silos sooner or later. "Might as well get it over with," I thought. Approaching from the soybean field, I could see that each silo had a steel ladder that led to a trapdoor on the roof. At ground level there was a side door that was kept padlocked when the silo was full of grain. The side door on the silo had no lock. I knocked on the galvanized steel wall – it was empty. I checked all of the silos just in case. To my surprise, one of the silos had about two feet of whole corn in the bottom. I quickly jumped inside and shut the door behind me. Shining my flashlight, I waded through the yellow kernels of corn. The flashlight's batteries were near death. It emitted an eerie orange glow. The sight of all that food got me to thinking: "What if I get a truck tonight, filled its bed with corn, and drive away." I grabbed handfuls of corn and let it run through my fingers as I planned.

On second thought, I realized that I couldn't live on corn alone. Corn is a low quality food with little nutritional value. It's mainly used to make syrup, oil or feed, or it's used as filler. Better to wait for the soybean and wheat harvest. High in protein, fat, and essential vitamins and minerals, the soybeans and wheat are real staples. A combination of the three – corn, wheat, soybeans – would provide me with an excellent food staple. I decided to wait.

I loaded my backpack with corn and jogged to the railroad tracks. If the feds had the silos under video surveillance, they would be along shortly. I paralleled Airport Road, keeping an eye on the silos, expecting a fast-moving SUV from the task force headquarters. But none came.

I had found my food source. Now, I would wait for the harvest. (See map on page 147.)

Over the next four nights, I visited the silos. On the fourth night, the corn was all gone. The farmers had taken it. The green corn in the field was head-high, and the soybeans were up to my shins. But the ears and the pods had yet to form. I had a long wait until harvest in October. The thought of staying there that long troubled me. I'd been on Webb Ridge only a month and already the feds had come within 10 yards of catching me. It hardly seemed possible that I could last three months.

I checked the silos once a week in case the farmers stocked them before the harvest. In August, I came upon a great discovery: one of the silos had its bottom filled with wheat. However, under the dying beam of my flashlight, the grains appeared to move. I thought it was an optical illusion until I grabbed a handful for closer inspection, and sure enough, the grains moved. The wheat was crawling with weevils. The little bugs had hallowed out about half the grains. But the other half looked fine. To the farmer, it was cattle feed. To me, it was food. All it needed was a little bit of polishing. I could sift the wheat through one of the window screens that I'd found by the unused reservoir. That would remove most of the mold and dirt. I'd kill the weevils later. Back on Fires Creek, I had a half bag of diatomaceous earth. One tablespoon per five-gallon bucket of wheat would exterminate the buggers. I hadn't noticed any wheat planted in the fields around Andrews, so this was likely the only wheat I'd see that year. Might as well get it before the farmer uses it to feed his cows.

I collected garbage bags from the McDonald's dumpster over the next few nights. They were washed in the river and dried in the sun. Working at the silos only after midnight, I loaded the bags with weevil wheat and carried them to the tall weeds behind the church across the road. There were about 15 bags in all.

Except for the church, the north side of Airport Road was wooded. A creek spilled out of the woods, passed the church, and then cut through the soybean field. No discernible trails followed the creek into the woods, for the rhododendron grew thick, its branches sprawling along the ground.

In the early morning, I began carrying the sacks of wheat up the creek into the dense rhododendron. I turned up the ridge and found a good spot between the lines of drift – those paths that are the most commonly used when going from one place to another, the paths of least resistance. I had to exist between those lines.

I lodged a center pole above my head in the trees. The bags of wheat were hung from the pole with string. For a roof I used a thick sheet of black plastic that I'd trimmed off the edge of a hayrick, or haystack, down in the valley. Draping it over the pole, I tied the four corners. Mice would have a hard time negotiating the string, and bears rarely come down this close to town. The wheat would be safe there until October.

By late August, I had outlined a plan: (1) fill the blue barrel in Snowbird with corn, soybeans and wheat, (2) haul the grain to Fires Creek, (3) purchase supplies in Franklin, North Carolina, and (4) transfer the explosives from Copper Creek to Andrews. At that stage it was more of a wish list than a plan, too extensive for one man to accomplish. Assuming that I acquired transportation, I'd have to do most of the work in one night, two nights at the most, which was simply impossible for one man. I'd likely run out of time and energy before completing half of it. With Franklin near the Georgia border and Copper Creek on the Tennessee border, the distances I'd have to travel were too great. I had to prioritize. Fires Creek and Franklin were closest together; therefore, I would finish them first. If I had time left over, then I'd move the explosives to Andrews. That left Snowbird. By road it was a long way from any of the other places. I'd waste too much time driving over there. If anything went to Snowbird, I'd carry it over the mountains on foot. The thought of freighting another load of food to Snowbird didn't appeal to me at all. "Maybe later," I thought. But later never came. I kept postponing the trip to Snowbird until the end of the season. Eventually the idea was dropped all together.

* * *

The drought never loosened its death grip on the highlands. Very little rain fell during that sweltering summer of 1999. With my little stream reduced to a trickle, I had to spend hours at night collecting water, one drop at a time. The once booming Valley River turned into a rippling creek. The sun baked the dirt hard as pottery. You could've dribbled a basketball through those cornfields. When it did rain, the droplets shed right off the ground.

I didn't think the corn and soybeans would make it. At night, before going to town, I would check the corn and beans, breaking open ears and snapping the pods to examine for growth. I would dig in the iron-hard dirt checking for moisture. It was dry as a desert. Despite the drought, the hardy hybrids kept growing. I marveled at the plants' ability to adapt. Their tap roots drilled through the soil in search of the last remnants of the rains that had fallen in June. The plants grew a little more every week.

My next bombing mission was never very far from my mind. While I waited for the harvest, I watched the feds in Andrews. Their headquarters was sewed up pretty tight after that shooting in November of 1998. Two gate guards were on duty at all times, and agents lingered around the place day and night. If I hit them, I'd have to do it while they were away from their headquarters. There were problems with the mission, but none that couldn't be solved. The big problem was my lack of food. I simply wasn't ready for a long siege in the mountains. Until I secured several years' supply of food, I wasn't ready to move against the task force.

My new sense of caution had much to do with my new diet. I enjoy a good sandwich. On Webb Ridge, I was eating four huge sandwiches every day. As my diet improved, I became more optimistic. The prospect of becoming a corpse wasn't that appealing anymore. Half of me, the half eating Big Macs, wanted to believe that the government's case against me wasn't that strong. "Get a good lawyer and beat the rap," said my burger belly. "But if you bomb the task force, your prospects for success will disappear. Don't make it worse by giving them more evidence."

* * *

Trips into town for food became routine. Occasionally, I waited on the side of Airport Road before going to the gardens and McDonald's. Other times, I prowled the valley west of the airport. Typically, I got a little rest before descending the ridge. Prowling around the valley late at night had a certain charm. The people of the valley ruled the day, while I ruled the night. I learned to use the phases of the moon like some nocturnal creature. The new moon was avoided. The first quarter began a flurry of activity that lasted until the last quarter. Painting the valley in pale light, the full moon had an addictive quality that kept me out all night, expanding my territory in search of new prey. But the moon was a double-edged sword that could cut you if you weren't careful. I could see better in the moonlight, but so could everyone else. Roads could be especially treacherous. On dark, moonless nights the headlights of cars approaching from behind reflected nicely on the foliage, giving me ample opportunity to take cover. But when the moon was full, it was hard to see the contrast between the headlights and the moon light. I had to stay alert, turning my head frequently to look for approaching cars.

My watch batteries died during the winter so I started keeping a written calendar, marking the time of day by watching the sun, the phases of the moon, the bird and animal patterns, even delivery trucks following a set schedule.

On a typical night, I got my food and returned to the ridge within a couple of hours. But sometimes I ran into a problem, such as the McDonald's manager doing early morning inventory or payroll, and I had to wait for hours on the berm behind Gibson's Furniture. Frequently, I tangled with the pint-sized dog who patrolled the gardens. Probably some sort of terrier, he was a 10-pound bag of canine bile that I called "Fluffy."

Every time I stopped off at the gardens, Fluffy was there watching, listening. Despite his size, he was quite fearless. He had this big dog partner who usually stayed on the porch snoozing. Not Fluffy – he sat on the front porch at attention, listening for the slightest sound from the gardens across the road. At 10-minute intervals he'd descend the stairs and patrol his yard. If he heard or smelled me, he'd wind himself into a rage and force me to retreat empty-handed. I tried softening him up with McDonald's hamburgers, but he wouldn't accept my bribery. He hated me, I hated him, and our little late-night feud lasted all summer and into the fall.

Fall brought colder temperatures at night, and I hesitated to get out of bed. I hadn't planned on staying this far into the fall season. The only bedding I brought with me consisted of a sleeping mat, poncho, and poncho liner. For added warmth, I piled two feet of leaves on my little poncho bag. I draped plastic sheeting over the leaves and held it in place with rocks along the edges. If I stayed on my back, the makeshift sleeping bag was quite warm. I needed more plastic sheeting for the bed, so I rolled out of my leaf-bag and went to town. I stopped off at the gardens first. Relying on creek irrigation throughout the long dry summer, the gardens continued to produce crop after crop. For the past month I'd been taking extra vegetables to dry in the sun. The desiccated veggies would go back with me to the mountains.

The drought had drained a lot of water out of the river. It was little more than a creek. Recently I'd improvised a pair of waders from doubled up garbage bags and strings. This allowed me to keep my boots on as I crossed the river.

My next stop was the garbage can beside Gibson's Furniture, where I usually found one or two USA Today newspapers. Although a poorly written left-wing rag, the papers were a welcome find. I spent a lot of time reading the papers. Often as I performed my nightly chores, I'd think about the articles that I'd read that day, engaging in debate with myself over the latest issue, or improvising comedy routines based upon something in the paper. A recent USA Today article criticized Nike, the shoe manufacturer, for overlooking the abuse of its factory workers in Vietnam. Nike factories employed a large number of young women, and their managers, mostly middle-aged Korean males, allegedly abused them like tin pot dictators. Girls who showed up late for work were forced to run around the factory. Those who missed quotas were made to lick the floor. On this particular night, my inner dialogue was based on an imaginary scene between an abused factory girl and her tyrant boss. I used my best Asian accent.

"You lick the floor. You run around factory," said the manager.

"No, I don't want to lick floor. Oh, prease don't make me lick floor," said the factory girl.

"You run around factory now or you fire."

My improvised skit went on and on as I sifted through the trash. After going through Gibson's green Roll-A-Waste can, I headed for the large pile of refuse behind the store. Gibson's had a berm out back in the shape of a horseshoe. Inside the berm were old box spring mattresses, large pieces of cardboard, and sheets of plastic. Right on top of the pile, I spotted the very thing I needed for my leafbag, a sheet of clear plastic. It was draped over a long rectangular box. "That was easy enough," I said. Pulling the plastic off the box, I proceeded to fold it up, all the while doing my comedy skit.

"You better lick the floor," the tyrant boss said.

"No, prease don't make me lick the floor."

Just as I finished this line, the long rectangular box slowly opened like a coffin in one of those old vampire movies. I couldn't believe my eyes. There, inside the box was the barely visible outline of a person. I thought this was an ambush; someone had seen me going through the trash on a previous occasion and had set this up. An agent had hidden in the box like Baretta, the 1970s TV detective. My heart lodged in my throat as I waited for him to draw his weapon and yell "Freeze!" Then the figure spoke: "Who's making you lick the floor buddy?" His voice came out hard and gravelly, obviously damaged by years of drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes.

"Nobody is making me . . . nobody is making me lick the floor," I blurted out without thinking. I backed away toward the river.

Not even bothering to put on my improvised waders, I splashed across the cold water, climbing the highway fence on the other side. I fumbled with my binoculars to get a better look at the strange man in the box. There he stood on the garbage pile beside his box.

“Who is this guy?” I muttered under my breath. “He’s not a cop.” Then it came to me. This was a bum, an urban outdoorsman, a homeless guy sleeping in the trash. And I’d just stolen his plastic roof.

Yet even a homeless guy might go to the police. Maybe he was waiting to catch his breath before tramping downtown to the police station. After several tense moments, I saw a flash of light. He’d lit up a cigarette. He puffed deep and let loose a phlegm-rattling cough. Finished smoking, he lifted the lid on his box and climbed back inside.

* * *

I began implementing the food plan in September. Preparation is key to most successful human endeavors, whether you’re baking a cake or trying to heist two tons of food right under the noses of a hundred FBI agents. Containers were needed first. I simply couldn’t shovel the grain into the bed of a pickup truck. I’d collected a handful of five gallon buckets over the summer, but something bigger was required to haul the mother lode. I hit upon the idea of using the municipal Roll-A-Waste garbage cans, those plastic receptacles provided by the city to local businesses. Weatherproofed, with wheels, a flip-top lid, and “Andrews” embossed on the side, the trash cans would hold about 55 gallons each. Also required were plenty of plastic bags from the McDonald’s dumpster.

To haul the Roll-A-Waste containers, I’d need a truck. I had one picked out at Buy Rite Motors, a 1996 Chevy Silverado. The owner of the lot kept the keys to his vehicles on his office wall. The back door had been boarded over with plywood. Using my hatchet, it would be a simple matter to pry loose the plywood and snatch the keys. I made a few cursory measurements of the truck bed using a knotted rope. Four Roll-A-Waste containers would fit snugly standing upright. Attaching a dealer’s plate to the truck bumper should take care of any cops.

In early October, I heard combines working in the valley. The harvest had begun. The monster machines raised huge dust clouds in the bone dry fields. The farmers harvested the soybeans first, then the corn.

Time to move. I broke camp on Webb Ridge and moved to the heights overlooking the silos, lugging four Roll-A-Waste containers across the river, one at a time on my back, through the scrotum-tightening water. I cleaned the containers using river water and leaves, and then rolled them through the barren corn fields to the woods above the silos.

After the combines finished, all five silos were filled to the roof with either corn or beans. I was fortunate to have gotten that wheat when I did, for the farmers had not harvested any wheat that season. The bags of weevil wheat were as I’d left them in August.

My campsite sat on the small ridge above the church. The north side of Airport Road was heavily wooded, except for a small scrubby field next to the church. Probably planted with grass at one time, the field had become overgrown with briars and small white pine trees. The field would make a good stockpile point for the grain, a place to conceal the Roll-A-Waste cans. When I was ready to move them, I could easily drive over the briars and small pines with the 1996 Silverado. During the loading process I’d conceal the green garbage cans with cut white pines. No one would see them.

I started getting visitors right away. Two guys came to the church one night. Sounded like they were doing some kind of renovation on the inside. I worried about the containers only yards away, but the two guys at the church turned out to be the least of my problems.

Large vacuum fans sucked air through the bottom of the silos, cooling and drying the grains. The fans produced an ear-splitting wail, like that of an air-raid siren. You could hear it a mile away. The farmers kept the fans running all night, which made it impossible for me to hear cars approaching. I accessed the breaker box and shut the noisy fans off while I worked. The first night, I hauled about six bags to the Roll-A-Waste containers. It was back-breaking work. The silos stood about 30 feet high. The

side doors were padlocked. I had to climb a steel ladder to the top where a trapdoor opened onto the mountain of grain. I steadied myself on the dew-covered roof, filled a plastic bag with grain, put it in my backpack, stepped down the ladder, and carried it over to the cans in the scrubby field. All the while, keeping an eye peeled for visitors.

A lonely mercury vapor lamp painted the silos in shadow and light. Bats swooped into the light to snatch insects. The air was cool and dry and smelled like rotting corn stalks. The drought hadn't abated. Tramping through the field, I raised a wake of dust. The place teemed with mice searching for grains of corn that were accidentally spilled during the loading of the silos. The mice attracted a squadron of owls. They perched in the trees overlooking the silos, waiting for a hapless rodent to cross the bare field. A small kill zone surrounded the silos. Between loads, I'd sit atop the silo and watch the combat. An owl would swoop down and snatch a mouse in the field. Dust enveloped them as they struggled. With the battle over, the owl would fly to the wood line with his trophy and celebrate his victory by hooting a little tune.

The second night started without incident. But after midnight, I was coming down the ladder with a pack full of beans when I saw a car coming. It slowed dramatically and pulled in behind the silos. In that location, the car couldn't be seen from the road. I soon discovered that the silos were one of those places where teenagers go to do what teenagers shouldn't be doing: smoking pot, having sex, drinking beer. The couple – male and female – was there for sex, for they had little time for anything else. I flattened out on my belly between the silos as they started going to town on one another. "God, I hope they don't decide to take a leak when they're done," I whispered. "Because I'm lying in the closest spot. If they open that door, they'll walk right on top of me." After fifteen minutes they quietly wiped the fog from the windshield and drove away. The things I saw late at night never ceased to amaze me. I was the town's proverbial fly on the wall.

I didn't like the silos. Some places just give me the creeps, and the silos were one of those places. They had a bad vibe, as the hippies used to say.

I had another close encounter of the strange kind on the third night. Dropping a load at the cans in the scrubby field, I turned to walk back across the road to the silo when a little voice in my head whispered "Watch out . . . there's something on the road." It wasn't a stranger's voice; we're not talking schizophrenia here. It was my inner voice, only much clearer than usual. I stopped at the edge of the road and sat down in the high weeds. Moments later, I heard a metallic sound and the whirr of bicycle tires. Out of the darkness rode a man on a bike. He passed me heading in the direction of Marble. "A man on a bike?" I asked myself. At this hour? What are the chances?

No, I definitely didn't like that place. I had a feeling that the lovers and the cyclist were only a small taste of things to come. I resolved to finish as fast as I could. Unfortunately, nature didn't care about my resolutions. Rain moved in the following day.

Generally, when it rained I'd cease most activity and stay under shelter. For me the rain, like the darkness, was a security blanket. The choppers stayed grounded, the searchers hunkered down in their motel, and the hunters remained home. Listening to the rain murmur on the coated nylon, a feeling of well-being came over me. I always slept like a baby in the rain.

Around noon the rain let up and I decided to cook my daily gruel before the rain picked up again. For the last few days I'd been cooking on the ridge. The woods were thick, and the chances of someone stumbling upon my camp were slight. I fetched my water from the creek at night and used it the following day to do the cooking. It was a hassle though. Cooking gruel consumed a great deal of water. Because it was a weekday and the weather was nasty, I figured it would be safe to go down to the creek and do my cooking there. While I was down there I could take a much needed cat bath.

I gathered the pot, grain, and dry kindling that I always kept stashed in a Hefty Bag. I left my rifle behind because I wouldn't need it on such a rainy day. Then I headed down the ridge through the dripping forest.

The rhododendron choked the small creek. I came off the ridge about a 100 yards above the church in the thick of the rhododendron and proceeded to make a fire. Cutting two green logs, I laid them parallel to one another about a foot and a half apart. Laying flat rocks between the green logs, I built my fire on the rocks, keeping it up off the saturated ground. A checkerboard pattern worked best, small twigs to larger sticks. I used a Bic lighter and a small piece of newspaper to get a small flame started. Once I had a good flame, I used deadwood from the surrounding rhododendron. Smaller lengths of green wood were cut for pot holders. I laid the green sticks like a tic-tac-toe diagram, using them to hold the pot of boiling water over the flames while continuing to feed the dry sticks where needed. I took the pattern of sticks up four or five levels – the higher the level, the more flame under the pot. The green sticks burned slower, which allowed me to relax knowing my pot of water wouldn't tip into the fire.

As I was putting the soybeans into the pot, I turned to look upstream and saw the lower half of a man walking down the creek. Wearing a camouflage jacket and carrying a small caliber rifle, he stepped carefully over the rhododendron branches. I was caught completely off-guard and had only enough time to run up the opposite ridge. I ran without thinking. My ears tingled like a five-year-old caught stealing cookies. I made it about 100 yards up the ridge when I remembered the pot of soybeans on the fire. I stopped running. An image suddenly flashed in my head of this guy standing over that pot of boiling soybeans. A squirrel hunter, he had probably gone up the creek earlier when I was at camp. He would have passed that same spot on his way up. Now, on his way down, he runs into this. Not good! A thousand thoughts crowded my mind, and it was difficult to concentrate on one.

Moments later I heard branches snapping; he was moving down the creek, and fast too. He was definitely spooked. The sound of breaking branches grew fainter.

"He knows who I am," I thought. "He'll run to the feds sure enough. They'll be here in less than a half hour. I need a plan. Think, damn it. Helicopters will be hovering overhead. I need to get out from underneath their infrared scopes if I'm to have a chance."

I ran as fast as my feet could fly. Dumping the soybeans into the creek, I tore the fire apart. The coals were tossed in the creek and leaves spread around to camouflage the area. Bounding up to camp, I packed my things in a hurry and spread my map on the ground. "Think! You need a way out," I said. I beat down the monster of fear through perpetual motion. As the action took all of my attention, I no longer had time to be afraid.

To my front were open fields, suicidal to cross in daylight. To my rear were the Snowbird Mountains, and on the other side of the mountains was an extensive road network. There was my only hope of escape. If I could reach them before dark I could travel on them all night, using their hard, dry surfaces to break my scent trail. Using a creek to break my scent trail was out. There were no good backtracks available. The dog handlers would simply search both banks of the creek to find where I came out of the water. No, in this situation, I needed roads.

I plowed through the wet woods. After a half hour, my second wind kicked in and I cruised on auto-pilot. Sweat coursed down my back, mixing with the rainwater. My clothes became soaked. My legs pumped like car pistons.

Briars suck – this is a timeless truth. I think it's in the Bible somewhere. As I traversed the ridge parallel to the airport, I ran smack into a massive clear-cut. Acres of briars and 10-foot white pines blocked my path. Struggling to the other side of this green hell, I looked like I'd been in a fight with 10 alley cats.

Up ahead my path was blocked by several houses. I drudged on. Dogs came out to bark, but fortunately their owners stayed inside.

Reaching the spur I'd seen on the map, I climbed the base of its side, thus avoiding the thick foliage along the top of the spur. A couple hours had elapsed since I started. The feds should've been all over the valley by then. Their headquarters was less than two miles from the silos. That squirrel hunter should've reached town in minutes. I grabbed my binoculars to get a better view of the valley. Activity at the task force headquarters appeared normal. The helicopter hanger was closed up tight. I swept over to the airport – nothing there either. I'd seen enough to know that no one was chasing me.

There was enough light left to make it over the crest of the Snowbirds. But if the feds weren't coming, why put myself through the trouble. I decided to move up closer to the crest and wait there for the time being, wait and see what developed before committing myself to the other side. If I had to go over in the dark, my new position would make it easier.

Night came and the wet clothes chilled my skin. I shook like a dog crapping peach pits. I didn't want to put on my only pair of dry clothes yet. At any minute I might have to start moving through the wet woods again. I couldn't light a fire. But the shaking became unbearable, so I changed into my dry clothes and unfurled my bed roll.

Out of the west I heard the sound of chopper blades pounding the air – thwack – thwack – thwack. “There it is,” I said. The search has started. Earlier, the feds had sent the choppers away, maybe for repairs. They were back now. I scrolled up my bedroll and waited for the choppers to begin circling the ridges below me. But the helicopter (there was only one) flew past the silos without slowing. Then I remembered. It was one of the National Guard helicopters that regularly commuted through the valley. As it disappeared beyond Andrews, I realized that the feds were not coming.

For some reason, the squirrel hunter hadn't squealed. I scratched my head and wondered why. Perhaps he went to the feds and they didn't believe his story. Or, maybe he didn't get a good look at me. But none of those scenarios made sense. He had to have known it was me. It was the fall of 1999, just over a year since the start of the most publicized manhunt in American history. A hundred federal agents were headquartered a little over a mile from the silos. I was known to be hiding in the woods. That day was rainy; the creek rarely travelled. And this squirrel hunter finds a man in camouflage squatting over a pot of boiling soybeans, who then takes off running into the woods after being spotted. He would have to be pretty stupid not to put those clues together. His hasty exit, basically crashing through the rhododendron, convinced me that he knew exactly who he had stumbled upon. Whatever had caused him to keep quiet, I prefer to think of it as a gift from God.

I spent a couple of days on the spur overlooking the valley. Then I returned to my original campsite on Webb Ridge. For the next three nights, I crept down the railroad tracks to watch the silos. Everything looked normal, so I began loading grain again.

I decided not to move my camp back to the ridge above the silos. The silos were too bizarre. I'd work fast. I walked the mile to the silos, worked most of the night, and returned to Webb Ridge before dawn. During the next three nights, I had no serious run-in with the nocturnal visitors who continued to show up every night. But each time one came by, I had to put the work on hold until they left. Some nights, I managed to carry over only three bags to the cans because of the night people. It was frustrating. One time I waited atop the silo as a state trooper did paperwork in his car. Parked next to the church, he would race off to catch a speeder, write a ticket, and then return to his spot beside the church to do his paperwork. Almost every night a couple of teenagers parked behind the silos to smoke pot. They drove away, leaving behind a pungent cloud of grass. The place attracted surreptitious behavior like a Grateful Dead concert.

Despite the frequent interruptions, I made steady progress. I'd be ready by the end of October. One more Roll-A-Waste container needed filling. It should take me two more nights. That first night was beautiful, a harvest moon shining down through a cloudless sky. I was taking a little break on top of the silo when I noticed a small truck puttering up the road. Because it was after midnight, I didn't expect it to stop at the silos. But the truck slowed and turned into the church parking lot. I peered over the edge of the silo to have a look-see.

"No, no – can't be the same truck," I hissed. But a closer inspection confirmed my suspicions; it was in fact the same truck I'd seen here two weeks ago. "Coon hunters . . . stinking coon hunters." Before I began hauling grain, I'd come to the silos on a scouting trip and saw these same coon hunters. From the railroad tracks, I'd watched them hunt the ridges above the church. Their hunt had been unsuccessful so I figured they wouldn't come back. I figured wrong.

Now, in the middle of the loading process, I had removed the cut white pines used to camouflage the garbage cans in the scrubby field. Anyone walking back through the field would easily see the exposed containers. The coon hunters would find them for sure once they got their dog out snooping around.

A beat-up Toyota, the coon hunters' truck had a couple dog boxes on the back. They shut the motor down and walked around back and let a hound dog out of the box. I lay spread-eagle on the roof of the silo, peeking over at the coon hunters.

"They'll find the cans if the hunt is anything like the last one," I thought. "I'll have to start all over again – get a new bunch of cans and move them farther up the ridge."

One of the coon hunters started encouraging the hound, "Get'em Lil. Go on, get'em Lil." The dog began sniffing around, wagging its tail.

The coon hunters – there were two – turned on their powerful wheat lights, shining them on the trees and church building. I strained to see what was happening. I lay on the opposite side of the silo so that the road to my front wasn't visible. I could see the church and traffic coming from left and right on Airport Road.

The dog seemed to have a nose of its own, roaming the parking lot while the coon hunters walked toward the scrubby field where my grain containers stood uncovered. "Come on Lil," one of the hunters called to the dog. Off to the left I spotted a pair of headlights approaching. The car was hurling down the road at top speed. A split second after it disappeared behind the silo – BAM ... AARP – a loud bang accompanied by the yelp of a dog pierced the air. The car momentarily slowed but then gathered speed again and continued on its way.

There was a moment of silence. The coon hunters walked toward the road out of my view. I heard one of them ask the other, "Is he dead?"

"Yep," the other one responded. "He's dead alright. And that som-bitch never even stopped. A five-hundred dollar dog and he ain't never had a chance to tree a coon. How da ya like that som-bitch never even stopping?"

One of the men backed the truck out to the road, where it paused briefly as the other man threw the dead hound dog into the back with a dull thud. Then the truck pattered back down the road.

* * *

Past the cluster of houses and the small cabinet shop that crowded up against Highway 19, Airport Road bent sharply into a blind curve before straightening out as it entered the flat expanse of the valley. The curve had a retaining wall made of flat rocks and concrete. During the day, the wall sucked in the sun's rays and remained warm long into the night. Lately, I'd got in the habit of standing with my back

against the warm wall before beginning my nighttime routine. Tonight was anything but routine, though; tonight I would make my move and haul the grains back to camp.

It was Halloween 1999. My back against the wall, literally as well as figuratively, I watched the '96 Silverado under the cool florescent lights at Buy Rite Motors. Parked in its usual place, the truck looked ready to ramble.

Hearing a vehicle approaching, I lay down in the drainage ditch at the base of the wall. A truck flew around the blind curve, passing within inches of my body. I hopped to my feet and resumed my position against the wall.

Months of preparation had led to this night. It was now or never. The plan seemed simple enough, but then again, most plans seem simple until you try to execute them and something goes wrong. Filling the cache in Snowbird had fallen by the way side; it was just too far out of my way. The plan before me was still extensive. Food had to be dumped at Fires Creek, food and supplies purchased from the Wal-Mart in Franklin, and, if there was time left over, explosives moved from Copper Creek to Andrews, and all of it had to be accomplished in fewer than two days.

It was around 9:00 p.m. on Saturday. Buy Rite Motors would open for business at 9:00 a.m. Monday morning. The owner would report the truck stolen shortly thereafter. The truck had to be ditched, and I had to be 20 miles away when the sheriff took that report. I had 36 hours. Everything had to happen within that time frame, and the bulk of the work had to be done tonight. I'd designed the whole plan to steer the FBI away from Tusquitee. I wanted them to keep searching in Nantahala; therefore, it was imperative that no one notice that truck on Fires Creek or anywhere west of the Tusquitee Mountains. After the owner reported the Silverado stolen, the feds would try to figure out where it had been. I'd already left the feds enough clues that pointed to Tusquitee. I was determined to leave them no more.

The first thing I needed was a siphoning hose. Rather than use my precious little money to purchase gas, I'd siphon 20 gallons from the lot vehicles at Buy Rite Motors. The buckets to hold the gas were already stashed in the bushes near the car lot. I'd located a suitable hose; unfortunately, it was still attached to a garden sprinkler in the barn below Fluffy's house. I didn't want to tip the gardeners to my presence while I continued to subsist on their vegetables, so I waited until tonight to cut the hose.

I pushed away from the retaining wall and made my way east on Airport Road. Immediately, I ran into trouble. The gardeners were home, and they had guests, and all of them were congregated on the front porch. Fluffy and his partner were there too. Their neighbors had company as well. An SUV full of trick-or-treaters sat parked at the end of the driveway. It was a big mess. My path to the barn and the hose was blocked. I sat on the road bank to wait. The SUV left but came back after a few minutes. The trick-or-treaters poured out onto the lawn and proceeded to play hide-and-seek. Meanwhile, time ticked away. I waited an hour before giving up on the hose.

Already I was changing the plan. It was a bad omen. But I figured the Silverado would have sufficient gas in the tank to get me to a service station, where I'd put \$25 worth of gas in the tank.

I wedged my hatchet behind the sheet of plywood that covered the back door of Buy Rite Motors. I pried loose the board. I hadn't noticed an alarm system on the office, but, just in case there was one, I'd move quickly. Opening a doggy-door size hole, I crawled inside and headed straight for the keys on the wall. Scanning the tags, I snatched the one that read "'96 Chevy Silverado." I stuffed three more sets of keys in my pocket – in case the truck wouldn't start. Climbing back out through the doggy door, I hugged the wall all the way around front.

After attaching a dealer's plate to the back bumper, I keyed open the door and ducked down in the cab to look over the controls. The engine cranked. I twisted the blinker knob thinking it controlled the headlights, but the windshield wipers turned on High. I put the truck in drive and eased out of the car lot,

still trying to locate the headlight switch, which I finally found on the dashboard as I turned onto the highway.

The truck felt strange, like I was floating on a cushion of air. The previous operator must have been a midget or a woman because the seat was all the way forward. And the wipers kept scraping away at the dry windshield – skree – skree – skree.

Turning left on Airport Road, I pulled into the driveway below Webb Ridge where I had my backpack and equipment hidden behind a haystack. I piled everything in the back of the truck, fixed the seat, and managed to finally stop those crazy windshield wipers. As of yet, I hadn't even looked at the gas gauge. When I did, my jaw dropped. The tank was empty!

I'd watched the owner of Buy Rite Motors drive that truck around for three weeks. The Silverado was his driving around vehicle; that's why I'd picked it. I couldn't believe he had left the fuel tank empty.

I couldn't get the siphoning hose – the gardeners were still on the front porch. And I couldn't purchase gas in Andrews or in Marble – too many people knew my face at the filling stations. Murphy was the only place I could buy gas. But it was 15 miles to Murphy. I might not make it.

The nearest service station, FatBack's Citgo, was on the west side of Murphy. I knew that empty never really meant empty. Most vehicles have an extra half-gallon of fuel in the tank when the needle reads empty. "I can get to FatBack's on a half gallon," I said to myself.

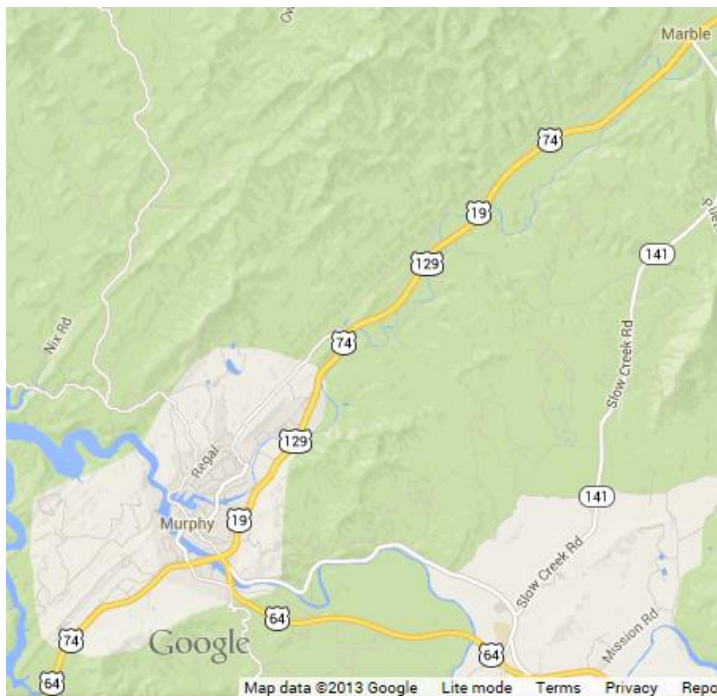


Figure 12 Murphy

On the outskirts of Murphy, about a mile short of FatBack's, the engine quit, the headlights dimmed, and the power-steering shut down. I wrestled with the wheel, swerving off Highway 19 into the parking lot of Heilig Meyers furniture store. The store was closed, the parking lot empty, except for a lone delivery truck. "What rotten luck!" I yelled.

I'd have to walk the rest of the way to FatBack's.

Gallon jug in hand, I hit the road. I'd taken maybe 10 steps when I saw a Cherokee County Sheriff's car coming toward me. My luck just kept getting better and better. There were two deputies in the front seat. They pulled up beside me.

"Run out of gas?" one of the deputies asked.

"Yah," I said, pointing to the truck parked at the furniture store.

"Hop in, we'll take you to FatBack's."

I guess I could've run, but I probably wouldn't have made it far. And all my work gathering grain would have been for naught. He popped the back door, and I slid onto the back seat.

We turned onto Highway 19. I gazed out the window, trying to avoid eye contact with the driver in his rearview mirror.

"Who are you," I asked myself. "What's your story?" I needed a story if they asked me questions. It was difficult to concentrate. I remembered something. In the garbage at Buy Rite Motors, I'd discovered the owner's name on some of his paperwork. I quickly put together a believable story: "I'm from down Charlotte. My brother-in-law owns Buy Rite. In town for a couple weeks, I've been asked to tune up some of the vehicles on the lot. I was on my way to Wal-Mart to pick up some oil and filters when the truck ran out of gas."

The driver had grey hair and a beer belly. His partner was younger and thinner with dark hair and a mustache. Both were good old boys. I prepared to use my best twang on them. The deputies talked to each other but not to me.

Being Halloween, FatBack's was packed. We pulled next to the pumps. The bright lights overwhelmed me. Happy that the ride was over, I hopped out and thanked them for the ride, expecting, hoping that they would drive on.

"We'll wait. Get ya gas . . . We'll carry you back down there," said the deputy with the mustache. While I was filling the jug with gas, I noticed the driver grab the radio mike from the dashboard. "Dispatch," he said. The dispatcher responded. The deputy gave his location and a brief description of the situation with the broken-down truck. The dispatcher said something that I couldn't make out. Leaning out the window, the deputy asked, "What's your name fella?"

"Bill Smith," I said without hesitation. I heard the words "Bill Smith" come out of my mouth, but it was as if someone else had said them. I couldn't believe I'd given these cops that ridiculous cliché name. Needless to say, Bill Smith wasn't the name I'd invented for myself as part of the scenario.

But the driver didn't bat an eye, as he relayed the name to the dispatcher and informed her that he would be driving me back down to Heilig Meyers.

I entered the store and took my place in line. The deputies waited outside, watching me through the window. "How stupid can you be?" I scolded myself. "'Bill Smith!' What happened to that whole scenario with the Buy Rite brother-in-law and the tune ups, oil, and oil filters?" I glanced occasionally at the deputies waiting patiently in the parking lot. I fully expected them to grill me when I got back in the car.

But the deputies said nothing, not one word to me the whole way back to Heilig Meyers. We drove in behind the Silverado. I proceeded to pour the jug of gasoline into the tank. Suddenly, the deputies switched on their spotlight and a beam of light enveloped me. I felt like an alien abductee with the mother ship hovering above me. Then I realized he wasn't spotlighting me; he was spotlighting the jug in my hand. After the last drop tinkled into the tank, the deputy extinguished the light, said "Have a good'en," and drove away.

Driving to FatBack's, I pumped \$25 into the tank. So far nothing had gone according to the plan. I proceeded with a sense of resignation. "If it's God's will that I get caught, there's nothing I can do to prevent it," I said to myself.

Finally, I pulled in behind the silos in Marble and slipped back into my bush clothes. I backed through the scrubby field, the briars and small trees scraping the undercarriage. I had to work fast now. At any minute, a visitor could pull up on me. I hefted the heavy bags of grain out of the green containers and piled them on the truck's tailgate. I positioned the empty Roll-A-Waste cans upright in the truck bed and loaded the bags of grain into them. Then I squeezed buckets and fencing in the cab. As I pulled away from those star-crossed silos, I breathed in a huge sigh.

The truck swayed under the weight of grain. I used the small turnout on Rockhouse Road. This load, however, was significantly larger than anything I'd moved in the past. Loading the grain at the silos was easy; this was hard. The anxiety was a killer. At any minute someone could drive up that gravel road.

Finally reaching my camp at Fires Creek, I backpacked over 70 loads into the rhododendron thicket. Sweat blinded my eyes. My heart felt like it would burst, but I couldn't stop to rest. Once all the bags and containers were in the bush, I cut small hemlocks from along the road and built a brush screen to completely camouflage the Roll-A-Waste cans.

I made it out of Fires Creek without anyone seeing the Silverado. Thank God, something had gone right. I retraced the route I'd taken in Nordmann's truck last summer – over Tuni Gap into Nantahala. I passed the FBI field headquarters in Appletree, but couldn't see if they were still there. The Big Search covered the woods outside my window.

My destination was Tellico Gap, a notch along the curvaceous spine of the Nantahala Mountains and only a few miles south of my old homestead on Partridge Creek. The roads on the other side of the gap led to Franklin. Alongside the road, a high voltage power line cut through the gap. The gravel road narrowed on the eastern side, zigzagging back and forth through the power line clear-cut. I noticed a spot of flat ground above the road, in the middle of the clear-cut. It looked like a good place to hide the truck.



Figure 13 Tellico Gap

I dropped the Chevy into four-wheel drive and gunned it up the steep embankment. The Silverado tore through the thick brambles like a logging skidder. I parked, got out, and retraced my path backward,

pushing the foliage upright, smoothing the tire ruts that creased the embankment, piling old trimmings next to the truck. The truck was invisible from the road.

Rising from the Cowee Mountains, the sun resembled an orange beach ball. The critical part of the plan was completed. Despite early complications, I'd managed to haul a couple tons of food into the wilderness, and no one had seen me on the Tusquitee side of the mountains. The plan was to stay hidden in the clear-cut for a few more hours. Then, in the afternoon, I'd go shopping in Franklin. I had \$160 in my pocket. I thought I might as well use it to buy some essential supplies. Franklin was chosen because it lies east of the mountains, far away from Fires Creek. I had one more night.

I consumed a baggy of cold gruel that I'd prepared for the journey. There were five more baggies. I tried to get some sleep, draping a shirt over my head, laying on the front seat with my feet dangling out the door. My body was tired, but my mind was wide awake. Last night's sense of resignation had channeled into my usual anxiety. Enough had already gone wrong with the plan for me to rethink every detail. I couldn't stop thinking. Over and over, the wheels of my mind turned. "Should I go to Franklin?" I asked myself. "In a town full of people you're bound to run into a problem. And don't even think about going out to Copper Creek for that dynamite. Heck, you can't put gas in this truck without a sheriff's deputy rolling up on you."

The recent run-ins with the squirrel hunter, coon hunters, and sheriff deputies had me feeling jinxed. Almost everything had gone wrong last night. I expected more problems tonight.

Down in the low brush, I had nowhere to hide from the sun. Warm and friendly at dawn, the sun became a blazing torch by noon. It was too hot on the front seat so I crawled underneath the truck. But I couldn't sleep there either. I finally gave up trying and, instead, prepared for that night's work.

I wanted to leave a note for the owner of the truck. On a blank piece of paper I scrawled:

To the owner of Buy Rite Motors: Please forgive me for borrowing your truck. I was starving and needed it to haul food. I've tried my best to keep it in good condition.

Sincerely,

Eric Rudolph

I smeared ink on my right thumb with the ballpoint pen and pressed it to the edge of the note. The note would serve a few purposes other than offering an apology to the owner of Buy Rite. Rumors were rife about me being "dead in a cave" somewhere. The note would, hopefully, dispel those rumors and let my loved ones know that I was very much alive. I also wanted to let the FBI know that its Big Search had failed. Left in the truck, less than a mile from the epicenter of last year's Big Search, the note should boost the feds' morale considerably. Perhaps they would spend another \$50 million searching the empty woods of Nantahala.

I eased the truck out of the clear-cut as the afternoon shadows blanketed the north side of Tellico Gap. Despite my worries, I continued as planned. Once out of Tellico, I hit Highway 28 into Franklin. Road construction constipated the flow of traffic. It was stop-and-go driving for miles. Still light, I knew people would see the Silverado. I wanted people to see the Silverado on that side of the mountains. It would help convince the feds that I was exactly where they thought I was all along – in Nantahala.

The Chevy's V-8 engine gobbled gas like a pig. I'd pumped in \$25 at FatBack's but already the needle neared empty. Driving fast on winding mountain roads hadn't helped the gas mileage. I'd have to buy more gas in Franklin, which meant fewer supplies.

Sleep deprivation is one of those things you never plan for. I hadn't slept since Friday night, and the physical toll of lifting tons of grain compounded the problem. My head throbbed; my eyes felt gritty from lack of sleep. "Drink water," I told myself "It lubricates the eyeballs."

During one of the frequent stops on Highway 28, I reached down on the floorboard for my canteen and, out of the corner of my eye saw a man crouching in the bed of the truck. I didn't panic, nor did I let on that I knew he was hiding back there. I drove normal. Up ahead, I spotted an intersection. Just what I required. I turned that corner without slowing down. The tires barked and howled as I slid sideways. I slammed on the brakes and came to a screeching halt. Turning around to look, I saw that the bed was empty. Sleep deprivation causes hallucinations.

At Wal-Mart, I loaded my cart with rubber cement, duct tape, sewing thread, soap, detergent, Bic lighters, flashlight bulbs, batteries, mink oil, a file for sharpening my axe, dental floss, nylon string, and socks. Wearing sunglasses and a ball cap, I stalked the aisles like a sleep-deprived speed freak. At Ingles grocery store, I bought cooking oil, vinegar, salt, and sugar. I visited three stores in all, spreading my purchases around as if I was assembling a nuclear weapon.

The plan was to wait on that side of the mountains until dark. On the outskirts of Franklin, I searched for a place to lay low for a few hours before crossing the mountains to dump the store-bought supplies on Fires Creek. Along Wayah Road, there was a small dirt drive that crossed a pasture to an old barn. As I approached the barn, I noticed No Trespassing signs posted everywhere, on trees, on posts, on the side of the barn. I'd taken a wrong turn into "Uptightville." The only people who put up that many No Trespassing signs were "Florida people," the upper-middle class arrogant kind.

I flipped the truck around and began driving back to Wayah Road when a black Range Rover came out of nowhere and blocked my exit.

His face contorted with rage, a white-haired man rolled down his window and yelled, "What the **** are you doing?"

"I took a wrong turn," I said, holding up my hands.

"Where did you think you were turning?"

"I was driving . . . turned down the wrong . . . Move your car and I'll drive out."

The look on his face told me this could get ugly. My initial shock was now gone and I got angry. If he didn't move his Range Rover, then I'd move it for him. I reversed the truck to get enough gap between us so I could ram his English piece of crap off the drive. But as I eased backward, he eased forward to close the gap. We were locked in a vehicular stand off like two bulls sparing. I stared at him; he stared at me. But he blinked first. He reversed and pulled alongside me. "Next time you ***** . . ." he said, but his words trailed off as I drove away without looking at him. I glanced in my rearview mirror to see the familiar license plate – Florida. "Thought so."

Around midnight, I reached Rainbow Springs in the heart of the Nantahala mountains. The road seemed to go on forever. I picked up speed but soon found myself wandering toward the edge of the road, so I slowed down. I figured I could use salt more than gas so I'd put precisely \$1 in the tank at a service station in Franklin. The attendant looked at me like I was crazy, and I was crazy – for thinking that I could make it the rest of the way on a dollar's worth of gas. Now, the gas needle hovered over "E," and I still had many miles to go.

Crossing over the Nantahala Mountains on Highway 64, I shifted into neutral, turned the engine off and coasted the eight miles into Tusquitee. Coasting would help conserve gas, and I needed to conserve every last drop.

Last summer, I'd had to retreat to the Snowbirds because Nordmann's worthless Datsun had died on me at Tuni Gap. All those grueling trips carrying food across the valley – because I couldn't get that truck on the other side of the Tusquitee Mountains. Now I was about to do the exact same thing.

At the turnout on Rockhouse Road, the gas gauge needle split the E in half, precisely the same position it had been last night when I decided to try for FatBack's. I was running on fumes.

But I made it. Safely at my camp in Fires Creek, I quickly stashed the supplies that I bought in Franklin, and then returned to the Silverado for my last leg of the trip.

On the road back through Tusquitee, I prayed, as the asphalt drifted under the Silverado. I expected to run out of gas at any minute. Every mile was a miracle. Tuni Gap up ahead. Almost there. Over the top, I turned the engine off and coasted to the bottom.

"Start up, baby," I said at the bottom of Tuni. The lovely V-8 obliged. It hummed like a chorus of angels all the way up to Junaluska Gap where I again killed the engine and coasted five miles to the Nantahala River. After that, one more start should take me to the spot.



Figure 14 Silverado Truck Abandoned

The sight of White Oak Flats brought tears to my eyes. I'd made it – or so I thought. The place had been picked out on the map. An old abandoned house sat on the side of Wayah Road in White Oak Flats. Sally Cove, they called it. Rotted wood frame, rusted roof – the house hadn't been occupied in years. Nordmann's house was a mile to the east, and the task force's Appletree headquarters was a mile to the west. The house was located at the center of last year's Big Search.

The short driveway ended five yards from the edge of Wayah Road. I wanted to park the truck behind the house. Back there the Silverado would be invisible from the road, and wouldn't be discovered for weeks. I eased to the end of the driveway, when suddenly the left front tire fell into a hole. Slipping it into four-wheel drive, I gunned the engine, but the truck burrowed deeper into the hole. I tried reverse but the wheels spun without purchase. Then I tried rocking, shifting between reverse and drive, but the truck still wouldn't budge. With each effort to extricate the truck, it only burrowed deeper into the hole. I was stuck.

Examining the ground around the tire, I could feel water bubbling up through silty mud. I pushed my arm down and buried it up to the shoulder. I'd driven into a muddy spring. The soil was like quicksand, the more I struggled to get out, the deeper I went in.

Clearly visible from Wayah Road, the truck could easily be seen today. The task force might have bloodhounds on my heels within hours. My bright plan to humiliate the feds might turn out to be my undoing.

I had two hours before daylight closed the roads to travel. I thought for a minute. With a little work, I might be able to make the truck disappear; not with magic but with vines. Tucked into a dark cove, the old house had ridges hugging it on both sides. Cars came by pretty fast in that straight away. I might be able to attach the truck to the ridge closest to it. People would drive past without seeing it just ten feet off the road.

Ivy vines covered the house's front porch. I yanked off big clumps and cut them with my knife. After smothering the truck with vines, I cut several poplar saplings and poked them in the ground around the Silverado's parameter.

I ran south on Wayah Road. The lighted houses of Nantahala lined the roadway. I glanced over and saw people eating their breakfast, preparing for a new day. By sheer force of will, I kept my legs churning. I was beyond exhaustion, on the verge of collapse. Sleep deprivation and fatigue distorted my senses. My boots clapping on the pavement sounded alien, lights appeared blurry. I was conscious, but no longer connected to my body.

Up ahead, Wayah Road intersected with Junaluska Road. That was the direct route back to Tusquitee. But I wasn't taking the direct route. The plan was to follow Wayah Road out around Lake Nantahala, then turn south on Rainbow Road toward Standing Indian. It was a bit of misdirection. If the bloodhounds picked up my trail at the truck, they would follow it south into Nantahala instead of west into Tusquitee. The trail, I hoped, would dry up somewhere before Rainbow Springs, in the heart of the Nantahala Mountains. After reaching Rainbow Springs, I'd backtrack northwest into Tusquitee. In effect, I'd travel a huge half circle.

I jogged past a little general store called Lake's End. The road twisted around the shore of Lake Nantahala. A faint ribbon of sunlight stretched across the eastern horizon. Dawn was imminent. In the low light, the lake resembled polished glass. I'd run four miles already. I couldn't go any farther. In a switchback, I spotted a little spit of flat ground above the road. I crawled up the embankment and into the thick mountain laurel. At the base of a pine tree, I curled up and fell into a deep sleep.

Awakened by rain drops slapping my cheek, I saw that it was light out, but my sense of time had vanished. I hastily strung up the poncho shelter and went back to sleep. Throughout the day, thunder and rain shook me from my slumber, but I quickly fell back under. That was the first rain since June. I had to continue on that night, but the rain wouldn't quit. Having only one pair of dry clothes, I waited for a break in the storm. While I waited, I slept. I wasn't worried about the feds now. Any scent left on Wayah Road had washed away. The truck, however, was a little too close for comfort.

I went under one more time and didn't come up for hours. When I did, I could tell it was almost morning. "Damn! I've wasted the night," I scolded myself. The rain had turned to a drizzle. I believed at the very least I could make it to Rainbow Road, a few miles away, before dawn. I hit the wet asphalt running. Dawn was breaking as I turned on Rainbow Road; a cool fog hugged the air.

I'd have to spend another day in the woods. Bear crews patrolled the road all day, their dogs tethered to the top of their dog boxes. I hid in the laurel waiting for dark. The mountains were shrouded in an icy fog. Bad harbinger – the weather would turn frigid tonight.

With my radio and most of my gear on Fires Creek, I had no idea what was behind me. Needless to say, I assumed the worst, that the feds had found the Chevy Silverado and were amassing a small army in White Oak Flats. Rain or not, I had to march tonight.

Rainbow Road was a single-lane gravel Forest Service track that hugged the base of the Nantahala Mountains. The road was popular with hunters. The only houses for many miles clustered around the intersection with Highway 64. Across the intersection, the road continued on to Standing Indian, where it dead ended at the Georgia border. It was some of the roughest country in the eastern United States.

A light drizzle was falling when I started down Rainbow Road that night. I squeezed my head through the head-hole in my poncho and draped it over my chest and backpack. The temperature plummeted. Winds rushed up the hollows. Rain turned to sleet. Other than my uninsulated Danner boots, my Gortex hat, and my poncho, I was wearing clothes that I'd found in the trash: jeans, T-shirt, and fatigue jacket. My good rain gear was left on Fires Creek to lighten my load.

The sleet sand-blasted my face, rendering me blind. A mile into the march, I wandered from the roadway and fell face-first into a drainage ditch full of water. Splash – the icy water rushed up under my poncho, soaking my pants up to the belt. Halting to make a fire wasn't an option yet. Nor did I have a change of clothes. So I picked up the pace trying to dry myself with body heat. It didn't work. The wind froze the poncho and my pant legs stiff as steel.

Some places leave a residue on the soul. Rainbow Road is one of those places for me. Years earlier, the road had almost killed me. With steep drop-offs and no guard rails, the road can be treacherous. Late one night, a friend and I went over the side in his Ford F-150. Watching the front tire slide off the edge, I can remember thinking to myself, "Why is he driving off the road?" Flashes of light and pain filled my consciousness. We flipped over and over down that mountain until a tree miraculously caught the truck broadside. I came to with blood in my eyes. The truck was on its side, and the roof was smashed almost flat. My friend was scrunched against the driver's side door, and I was standing on top of him. "Get out!" he yelled. "She's going to blow!" The thought of burning alive touched something primal inside me. I reached out for the windshield, and, in one fluid motion, kicked the glass out and dove into black space. I tumbled down that mountain bouncing off trees like a Chinese pinball.

A lone streetlight glimmered through the trees up ahead. I knew I was close to Highway 64. The only major road for many miles, Highway 64 splits the Nantahala Mountains at a place called Rainbow Springs. I'd driven through there on my way to Tusquitee less than 24 hours earlier. At that hour, the highway had the occasional semi-truck. Now, I followed the highway west, ducking behind the guardrail as the big rigs blew by me, whipping up a tornado of sleet. A couple miles down, I left the highway at Barnards Creek just below Perry Gap. I was heading northwest now. Time to stop.

In the frozen brush beside the road, I unfurled my bedroll. I pawed at the ground for leaves to insulate the bed, but everything was frozen. I stripped off my stiff pants and slipped inside. It was too cold to sleep. I shivered until dawn, until I could finally make a fire.

Having landed in a dark, north face cove, I waited for the sunlight to filter through the trees. But no direct sunlight penetrated the hemlocks and pines. The forest resembled the inside of an old frost-encrusted freezer. The branches of the trees were encased in a fine velvet of white frost. I ambled deeper into the wood line to make a fire.

Cold, dense air continued to spill into the atmosphere throughout the day. It would take another day for the sun's rays to warm it up. Tonight would be frigid. I was over 20 miles from the truck. It was safer to stay put tonight. I gathered a supply of firewood, which included a few old pine knots. Saturated in resin, the pine knots held flame like a tiki torch. From under the larger white pines, I was able to scrape together enough dry needles to insulate my bedroll. That day I stayed close to the fire; actually, I hovered over the fire, with its thick black smoke washing over me.

I slumbered well that night. In the morning everything appeared blurry, like I was looking through dirty cellophane. I could see shades of light and dark, but couldn't distinguish details. And my long distance vision was gone. I started to panic. "Have I eaten something poisonous?" I wondered. "What's going on?"

That night I planned to climb over Perry Gap into Cold Springs. But I couldn't read a map or compass. Part of the journey consisted of roads, and I could handle them okay, but I would also have to negotiate a stretch of heavily wooded terrain. On the other side of the gap was an old logging road that would take me into Cold Springs. I thought I might miss it without my eyes.

I washed my eyeballs throughout the day. It didn't help much. When it came time to leave that night, I was still blind as a bat. It wasn't poison that had caused the blindness; it was the fire, specifically the resin-saturated pine knots. Pine throws off a black, sooty smoke. I'd gotten too close to the fire and the smoke had coated my eyeballs with resin. Regardless of my condition, I had to leave tonight or I risked feeding my precious grain to the local wildlife over there on Fires Creek.

Staring at my lensatic compass, I was finally able to distinguish the cardinal points illuminated in the dark. The general direction to Cold Springs was due west, and I adjusted the luminescent dial accordingly. I planned to ignore the terrain features and follow the compass dial instead.

I slipped into the woods below Perry Gap, holding the compass at chest level, and eased through the cave-like gloom. Once over the crest, gravity took over. I sat down and slid on my hind end along the frozen leaves. When the terrain abruptly leveled out, I crawled forward on hands and knees. About 10 feet farther, the terrain pitched down again. I turned left and crawled 10, 20, 30 yards on flat surface. I knew I'd reached the old logging road that led into Cold Springs. I could find my way back home now. Near daybreak, I made camp on Bristol Branch at the foot of the Tusquitee Mountains.

The front had pushed on through, leaving cloudless blue skies and bright sunshine. My sight gradually improved. I was like a newborn babe seeing the world for the first time. I beheld the familiar ridges of Rockhouse. The mountains retained some of the colors of fall. My nerves settled. The months of hard work had finally paid off.

I had food!

* * *

I listened to the daily news broadcasts for weeks, but there was no mention of the truck, or the note, or the grain taken from the Marble silos. For years I thought the feds had kept it quiet, had hidden the information on the truck from the media as part of Special Agent Steve McCraw's low-key search strategy. I was mistaken. After my arrest in 2003, I found no documents on the '96 Silverado in the discovery provided to me by the government. I thought that was curious. Then it hit me: the feds hadn't kept it from the media; rather, the local sheriff had kept it from the feds. Sure enough, I was right. A reporter working for USA Today did two stories (July 5 and 6, 2005) on my experiences during that summer of 1999. He discovered a stolen vehicle report on the 1996 Silverado. The report, however, apparently never mentioned the note or the thumb print. And, apparently, the sheriff never shared his information with the federal task force in Andrews.

I guess it was a turf war. The sheriffs of western North Carolina had grown tired of the FBI task force stepping all over their jurisdictions. They wanted the feds gone. By the fall of 1999, the task force's manhunt had hit a dead end. Unless new leads surfaced, the task force would have to pack up and leave. The sheriffs weren't about to interfere with that process by providing the feds with new information. If the sheriff had told the task force about the truck, the manhunt would have been back in business. Choppers, agents, and bloodhounds would have started "combing" the woods again. The sheriff didn't want that, so he threw the note away and kept it quiet. The stolen '96 Chevy Silverado went in the books as a simple case of joy riding. And it was indeed a ride, one with little joy involved.

CHAPTER 15

Ft. Benning, GA • 1987-89 • In the Army

Forty of us had crammed into the back of an old cattle trailer that had been converted to haul trainees around the base. Our heads freshly shaved, wearing new camouflage uniforms, we were like lambs being led to the slaughter. The trailer pulled in beside a square pit that was filled with garden mulch. Five drill sergeants stood in the pit at parade rest, their hands clasped behind their back, feet shoulder-width apart. As soon as the side door of the trailer flung open, the drills came at us like pit bulls.

“Get off my truck!” they yelled. “Line up in formation!”

Along with our personal baggage, we carried two duffle bags of military issue. Back at the Orientation Center, it had taken us 15 minutes to load into the trailer. Now there was a sudden rush for the lone door, and everyone jammed into the doorway like a bottle cork. The drill sergeants promptly uncorked us, grabbing recruits and bags and tossing them into the pit.

“Form up in the pit!” the drills shouted. “Leave your bags on the ground! Form up for PT [physical training] you dusty *****!”

Recruits who tripped were trampled. A dense cloud of dust enveloped us. We stumbled blindly, tripping over bodies and duffle bags. In the center of the PT pit, we spread out into a loose formation.

“Front-leaning rest position, move!” the drills shouted. I bellied down into the standard push-up position and prepared to exercise. “Begin: one – two – three – four . . .” At midday, the sun was burning a hole through the back of my freshly shaved bald head. “Roll over on your backs! Leg lifts! Begin: one – two – three – four . . .” Sweat stained my new uniform and stung my eyes. Grey sand and garden mulch clung to my moist flesh. “On your feet! Jumping jacks! Begin: one – two – three – four . . .” The trampling of 80 booted feet produced an even denser cloud of dust. I breathed it in and felt the grit in my teeth.

The drill sergeants walked among us picking on the weaker ones. “You gotta be kidding me! That’s all you can do? Keep pushing, fat ass! Give me just one good push-up, fat boy!” Those who couldn’t keep up were taken to the far end of the pit and forced to low crawl from one end of the pit to the other. Their bodies quickly became caked with black garden mulch. The drills would straddle them yelling, “Faster! Faster!”

A recruit in front of me inexplicably stood up at attention. Two drill sergeants quickly converged on him.

“I refuse to train,” the recruit said.

Two drill sergeants positioned themselves on either side of him, one inch away from each ear. “What do you mean, you refuse to train?” one drill shouted into his ear.

“I refuse to train,” the recruit repeated. He made a slight movement, and that was all the justification the drills needed. One of the drill sergeants punched him in the gut, the other pile driving him to the ground. Two more drills were there in a flash. They dragged his limp carcass behind the company headquarters. I never saw him again.

The August heat was unbearable. The drills kept us going: push-ups, leg lifts, jumping jacks, running in place. They stretched out a garden hose to the pit. The drills put us in line and soaked us down as we filed past them. Then it was back into formation: “one – two – three – four . . .” Several northern boys showed signs of heatstroke. One kid keeled over right beside me. The drills pulled him to the company headquarters and started CPR. Never saw him again. It was my first day of basic training at Ft. Benning, Georgia.

* * *

Located in the pine barrens of central Georgia, Ft. Benning was the Army's primary facility for training combat troops. Most of it was marginal farm land before the government seized it under the power of eminent domain. To prepare the troops for the Second World War, the Army built row upon row of wood-frame barracks. By the time I arrived in 1987, most of the old barracks had been torn down to make room for more economical brick buildings. Mine was one of the last cycles to train in the old wood barracks at a place called Harmony Church. The barracks were clustered around an old sharecroppers church; hence the name. The history of Harmony Church was as thick as the white paint on the dilapidated buildings, for this was where they had trained the troops who landed on Omaha Beach, who fought off waves of North Vietnamese troops in the Ia Drang Valley.

The typical training day began at 4:30 a.m. We filed out of the barracks and formed up in the PT pit. Still dark out, we carried green GI flashlights. Push-ups, leg-lifts, jumping jacks – the exercises came hard and fast. In no time at all, our over-heated bodies began to smoke in the pre-dawn chill, a light mist rising from the formation. After the “dog-out” session, we filed into a column of fours to begin the four-mile run. You kept the flashlight trained on the feet of the guy in front of you. A drill sergeant jogged alongside the formation calling out the cadence: “I want to be an Airborne Ranger . . . I want to live the life of danger . . .” After each line, we repeated it back to him. Done with the run, we choked down a breakfast of runny eggs and stale Raisin Bran. The drill sergeants patrolled the aisles of the chow hall yelling in your ears: “Eat and move out! Eat and move out!” Again, we filed into formation and marched to the ranges. The sandy roads of Ft. Benning seemed to go on forever. We carried a rifle, web gear, and a 50-pound ALICE pack. It was like walking on the beach in the blazing sun; after five miles, you felt like your lungs would explode. You found yourself searching for a shady spot to lie down and die, but then you pushed on. You adapted and overcame.

In the first weeks we did a lot of marching – right face, left face, forward march – to familiarize us with following orders. Then we mastered the M-16 rifle. For an infantryman, the rifle was more than just a weapon: it was his life. You ate with it, slept with it, never let it out of your sight.

Entering Advanced Infantry Training (AIT), we expanded our skill set to include other weapons: M-60s, SAWs, LAWs, AT-4s, and mines. But the rifle never left your side. At every range, we'd listen to the obligatory safety briefing.

“Don't do this,” the range sergeant warned. “Don't do that . . . If you do this or that you will die!”

It was the same briefing at every range. After ten minutes of do and don't, some trainees started to nod off. A loud bong emanated from the seated throng; our drill sergeant had caught a sleeper and whacked him in the “brain bucket” (metal helmet) with the little swagger stick that he always carried with him. “Wake up Linda! You ain't gettin' any beauty sleep on my time!” He invariably called you “Linda” or “Sally” or “Petunia” – any female name would do. It was his way of humiliating you.

At the M-60 range, the briefing sergeant showed us the targets down range and told us to fire a “three to six round burst” at each target. In my groggy state, it sounded like he said “thirty-six round burst.” I thought 36 rounds was a bit excessive, but orders were orders. “Let's rock 'n' roll,” I said to myself.

They moved us up to the firing line. Settling in behind the machine gun, I eased the trigger to the rear and kept it there bub - bub - bub - bub – the rounds chewed the upper torso off the first target so I swung the barrel to the next one bub - bub - bub - bub – a cloud of dirt and minced rocks surrounded the target bub - bub - bub - bub – it was beautiful. Lost in M-60 bliss, I was oblivious to the figure moving up beside me. Bong – my brain bucket exploded. I released the trigger and looked up to see my drill sergeant standing over me with his little swagger stick.

“What in hell are you doing, Jackie?” he yelled. “You were told to fire a three to six round burst at each target! You just fired off a hundred rounds!”

I couldn’t stop smiling as he continued to tear into me. He paused for a second as if he contemplated whacking me again with the swagger stick. “You like it, don’t you?” he asked. I nodded. His angry drill sergeant face suddenly broke into a broad smile. “It’s fun, isn’t it? Move aside Melissa. Let me show you how it’s done.”

I stood to the rear. He clamped another belt of ammunition in the M-60’s breach and proceeded to pepper the targets with perfectly placed three to six round bursts.

At the end of the training day, we were exhausted, our clothes soaked with sweat and our armpits infested with tiny ticks. But the day wasn’t over yet. As the sun slipped over the horizon, we sat cleaning our weapons and shining our boots. I loved it. For the first time in my life, I felt challenged. Every week I could feel myself getting stronger. I’d finally found something I liked doing.

Infantry training was quickly followed by airborne training. It was a three-week course with five qualifying jumps at the end: three daytime jumps and two nighttime jumps. Airborne School was located in the center of the base, close to the headquarters and the Post Exchange. Everywhere I looked there were officers and women.

Back at Harmony Church you rarely saw any officers, and you never saw any women. Airborne School was also where I first encountered REMFs.

The military is divided into two basic groups (Arms): combat and support. The Combat Arm, consisting mostly of infantry troops, is an all-male fraternity trained to close in and destroy the enemy. As its name indicates, the Support Arm is trained to support the Combat Arm. These are the cooks, clerks, mechanics, and so forth. Because they don’t engage in combat, support units admit females and individuals who couldn’t cut it in a combat unit. Combat soldiers contemptuously refer to support troops as REMFs (rear echelon mother *****).

Very few jobs in the civilian world call for the skills of an ex-combat soldier, except maybe law enforcement or private security work. So an infantry recruit volunteers out of a sense of patriotism or idealism – he wants to be a hero. The typical REMF, on the other hand, volunteers in order to collect an easy paycheck, and perhaps to see the world on Uncle Sam’s dime. He’s a welfare soldier.

At one time, Airborne School was a tough course reserved for the Combat Arm. Earning your jump wings was a highly coveted honor. When I got there, the Army had relaxed its standards to let in females and REMFs. The once prized jump wings were handed out like Halloween candy. Standing next to me in formation was a female colonel who couldn’t do 10 push-ups; in front of me, a Brazilian captain on loan from the School of the Americas, who looked like he had never fired a weapon in his life. The infantry trainees stayed together in a separate group. While we did the push-ups and completed the four-mile runs, the rest of the company looked like a senior’s exercise class at the YMCA. I felt sorry for the jumpmasters, who were themselves trained infantry, acting as personal trainers for these REMF officers. But as long as the REMFs put forth the “effort,” they were passed through to the next week.

Although wearing jump wings no longer had the same significance, I did get to jump out of airplanes. I had the door position on my first jump. The C-141 slowed to cruising speed at an altitude of 1,250 feet. The jumpmaster slid open the side door. The roar of wind deafened me. Looking down I could see tiny trees and buildings through the haze of jet fuel. My chest tightened and I said to myself, “There’s no way I’m jumping out of this airplane.” I started to think about my parachutes. If the main chute malfunctioned, I’d have only a few seconds to deploy the reserve. I worried about freezing up before I could fix a malfunction. “Any hesitation and they will be digging you out of the ground with a shovel.” I wondered about who had packed the chutes. “Probably some REMF with a hangover and a bad attitude.”

But I had to jump. There was no way I could live with myself if I chickened out and rode that empty plane back to the airfield.

“Stand up!” the jumpmaster yelled, motioning with his outstretched arms. I stood on the line painted on the floor, the six soldiers in my “stick” behind me. “Hook up!”

I clipped my parachute static cord to the cable that ran overhead. The static line would deploy the main chute four seconds after I jumped out the door.

Jumping from a propeller driven C-130 required that you literally stand in the doorway and leap into the air to avoid being blown against the side of the aircraft. But on the C-141, which is jet propelled, you simply step out of the door like you’re taking a dip in the swimming pool on a hot summer day.

The light over the jumpmaster’s head turned from red to green. “Go!” he yelled.

I stepped out and the wind carried me away. Chin locked tight on my chest, I cradled the reserve chute on my belly and counted “one – two – three . . .” Any longer than four seconds and you were dealing with a malfunction. As I counted “four,” the harness dug into my groin. It felt like an invisible hand pulled me up into the heavens. Milking the risers upward with my hands, I looked up and saw that my chute had deployed properly. There was absolute silence, the deafening roar of the airplane gone. The fear was gone too. I was floating in space with half of Georgia spread out before me. What a rush!

* * *

With my training complete, I was assigned to the 101st Airborne-Air Assault Division at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. No longer a straight airborne division, the famed “Screaming Eagles” had handed in their parachutes for helicopters as part of the Army’s new concept called air assault. During the first month at Ft. Campbell, I breezed through Air Assault School, learning how to set up landing zones (LZs), how to “sling load” vehicles and equipment for helicopter transport, and how to repel out of a Blackhawk helicopter. Upon graduation, I began duty as an 11-Bravo (rifleman) with A 2/327th, the “No Slack” battalion. As I settled in at Ft. Campbell, I could feel a big momentum shift as the slow routine of regular duty replaced the hyper pace of training. It was a change I would never get used to.

Pioneered during the Vietnam War, air assault warfare called for using helicopters to insert troops with pin-point accuracy onto small LZs. Supported by Cobra and Apache gunships and field artillery, the air assault unit had more power and flexibility than the traditional airborne outfit. The heart of the air assault division was its infantry battalions. Their mode of warfare: night operations.

The typical field exercise lasted a week or two. Carrying weapons and an 80-pound pack, we waited on the edge of the LZ as the sun went down. Four Blackhawk helicopters settled in the high grass and loaded one “stick” (platoon) of troops at a time. Lifting off into the darkening sky, the four choppers assumed a staggered formation. The engines produced an ear-splitting whine. No lights showed on the Blackhawks except for the candy-colored instrument panel. The pilots wore PVS-5 night-vision goggles. Soon we reached cruising speed. At 100 M.P.H., the Blackhawks buzzed the tree tops, flying what they called NAP (near as possible) the earth. Every now and then a chopper tire lopped off a tree top and the spray of pine needles sandblasted your face. The trees were the least of our worries, though. Flying in a tight formation at that speed, there was a risk of colliding with the other choppers in the stick. Choppers in the lead position sometimes slowed unexpectedly, forcing the birds behind to veer wildly out of formation. You had to stay alert. If you were not buckled in properly, you’d shoot right out the door.

One evening we waited on the LZ for our pick up. The Blackhawks lifted two sticks ahead of us. But then our squad leader marched us back to the barracks without explanation. The next day we found out why. Two of the Blackhawks in one of the sticks ahead of ours had collided, killing everyone on both birds. The bodies were burned beyond recognition. Among the 17 killed was Private Clifford Bath, one of my comrades going back to basic training.

The pilots at Ft. Campbell were top of the line. Despite the rare mishap, they usually landed us safely at our destination. The blackness of night enveloped us as the Blackhawks flew away. “Maneuver to contact,” was the official phrase for the skill set that we spent most of our time learning. We typically maneuvered in platoon- or squad-size elements. Humping loads as heavy as 120 pounds, we crossed several kilometers (“klicks”) of bush, sometimes to set up an ambush on a column of Humvees. Other times, we raided a small compound. Often, there were two or more maneuver elements involved in the exercise, sister platoons or squads dropped at different LZs, converging on the same target or a different target. In order to pull it off, those on “point” (leading the formation) had to know how to read a map, use a compass, and keep an accurate pace-count – what they call land navigation. We didn’t use GPS devices back then, nor did we rely on night vision. Although they had issued us PVS-5 goggles, we rarely used them in the field, the goal being to prepare us for the default situation of natural darkness.

The task of those on point was to get the unit to its destination while avoiding the lines of drift, a military phrase meaning terrain that tends to channelize movement. We were most likely to encounter the enemy in the lines of drift. Roads, trails, ridge lines, valleys, and river banks are all lines of drift. We wanted to avoid stepping on land mines or being ambushed, so we plotted a course between the lines of drift.

If everything went smoothly, we simulated a raid or an ambush. Prisoners and wounded were policed up. Demolition charges were set. Then we force-marched to a nearby LZ and the Blackhawks or Chinooks took us back to the battalion perimeter, where we spent the daylight hours digging fighting positions (foxholes), doing hygiene, eating, and sleeping. The next night we went on a new mission.

That’s how it was supposed to happen. Missions often didn’t go according to plan. Sometimes we failed to coordinate with the other maneuver elements, or we wandered around the woods all night unable to find our target, or we arrived with daylight breaking before we got into ambush position. And sometimes we simply found a quiet spot in the woods for sleeping. In the morning, the squad leader made some excuse. They called it “shamming,” a word that meant doing as little as possible without getting caught. I soon discovered that A 2/327th did a great deal of shamming. There were a lot of slackers in the “No Slack” battalion.

It was a systemic problem, related to the larger problems in American society. Much to my chagrin, I found out that only a handful of the squad leaders and platoon sergeants had enlisted as infantrymen, and only a couple wore the Ranger tab. The coveted Ranger tab indicated that you had successfully completed Ranger School, still the Army’s toughest infantry course. The rest of Alpha Company’s sergeants were REMFs! At that time the Army’s infantry battalions were the dumping ground for unassigned NCO’s (sergeants). Enlisting as clerks or mechanics, they had spent most of their career working in their chosen field but were then reassigned to the infantry for some reason or another. The REMFs were not happy about serving in an infantry battalion, and the infantry soldiers were not happy about serving under REMFs. Most of the REMFs were short-timers with only a few years to go until they could collect their retirement pension. No way were they going to get their hands dirty. We’re talking about middle-aged guys with beer bellies and hemorrhoids. Trained as an administration specialist, our First Sergeant had not even been to the field in over 25 years of service.

One of my first squad leaders was a fat REMF named Sgt. Moore. Looking at a topographical map, he couldn’t tell a ridge from a valley. The compass was a foreign artifact to Sgt. Moore. He had no idea how to set up a simple L-shaped ambush, assuming we ever made it to the target. If we had somewhere to go, the infantry privates led the way. I operated exclusively on point – plotting the course, handling the map and compass – while Sgt. Moore’s fat carcass brought up the rear. Through trial and error, I became pretty adept at navigating between the lines of drift. Sgt. Moore, however, wasn’t keen on reaching our target. Getting lost on purpose was his expertise.

One night, while we should have been moving to link up with another squad, he told the point element to scout ahead for a good ambush site. When we got back, after two hours of thrashing through briars, everyone was laid out on their air mattresses asleep.

In the field, Sgt. Moore invariably cut himself a thick walking stick. Ostensibly to whack snakes, the stick also served as a prop in his frequent monologues. One of his favorite topics was Michael Jackson, the pop singer. "I'm not a fag," Sgt. Moore would assure us. "But if I ever ran into Michael Jackson, I'd tap that tight little butt." To illustrate his perverted point, he wedged the walking stick between his thighs and gently stroked it. Thus, our fearless leader.

Rather than the exception, NCOs like Sgt. Moore were becoming the rule in the Army. Incompetent half-wits who couldn't hold a job in the private sector, they joined the Army for the benefits and the pension. Like union employees, they were almost impossible to demote. Because the Army was an institution built for war, I'd always thought that the officers would have the authority to cull the weak and the incompetent. Not so. Washington's Army, I discovered, was infected with the same egalitarianism that was sickening the rest of the country. As long as worthless NCOs like Sgt. Moore functioned at a minimum level and didn't commit any major felonies, the Army was forced to punch their tickets to the next rank and grade.

It was bad enough humping a 100-pound pack through the woods at night in order to simulate a fake ambush with fake ammunition, but when the squad leader did his utmost to sabotage the mission, it got downright discouraging. The frustration started to build. As my level of frustration increased, so did my level of insubordination. Pretty soon I started asking Sgt. Moore questions like: "How did you get to be a squad leader when you can't even read a map?" "Why didn't you choose a more appropriate line of work, like mopping floors?" I pushed Sgt. Moore's buttons and he went out of his way to make sure my uniform was pressed and my boots were shined. Sgt. Moore was a great presser of uniforms and shiner of boots, a real master of the dog-and-pony show crap that passed for soldiering in the peace-time Army. He couldn't read a map, but he always wore a pair of spit-shined jump boots. I picked up a few Articles 15s, in-house disciplinary actions resulting in loss of pay and extra duty. I cleaned toilets, buffed floors, painted parking lot lines, that sort of stuff. It got so bad they started calling me "Extra Duty Rudy."

One day a new company commander arrived at A 2/327th. Sporting a high-and-tight haircut and wearing a Ranger tab, Captain Dorman announced his intention to change the culture of shamming in Alpha Company. "From now on we will live in the field and train like a Ranger Company," he said. "At the end of three months, Alpha will stack up against any outfit in Uncle Sam's Army."

There was a big field exercise coming up at Ft. Chaffee, Arkansas, designed to test the "combat readiness" of the "No Slack" battalion. Our battalion would square off against Chaffee's elite 9th Division in a month of grueling war games. The exercise was a big deal with the brass, the kind of thing that looks good on a career officer's resume. Captain Dorman was determined to whip us into shape and earn himself some kudos.

Things did change for a while. Captain Dorman didn't care about spit-shined boots and starched uniforms. He took us to live-fire ranges, reacquainting us with the M-60 machine gun, M-249 squad automatic weapon, and M-203 grenade launcher. We spent a week at the demolition range blowing up stuff. Expanding our skill set, Captain Dorman cross-trained riflemen like me on 60mm mortars and TOW missiles. Communication specialists taught us the ins and outs of military radios, showing us how to improvise antennas and batteries. And we marched. I hadn't marched like that since Ft. Benning. Captain Dorman was a breath of fresh air. I actually started to take interest again. But it didn't last long.

In his effort to turn Alpha Company into a Ranger outfit, Captain Dorman overlooked one important factor. Unlike the officers in the Ranger battalions, he didn't have the authority to unload the dead weight. The dead-weight sergeants conspired against his little Ranger training program. In the

military, the officers give the orders, but it's the sergeants who carry them out. If the sergeants want to sabotage the mission, they can do so very easily.

Our battalion geared up for the Ft. Chaffee exercise at a small airfield outside of Muskogee, Oklahoma.

My platoon climbed aboard a giant Chinook helicopter. We taxied onto the tarmac where we joined a battalion-size formation. After lifting off, the sticks of staggered Chinooks and Blackhawks spread out like a huge flock of geese heading south for the winter. Guarding the flanks were several Apache and Cobra gunships. We had been training for tonight's insertion for months. The Ranger battalions had gone through Chaffee last summer and set the bar pretty high. By tomorrow, we should know how the "No Slack" battalion stacked up in the world of elite infantry outfits.

Reaching the edge of Ft. Chaffee, the massive formation of helicopters made a rapid descent. Choppers below us stirred up a storm of static electricity in their blades that looked like a billion fireflies. Finding tree-top level, the sticks followed the Arkansas River, clipping along just above the water. A three-quarter moon reflected off the river's black surface. A Chinook closed up on our rear. It was hard to see air space between the blades of the two choppers. Those pilots really had it together in the air. The problems started after we hit the ground.

The squad leaders and platoon sergeants deliberately led us the wrong way. They sat us down when we should have been marching; they turned the radios off and "missed" key communications. Our entire company was put out of action within 24 hours. Crap rolls downhill, as they say in the military. The brigade commander blamed the battalion commander, who in turn blamed Captain Dorman; Captain Dorman blamed the squad leaders and platoon sergeants, who saluted and later laughed it off.

After returning to Ft. Campbell, things went back to the way they were before Captain Dorman. Captain Dorman gave up trying to train the company. A 2/327th fell back into the routine of shamming. No more ranges, no more cross training.

* * *

I'd never intended to make a career out of the Army. From the beginning, the plan was to acquire as much training as possible in one enlistment and then get out. I thought one tour would be enough. As it turned out, I was wrong. Before walking into that recruiter's office, I had no idea how the peace time Army operated. I was under the impression that the Army was a meritocracy, where talent was rewarded with quick advancement. It wasn't that way at all. The Army was, in fact, a long waiting line, with the primary criteria for advancement being your pay-grade and time in service. Individual excellence counted for very little. Opportunities, such as training schools, came to you depending on your present position in the line. As long as the minimum standards were met, everyone – males, females, gun-ho soldiers, and slackers – moved along the line at the same speed.

In one enlistment, I'd managed to get Advanced Infantry training, Airborne School, and Air Assault School. This was more than most soldiers got. However, the best combat training available was in the Ranger School and the Special Forces program. But the government wouldn't waste \$1 million worth of training on a one-tour enlistee. So if I wanted Ranger School and Special Forces training, I would have to reenlist for at least five more years. Until my present enlistment was up, I was stuck in regular line units with fat REMFs like Sgt. Moore. I thought about reenlisting – for about two minutes – but decided against it. When the Army offered me a general discharge under honorable conditions, I took it without hesitation.

During my tour, I'd learned a little about weapons and small unit tactics, mostly by observing the failure to use them properly. I would put these skills to good use later on.

* * *

After my discharge from the army, I returned to the old family homestead in Nantahala. The first thing I did was go hunting in the Nantahala Gorge. I climbed the steep walls of the gorge with two feet of new snow on the ground. To keep my footing, I had to slam each boot in deep like an ice capon and steady myself using the shriveled laurel bushes for hand-holds. It took me half a day to reach the top. About 1,000 feet above Ledbetter Creek, the terrain levels out to form a small plateau. The large oak trees shed buckets of acorns in the fall, which attracted many deer and boar. Stringing a small poncho shelter next to a head-spring, I camped for a couple weeks, stalking gangs of wild boar from one end of the plateau to the other.

At dawn, I watched the sun rise over the eastern rim of the gorge. Down below me the valley was engulfed in swirling white fog, the trees coated with frost and snow. As the sun hit the trees, the frost glittered like diamonds. The solitude was invigorating. It was good to be home.

* * *

I agreed to purchase the house in Nantahala from my mother, who had moved over to Sylva to be with my younger brother, Jamie. He was attending WCU, and Mom wanted to be close to her “baby.” My older brothers – Dan and Joel – came to live with me for a couple of years. We worked together remodeling houses. A black belt in the martial arts, Joel set up a little gym in the garage and invited a few Bubbas over on the weekends to use as punching bags. Every month or so, we drove to Asheville to visit my sister’s family. They had recently escaped south Florida and bought a house south of the city. Our old neighbor Tom Branham had married while I was away in the military. Marriage really put the hooks into Tom. The man who had formerly eschewed marriage as an assault on his precious liberty finally settled down to become quite domesticated. The wife didn’t care for us unattached bachelors and sought ways to drive a wedge between us and Tom. We rarely spoke anymore. Last time I saw Tom, he was building flower beds.

All things considered, they were a good couple of years. I was young and had my whole life ahead of me. But there was something missing. Like a hound dog that doesn’t hunt, I wasn’t doing what I was meant to do. From an early age I had this incredible sense of mission, this desire to fight injustice and storm the ramparts of evil. For me, that evil was everything marching under the banner of leftism. But I simply couldn’t find the front lines, so to speak. The various Patriot and conservative groups that I was familiar with were doing nothing. To me, they were a bunch of pusillanimous cowards, waiting for some miracle to come along and save them. They would only rant and rave until the zeitgeist eventually swept their dead movements into the dustbin of history. I couldn’t stand the smell of corpses, so I left the movement behind me. In the years after the military, I lost a lot of my zeal for the Cause. I’d almost given up on locating the resistance. My attitude was this: if no one else is going to fight, then neither am I; embrace the apocalypse; stay on your mountain and mind your own business. I paid little attention to politics. I couldn’t have cared less who was in the White House or what was happening on Capitol Hill.

My indifference didn’t last long. Events soon rekindled my zeal for action. In quick-fire succession the Democratic Party nominated the arch-liberal Bill Clinton, the FBI murdered the Weavers on Rudy Ridge, the gun control lobby tabled the Brady Bill, and Janet Reno incinerated 80 people in Waco, Texas. I still remember watching those poor people being burned alive on television, thinking that from this day forward things will be different, surely folks will respond to that injustice. And then militias began to organize around the country. This spurred me into action.

I began attending gun shows, where the talk was more militant than I’d ever heard in the past. I bought several weapons and set up a reloading machine in the garage. Day and night I sat at the press churning out thousands of rounds of ammunition. Resistance is possible after all, I thought.

The “tipping point,” as they say, came when Paul Hill shot the abortionist Dr. Britton in Pensacola, Florida. I remember having a conversation with one of my old neighbors shortly after the shooting. I’d known this guy for years. A self-described “pro-life Christian,” he tried to explain to me that Paul Hill

was just as bad as Dr. Britton; that the cold-blooded killer of thousands of innocent babies was the same as the man who had finally stopped him. “How can you stop killing by killing?” he asked, his eyes wide as if his words were truly profound.

I was curious about his strange reasoning, given the fact that Christian ethics clearly allows for self-defense, the defense of others, and just war. “Haven’t you said to me on several occasions that ‘abortion is murder,’ that ‘killing a person inside the womb is the same as killing them outside the womb’?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“So, if you knew that your neighbor was murdering babies in his basement every day, wouldn’t you feel obligated to stop him? And even if you ended up killing him, do you really believe that your actions were the same as his? How was Paul Hill’s actions any different? If, as you claim, ‘abortion is murder,’ then Dr. Britton was a mass murderer, and Paul Hill was a hero for stopping him.”

“Oh, but . . . but what Paul Hill did was take the law into his own hands,” he said.

“In other words murder is okay – as long it has the sanction of law.”

“Well, like it or not, abortion is legal in America,” he said. “And good Christians must obey the laws, even the ones we don’t like.”

“You mean like King George’s laws, right? Don’t you remember that our ancestors rebelled against the unjust laws of Great Britain because they were being taxed without being properly represented in Parliament? Was their act of rebellion justified? If so, do you mean to tell me that ‘taxation without representation’ is a more weighty cause than the systematic murder of over one million babies every year?”

“But you’re talking anarchy,” he said. “If everyone acted like Paul Hill, there would be chaos.”

“On the contrary, if everyone acted like Paul Hill, then law and order would be restored in this country. I can think of no greater state of anarchy than the one we live in today, where any pregnant woman can walk into an abortion mill and have her own baby killed for a nominal fee. There’s no ‘law and order’ in this country.”

He fumbled for words as he tried to rehash his hollow arguments, but I cut him short.

“If, as you claim, ‘abortion is murder,’ then by the standards of Christian morality, Paul Hill was justified, and those who condemn him are cowards.”

He got this smug look on his face, a look I’d seen a thousand times before, and hissed: “What you need is the love of Jesus.”

“What you need is a pair of testicles,” I shot back.

I never spoke to him again, but our little conversation reminded me of an essay I read called “Christians and Abortion,” by Richard Schoenig. Written by a pro-abortion ideologue, the essay was one of the best things I’d ever read on the issue. Acknowledging that the pro-life movement is dominated by conservative Christians, Schoenig laid out the argument that if pro-lifers really believed that abortion was murder, then they would certainly support all means to stop it, including force. He explored the Bible and the various writings of Catholic and Protestant theologians, showing that Christian ethics clearly justifies the use of force to protect innocent life, regardless of what the current statutory law may have to say on the subject. When it comes to protecting life, the law of God and Nature takes precedent to the positive law of the state. Laws permitting infanticide and abortion are therefore illegitimate. A government that sanctions such practices is illegitimate, and no Christian is bound to obey the laws of such a government.

And yet, as Schoenig pointed out, so-called pro-life Christians are the first to condemn anyone who shoots an abortionist or who torches an abortion mill. To Schoenig, and any intelligent observer, this indicates that these “pro-life Christians” are either hypocrites or cowards. They either don’t believe that abortion is murder, or they lack the courage to do anything about it.

To me abortion represented everything rotten about liberal modernity. Disposing of your unwanted babies for the sake of convenience is the height of selfishness, and camouflaging it behind the mantle of “liberty” and “equality” is pure evil. The issue of abortion was already settled in my mind. The only question I struggled with was how to get pro-life people to advance when all they’ve done for 20 years was retreat. I knew that most so-called conservatives were like that coward I spoke to after Dr. Britton’s shooting, that no matter what the provocation, they would never lift a finger against the Washington commissars. Life was simply too comfortable under the current system to upset the status quo. It was about convenience, and had nothing to do with the “rule of law” or the “love of Jesus” or any of the other lame excuses they used to explain away their cowardice. Their representatives in the Republican Party were under orders to compromise, to hold off the liberal agenda long enough for them to get through their own lives. To hell with their children and grandchildren. For their part, the smarter liberals were only too happy to compromise. The liberals controlled the schools and the popular culture; any compromises made with conservatives today would be undone tomorrow. Why back conservatives into a corner and risk a civil war, which they might lose, when they can have everything they want through incremental change? This has been the liberal formula for 80 years.

But Paul Hill’s actions, and the actions of others like him, demonstrated that there were still a few good men out there. Unlike my cowardly neighbor, men like Hill were beginning to act upon their beliefs. I saw potential. If the right buttons were pushed, who knows, maybe more Paul Hills would begin to act.

At that time, I believed a small insurgency would plant the seed that would ultimately grow into a real nationalist revolution. This was the great hope of all those who travelled on the militant fringes of the Patriot movement. To defeat such an insurgency, so the belief went, Washington had to rely on its army and police. It is precisely in those institutions that one still finds an over-abundance of conservative sentiments. At first, Washington’s soldiers and cops would follow their orders without question. They would kill their fellow Americans, as the FBI did at Ruby Ridge and Waco. But after a while they’d grow wary of killing their own people for the sake of a regime that grows more alien and out-of-touch with the Heartland every day. Eventually, some elements within the army and police would turn on their commissars. Once we had that support, the regime’s days were numbered. Or so we hoped.

My job was to help get it started. In the spring of 1995, I decided to carry out a series of high-profile attacks against symbols of the regime. I was willing to encourage any militant tendency on the Right, but I chose to focus my attacks on abortion because it is the most egregious of Washington’s many sins, and because attacks on abortionists were the most likely to garner widespread support from conservatives. I hoped to encourage others to act and that the cumulative effect of many such attacks would push larger elements within the conservative movement into open opposition with Washington. Not directly, mind you. I knew that most in the mainstream conservative movement would condemn such attacks, arguing that acts of violence only give the liberals more ammunition, making it that much harder to slow down their agenda. And this argument is undoubtedly correct. Isolated acts of violence would only make it harder for the Republicans to compromise with their Democratic counterparts on Capitol Hill. And the pro-abortion lobby would certainly use attacks on their constituents to bludgeon their pro-life opponents. But desperate situations call for desperate measures. As I saw it, America was one generation away from Third World conditions, and 50 years of compromise had gotten us nowhere. My aim was to back conservatives into a corner or, rather, to force the liberal establishment to back them into a corner. The object of such attacks was to make compromise impossible. When the Republican Party and the National Right to Life Committee tried to compromise the right to life of unborn children, I’d bomb an abortion mill. When they tried to compromise with the so-called gay rights lobby over civil unions,

“hate crimes” or so-called gay marriage, I’d blow up a homosexual organization. Whenever they crawled before the commissars begging for “bi-partisanship,” I’d drive a wedge between them. I’d prefer that Americans live under the most extreme advocates of liberal-progressivism today, rather than leaving it for their grandchildren to deal with tomorrow. Maybe then they would choose not to compromise with the enemies of Western Civilization. Either restore the Constitution and Western Culture or live under the lash of San Francisco commissars. And if they still refused to fight, well then, they deserved the lash.

CHAPTER 16

Seasons and Survival

Since my arrest in 2003, probably the most frequently asked question is, “How did you manage to survive in the wilderness for five and a half years?” Folks typically evince a level of incredulity, as if my living in the mountains of North Carolina was similar to living on the planet Mars. They cannot imagine themselves living without television and toilet paper; how could I have done it. I must have had helpers, they say, sympathizers hiding me in their basement, feeding me Budweisers and Baskin and Robbins’ ice cream.

Billions of people on planet earth live “outdoors,” according to our modern definition of that term. They hunt, fish, and farm. They cook their food over an open flame or on a crude stove. They shelter under tents, tarps, or in huts made of mud, logs or thatch. They relieve themselves outdoors and bathe in creeks, rivers, or springs. They lack the amenities of modern civilization, and yet they survive. For the average American living today, such a lifestyle seems impossible. But it is possible. Most Americans lived that way only a century ago. I lived that way for almost six years.

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As the earth makes its annual trip around the sun, it wobbles like a toy top losing its balance. This slight wobble changes the amount of sunlight that enters the earth’s atmosphere. The variations in sunlight produce our seasons. Along the equator there are only minor changes in the amount of sunlight, which creates what seems like an endless summer. In the northern and the southern hemispheres, however, the changes in sunlight are very pronounced, and, therefore, the seasons are very distinct. The cycle of life on this planet follows the seasons. Plants grow, flower, and die; animals mate, give birth, and pass on – according to the seasons. Because I depended upon plants and animals to survive, I too followed the seasons.

In civilization, man follows social cycles. Clocks and calendars regulate his artificial lifestyle of school, work, and entertainment. No longer engaged in hunting, fishing, or farming, most “civilized” men live their entire lives divorced from the cycles of nature. They have tax season and football season but never deer season or harvest season. They purchase their lifestyle with money earned doing work that is far removed from nature. They travel from point A to point B in planes, trains, and automobiles. They eat food grown on factory farms and sold in supermarkets. Roofs shelter them from rain, sleet, and snow. Gas or electric stoves fend off the cold. Air conditioning eliminates the heat. Their soul-life comes from a television. They take for granted this highly artificial lifestyle and peer at nature through rose-colored glasses manufactured for them by Hollywood. Nature, they believe, is a benign “Mother,” a primeval version of the welfare state, who provides plenty of food for the friendly, cooperative creatures of the forest. Civilization has, in effect, built them a fool’s paradise.

If nature is female, then she is a bitch; if nature is a mother, then she is the kind that abandons her child at the bus station to fend for themselves. Nature is a tyrant, and for most of his history man has lived under the tyrant’s lash. Properly understood, the invention of agriculture, science, and industry were great rebellions against nature. Hollywood and left-wing environmentalists imagine tribal people living in “harmony with nature,” and worshiping the earth gods as loving caretakers. Nonsense. Primitive religion is based on fear. Tribal people sacrifice to the gods of nature for the same sort of reasons restaurant owners in Little Italy make pay-offs to the local Mafia Don: because they don’t want to be killed or have their legs broken.

Subject to the harsh realities of life in the wild, primitive people ascribe anthropomorphic motives to nature. Nature, however, is neither good nor evil; it’s indifferent. Nature doesn’t care whether you live or die, whether you are a good person or a bad person. It has no moral agenda. Operating on the law of

scarcity, nature kills off the weak in order to make room for the strong. Rather than being friendly and cooperative, most creatures are pitted against one another as competitors. Staying alive requires defeating the opponents. Man is given no deferment in this battle; there are no conscientious objectors in nature.

Forcing myself to forget the cycles of civilization and to learn the cycles of nature was the hardest lesson for me to assimilate. Only those people who live by farming, fishing, and hunting know these things. You cannot learn them from books or from television shows. You must learn them from experience. During that first winter on Tarkiln Ridge, I wandered around making mistake after mistake. In the second year, I spent so much time avoiding the task force manhunt that I never really adjusted to life in the mountains. But those hard years taught me a lot about what not to do. In the fall of 1999, I began to focus on survival technique. Focusing on long-term survival, I developed the routines that would sustain me in the years to come.

In order to stay alive I improvised and adapted. Knowledge was useful, but perseverance was worth more. I'd grown up in Appalachia, so I knew how to hunt, fish, and gather acorns and greens. And I'd spent a little time in the military. But I wasn't what they like to call a "survival expert," one of these guys who considers it a virtue to hunt with snares rather than rifles. My most important survival skill was thinking a problem through to find the simplest solution. When I found an effective method of doing something, I stuck with it for as long as it continued to work. I never took risks I didn't have to, never wasted time and energy on an inefficient method when I had a better one at hand. I knew how to make fire with a fire drill, but I found it more efficient to start my fires using a Bic lighter, a sliver of newspaper and, in wet weather, a thimble of resiny pine shavings. I knew how to identify most edible wild plants in the highlands, but after discovering quantities of produce in the dumpster behind Save-A-Lot, I began to exploit that food source as well. Occasionally, I used loop snares to trap groundhogs, but I spent most of my time hunting large game with a high-powered rifle. Knowing that my life was on the line, I used methods that worked best and left the wilderness nostalgia to the "survival experts."

* * *

The fall equinox arrives in late September. With less sunlight, the forest slips into hibernation. It rains less. Temperatures grow cooler at night. Frosts settle on the landscape in the morning. Trees stop producing chlorophyll, and the leaves begin to die. Once the acorns fall from the trees in October, the competition for calories begins in earnest. The animals gorge on the fatty protein-rich nuts, or, like the squirrel, stash them away to eat later during the winter. Waning sunlight also triggers the deer rut, causing randy bucks to seek out estrous does.

Deer hunters descended on the woods in mid-November, setting up their tree stands in the feeding areas of Jake Cove and along the deer trails that crossed Tarkiln Ridge. Before opening day, I tried to harvest at least a couple of deer. Prevailing winds usually blew out of the southwest. However, after a front passed through, then the winds blew in the reverse direction for a day or two. Deer lack good eyesight, so they follow their noses upwind, feeding on grasses and acorns at night and bedding down in the thickets during the day. The best place to find deer is in the border lands between their feeding areas and the bedding areas. The best time to catch them is at dawn or at dusk; the best weather, just before a front comes through. Their favorite foods are white oak acorns and alfalfa. In reality, every place is a little different; therefore, the best place to find deer is where you have found them before.

Most hunters prefer to get up off the ground so the deer cannot smell them. Lacking a tree stand, I searched for elbows in the deer trails. During their nightly forage upwind, the deer are sometimes forced by the terrain to veer to the left or to the right. The wind hits them broadside instead of head on. At such elbows, I waited on the downwind side of the trail. If the morning breeze didn't zigzag, I usually avoided being winded.

The deepening drought made hunting more difficult in the high country. Forage for the deer became scarcer every year. Trees that normally produced acorns became barren. During drought, trees

focus their energy on growing roots rather than growing acorns. Large game retreated to the low country in search of grass. Deer patterns became less predictable. Rarely did they use the same trail twice in one week. I'd spend a few days watching a trail, and if I had no luck, I'd move to another trail, alternating my hunting between mornings and evenings.

As a rule, the older the animal the tougher the meat. I usually targeted the younger deer, yearlings that trailed behind their mothers. However, I sometimes succumbed to "buck fever." Because they are more cautious than the does, the mature bucks are harder to kill. Typically, I'd come down with a case of buck fever after a sighting.

Every area has at least one dominant buck. During the rut, he impregnates his harem of does and defends his territory from interlopers. He digs "scrapes" to mark his territory, raking away a patch of leaves and urinating on the bare dirt. With his horns he thrashes the surrounding shrubbery, challenging younger bucks to come duel. The early rut, occurring when he begins to mark his territory and fight, is the best time to bag a big buck. In his desire to mate and fight, he loses his native caution.

The dominant buck on Tarkiln Ridge had a ten-point rack. I started seeing him in the fall of 1998.

I shot one of his girlfriends on a drizzly day in November. Bent over to field dress her carcass, I heard a foot-fall behind me. I turned and beheld his majesty standing 20 feet away. He had been tracking the young doe. We stared at one another for a few seconds. He shot me a contemptuous look before trotting over the rise. I had to get him. Sometime later, as I lay in my tent watching the rain fall outside, he appeared for a moment but was gone before I could blink. It was as if he taunted me, showing me that this was his territory, not mine.

I watched his scrapes and stood next to his favorite trails in the morning and in the evening, but I could never catch up with him. After one long rainy night, I checked his biggest scrape in the morning and found tracks. Not very well-defined, the tracks were made the night before in the rain. Come to think of it, a light rain was falling the day I shot his honey, and it was raining the day I saw him outside my tent. That got me thinking. I'd remembered reading somewhere about so-called "bad weather bucks," deer that only emerge from the thickets when it rains or snows. I was beginning to believe my buck was one of those wily dudes who survive every hunting season because he comes out only when humans head in for shelter.

The rut had ended, and it seemed I wouldn't bag the bad-weather buck this year. A front was moving into the mountains. Moisture hung in the air. Snow was expected later in the afternoon. By all measurements, it was a day for staying close to camp. I avoided wet weather like the plague. My leather boots had to last me for years, and moisture mangles leather boots. Boots took precedence to bad-weather bucks. But I couldn't help thinking that I was one hunt away from bagging that buck. There was still a little light left in the day, and the snow wouldn't begin falling until sundown, or so I thought. Those were symptoms of buck fever.

I donned my web gear with its butt pack containing a knife, hatchet, rope, quart canteen of water, and a flashlight. I carried two magazines of .223 caliber ammunition, one containing soft-nosed bullets for bringing down larger game like deer and boar, the other filled with full metal jackets for turkey. I seated the magazine of soft-nosed bullets in my FNC rifle and headed for the bad-weather buck's favorite trail.

Thick fog rolled in over the mountains and settled on the landscape. Standing on the down-wind side of the trail, I couldn't see more than 10 yards. The trail was within spitting distance, but I could barely make it out. Dark skeletal trees surrounded me like octopus arms. The wind stood absolutely still, not a sound in the forest. It was other-worldly, like being marooned on an alien planet.

"I'll have no luck in this mess," I thought. "Time to head back to camp." Before going back I walked to the other side of the saddle, cutting across the deer trail. Midway, I stopped to examine one of the bad-weather buck's muddy scrapes. There were no tracks in the mud, so he hadn't come this way in a

while. Following his trail to the edge of the crest, I looked over the eastern slope at a solid wall of grey fog.

Pop – it sounded like someone snapping his fingers in a large room. I couldn't tell whether the sound came from the front or from behind. Seconds later, a black hulk emerged from the fog. It was my buck. Head down sniffing for acorns, he walked right in front of me traversing the steep slope. As suddenly as he appeared, he disappeared again into the fog, like a ghost ship. My heart smacked against my rib cage. "Deep breaths," I reminded myself. I sighted down the barrel of my rifle at the last location I'd seen him. Fog, there was nothing but fog.

Like an apparition, he suddenly materialized out of the fog, traversing back the other way. I closed my left eye slightly, locked the front sight post behind his shoulder blade and fired a bullet through his heart and lungs. He jolted and ran. All four legs churned like crazy. "Solid hit!" I said.

You can always tell a hit from a miss by the animal's reactions. If you miss, they bound away in smooth, effortless strides. But if you score a hit, they run like they're being stung by bees.

No matter how many hunts I'd been on, every good shot got my adrenaline pumping. I was so excited I could barely stand upright. The fog was so thick I thought I'd never find him. "I've finally managed to bring down the bad-weather buck only to let him rot in the woods."

Typically, a shot deer runs 100 yards and then keels over dead. Occasionally, they run 300 yards before bleeding out. But if you don't hit anything vital, they might run for miles. You might never find them. I shot a deer once and tracked his blood-trail to the edge of civilization before finally giving up; must have been three miles.

I knew I'd hit this deer's vitals. He was out there somewhere in the fog, probably within 100 yards. It was getting dark. Snow was beginning to fall. I reached inside my butt pack for the flashlight, but it wasn't there. I'd foolishly left it behind in my tent. The wet leaves showed no blood trail in the low light conditions. But his huge hooves had imprinted a discernable trail to follow. After 200 yards I lost his trail in the dark – still no sign of him.

I heard a thump. Barely audible, the noise came from somewhere below and behind me. "A branch falling perhaps," I thought. "Might as well go check it out."

Backtracking 10 yards, I searched for the source of the sound. My boots suddenly snagged something solid and I pitched forward, but then caught my fall with both hands on the soft, warm carcass of the buck. I was looking right into his eye. Sprawled on his side with his belly against a poplar tree, the buck was in the last throes of death. Quick as lightning his back legs sprang out, missing my head by inches and slamming into the tree – thump. There was the source of the sound. If he hadn't kicked that tree I'd have never found him.

With the fun part over, the real work began. Snowflakes the size of cotton balls fell in heaps. It was too dark to see detail, so I worked from sense of touch and memory. My Gortex jacket dripped snowmelt on the carcass. Rolling the big buck on his back with his head pointed uphill, I used my Cold Steel knife to slit the skin inside his back legs down to the groin, around the genitals, then up to the breast bone. The knife's drop-point blade glided through the skin like paper. Carbon V steel made the wet work easy. I sliced through the stomach muscle from pelvis to breast bone, guiding the blade with my fingers so as not to puncture the animal's entrails. I cut around the genitals gently. Then I sliced down through the groin muscle to expose his pelvic bone. Two swift blows with my hatchet broke the bone, creating an opening through which to pull the entrails.

My hands were freezing, so I thrust them inside the warm chest cavity for a minute. The smell of steamy blood reminded me of the venison steaks I'd soon be eating. Above the deer's breast bone a thin membrane separated the heart and lungs from his lower bowels. I punctured it; warm blood from the

buck's exploded heart gushed out onto my arms. Reaching all the way up inside the cavity, I severed his esophagus. Now everything broke free. The legs and pelvic bone were splayed open to allow the entrails to slide through the opening. A little knife work around the deer's anus and tail and the buck was field-dressed. I used a quart of water and handfuls of leaves to wipe excess blood from the smoking chest cavity. Water is the enemy of meat, thus I used it sparingly. Once I got the carcass cut and under shelter, I'd keep the meat cool and dry.

I was a half mile from camp. I tied a slipknot around the buck's antlers and two bowlines for handholds. Once I got the buck up to the ridgeline, he slid nicely in the slushy snow. I maneuvered him over rocks and logs; his sharp horns jabbed my calves. At the point above my camp, I turned down into the rhododendron slick. The deer and I switched places as he started dragging me downhill. I tried easing him down but lost my footing in the slush. We slid together over rocks and branches until the rope snagged around the base of a rhododendron. I was sopping wet – on the outside from snowmelt, on the inside from sweat.

Fires were a no-no after dark. I worked in the glow of my red lens flashlight, which was hung from the center pole of my cooking slab. First, I parted the big fellow, slicing along the buck's bottom rib and around to his spine. Pulling hard on his back legs, I gave him a good twist until I heard his spine pop. I severed the remaining tendons with my hatchet. The head was removed, along with all of his legs below the knees.

I was almost done. I hung the two halves from the center pole under the shelter. I carefully dried the carcass – inside and out – using a clean towel which I kept just for that purpose. Hung in the cold air, under the shelter, the meat would remain edible for up to a month; depending on the temperature, sometimes longer.

Work continued at dawn. I cleaned my rifle, sharpened my knife and hatchet, gathered firewood, bathed, washed clothes, and ate venison. I sliced off only enough for a couple of meals. Exposed to the elements, the meat hardens and has a tendency to spoil faster. I left the hide on and skinned back just enough to get at the fresh meat. Frigid weather sometimes froze the carcass. But such weather rarely lasted more than a week. Before the temperature dropped I'd sliced enough steaks to last me a couple of weeks. Nylon string was threaded through the cutlets like a pearl necklace, leaving enough space between the cutlets so they didn't freeze together.

* * *

Quite often I dragged more than one deer back to camp. I'd hang one from the center pole and turn the other one into jerky. Lean venison dried the best, and only the best cuts: the back legs and the meat along the spine. I waited for a stretch of dry weather, then drove stakes around the perimeter of the cooking slab and stretch a section of fence between the stakes, about three feet off the slab. A big fire was built, and the coals spread over the slab. Keeping the coals hot by adding fresh ones, I cut the meat into long, thin strips and lightly salted it. The venison was laid across the fence and allowed to dry – but not cook. If the jerky needed more drying, I left it out in cool, dry weather away from the skunks and mice.

* * *

At the winter solstice (December 21) the northern hemisphere has wobbled farthest away from the sun. Being the shortest day of the year, the solstice marks the beginning of winter, the season of death. Nights are long and cold. During the day the sun barely breaks above the tree line. Deer stop rutting. Bear head for hibernation. Grouse don't drum. Cicadas don't buzz. An eerie quiet settles over the landscape. The forest creatures hunker down to wait for the sun to return in the spring. Winter is nature's hospice. Only the strong make it through. The rest die off.

Compared to the cold season in the northern Rockies, winters in the southern Appalachians are rather mild. Average temperatures range from the 20s at night to the 40s during the day. The temperature

rarely dips below zero. Snow comes to the highlands, but it almost never piles higher than a couple of feet. Warm daytime temperatures usually melt the snow down to the leaves within a week. Only those stretches of northern exposure above 5,000 feet retain a light snowpack, and only in January and February.

The winters, however, were no joke. Snowstorms often arrived back-to-back, the snow remaining on the ground for weeks. To avoid leaving fresh tracks outside the rhododendron slick, I stayed closed to camp. Although winter brought more seclusion to the wilderness area, wildlife agents periodically patrolled the roads. Because hunting season was over in January, a rifle shot in February might draw the agent into the woods. It wasn't worth the risk to leave tracks in the snow leading back to my camp. I stayed put and ate jerky.

Snow was bad, but ice was worse. When rain falls in a mass of freezing air it sticks to everything, solidifying into grey ice. The weight of the ice can pull down tall trees and skull-crushing branches. The worst ice storm hit the highlands on Super Bowl Sunday, 2000. A hundred miles to the south of Tarkiln Ridge, the Tennessee Titans met the St. Louis Rams in the Georgia Dome. I huddled in my tent listening to the game on the radio while the deadly ice silently accumulated on my shelter, threatening to tear it to pieces. Cinderella boy Kurt Warner, quarterback for the Rams, passed for a record 414 yards to defeat the Titans in the greatest Super Bowl ever played. As I cheered Warner's incredible performance, I was beating successive layers of ice off my shelter. The radio couldn't drown out the sound of trees falling and branches crashing down around me.

When it snowed, I dug pathways between the tent and cooking area and the spring. I chopped and stacked firewood. I shelled and boiled acorns and sewed damaged clothes. And I did hygiene.

Living in the wilderness, you obviously can't bathe like you would in your home. However, I learned that it's possible to maintain a healthy cleanliness. People stay filthy in the wilderness because they are either ignorant, lazy, or both. It's as simple as that. Hygiene is easy if you make the effort. I crapped in catholes. Basically, I'd cut three sides of a small hole using my shovel, pull the clump of sod up, and flop it on the downhill side. I always kept a hole ready. Eating a steady diet of whole grains kept me regular, let me tell you. Soon as I unzipped my sleeping bag in the morning, I had to go, and I do mean go. Like a ticking time bomb, I was ready to explode. I'd trot to the cathole, drop trousers, and assume the baseball catcher's position. Moss or leaves served as my toilet paper. Moist green moss worked best, but old dead leaves would do in a pinch. If, however, the leaves were newly fallen and dry, they would often slip right off leaving me with a handful of, well, you get the picture. Done with the cathole, I replaced the divot of sod and pressed it firmly, and then dug another cat hole for the next morning. Within a year, the feces were rendered inert and I'd use the same ground again – like one of those 1,000-year-old Muslim cemeteries where they bury people on top of one another.

Every few days I took a catbath – cleaning my armpits, feet, face, and crotch. Clean socks as well. In winter time, full baths occurred every two weeks, but only if the wind was calm. I filled two five-gallon buckets with water and gathered enough wood to fuel a blazing fire. Then I heated a pot of water and set it beside the buckets. Lathering up the soap, I washed my head first with the warm water and rinsed the rag in cold water. Warm to wash, cold to rinse – little by little I scraped away the body funk. Finished washing the head, I moved down to the torso, and so forth, replacing the dirty clothes with clean ones as I went. With a nice fire nearby, I scarcely felt the cold.

I sometimes went months without seeing my reflection in the mirror. Skin pale from the cold and lack of direct sunlight – I appeared to age twenty years in one month. My eyes were permanently bloodshot from standing over a cooking fire. I looked almost anemic. At times, I used to think something was wrong with my liver, like maybe I'd eaten something poisonous, but it was just what a body comes to look like when you live in a rhododendron slick.

Weather dictated everything – when I went out, when I stayed in, how much food I cooked. Fortunately, I had a radio and could schedule my activities around the weekly forecasts. I prepared in advance for rain, snow, or high winds – gathering extra firewood or cooking extra food. Sometimes the winds made building a fire impossible. Sometimes I was forced to lie in my sleeping bag for days, emerging only to eat a baggy of cold gruel or to relieve myself. Sores developed on my aching hips from lying in the bag so long. My bones popped like an old dog when I got up to drain my bladder. On especially windy days, I stored Ziplock bags of food and bottled water in the bottom of my sleeping bag to keep it from freezing. Seventy mile-per-hour winds sometimes buffeted my tent for two days straight. The roar of the rattling, flapping tent drove me crazy. The frustration would build until it finally burst. To relieve the pressure I'd yell at the top of my lungs, "Enough wind, already!"

I became obsessed with my teeth. A couple of years before I took to the mountains, I had cracked part of one of my wisdom teeth, exposing some of the dentin. I never had the thing fixed, and now the tooth started to decay. Fearing that the tooth might abscess, I began a tooth-brushing regimen that would have made the American Dental Association proud. No amount of brushing, however, would fix the broken wisdom tooth. So one day I decided to pull it. It wasn't one of my better ideas.

I whittled a stick to fit snugly against the side of the offending tooth. Unraveling a strand of nylon string, I fastened a slipknot around the tooth and anchored the other end to a branch overhead. I wedged the stick inside my cheek against the tooth. Then I let my knees buckle. Hanging by the tooth, I commenced to pounding the end of the stick with the flat of my hatchet. Oh, the torture! I figured with the string pulling and the hatchet pounding that tooth would work its way out of there. I figured wrong.

I pounded and pulled for 10 minutes, my eyes watering from excruciating pain. But the tooth wouldn't budge. The string and stick didn't work. "Why not try pliers?" I thought. I latched onto the tooth with my pliers, pulled and wiggled, but the blasted thing still wouldn't come out. It was no use. Rooted deep in the jawbone, the tooth wasn't going anywhere. I needed a surgeon to extract it. No way was I going to start carving on my gums. I was afraid all that pounding and pulling would only break off the rest of the enamel exposing even more of the dentin. About the only thing I could do was keep it clean. Hopefully, that would slow the decay.

Washing clothes can pose a problem without lye or detergent. Cold spring water just doesn't cut the body grease. The summer when I camped on Webb Ridge near Andrews, I destroyed a good set of clothes in one month rubbing them on rocks in the creek to get them clean. By fall I was decked out in clothes that I'd found in the trash. I made socks from cut up old T-shirts. That first winter in the mountains, I didn't have detergent, so I made a lye solution to wash my clothes, filtering boiling water through wood ashes. The clothes were soaked in the lye water before washing at the creek. Naturally I put detergent at the top of my shopping list for the Franklin spree. It worked better than the rocks and lye solution.

I changed socks every three days, long underwear every week, pants and shirt every month, everything else in the spring. The really greasy items of clothing were soaked in a five gallon bucket of water and a smidgen of detergent. After the soaking, I carried the articles down to the creek and spread them flat on a rock, where I loosened the grime using a soft bristle hair brush, and then rinsed. Mice like to chew holes in clothes, so I hung them to dry on a thin pole that was suspended from a tree using fishing line.

My war with the mice was a year-round siege. Like Turkish sappers, they tried to undermine my defenses every night. As soon as the sun slipped below the horizon, my camp was overrun by rodents. They chewed through plastic buckets, bored holes in the bottom of my Roll-A-Waste containers, and tunneled into my tent. I was meticulous about segregating food from the shelter, but still they came. Pregnant mice were the worst. They tried to build their nests inside my boots and on top of my tent. They tore holes in my socks, my boots, and my sleeping bag. One night, I awakened in a rainstorm with water

dripping on my face because a stinking mouse had torn a hole in my poncho shelter. (Rubber cement and patches were invaluable for repairing ponchos, tents, tarps, and boot soles.) The pregnant mice used the shredded material to insulate their urine-soaked nests. I even had them crawl inside my sleeping bag. They scampered across my face at night. I swatted them with my boot; I squeezed the guts out of them; I baseballed them against trees; but nothing would stop the rapacious rodents.

Lacking efficient traps, I built several improvised dead falls. Most were automatic and functioned poorly, but the manually operated trap I set outside my tent flap did the job. Rolling up the edges of a plastic bag, I spread it flat on the ground and put a spoonful of corn and wheat in the middle. I placed a frying pan over the grain and propped up on one side of the pan with a small stick. I tied a string to the stick. While lying in my tent, I listened for the bag to rustle. Count to five, then pull the string. Gotcha! Rolling the bag closed around the pan, I pulled the pan out, and the mouse crashed against the sides of the bag, struggling to escape. Instead of freedom, he found the bottom of my boot – crunch – the sweet sound of revenge. Then I reloaded the trap to catch another and another – sometimes four in one night. But my enemy had inexhaustible reserves. No matter how many I killed, always more mice came and filled their ranks.

I grew tired of manning the crude traps. I needed a strategic solution. Later, at Murphy, I collected enough nerve and enough coins from the pay phones at night to buy some mouse traps at the Family Dollar Store. That winter I went on the offensive. Traps were set around my tent and food supply. I racked up a big body count right away. Each trap caught two mice every night, on rainy nights they sometimes caught four. The sound of traps slamming shut was music to my ears, a nocturnal rhapsody in red. My strategy of attrition worked. The mice no longer owned the night. Torn clothes and equipment were a thing of the past. In all my readings, I've never seen mouse traps included on any list of survival tools, but in my opinion they are invaluable.

Another invaluable tool was my sewing kit. Clothes always needed repairing. I patched holes in pants, fixed fraying seams, fashioned harnesses, sewed socks, and extended tarps. Cotton-nylon thread worked well on lighter clothes, but I relied on 100-percent nylon thread for the heavier stuff. For extra heavy-duty work, I unraveled nylon string. In a pinch I substituted fishing line for thread.

Boots were a constant problem. I had two pairs of Danner boots: an insulated pair for winter and an uninsulated pair for summer. I'd left behind my mink oil at the Cane Creek trailer, a crucial mistake. I remembered seeing boot oil at Nordmann's house, but in my rush to get out of there neglected to grab it. Foolishly, I started using vegetable oil on my boots, another crucial mistake. At the time it seemed like a good idea. The vegetable oil softened the boot leather. Possessing plenty of vegetable oil, I thought I wouldn't need mink oil. Boy was I wrong. Vegetable oil destroys leather. You should use only animal-based oils on leather, a fact I learned much too late.

During my long sojourn on Webb Ridge, I did irreparable damage to my summer boots. At night when I went into Andrews for food, I'd soak the boots walking in dewy grass, and the next day I'd dry them in the sun. To soften the leather I'd use soybean oil from the McDonald's fryers. Going into my third year, the boots had molded and ripped along the sole. It was bad.

I didn't want to end up barefooted like those guys at Valley Forge with rags wrapped around their bloody feet. It was time for an overhaul. I duplicated the boot upper using thick Cordura brand nylon cut from extra ammo pouches. Fortunately, Danner sews its boot uppers to the sole with nylon thread. The new nylon uppers could be sewn over the old uppers and attached to the original thread in the sole. Bent over for hours, I used an improvised wooden thimble and two pairs of pliers – one regular, the other needle-nose. It was tedious, a flashlight protruding from my mouth to see inside the boot, pushing the needle with the thimble and pulling with the pliers.

One winter, I tracked a herd of wild boar for two weeks on the high ridges above my camp, but I couldn't catch up to them. The hairy porkers ran the ridges every few days, but used a different trail almost every time they came through. You can go crazy trying to nab a wild boar.

Although extremely destructive of the environment, boars are very tasty. Young deer makes a good meal, and turkey breast grilled in lard is delectable. But boar is the best tasting game animal in the mountains. The hogs feed on acorns and roots, and drink fresh spring water. The meat is pink, lean and delicious.

New Year's Day dawned clear and cold. White frost glistened on the high peaks to the east. The morning sun struggled to free itself from the frosty ridges of Weatherman Bald.

The gang of ghostly boar had been using a trail below me to enter a thick bedding area. No doubt they were chilled after a long night of foraging, and I bet the pigs would head for the bedding area soon after first light. I'd just arrived, but already I was cold, like being trapped in a walk-in freezer. Shifting from foot to foot in a futile effort to get warm, I wiggled my toes and clenched my fingers. I wasn't there 15 minutes when I heard a grunt echoing through the trees below. I was too late. The hogs had just passed through and were already in the bedding area.

"Maybe they'll come through tomorrow," I thought, resigning myself to the loss.

A sudden sound thundered from behind, like a herd of cattle. My eyes popped wide open. I turned to see a herd of swine charging at me. I barely had time to react. Left foot forward and rifle snug in my shoulder, I locked on the leader, a small black boar. When he was 10 feet away, he suddenly darted to the left, giving me a profile shot – BOOM – I put the round right into his heart and he tumbled forward, squealing. Swinging the rifle to the next one in line, a large red boar, I fired again. The shot blew one of his front legs clean off. Ramming head first into the ground, his back legs still driving, the red boar plowed clean across the crest of the ridge and down the other side. (The bullet had actually deflected off his leg bone and into his chest.) The rest of the gang scattered before I could take down a third. Branches snapped, crackled, and popped.

The little black boar lay nearly at my feet still squealing and kicking. From the thicket came a low grunt – the red boar was hit and dying. It was as if the two mortally wounded hogs were saying their farewells. "They've got me Red," the little one screamed. "I'm hit too, Blacky. There's nothing I can do for you. What a world . . . What a world," the big red boar grunted.

I finished field-dressing the two hogs, and dragged their limp carcasses back to camp. Anything not eaten or used – guts, heads, legs, hide – was disposed of downhill, far from camp. Years earlier I'd learned my lesson about keeping offal around camp. One Christmas, I caught an explosive case of diarrhea. First thing to check is the water supply. There it was, a rotting boar's head buried under the leaves in the back corner of my spring. The thought of sipping the juices that were oozing off that boar's head pulled at my up-chuck lever. Little claw marks in the clay looked like they were made by a skunk. About a month earlier, I'd buried the offal of a boar up near my camp. Looking into his rotting eyeballs, I thought I recognized him as the same pig. Skunks must have exhumed the head and dragged it down to my springs, no doubt to marinate it in preparation for their Christmas feast. Never again, I swore.

An indispensable part of the wild boar is its thick layer of milky-white back fat. One of the few forest creatures besides bear that carries excess body fat, boar have the most delectable lard in the highlands. I sliced the fat thin and tossed it in the Dutch oven. Heating it slowly, the fat melted into a clear liquid. I then stirred in a tablespoon of salt, which acts as a preservative, and let the lard cool a little before pouring it into old coconut oil jars. The lard hardened into excellent cooking oil, a precious source of calories in the wilderness.

After a couple of winters in the woods, I developed into a decent hunter, harvesting at least one deer, boar, or turkey every two weeks. In the early years, I pulled the trigger on anything that moved:

young and old, male and female. I brought down so many breeders that the game became scarce in the mountains around my camps. Later, I became more conservative, shooting yearlings, boars, toms, and Jakes. Breeding does, hens, and sows were left alive. More important, I expanded my territory into fresh hunting grounds.

On the other side of Tarkiln Ridge, in Tom Cove, the Forest Service had carved out a couple of small fields and planted them in sweet grass. Drought and the dearth of acorns caused the animals to flock to the small fields in winter. I often hunted the lower field in February, crossing the ridge while it was still dark to arrive at the field before dawn. Deer and turkey liked to congregate in the field at first light. I waited for them eagerly.

Because it was an uphill climb getting back to camp, I lightened the load as much as possible. First I cut animal carcasses into manageable pieces. Removing everything except the hide, I wrapped the chunks of meat in clean Hefty Bags and loaded my ALICE pack.

Once the bear went into hibernation, I traveled farther from camp to the head waters of Fires Creek just below Potrock Bald. A field of grass and wild flowers sprouted at the base of Potrock. At dawn, the forest creatures seemed to drain off the mountainside into the field to pick at grass and dead flowers. Before leaving Tarkiln, I always suspended my essential gear in the trees. Hibernation never really meant hibernation in the southern Appalachians. The black bear would periodically come out of their dens for a snack.

The late night journey to the field on the winding gravel road ended on Shinbone Ridge. I hunted the field at sun up. If I didn't kill anything substantial that first morning, I'd stay a second day, and, if necessary, a third. I hunted until I dropped something big enough to fill my backpack with meat.

The small fields of grass along the banks of Fires Creek drew game during the dead of winter. The best thing about those fields: the prevailing winds blew up the creek, making the steep bank on the north side of the creek as good as any tree stand. Brown-grey deer flitted like hazy apparitions in the mist-shrouded trees. I steadied my rifle against a tree and waited for the perfect shot before pulling the trigger. Shooting deer over iron sights at that range was a challenge; shooting turkey was a true skill.

Eventually I moved my cooking slab from the dark, damp hollow to the spur about 10 yards above the tent. I dug out a couple of terraces and used the upper one for cooking and the lower one for sitting. Sitting on the lower terrace in front of the cooking fire, which was at shin level, kept the core of my body warmer. It also made cooking easier and kept my boots away from the fire. I used flat rocks to lay the floor of the slab and lodged a thick sapling in the rhododendron for a center pole. When it rained, I stretched a tarp over the pole and created an A-frame. When it was dry, I folded the tarp to reduce the profile of my camp.

I quickly discovered that the center pole leaked water into the fire when it rained hard. To solve the problem, I offset the fire from the center pole by a couple of feet. I then drove a stake in the ground uphill from the fire and attached a string. This allowed me to dangle the Dutch oven from the center pole and use the string to pull it directly over the flame.

One good thing about camping in a rhododendron thicket is that you never run out of firewood. Besides offering effective overhead cover, the rhododendron makes an excellent cooking fire. It's a hardwood and gives off very little smoke; it burns bright and long. Rhododendron is actually more of a shrub; therefore, it grows in manageable widths. Very little axe work is required to gather enough wood for a couple of weeks. The wood doesn't pop, throwing out chunks of burning wood. I could pile the logs on thick without fear of losing an eyeball. I never trusted oak, hickory, or pine. Poplar is worthless as firewood. And hemlock is downright treacherous. Its dry, flammable branches have lured many a man to blindness. Make a fire with hemlock, and a minute later – pop – you're trying to dig a burning coal out of you eyeball.

Along with the wild game, I ate corn, wheat, soybeans, desiccated fruits and vegetables, and acorns. I boiled the grains and beans until they were soft, and then pounded them into pancake gruel with a wooden pestle. Spooned into a hot frying pan, the gruel was browned in boar lard. On the side, I prepared a small pot of vegetables or fruit. For breakfast, I sometimes softened a handful of desiccated bananas and strawberries and mixed them with the pancake gruel. For dinner, I heated a small side dish of collard greens, bell peppers, tomatoes and onions. (My cooking routine changed as the FBI's search effort changed. While the Big Search was still going on, I rarely lit a fire to cook more than twice a week. Most meals were eaten cold. As the search relaxed, so did my cooking habits.) Adding the desiccated fruit and vegetables to my wintertime diet really boosted my morale, as well as my immune system. A better outlook was crucial to my success.

In the spring, when the temperature rose, I added sprouts to my diet. Using glass gallon jugs, I sprouted wheat, soybeans, mung beans, and flax seed. Screen was fastened over the mouth of the jar. The mixture was kept moist, the jar hung upside down in the trees.

Acorns are nature's staple. However, only a handful of trees – hickory, walnut, white oak – produce "sweet" acorns, that is, edible right out of the shell. Such trees are scarce. During drought it's especially difficult to find a tree bearing sweet acorns. Most acorns you find in the southern Appalachians contain "bitter" tannins, rendering them inedible out of the shell. I subsisted on these bitter acorns, red oak mainly. To make them edible, the tannins had to be removed, which was a tedious and time-consuming process.

My typical day consisted of hunting a game trail in the morning, and if I didn't bag anything, gathering and processing acorns until evening. From side-to-side, I scratched the leaves away and filled my pockets and backpack with acorns. Back at camp, the acorns were spread on the ground to dry, and then stored in buckets and barrels. I spent the remainder of the day removing tannins by cracking, peeling, and boiling. Cradling a flat rock in my lap, I cracked the acorn's shell using the blunt face of my hatchet. I then wedged a serrated kitchen knife in the crack, and the shell shucked off. My fingers ached after an hour of such work. The shelled nuts were then chopped into tiny bits with the hatchet. Boiled in water for ten minutes, the acorns were rinsed and boiled again, and again, until the tannins bled out. After the first boil, the water turns to thick brown-red syrup. Gradually, after repeated boiling, the water becomes lighter until it's almost clear. I say "almost" because no matter how many times you boil the acorns, you can never remove all of the tannins. The process took time, water, and plenty of firewood. And, believe me, the acorns still tasted like dirt. But acorns contain fat and protein. Mixed in with the pancake gruel and a tablespoon of sugar, the acorns were halfway edible, and, more important, they allowed me to greatly extend my food supply.

I kept a couple gallons of processed acorns at all times, adding them to the gruel with each meal. As soon as I finished leaching the tannins from one pot of acorns, I started processing another. Unless the weather intervened, processing acorns was a daily thing.

Spatulas, forks, and ladles were useless. I used a sharp knife, a two-quart pot, a Dutch oven, a frying pan, a pair of leather gloves to handle hot objects, and a heavy duty soup spoon to do all the stirring and flipping and eating. I broke everything down into simple routines. The movements were efficient so I could do them without thinking or without sunlight. I worked like a fry-cook during the dinner rush.

Nature doesn't schedule vacations or set aside weekends for leisure. Work follows necessity. Sometimes there wasn't enough light left in the day to finish a task, and I had to work long into the night. At other times – snowstorms or high winds – I'd lie all day and all night in my sleeping bag.

In order to beat back the boredom, I sometimes listened to the radio. During the early years I rarely listened to anything other than the daily news and weather reports. Later, after the search died down, I began to listen longer. Talk radio enlivened those long winter nights. The radio waves traveled hundreds

of miles through the dry winter atmosphere. Late at night I could pick up stations from as far away as New York and Chicago. My tiny portable was battery-powered, and batteries eventually died. Maintaining a steady supply of batteries took considerable effort. I cursed myself for not investing in a free-play radio, the kind with the hand-crank generator.

I turned the radio off during commercial breaks to conserve the precious batteries. Silently I counted: “One, two, three . . .” Through much experience I developed an internal clock. I knew exactly when the commercials were over. Pressing the tiny portable to my ear, I tuned in to Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and G. Gordon Liddy. The political discussions, although often trite, provided food for thought during the day when I hunted and cooked.

* * *

In March, heavy rains typically hit the highlands. Sometimes it rained every day for a week. As the ground became saturated, the mountains sprang leaks like a spaghetti strainer. Where one spring had been, I now saw five. Freshets formed new streams, the streams merged into creeks, and the creeks spilled into the rivers. The roar of water echoed through the hollows.

When I became hot, I peeled off a layer of clothes and splashed myself with water. When it got cold, I added another layer of clothes or curled up in my sleeping bag. But when it rained heavy, I could do nothing. There was no escaping the rain, not even inside my tent. As the air became saturated, moisture condensed on the roof of the tent, creating a mini ecosystem. The sleeping bag and clothes – everything – became moist. I developed wrinkled old lady hands, like I’d been soaking in the bathtub for too long.

As the northern hemisphere wobbles back toward the sun, the rains cease. The sun’s rays penetrate the atmosphere, coaxing forth a new cycle of life. The forest comes alive. Seedlings and insects thrust up through the moist ground. The sassafras buds first. Swarms of gnats dance before the wind. Ruffled grouse drum for mates. The males stand on fallen trees and beat their wings against the trunk, producing a poop – poop – poop – poop sound like that of an old tractor starting up. The buds start spilling their pollen everywhere. Periods without rain made it unbearable to breathe.

Spring brought me fresh opportunities for food. I added greens to my diet. Green briars grew thick on the ridges above camp, but the asparagus-like shoots tasted like fescue. Wild grape greens were plentiful, but tasted like crap and had the texture of military canvas. Bear corn was abundant, but again, not very tasty. And though very delicious, poke weed and Indian cucumbers were scarce. Blackberries didn’t ripen until June. The forest simply couldn’t supply enough vegetables and fruits. Most wild plants grew in the low country in fields and along roads near more populated areas. However, I managed to get plenty of one thing: tea. I dried blackberry leaves and sassafras root and spearmint, then brewed it into a nice blend, sweetened with a little sugar.

Warmer weather produced storms. Intense sunshine heats the atmosphere, which draws moisture into the air. Cold fronts pushing in from the west collide with this mass of warm moist air, whipping up fierce storms. Like the finger of an angry god, lightning crashes down from the heavens.

In the early days of hiding, I took the standard precautions for lightning. Avoiding metal and the base of trees and tall objects, I spread out flat on open ground and enjoyed the light show. Then, one day, the light show almost blew me off the mountain. I heard the thunder rumble in the distance. Lightning flashed, wind swished through the tree tops, and rain peppered the bone dry leaves. I tightened the knots of my shelter and laid there looking out at the approaching storm. I was a good 20 feet from the base of the nearest tree, more than a safe distance, or so I thought. Bright light flashed overhead followed by a deafening BOOM. “Whoa, that was close,” I said. Instinctively, I made myself small, curling up into a tight ball. I looked under the edge of my dripping poncho shelter anticipating the next strike. Faster than a blink, a bolt of lightning coiled around a nearby tree like a snake and exploded in the leaves with a

brilliant flash – BOOM. Smoke filled the air, smelling of burnt leaves. Branches the size of I-beams rained down around my tiny poncho shelter. My throat constricted and I couldn't breathe. Thinking that I'd been hit, I ran my hands over my body checking for charred flesh. Physically, I was unscathed. Mentally, I was a wreck. My nerves were fried. As the storm passed over, every flash of lightning spooked me like I was a gun-shy horse.

The experience forever changed me. Lightning put the fear of God into me. I remembered the story of Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, of how he had been caught in a lightning storm. The squall got so bad that he promised God he would join the priesthood if he made it through the storm alive. I didn't promise to join the priesthood, but from that day forward, when I heard a storm coming I found hard shelter. I tracked thunderstorms like a human Doppler radar. Sound travels at about 322 meters a second, whereas light covers the same distance almost instantaneously. Seeing the flash of lightning in the distance, I'd count the number of seconds until I heard the thunder. If the interval between the flash and the thunder got shorter, then the storm was headed my way and it was time to take shelter under the rock ledges below camp.

Of all the game animals in the woods, the eastern wild turkey is the most challenging to kill. I'm not a patient person. I never enjoyed waiting next to a deer trail for hours in the freezing cold. I preferred to stalk my prey. In order to bag an eastern wild turkey, you have to do a little waiting along with your stalking.

Mating season for the big birds begins in late March. The randy Toms are rearing to go. An ancient ritual commences. Presenting themselves out in the open, hens entice the Toms and Jakes using a call that sounds similar to a rusty squeeze box – yelp – yelp – yelp – yelp – yelp – and those Toms and Jakes within earshot respond by gobbling. Their throats still immature, the Jake's gobble sounds stunted, almost like someone choking on a chunk of meat. The gobble of a fully grown Tom sounds perfect, like a golden cowbell. The turkeys meet and mate. The hen builds a nest nearby and begins to fill it with fertilized eggs. Almost every morning for the next few weeks, the lovers meet to fertilize another egg. The more often they do it, the less need they have for formal introductions. By the end of the mating season, there is very little yelping and gobbling.

My strategy was to use a turkey box caller to imitate the sound of a hen. To succeed, I had to cut in on the mating dance early in the season before they established a routine. Once a Tom acquires a harem of hens, he becomes suspicious and less interested in the mating call of strange hens. In mid-March I began hiking the ridgelines in earnest. Up high, I could hear turkey gobbling in the hollows on both sides of me. Hunting season opened on April 8. I wanted to harvest a few turkeys before then. Using my trusty cherry-walnut box caller, I posed as a love-starved hen searching for my feathered Romeo.

I'd noticed a large Tom roosting high in the white pines near a prime feeding area. For the past two days, he gobbled in the roost just before first light. After gliding down to the forest floor, he waddled to the nearby creek for a quick drink, and then feasted in a nearby stand of white oaks. The stand of white oaks was a hot spot for mating hens. He was cruising for chicks.

I pushed through the woods well before dawn. There, I cut down four small white pine saplings with my knife. The pines were the size of Christmas trees. I dragged them to the middle of the feeding area and constructed a makeshift blind, poking their sharpened stumps in the ground to form a circle around me.

At first light I began calling – yelp – yelp – yelp – yelp – yelp – on my box caller. Like tripping a switch, my call triggered a cowbell gobble. The mature Tom was somewhere in the hollows to the north. By his gobble, I could tell he was at least three years old. I waited 10 minutes then called again – gobbbble. “Got him hooked,” I thought. Now comes the hard part – reeling him in.

Turkeys were not the only birds mating. Songbirds were hard at work, finding mates, laying eggs, and defending territory. The forest was a cacophony of chirps, screeches, whines, and purrs. It was hard to hear myself think. Gnats hovered around my forehead making Kamikaze dives at my eyeballs. For the most part, my camouflage-netted hood held the suicidal bugs at bay. Occasionally, a gnat would break through and lodge in the corner of my eye; I'd dig him out.

As light filled the forest I noticed bare patches of ground with the leaves bermed up on one side. Turkey sign. "He was here yesterday," I said to myself. "He'll come back today . . . Unless I scare him off."

I was tempted to overdo it, to grind away on the box caller until he walked right to me. "Don't do it," I reminded myself. "Play hard to get. Works as well with turkeys as it does with humans." I waited a good 15 minutes before calling. Gobbble. He hadn't moved.

I flirted with the Tom for an entire hour. He acknowledged my flirtations with a gobble, but he wouldn't come in. "Shy one," I thought. Two ridges away, the bashful Tom was probably eating his breakfast. "Well, if he won't come to me, then I'll go to him," I concluded.

Stealthily I stalked over the first ridge and followed an ancient logging trail that led up to the top of the second ridge. He was somewhere on the crest. I inched along like a sloth, rifle at the ready, taking a few short steps one at a time. Stop. Listen. The songbirds were raising a racket and it was hard to hear anything else. Topping the ridgeline, I could see where the Tom had turned over a section of forest floor. Flies buzzed over fresh turkey scat. But no turkey. Where did he go?

Retracing my steps to the edge of the crest, I looked down into the hollow that I'd just crossed. There, climbing the far ridge on the ancient logging trail was the big Tom. He had circled around me and was making a B-line for the stand of white oaks where I'd started the call over an hour and a half ago.

Dropping into a squat, I braced my elbows against the insides of my knees and took careful aim. He was over 150 yards away, a long shot using iron sights. At that range the mass of the 25-pound bird was only half as big as my front sight post. But I knew I could hit him – if I could get him to stand still. I parsed my lips and made a loud puck. This was a warning call in turkey-speak. The Tom froze and craned his long neck to look for the source of the warning. I squeezed gently – BOOM – letting the kick of the rifle surprise me. The huge turkey flapped his wings to get airborne, but he was hit hard and his breast bone was breaking apart, his lungs filling with blood. Nice shot.

Sometimes I missed. One glorious spring morning I hooked a gobbler with my little box. I reeled him in to 100 yards. But the bird was shy. Despite my assurances on the box caller, he wouldn't come any closer. He wanted me to reveal myself. Nothing doing. I peered through the trees and caught a brief glimpse of the Tom. He was hard to see in amongst the budding sassafras. Chameleon-like, the turkey shifted color spectrum in the early morning sunlight. In an opening in the trees I got a good sight-picture and sent a .223 caliber bullet spiraling at him. Feathers flew in the air like someone tearing the stuffing out of a pillow. He popped up six feet in the air, righted himself, and then flew away. I stood aghast watching him sail through the trees. Missed!

Undeterred by the miss, I returned to the same spot at the same time of day and succeeded in hooking another Tom. Once again, the turkey hung up 100 yards out. "I'm losing my touch," I thought. "I just cannot seem to finish a hunt." I couldn't figure it out. I yelped and putted and purred at him but nothing would bring the turkey any closer. Switching to my rifle, I found an opening and took a shot. Feathers blew off his body, just like the last one, and he popped up and flew away.

Bad luck seemed to come in streaks. One month I missed five times in a row. A slight flinch, a bad sight-picture, a branch deflecting the bullet can throw your shot off target. The key is to not let bad luck sink in. "Shake it off," I told myself. "Get back out there."

That's what I told myself, but in reality every missed shot hit at my confidence. And when you lose your confidence, you lose your poise. If nothing else, shooting small targets at long ranges requires a lot of poise.

Refusing to give up, I repeated the same routine. Shot at another turkey and missed. Laying the rifle down in the leaves, I stepped back a few paces and proceeded to scold the piece of Belgian steel. "What's your problem? Why won't you shoot straight?" I delivered a blistering critique of the rifle. But it just lay there staring up at me.

Moping around camp for the next couple of days, I thought more about the problem. I refused to believe my shooting was that bad. It had to be the rifle.

I had an idea. Finding a plain sheet of white paper, I used a pencil to draw a small rectangle about the size of a matchbox and colored it in. The paper was tacked to a pine tree. Then I paced off 25 yards. The .223 is a flat trajectory round, which means the strike of the bullet won't change, regardless whether the target is at 25 yards or 300 yards. At 25 yards, the matchbook-size rectangle was about the size of a man's torso standing at 300 yards. Aiming my FNC rifle at the center of the dark rectangle, I squeezed off three well-aimed shots. I checked the paper. My shot group was tight, all three rounds hit almost on top of one another. But there was a problem: the shot group was right on the edge of the rectangle rather than in the center where it should have been.

"Impossible!" I said. "I zeroed this rifle a month before Birmingham. This sucker was driving nails at 25 yards."

Returning to my firing position 25 yards from the paper, I fired another three-round shot group with the same results: all three rounds bored a dime-size hole on the edge of the rectangle. "No wonder I missed those turkeys," I said. "The rifle isn't zeroed. How could that have happened?"

Examining the rifle closely, I looked for any damage to the sights, but everything looked fine. My shot group was tight, so the problem wasn't my aim; it had to be the sights. I couldn't figure it out. Whatever had changed the sights, I'd at least located the problem. I adjusted the rear peep sight three clicks of windage, bringing the strike of the round over. I fired another shot group, and it drilled the matchbox dead center. I was now zeroed. Should be able to drill a deer at 300 yards; a turkey at 200 yards.

A week later I had an opportunity to confirm the zero on a live target. I called another Tom to the stand of white oaks. Like the others, this turkey played hard to get. He refused to come closer than 100 yards. "That's okay," I thought. "I'll bring him to me." BOOM – the bird fell over dead. Problem solved.

After admiring the Tom's foot-long beard, I rolled him over and noticed big patches of feathers missing on his back. Bloody scabs had developed in the patches. "A fighter?" I wondered aloud. "No, these wounds are too deep. Spurs couldn't have done that." I began to chuckle as I realized what had caused the turkey's wounds. I had inflicted his wounds with my rifle. I hadn't shot at and missed three different turkeys, just one, this one. I'd aimed at him dead center but the rounds had skimmed him just as the rounds had hit the edge of the rectangle on the paper target.

I laughed, thinking about that poor love-starved turkey returning to the stand of white oaks every morning searching for his soul mate only to be attacked and horribly wounded by unseen forces. But I still couldn't figure out how I'd lost my original zero. The unique structure of one's face and how it lines up behind the sights produces the zero. To hit big targets at short ranges, you really don't need a zeroed rifle; but if you want to shoot small targets at long ranges, then a properly zeroed rifle is essential. To zero a rifle or a scope, you adjust the sights to a neutral setting, fire a couple three-round shot groups at the target, then gradually bring the shot groups closer to the center of the target by adjusting the windage and elevation on the sights. The number of clicks on elevation and on windage from the neutral setting is your zero. Once you know your zero on a particular rifle, you should be able to pick up the same model of rifle

anywhere and adjust the sights to your zero and be on target. Your zero shouldn't change – unless the structure of your face changes.

Every spring I'd do a complete inventory – I'd wash clothes, clean equipment, repair damages, sweep away the cob webs and mold. It was an annual ritual. As part of the inventory, I shaved my winter whiskers and cut my mop of hair. The little camp mirror was hung from a branch. Holding up clumps of hair with one hand, I laid the scissor blades flush against my skull and snip. Finished cropping my mop, I shaved my jaws to the skin with a razor. This year I saw a stranger staring back at me. The eyes were familiar, but the rest of the face belonged to someone I didn't recognize. The man in the mirror was a scarecrow. My face was full and fat when I'd come to the woods two years ago. The face in the mirror belonged to a Russian peasant. Then I realized why I'd missed that turkey: the radical weight loss had changed the structure of my face, which in turn had changed my zero. The subtle things surprise you.

Many times I bagged more than one turkey. I'd come upon a gang of turkeys, shoot one, and the others would stand around waiting for me to shoot them too. Turkeys are especially vulnerable to rifles at long ranges. Perhaps they mistake the crack of the rifle for lightning.

One lazy afternoon, I came upon a gang of fighting Jakes. They milled around scratching, their heads down to the ground searching for bugs and acorns. Suddenly one Jake charged another Jake. Both sprang into the air, flailing one another with their inch-long spurs. They cackled and screeched. As soon as they hit the ground they resumed their scratching and eating as if nothing had happened.

Between bouts, I shot one of the Jakes. He went down flopping. The others seemed unperturbed and went about their business as usual; except one Jake who charged at the dying turkey and proceeded to spur him. Here was one turkey in the last throes of death and the other one spurring the snot out of him. Taking careful aim, I sent him to turkey heaven too.

Two weeks into mating season it becomes harder to box call the Toms. Often the birds begin gobbling while they're still in the roost at first light. If you're quick enough you can intercept them between the roost and the creek. Turkeys always go for water first thing in the morning. Knowing where the creeks and streams are located is a critical piece of information. Another strategy involves using the box caller to locate the Toms, then trying to get close enough for a shot. Whichever strategy you choose, the idea is to let them come to you. Turkey have no sense of smell, but they have eyes like an eagle and ears like an Irish nun. Stalking them requires much stealth and plenty of patience.

Searching a feeding area on a late afternoon, I heard the sound of the turkey shuffle. I scanned the open spaces between the trees looking for movement. There they were, a gang of Jakes feeding on the slope above me. The woods were open. If I approached them directly, they'd spot me before I moved 10 feet. So I sat still and watched. Ten minutes of watching the birds gave me their line of drift. They were headed away from me, over the ridge.

Knowing the terrain, I had a good idea where the gang of Jakes was going. On the other side of the ridge were two small hollows. Beyond the hollows the terrain dropped straight down 1,000 feet. Turkeys loved to roost in the trees growing on the steep slope. Using their huge wings, they sailed out of the trees like hang gliders, easily escaping predators. Because it was late in the afternoon, I felt certain those trees were their final destination. I'd ambush them in one of the hollows before they roosted.

Backing slowly down the mountain, I was careful to avoid breaking any branches. Old logging trails helped me move quickly. It was steep country. I huffed and puffed. Near the mouth of the first hollow, I paused briefly to listen: shirr – shirr – shirr. The gang had already crested the ridge and was working its way down into the hollow. Too late to ambush them in there. One more hollow left, but to reach it I'd have to expose myself to the turkeys. The only alternative was to go farther down the mountain and use the thick woods to skirt around them. I didn't have the time. It was getting dark. They would be in the roost in 15 minutes.

I eased onto my belly and crawled low to the ground, carefully moving aside small branches in my way. Out of their sight, I jogged the rest of the way. Sweat was seeping from every pore. Right in the center of the hollow was a hemlock tree. It would make a perfect blind. Concealed under its evergreen boughs, I remained invisible and had a perfect field of fire.

Ducking under the boughs of the hemlock, I quickly cleared a little pocket without leaves or branches. I snugged the rifle in my shoulder, flicked the safety off, and readied to fire. No movement now; the slightest flick of the wrist or turn of the head would send the Jakes flying.

I watched the Jakes for 10 minutes. My butt ached. My nose itched. And ants began using my legs as a highway. But I didn't move. Six Jakes in all, they looked about two years old. I opened fire at 30 yards. My first shot slammed one to the ground. The rest of the gang strutted around – puck – puck – puck – puck – looking for the source of the explosion. I brought down another bird, then another. The gang finally scattered to the four winds, leaving behind a cloud of leaves and feathers. Thinking that perhaps the danger must be on the ground, the last Jake flew straight up in the air and landed on an outstretched limb. He craned his head forward, scanning the ground for predators. I slowly elevated my rifle through the hemlock branches to draw a bead on him. He spotted my barrel poking through, but it was too late. I dropped the Jake. He hit the ground like a sack of potatoes – thud.

Four turkeys – it was the most I'd killed at one time. Pairing them up, I tied their fleshy necks together and dropped one pair over my left shoulder and the other pair over my right. I walked back to camp through the gathering darkness, a fitting close to another season in the southern highlands.

* * *

I never came to love Mother Nature the way that Thoreau did. She tried to kill me too many times. But, then again, she was just too beautiful to hate. I guess after so many seasons in the mountains I came to respect the scary old broad, albeit with one eye always kept open.

As the forest filled out with foliage and the weather settled into a predictable pattern, I knew it was time to break my camp in the mountains. The warmer weather and lush foliage made movement easier. Summertime was the campaigning season. It was time for me to complete the mission.

CHAPTER 17

Tomotla, NC • 1999-2000 • The Cause Revisited

Hauling those heavy bags of grain up to my camp on Tarkiln Ridge was quite a job. I carried the bags one at a time, which resulted in about 70 trips. Deer season would open in two weeks, so I had to work fast, and it had to be at night. It was an 800-foot climb on a virgin path that zigzagged through the rhododendron slick. Because I couldn't use a flashlight, I memorized the trail, counting the steps between turns and obstacles. After each night's work I swept leaves over my trail to prevent the deer hunters from discovering it the next day. Done with one Roll-A-Waste container, I wheeled the empty can up to camp. Three or four loads were all I could manage in one night. It took me nearly a month to move it all up.

Between loads, I scanned the radio for news about the '96 Silverado that I'd abandoned in Nantahala. I expected the task force to revive the search effort, though not as heavy as last year after they found Nordmann's truck. The feds had learned their lesson. I figured that after finding the Silverado, they'd intensify the search for a while and then scale it back when they found no new trails to follow. The truck was 25 miles away, on the other side of the Tusquitee Mountains. By now, every last trace of scent had evaporated or washed away. The feds would have nothing.

Generally, no news was good news. Yet I worried when I heard no news about the truck. In my chess game with the feds, I'd grown accustomed to planning my next move based on their last one. Not knowing what they were up to perturbed me. Perhaps the task force's new agent-in-charge wanted a lower-profile search. Months went by without word on the Silverado, and I began to wonder if they made the connection between me and the truck. "How could they have missed it?" I asked myself. "I've left them enough bread crumbs to follow. I'd even written them a note and pressed my thumbprint in the margin. What more could they ask for?"

I couldn't worry about it for long, however. Other things weighed on my mind.

Victorious in my perennial struggle for food, I started thinking about the mission again. The worm turned, and I itched for action. With six to eight years of staples in the woods, I had the supplies I needed to make a move against the agents in Andrews. It was no longer a suicidal operation. After attacking the federal task force, I could fall back to the mountains and, if necessary, stay hidden in the rhododendron for years. I thought it was time for the hunters to become the hunted.

The mission came into full focus during that winter of 1999-2000. I hunted, boiled acorns, and plotted. I pored over maps looking for weaknesses in the task force's operation. Then, one day I heard something on the radio that changed everything. "The FBI is down-sizing its operation in Andrews," the radio said. "The Southeast Bomb Task Force will move its headquarters from Andrews to the National Guard Armory in Murphy. Only a handful of agents will remain full time."

The National Guard Armory was located just outside of Murphy in the tiny community of Tomotla. I knew it well. The layout of the armory flashed before my mind's eye. Sitting on the side of Highway 19, the armory had no security assets, other than its thick walls. And 200 yards across the highway a prominent ridge dominated the area. From up there I'd be able to see the exposed front door of the armory.

Their headquarters in Andrews had been gated and patrolled 24 hours a day. Getting past all that security was tricky, and attacking them outside their headquarters carried other complications. Having only one remote control receiver limited my options. I'd get one good shot at the feds. I wanted to make it count. By moving their headquarters to the armory, they were giving me an open shot. Inside that armory the feds were like fish in a barrel.

For a few hours each week I studied the topographical map of Murphy. With so few agents available to the task force I doubted whether they would maintain a 24-hour presence, as they had in Andrews. And I didn't think they would hire private security guards or install cameras. The move to Murphy could mean only one thing: the feds were giving up. They thought I was either dead or out of the country. Leaving behind that token force at the armory was a face-saving gesture. Their guard was completely let down. God had delivered them into my hands.

My study of the map revealed a stretch of forest at the foot of Will Scott Mountain, about a mile west of the armory. Across the highway from the high school and close to the shopping centers and restaurants on the outskirts of Murphy, the little woods looked like a good base of operation. I'd camp there next summer and plan the attack on the armory. It seemed like destiny.

* * *

Sometimes I felt like God had given me the life of a groundhog. Every year I had to bury more caches, and every year the caches got bigger. In the spring of 2000, I began the laborious task of burying the grain on Tarkiln ridge, just south of camp near my other caches. Using the root balls of fallen oak trees, I dug down as deep as my shovel would take me. Making a hole for the huge Roll-A-Waste containers was like burying refrigerators standing upright. After sinking them below ground level, I had to harden them.

After that bear had dug up my cache in Snowbird, destroying a year's supply of food, I pondered ways to prevent that from happening again. As I saw it, I had two places to put the caches: up in the trees or under the ground. Given my present popularity with the FBI, I decided the best place for the caches was still underground. "But how can I keep the bears out?" I asked myself.

Once I saw a highway fence stop a pickup truck like a net catching a circus trapeze artist. If a fence can stop a truck travelling at 60 M.P.H. it ought to be able to stop a black bear. While I was in Andrews, I borrowed a few spools of welding wire fence from the farmers and cut lengths of barbed wire as well. I wove a basket of fence big enough to surround the Roll-A-Waste container while it was in the ground. The top of the basket was temporarily left open. I packed dirt and rocks into the basket and around the container. The top of the cache was covered with a foot of dirt, leaving only the four inch prongs from the basket sticking out of the ground. Then I spread a flat section of fence over the top. The prongs were twisted to the fence. Large rocks were laid on top of the fence and secured with strands of barbed wire. The rocks and fence were then buried in a foot of leaves and branches.

There was a problem though. By another one of my miscalculations, I'd brought only enough fence to cover half of the caches. A foot of dirt and leaves was all that protected the other caches.

It was late June before I finished burying the caches. Everything had to go below ground before I could leave for Murphy. The camp and surrounding woods had to look pristine. I dismantled the cooking slab and replaced it with squares of cut sod taken from the forest floor. The stumps had to go, too. In the process of gathering firewood, I'd left behind many rhododendron stumps sticking up out of the ground with axe marks clearly visible. I hacked them level with the dirt and peeled back the sod. Next, I covered them with fresh squares of sod and pressed down the edges. The spring rains would take care of the rest, reintegrating the sod into the forest. Leaves and branches were spread. A trained eye might be able to tell that someone had camped there, but to a hunter just passing through it would look like clean, primal woods.

On the far side of Big Peachtree Bald, I camped for the night on a small finger of ground that jutted out into the valley above Andrews. It should take me a day and a night to reach the patch of woods outside of Murphy.

Dawn of the next morning brought clear blue sky. Through the trees I beheld the Andrews Valley spread out before me. I retrieved my binoculars to bring the valley closer. Eight months had passed since

my sojourn on Webb Ridge. The lush green corn fields stretched for miles. The silos at Marble glinted in the sunlight. The sawmill ground through logs.

Certain experiences have such a profound impact, that even the slightest sound or smell can let loose a flood of memories. Familiar sights and sounds of the valley below evoked memories of those summer days on Webb Ridge: nights prowling for food, close encounters with cops, coon hunters, and that homeless guy sleeping in the trash container. Waves of emotion welled up inside me, and I had to sit down to take it all in. Something about those desperate days had left an indelible imprint on my soul.

Blue sky soon gave way to clouds and thundershowers. I walked along the logging road that meandered along the southern flank of Buckhorn Ridge. I squatted under my poncho when the rain came hard. Being mid-June, the blackberry briars were heavy with ripe fruit. The bears had been there during the night, flattening the briars to feast on the berries. Large piles of purple bear flop mined the roadway. But there were plenty of fresh berries left. Never pass up an opportunity to eat, I'd learned. I filled my belly first with the ripe berries, then stuffed two bags for tomorrow.

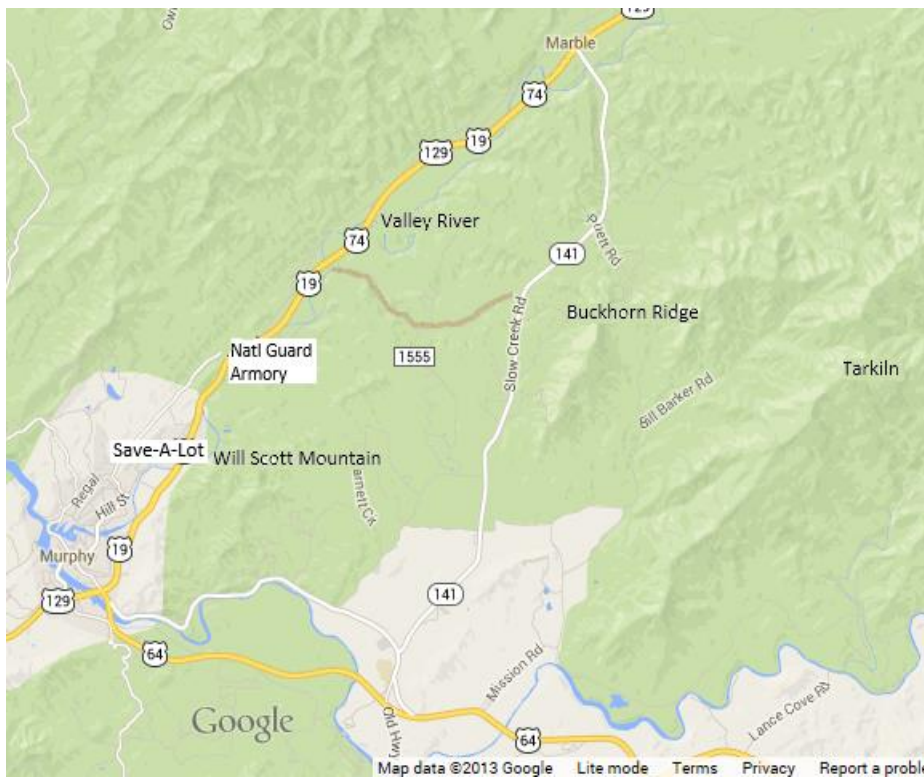


Figure 15 Murphy, Tomotla

At Indian Grave Gap, I ran into civilization as developers had blasted off the mountain top to make room for a summer cabin.

Descending into Puet Cove, I heard children playing, dogs barking, and lawnmowers running. I'd reached the end of my daytime trail. I waited in the woods for darkness, changing socks, eating a baggy of food, and preparing for the night's journey.

After midnight the tiny community of Peachtree went to bed and the roads cleared – my time for a road march. All along Puet Road, swarms of fireflies hovered above the wet pastures. I turned south on the main highway, which was well-travelled during daylight but had very little traffic after midnight. Cars were not the problem. The problem was a Highway Patrol headquarters up ahead. Housed in a small

trailer, the headquarters sat beside a large highway maintenance lot. Lit up like a football field, the maintenance lot stretched for 200 yards along the highway.

The lights were on inside the trailer and a lone Highway Patrol car was parked out front. Getting past would be delicate. I walked in the drainage ditch on the far side of the two-lane highway, keeping my eyes trained on the trailer's window and door. Shadows moved inside the trailer. I heard a click and dropped to my belly in the ditch just as the front door swung open. A car door shut, an engine cranked – the state trooper blew past me swoosh descending the long hill toward Marble.

I slogged through Peachtree, emerging on Highway 19 at Cal's Mini-Storage, the same storage facility where I'd rented space over a year earlier. The four-lane looked desolate. An occasional tractor trailer wheeled by, its trailer lit up like a house on Christmas Eve. Up ahead I spied the orange glow of sodium vapor light spilling over the highway guardrail. I debated whether to leave the highway and go around it. I decided to approach, duck-walking slowly behind the guardrail. Peeking over, I saw it, the National Guard Armory. After scoping it thoroughly with my binoculars, I smiled real big. "Just as I thought – they have no security," I whispered. "Like fish in a barrel."

On this side of the Valley River the Wal-Mart Supercenter blocked my way to the little patch of woods below Will Scott Mountain. I had to go around it, crossing over the river and following an overgrown trail along the river bank. The trail looped around the shopping center and back to the highway where a large concrete bridge spanned the river. Near the bridge the terrain opened into a small flat of bottom land of sycamores, walnuts, and grass. Will Scott Mountain rose behind me.

* * *

Will Scott is a low ridge overlooking Murphy. The Valley River runs along its lower flank. Murphy proper lies on the other side of the river. Years ago the only things on the Will Scott side of the river were the high school and a small collard field; the rest was woods. Old Highway 19 ran through downtown. Then, in the 1980s, they made Highway 19 into a four-lane which by-passed the town. Bridging the Valley River, the new highway sliced between the high school and the lower spurs of Will Scott and looped around to the west side of town. The high school still owned a good chunk of the woods leading up Will Scott Mountain, but now the woods were on the other side of the highway.

I searched for a campsite in this small patch of woods. Because it was school property I didn't need to worry about developers. And with the school on the far side of a busy highway, I didn't have to worry too much about any school kids walking up on me. And across the highway bridge were shopping centers, where, hopefully, I could find food.

The shopping centers were just across the river from Will Scott Mountain. At night I'd cross the river to forage for food. First, I needed a place to camp.

* * *

The best place to camp, if you're a wanted man, is deep in a thicket. There was nothing ideal about Will Scott in that regard. I could have camped on the steep slopes above the river; plenty of cover down there. But there were few sources of clean water along the slope, and with a landfill upstream, the Valley River was too toxic to drink. Besides, the mosquitoes were ferocious along the river. Although it offered less concealment, the small wood just west of the bridge had a better set-up.

Fifty yards west of the highway bridge an access road cut back into the woods and deadened atop a small spur where a high voltage power line came through. The woods above the power line were less than ideal for a camp. People signs were everywhere. I found spent shotgun shells and an old campfire on the access road. "Nine shot . . . Gotta be turkey hunters," I said, after examining the shell casings. "They were probably here a couple months ago, during the season." The campfire confirmed the time frame: rain had washed away all the white powdery ash, leaving behind a pile of shiny black charcoal. The turkey hunters

were not the only folks to have camped there. On a nearby spur I discovered a broken lawn chair and a ripped up tent in an area littered by soda cans. And down in the next hollow was a spring with a five gallon bucket embedded in the black mud. The power line stretched across nearby. Pot grower's camp, I concluded. They probably had a few plants in the power line clear-cut. To prevent them from being stolen, they had camped out there at the end of the season. Amateurs. Professionals wouldn't camp next to their patch, leaving all kinds of evidence for the police to find. Newspapers from the fall of 1994 indicated that the camp was at least six years old.

Years of watching what people do in the woods had taught me how to read these signs. I knew that people generally stay close to the trails, roads, creeks, rivers, and ridgelines. In the army, they refer to these well-travelled places as the "lines of drift." To avoid running into people I looked for those untrodden places between the lines of drift. Will Scott wasn't the best place to camp, but it was close to my target, and over the years I'd camped in a dozen places just like it. After scouting the area, I calculated the odds of running into someone. Tire ruts on the access road told me that power company people drove back there, but only to work on the power line. The spent shotgun shells and the campfire were left by turkey hunters last spring. And a beaten trail along the prominent spur leading up to Will Scott indicated that coon hunters used the woods, but only in the fall and winter. And paths along the river bank were made by fishermen. These were the lines of drift, the places where I was most likely to meet people. Avoid these places during the day, and I'd be fine.

Of course, there was always a chance that circumstances might force someone to leave the lines of drift, like the amateur pot growers who had made that camp on the spur. To ease my mind on that score, I combed the power line clear-cut for marijuana plants. An hour of searching turned up nothing. I was safe; the growers wouldn't be back this year.

Near the terminus of a dead-end spur I found a little pocket of flat ground between the lines of drift. I cleaned out the spring near the clear-cut and buried the bucket in the cold mud for refrigeration. Summer growth reduced visibility. If I kept everything close to the ground the camp would remain invisible beyond 20 yards. During daylight hours, I broke my shelter down and camouflaged everything with cut white pines. Essential gear was kept in the backpack in case I had to high-tail it over Will Scott Mountain into Falls Branch, a place with many thickets and plenty of space to lose any pursuers.

One item I absolutely had to have was a pair of shoes. I'd done enough damage to my poor boots already. Those late night forays in Andrews, walking in dewy grass, nearly destroyed them. And all the road marching had worn the precious Vibram soles to a thin sliver. This year, I vowed, would be different. I'd husband my resources. By hook or by crook I'd get me a pair of throw-away shoes, something I could wear when I did my night work.

After I finished searching the clear-cut for pot plants, I stood on the edge of the access road scanning the stores on the far side of the river. I looked for the best way to cross the river. Running across the bridge appeared to be the easiest way to the other side. Late at night there would be little traffic. Failing that, I could wade across the river underneath the bridge.

Something curious caught my eye. Underneath the bridge's steel girders, on the far side, I spied the makings of a homeless camp. Cardboard lay spread out on the dirt with heaps of clothes piled on top. My spirits sank. With a homeless dude sleeping under that bridge, my situation there was untenable. It was too dangerous to camp there. But upon closer inspection, the homeless camp looked abandoned. It was hard to tell at that distance. I'd have to get a closer look. I could see a silver lining in this cloud, though. Plainly visible in the lenses of my Leupold binoculars was a pair of tennis shoes, resting on the edge of the cardboard bed.

As the lights in the stores went out, I used the line of bushes in the highway's center divide to approach the bridge. Hurdling the guardrail, I ducked under the steel girders of the eastbound lanes. The

homeless camp lay directly across the river. I watched for an hour, but there was no sign of life over there. I looked both ways for cars before sprinting across the bridge.

I examined everything at the homeless camp carefully, using my red lens pen light. Undisturbed red dust covered the cardboard. I couldn't make out footprints in the smooth red clay surrounding the makeshift bed. No one had occupied the camp in a long time, probably several months. My camp on Will Scott was safe for the time being. Most of the stuff was worthless. But that pair of Adidas tennis shoes was a real godsend. Although worn and dirty, the shoes had plenty of life left in them. I held one up to my foot for comparison. I wore size ten; the shoes were size eleven; almost perfect. "Thank you, Lord!" I said.

* * *

Just as I had at Andrews, I developed a regular routine. About twice a week, I went out for food. During those first weeks, I checked most of the stores and restaurants on the east end of Murphy. I discovered that Ingles Grocery locked their garbage inside the store and that Bi-Lo grocery used a doorless dumpster that slid underneath a large chute. Neither store's garbage could be accessed from the outside. Save-A-Lot was the last grocery store in town with an accessible dumpster. On occasion I salvaged chocolates and newspapers from the dumpster behind Rite Aid Drugs. The can at Papa John's Pizza gave up the rare pie. However, for the most part, I would have to depend upon Save-A-Lot and Taco Bell for my food that summer.

Save-A-Lot was dangerous. After a couple of trips to the lone dumpster that sat at the end of a loading dock, I noticed a police patrol. Town cops – there was usually one car patrolling the graveyard shift, sometimes two on the weekends. About every hour, he would circle behind the Save-A-Lot shopping center. Most times, I'd sit at the bridge, waiting for him to pass before going to the dumpster. One night I watched him do something different. He drove behind Save-A-Lot the same as usual and then circled around to the front of the shopping center. After five minutes, he came barreling back behind the store, this time with his headlights turned off. Obviously, he was trying to catch a burglar who might be monitoring his movements.

Getting to the dumpsters at Taco Bell posed no problems for me. Having clear views in all directions, I didn't worry about the patrol. But I was blind behind Save-A-Lot. I couldn't see the patrol car rounding the corner of the long shopping center. In the open space between the loading dock and the pasture I was vulnerable. Most nights, the town cop gave me a "tell"; he left his headlights on and I could see the beam of light shooting past the corner of the building. I sat tight in the dumpster until he went by. But when he turned his headlights off I had no warning. If he came around that corner one night with his lights off, and I was halfway across the open space, he and I were gonna come face-to-face real quick.

(See map on page 202.)

Visiting the dumpster was a calculated risk, one that I believed worth taking. The store threw out a half a box of bruised fruit and vegetables every other day, and about every two weeks they dumped a couple hundred pounds of produce. There were times when I found the dumpster overflowing with boxes of bruised bell peppers, onions, bananas, strawberries, and so forth. The sight of so much food was intoxicating. When bruising or browning developed on the otherwise good fruit, the store dumped the entire inventory. Like a child anticipating Christmas, I waited for such occasions. Stuffing my pack full of bruised produce, I carried it across the bridge to the access road. Beyond the small gate I dropped the load and returned to the dumpster for another one. Next day, I'd dry the produce in the sun.

Hidden in the tall briars under the power line, I had cleared out a small place for a drying table. The plastic lids from one of the dumpsters behind Rite Aid Drugs made a nice table. If it rained, I put a sheet of metal over the table. To keep mice from eating the produce, I drove four stakes in the ground and set the table on top, like an Indian grave. As the rosy morning dawned, I filled buckets of water and cleaned

and sliced the produce. Sprinkled on the table, the sliced vegetables and fruit were left to dry in the sun. I dried bananas, bell peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, onions, and potatoes – anything nutritious. The potatoes had to be cooked before drying. Boiled soft, the potatoes were mashed and then smeared on the table. Three or four hot days was enough to desiccate the produce.

I later discovered new fields of opportunity. Several acres of collards were planted just beyond the high school. When the greens grew tall, I harvested and dried several large bags full. The greens were pressed into a compact block for travel. Within a couple months, I'd have enough dried produce to supplement my diet during the winter.

Trips for food were generally uneventful. I'd sleep until about 1:00 a.m., dress in my garbage clothes, and descend the ridge. Most nights I returned before 3:00 a.m., unless I jumped into a dumpster full of produce; then I'd work until the traffic on Highway 19 became too heavy to cross the bridge.

I became well-practiced at running the bridge. It spanned about 50 yards across. If I got caught halfway across when a car turned from Wal-Mart, which stayed open 24 hours a day, I could usually make it to the other side. But sometimes I had to hang over the guardrail. Hanging over the guardrail involved squatting with my feet on a few inches of concrete, while clinging to the aluminum rail 30 feet above a very shallow river. Doing this with an empty pack wasn't difficult. But when the pack was loaded with 120 pounds of bananas, it got really slippery. It would be a back-breaker if I fell.

Dumpster diving at 2:00 a.m. was no fun, especially in the rain. I dove into the Save-A-Lot dumpster one rainy night and fell through the empty cardboard boxes into a half foot of foul-smelling slop at the bottom. It was a mixture of rotting vegetables, fetid meat, and rainwater. I closed the lids of the dumpster, thinking it would keep the rain out. The smell of decaying flesh seemed more pungent than usual. Working by sense of touch, I felt for food in the darkness. The pickings were slim – a handful of bell peppers and tomatoes. I dove deeper, down to the subterranean level of the dumpster where I hoped to discover something more substantial. I grasped something solid inside a fifty pound potato bag. "Potatoes," I exulted. "Now I'm getting somewhere." It was strange. The object in the bag didn't quite feel like potatoes, though; didn't have that lumpy texture. Determined to have a better look, I shoved open one of the dumpster lids and heaved the heavy potato bag on the open lid. I had good light. Rain streaked down in the white light. I unfolded the top of the bag and looked inside to see a bloated dead dog staring back at me.

Often I couldn't sleep before going out, so I sat under the power lines with my binoculars, watching the people across the river shop at Ingles and eat at the picnic benches at the Taco Bell. Sometimes I waited down by the highway and watched traffic until the stores closed. Great fun, I know.

On a hot July night I skirted past the fence at the end of the access road and sat down in the gravel to watch the cars go by. I had a couple hours 'til Taco Bell closed. Pulling my knees up to my chest, I rested my chin on my arms, staring down at the gravel. A stick-like object slowly slithered between my feet and buttocks. Short and thick with a diamond-shaped head, I could tell right away it was a copperhead. I froze as the poisonous viper brushed against my hind end. It seemed like several minutes passed before the snake finally cleared my body and disappeared into the tall grass. I breathed again.

Before that night I'd honestly never thought about snakes when I went out looking for food. Somewhere in my mental filing cabinet, I knew that snakes were primarily nocturnal. On hot summer evenings they come out to hunt rats and mice, and they usually edged along rocks at riverbanks. Those many nights in Andrews – crossing that river and scrambling over those rocks – I'd gone about my business completely oblivious to the reptilian threat lurking beneath my feet. At Murphy, I was 10 miles downstream on the same river, same rocks, and same snake habitat.

I quickly cut a sapling and whittled a walking stick. From that night on, when I went foraging I used the stick like a blind man, tapping the path in front of me from side to side: tap – tap – tap.

My little cat and mouse game with the town cop continued into the summer. Several times he missed me by mere seconds. I dove inside dumpsters, ducked behind bushes, and watched him cruise past so close I could have reached out and touched him.

Late one night I was laying my cardboard workplace next to the Taco Bell dumpsters when I heard the patrol coming. Looked like a routine patrol. He couldn't see me inside the enclosure surrounding the dumpsters. Usually he cruised by the enclosure, then circled behind Rite Aid Drugs and Ingles Grocery. I stopped to peer through the crack as he went by. Instead of going past, he stopped a few feet away from the enclosure and opened his door.

I had three seconds before he walked to the other side of the enclosure and through the entrance. I looked around frantically for a hiding place. "Behind the dumpsters?" I wondered. "No! There's only one place to hide." I grabbed the lip of the nearest dumpster and vaulted over the side and eased down into the trash bags. Straining my ears, I could hear shuffling on the cardboard. He was only inches away now. Then liquid – I heard what sounded like liquid pouring on the cardboard. He was pissing. Seconds later his car door slammed shut and he drove away. Emerging from my hiding place, I found everything soaked. The cop had hosed down all of my food. "No tacos tonight," I said.

* * *

Gathering and drying food had distracted me from the mission. It was a full-time job keeping food in my belly, but doing it while planning an attack against the FBI task force took all of my energy. As so often happened, whenever I got into a comfortable groove, my instincts told me to stay put, stay where it was safe. The summer of 2000 was coming to a close and I still hadn't reconnoitered the target.

About a mile east of my camp, the National Guard Armory was below Highway 19 on the banks of the Valley River. The best place to set up a hideout was on the ridge directly across the highway. It was also the obvious place. "The feds might have a camera hidden over there," I thought. "I'll have a look at the armory from farther away. After gauging their defensive posture I'll decide whether to move over to the ridge."

I travelled the overgrown trail along the Valley River, which led to the old Lee Jeans factory, now vacant. The factory's driveway bridged the river out to Highway 19. The armory was about one quarter of a mile up the highway. Short of the factory bridge, a dirt road veered off into a vast desert landscape. For about a quarter of a mile along the south bank of the river, bulldozers and graders had been hard at work flattening the mountain to make room for some construction project. I skirted past parked dozers and dump trucks. The smell of diesel fuel and fresh dirt hung thick in the late summer air. Above the desert-scape I slipped into the wood line where I could view the armory across the river. The armory stayed empty throughout the remainder of the night. Good sign. If they had no security on duty at night, chances were good they would have very little during the day.

The next morning, bright sunshine filled the desert below me and the roar of bulldozers echoed through the river valley. One vehicle arrived in front of the armory around 9:00 a.m. A dark blue Chevy Suburban with tinted windows, it was standard FBI issue. A tall man wearing a baseball cap entered the building. Less than an hour later he emerged and drove away. I watched the place all day. Old Glory flapped atop an aluminum flag pole, its yarder rattling in the breeze. The asphalt parking lot shimmered in the blazing August sun. The place sat empty.

Last year the task force had over 200 agents working out of a building that looked like a small factory. They had helicopters, bloodhounds, machine guns, infrared scopes, and Ground Penetrating Radar. Now, they were down to one agent and a Suburban. "No way will they have that ridge under surveillance," I thought.

After midnight I moved over to the "Ridge." Rising to less than fifty feet, the ridge was a hotdog shaped promontory surrounded on all sides by roads. The little rise was too small to have a name so I just

called it the “Ridge.” Highway 19 cut along its southern flank, and a two-lane black top called Regal Road ran along its northern flank. The community was called Tomotla. Outside the Murphy city limits, Tomotla consisted of a perlite factory, a church, a handful of houses, and an algae covered pond full of bullfrogs. Across Regal Road was a nasty stretch of terrain known as Marble Creek. Loggers had worked Marble Creek pretty hard over the years. The place was carved into clear-cuts at varying stages of regrowth.

I took an old washed out logging road from Regal Road to the top of the Ridge. It traversed the Ridge until it reached the crest, where it switched back east, climbing the spine. At the top, in a grove of yellow pine trees, local Bubbas had left the remnants of many lost weekends: old campfires, beer cans, broken whiskey bottles, and a No Loitering sign tacked to a tree with a hundred bullet holes shot through it.

I did an about-face and followed the logging road back down to the switchback, where I got on a coyote trail that continued down the crest. Twenty yards down there was a small shelf of rocks under a group of stunted pine trees. Having been blasted away for the four-lane, the Ridge dropped 20 feet to the roadway, where rush hour traffic flowed under me like a river of steel. I snugged the binoculars to my eyes to have a look across the highway. The front door of the armory jumped out at me, looked close enough to touch. “Here is the place,” I said.

The diminutive Ridge had a little history. Back in the 1830s, the first white settlers were digging around an old Indian mine at the foot of the Ridge when they discovered a sixteenth century Spanish cannon and some rusted hand tools. The artifacts had belonged to Hernando DeSoto’s ill-fated expedition. The first European to explore the southeast, DeSoto left the coast of Florida in 1560 with over 300 men and a long pack-train containing mules, horses and a few cannons. The Spanish conquistadors dreamed of discovering El Dorado, the fabled city of gold. Instead, they found disease, starvation, and a lot of pissed off Indians.

DeSoto’s men hacked their way through the primeval forest of what is now Georgia. By the time they reached the Cherokee villages along the Hiawassee River, south of present day Murphy, they were exhausted. The Indians probably pointed the Spaniards to the rock formations at Tomotla, which contain talc and other minerals, but not gold. They must have dug around the Ridge looking for gold but gave up after a fruitless search. They could no longer pull the cannon, having eaten many of their mules and horses, so they buried the cannon in a mine shaft before pushing onward. DeSoto later gave up his ghost on the banks of the Mississippi River. His men weighed his body with rocks and tossed it into the muddy water. Only a handful of his men made it back to Cuba alive.

The armory was a brick building with a perfectly manicured lawn sloping down to the river. There was a small gravel driveway that led past the armory to a private residence barely visible in the distance. The parking lot wrapped around the armory’s east side. Behind the armory a gated lot held 20 or so Humvees and one early model white Chevy Suburban. Besides the armory, the only other building along that lonely stretch of highway was an auto-repair shop next door.

The armory’s front entrance was made to order: recessed into the sturdy brick building, and flanked by two boxwood bushes planted side-by-side. It was almost as if someone had planted them there just for me. I took one look at those two bushes: “That’s it,” I said, “that’s the perfect place to plant a bomb.”

The Ridge had no springs, and I’d brought along enough food and water for only three days. I had a couple days left. Not wanting to leave any evidence behind on the Ridge, I used empty soda bottles and plastic baggies to hold my bodily waste. I sat and watched the target. The Ridge grew swelteringly hot at midday.

Around 10:00 a.m., the dark blue Chevy Suburban pulled into the empty armory parking lot. This time I got a good look at my adversary: dark hair, tall, blue jeans, t-shirt, an automatic pistol holstered

high on his hip. He fumbled with an armload of paper work. He wasn't wearing a baseball cap today. The most curious thing about the FBI agent was that he had this shock of white hair running along the side of his head; looked almost like a skunk. Staying inside the armory for less than an hour, he locked the glass door behind him and drove away. That was it – that was the entire operation of the once powerful Southeast Bomb Task Force.

I hadn't moved a muscle in almost 15 hours, but at the end of that day I was exhausted. The hot sun had sucked the energy right out of me. Hiding under the thick forest canopy during the day and coming out only at night, I got little direct sunlight. I had become essentially a nocturnal creature. Unprepared for the sun, I felt like a dried prune after a full day on the Ridge.

The next day the routine changed somewhat. This time a stocky brown-haired man arrived a few minutes before the agent with the shock of white hair. I assumed he was an FBI agent also. Driving a late-model sedan, the stocky man carried a small brown paper bag. "His sidearm? His lunch?" I asked myself. One half hour later he was gone, followed shortly by the agent with the shock of white hair.

I wanted a closer look at the target. That night, before returning to Will Scott, I squatted in the shadows of the driveway west of the armory waiting for a break in a convoy of semi-trucks on Highway 19. Wary of cameras, I yanked my pull-over up over the bridge of my nose and ran for the entrance. After a quick search of the doorway for cameras (there were none), I squeezed between the two boxwood bushes and pressed my back against the wall. I was invisible back there. They would never see the bomb, and the recessed walls of the entrance would magnify the blast tenfold. Anyone in or around the entrance would be shredded. It was a perfect kill zone.

I started spending a few days at a time on the Ridge, watching the task force's daily routine, before returning to Will Scott. I discovered a better route to the Ridge: through a small horse pasture behind Family Dollar Store; left on the road from Wal-Mart, and straight down Regal Road. The new route saved me much time.

Some days the agent with the shock of white hair stayed for an hour or two. Other days he didn't show up at all. Other agents showed up now and then, but usually the agent with the shock of white hair was alone. After watching him for a while, I concluded that he was the agent-in-charge; the others were visiting agents, perhaps from their office in Atlanta.

Actually, the man with the shock of white hair was the new head of the Southeast Bomb Task Force, Special Agent Todd Letcher. At the time, he was probably the only FBI agent stationed in Murphy full-time. Unbeknown to me, the FBI was paying "civilian trackers" to hunt for me. They would search a section of mountains, and then come to the armory to report to Special Agent Letcher. The men I saw meeting with him on those mornings were probably these paid trackers.

One rosy morning two men arrived early and waited in the parking lot. A younger guy sat in the vehicle, while an older man with grey hair and a grey beard paced back and forth on the sidewalk. Minutes later, Special Agent Letcher pulled in. He talked with the older fellow. As he spoke, he gesticulated and smiled.

"Looks like a nice guy," I said off-handedly. "Going to be a shame to . . ." Before the last words could leave my mouth, something happened – inexplicable, visceral, uncontrollable – and I pulled the binoculars away from my eyes in horror. Images poured into my mind like water. I pictured this guy's mother wiping his runny nose when he was a child; spoon-feeding him in a high chair; then weeping over his closed casket. I shuddered and turned away from the armory.

On the way back to Will Scott that night I tried to force my thoughts on the upcoming operation. By shifting my thoughts to other problems, I had hoped to keep them from focusing on the obvious one. But it was no use. A persistent thought kept popping into my head. "What just happened back there?"

Then I attempted to staunch my emotions with torrents of ideological fervor. I delivered lengthy speeches on the illegitimate nature of the Washington regime. A crack had developed in my psyche, and I tried to patch it with politics.

Despite my ideological fervor, I realized that the agents at the armory were not responsible for shaping the policies that were destroying the country. They signed up for Duty, Honor, and Country. They probably didn't realize that they were serving Sodomites, abortionists, and Harvard commissars.

Years earlier, when I joined the resistance, I knew that I might have to go up against some of Washington's watchdogs. To me the federal government was illegitimate, and its officers were the agents of tyranny. But I had wanted to focus my attacks on abortion and homosexuality and other ideological symbols of the liberal Establishment. I had wanted to make symbolic statements that communicated a definite political agenda. Instead, I ended up confusing the message by killing an innocent bystander in Atlanta and a watchdog in Birmingham. Now, I had another watchdog in my sights. Somehow, everything had gotten twisted around.

I'd thought about these things a lot in the past year. That day at the armory brought it all back again. In the past, I saw my targets as nameless, faceless silhouettes. But at the armory I'd studied Special Agent Letcher closely. I'd looked into his face numerous times. I didn't want to kill him.

"What if you find a new target, one you have no qualms about hitting?" I asked myself. "What about bombing another abortion mill rather than the task force headquarters?" The idea intrigued me. Besides closing down another abortion mill, the attack might impact the upcoming presidential election.

I'd been following the 2000 election campaign in the newspapers. Supported by an enormous war chest, George W. Bush looked like the favorite. This was bad news to me. If elected, Bush would lead the country into four to eight years of drift. Just like his empty suit of a father and that fraud Ronald Reagan, George W. was courting social conservatives with pro-life rhetoric and visits to Bob Jones University. He was blowing hot-air phrases such as "strict constructionist judges" and "culture of life." But I could see through his rhetoric. I knew that once in office, he would govern like Bill Clinton, the only real difference being the smell of his hot-air. The country needed George S. Patton, not some two-bit oil salesman like George W. Bush.

To my way of thinking, constitutional politics had ended decades earlier. Fortuitous circumstances had catapulted the liberals into an unprecedented position of power. Liberals dominated every major institution of American society. They controlled the most powerful instrument for shaping public opinion in the history of the world: the mass media. Using that instrument, they were capturing the majority of each new generation. I knew that within a few decades, America would be a different country – no longer prosperous, Christian, or European. The legacy of our Founding Fathers would be gone, squandered by prodigal sons. I felt that only desperate measures could turn things around.

For 50 years the Republican Party had sold us out. The Party had long been in the back pocket of money-grubbing blue bloods whose only religion was capitalism. They had come to accept the demise of Western Christian America and only wanted to slow its collapse long enough to protect their own lifestyle. They had their padded bank accounts, their personal trainers, their IRAs, and their Mexican maids. Protected behind the walls of their gated communities, they would live out the remainder of their lives in relative comfort and ease. To hell with their grandchildren.

My job was to discredit these frauds, to silence the voices of compromise, to destroy the status quo. I would have conservatives in America believe that they have no representation in Washington. I would leave them a clear-cut choice: either remove the liberal regime, or live under its most radical proponents right now. Rather than postponing Marxist Third World America for their grandchildren to deal with, I would impose it on them today. Forced into such a dire position, hopefully they would choose George S. Patton rather than a compromising coward like George W. Bush.

My immediate goal was to destroy Bush's candidacy. Confronted with four to eight more years of leftwing-Al Gore-policies, conservatives would, I hoped, become more radicalized. I believed a bloody attack on an abortion mill just before the election might do the trick.

Bush had been courting pro-lifers from the beginning of his campaign, so he was stuck with the "pro-life" label. But at the same time he had been sending subtle messages to so-called moderates that he would tread lightly when it came to social issues such as abortion. Out of one corner of his lying mouth he gave hope to pro-lifers who wanted *Roe v. Wade* overturned; out of the other corner he assured the moderates that he would make no major changes with respect to abortion policy.

The pundits predicted a tight race. In key states they expected the margin of victory to come down to one percentage point. Although supporting Bush's cotton-candy policies of low taxes and free drugs (Medicare II), the moderates feared his rhetoric about promoting a "culture of life" and his association with social conservatives. Moderates love abortion, for it allows them to exercise their promiscuity while maintaining a thin veneer of morality; while expressing ambivalence about abortion in public, they want the "private" option of disposing of their unwanted offspring. An attack on an abortion mill might be the catalyst to push those moderates into Al Gore's camp. The Marxist media would pounce on the story, and they would hang the bombing around Bush's neck. Bush's moderates would change their votes. Key states would go for Gore, and Bush would go back to Texas to play cowboys and Indians on his big ranch. Eight years of Bill Clinton did more to radicalize the Right than anything in the last 30 years. I was hoping eight more years of such left-wing policies would push them into open revolt. That was the strategy.

"How can you pull it off?" I asked myself. "The closest abortion mill is in Asheville, over a hundred miles away. You have no money, no transportation, and worse, you've got no idea where exactly the Asheville mill is located."

Those were the ingredients of another catastrophe like Birmingham. The explosives could be gotten together. Enough gas could be siphoned to get me to Asheville. But that was about it. The rest of the operation would have to be done on the fly. I'd have to boost a vehicle, do the reconnaissance of the target in one day, plant the device that night, trigger it the following day, then make it back to the mountains. The whole plan seemed fraught with potential problems. But I thought it was worth a try. Focusing on one task at a time, I'd play it by ear. As long as things kept working, I'd keep going. But I vowed to abandon the mission the moment I ran into a significant obstacle. Birmingham was still fresh in my mind. Never again would I push a flawed plan. This I decided.

* * *

Buried near the Tennessee border, the caches containing dynamite and bomb-making tools were about 25 miles north of Murphy in an area called Unaka. Every trip into unfamiliar territory carried added risks. I'd been postponing that one for too long. I couldn't put it off any longer.

Sunshine streamed down out of a clear sky when I slipped across Regal Road. Beating a path through head-high weeds and junk cars to the railroad tracks, I turned up Marble Creek into the unknown. On the topographical map, I had a couple of miles of woods to cross in order to reach Owl Creek, a leisurely walk in the sun. On the ground however, it was a jungle. Loggers had chain-sawed the area into nasty clear-cuts. Most had a few years of regrowth. Briers gouged bloody ruts in my arms and legs. Scrap limbs were interlaced on the forest floor to a depth of three feet. I tried crawling under, climbing over, crashing through, but I gave up after a half mile and reversed course, following the old skidder trails south until I hit the main one leading back to Regal Road. Now, I turned north again and searched out the northern terminus of the logging trails. In no time, I was on Owl Creek nursing my brier wounds. It never ceased to amaze me how much time you save when you know where you're going.

I waited for dark in the wood line overlooking hay fields along Owl Creek. And I picked some sour apples from an old tree and stuffed a dozen in my backpack for tomorrow. Relying on asphalt roads for the rest of the journey, I climbed through Beaverdam Gap. “Ten more miles,” I told myself. “Keep pushing. Don’t stop.” I felt the damage I’d done to my body in the clear-cuts. Eating tacos and reading newspapers had made me soft. I had an incredible desire to toss the heavy backpack off the road bank.

Daylight filtered slowly through the rhododendron and hemlock trees at the head of Copper Creek. After a night of road-marching, I shivered in my sweaty clothes. When it became light enough to see, I strung up my poncho shelter near the creek, washed my filthy carcass, and put on clean, dry clothes.

Weather never seemed to cooperate with me. It hadn’t rained in over a month, but the moment I arrived on Copper Creek the sky opened up and dumped an ocean of misery on my head. Starting as a light drizzle, it slowly turned into a steady downpour that lasted for two days.

Utilizing my two-quart cooking pot, I scraped away the leaves and muck covering my cache. I grabbed a few dozen sticks of dynamite. From a separate cache, I retrieved my tools. Everything was stacked under my tiny poncho shelter. A drainage ditch had to be dug around the shelter to carry away the rain water. Sitting cross-legged under my poncho, I cobbled together an improvised battery pack and a remote control trigger. Contained within a five-gallon plastic bucket, the main charge would consist of a 20-pound Tootsie Roll of dynamite surrounded by 20 pounds of sheet-metal bolts. The rain drummed on the nylon. It was tedious work.

It’s always easier getting back. Having spent half a day thrashing in the clear-cuts of Marble Creek, I knew the network of skidder trails and logging roads pretty well. The dynamite and trigger and sheet metal bolts were stashed in a five-gallon bucket under a hemlock tree on the Ridge across from the armory. The device would be assembled later. For now, I’d stash the incriminating material there, far away from my camp on Will Scott Mountain.

* * *

Pressed on his intentions with respect to abortion policy, George W. Bush finally said something truthful: “America is not ready to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.” This was politician-speak. In other words, if America wasn’t “ready to overturn *Roe v. Wade*” then neither was he. Bush confirmed my estimations of him. I would do what I could to destroy his candidacy. But I had to work fast; the election was a month away.

I thought I’d better stick with what had worked in the past. I was able to boost that truck from the car lot last year. I’d try it again. There were a few used car lots nearby: one on the west end of town, a second lot across the river from the high school, and a third at the auto repair shop next-door to the National Guard Armory. The auto repair shop seemed best. During those days watching the task force at the armory, I’d seen the owner park the vehicles out next to the busy highway with “for sale” signs taped in the windows. At the end of the day, he drove them back inside his fence. The fence was easy to breach. He had a 1967 Chevy pickup truck, orange with mag tires, the quintessential Bubba truck. Because it was old, I wouldn’t have to worry about a car alarm, and hotwiring it would be a cinch.

The memory of being taken to a gas station by sheriff’s deputies still haunted me. Never again. This time I’d stockpile gasoline before boosting the truck. I siphoned gas from a flatbed truck parked beside West Construction, from a Ford Bronco in the carport of the house next-door to Bi-Lo, from vehicles at the car lot across from the high school, each time taking only a few gallons so as not to raise suspicions. Along the lip of the five-gallon buckets containing the gas, I punched tiny holes to relieve the pressure. It took me a week to suck seven buckets of fuel, which I stashed at the edge of the vacant lot behind Save-A-Lot. In the event that the truck’s tank was empty, like the Silverado, I backpacked one bucket of gas to the auto repair shop and hid it behind the highway guardrail.

The attack was planned for a week at the end of October of 2000. Time was running short, and I still hadn't assembled the bomb yet. Before I could do that I had to charge the battery pack on the trigger. To charge it I'd need electricity, which was not an easy thing to come by when you live in the woods. Best place to charge the battery pack was behind Save-A-Lot.

During those many nights watching the back of Save-A-Lot, I'd noticed the employees using a floodlight to help illuminate the loading dock while they unloaded delivery trucks. They snaked an extension cord through a mouse hole in the wall and plugged in the light. Most nights they pushed the cord back through the hole after they were done, but sometimes they didn't. I waited for such a time, watching the deliveries from the shadows of the bridge.

I got lucky one night. The cord was left out, but I had to hurry. I jogged to the armory Ridge and retrieved the trigger from the bucket. There was only a short window of time for work. It was midnight, and it would take three hours to give the battery pack a good charge. That means I'd finish at 3:30 a.m. when the traffic around Save-A-Lot made activity dangerous. I have to move!

I was on Regal Road below the Ridge when I saw a black mass of clouds approaching from the west. Tiny spider web streaks of lightning crackled in its midst similar to a Tesla coil. After securing the remote trigger, I trotted back down to the road. The storm broke. End-of-the-world lightning blasted from a pitch black sky. Rain fell in a roaring rush like a freight train approaching.

I found shelter in one of the Perlite plant's large storage sheds. Sitting on top of a mountain of bagged Perlite, I watched the raging storm. The ground, hard and dry from the drought, shed water like glass. I waited for half an hour without a let up in the storm.

I couldn't wait any longer. I had to charge the battery pack tonight or risk having to wait another week for the extension cord. By then the election would be over.

A break in the storm opened a path down Regal Road, and I took off running. But I didn't get far. I had gone only a quarter of a mile before the storm broke again and forced me to take shelter in a dilapidated mining shack. Right next to the road, the shack sat in front of a small rock quarry that was filled with water. The quarry had shut down years earlier, and the shack was literally falling apart. Trash and broken glass littered the floor. Sections of the roof had caved in, allowing rainwater to pour through the openings. I crouched between the drips wondering whether the rest of the roof would collapse on my head.

The shack wasn't helping any. I was already soaked to the skin. I ran through the storm.

At the rear of Save-A-Lot, I plugged in the charger and the battery pack and bundled both in a plastic bag to waterproof them. Retreating to the bridge, I waited for it to charge. The blasts of lightning reverberated from the concrete bridge. Rainwater drained off the bridge above me through drain pipes located underneath the guardrail. It formed a perfect waterfall 50 yards wide. Feeling uneasy, I wondered whether the storm was a bad omen.

* * *

I touched the ignition wires together and the '67 Chevy turned over on the first try. The truck was a loud clunker. I gunned it a few times and then shut her down. I glanced nervously at the highway, but there was no traffic at that hour. I positioned the bucket of gasoline on the truck's roof and ran a siphoning hose down into the tank. Then I cut an opening in the fence large enough to squeeze the truck through. Once I pulled the truck out, I tied the fence back in place using bailing wire.

Already there was a problem. As soon as I let up on the gas pedal the engine died. I thought maybe it just needed to warm up, so I pressed the pedal to the floor and let the Chevy's V-8 roar. And loud – the truck ruptured the eardrums of deaf people. I suspected that I'd picked a lemon; sounded like it had a timing problem. Nevertheless, I persisted in thinking it only needed to warm up.

I veered into the vacant lot behind Save-A-Lot and shut off the headlights. The engine sputtered to a halt. I sat for a few minutes, pondering the potential problems that lay ahead. Part of me wanted to push on. “Load the buckets of gas and the bomb and make it happen,” this part said. “You can’t scrap the entire plan because of a timing problem. You’ve driven it this far; it will make it the rest of the way.” But the other part of me knew I wouldn’t make it to Asheville in that heap. “You will get 30 miles down the road, and the truck will break down,” said the rational part of me. “Then what? Are you going to boost another vehicle?” I shook my head in despair – if I wanted the plan to succeed I’d have to get another vehicle.

Reluctantly, I drove the Bubba truck back to the repair shop, where I parked it outside the fence. The owner would know it was boosted anyway. The truck was clean of fingerprints, so, hopefully, he would think some teenagers had taken it out for a joyride.

I reloaded for the next night. Hiking the four-lane to the other side of Murphy, I crossed the bridge that spans the Hiawassee River. Fatback’s Citgo dominated the intersection up ahead. This was where the sheriff’s deputies had taken me for gas last year. Fatback’s was a cop hangout. Glassing the parking lot with my Leupolds, I saw the profile of a Murphy Police Department cruiser. The cop who had pissed on my tacos that night was leaning against the hood drinking a cup of coffee. I bounded down the road embankment and skirted around the Baptist Church through the head-high weeds along the river. On the other side of the church, I rejoined Valley River Avenue, where a small used car lot lay across the street. Two dozen vehicles were parked under bright mercury vapor lamps.

A slight bend in the street blocked my view of Fatback’s and the police cruiser parked out front. He would begin another patrol soon, his first stop being this small car lot. I had to stay on my toes.

Sprinting into the car lot, I began checking car doors as fast as I could. Finding a blue Saturn with the passenger side door open, I climbed inside and lay down under the steering column and went to work on the ignition.

I heard the faint sound of gravel crunching under car tires – the patrol. I lay still as a bright beam of light slowly swept across the interior of the Saturn. His engine revved and he was gone. He would be back within an hour.

Popping open the steering column, I worked loose the necessary wires and turned the engine over and over and over, but it would not fire. “Maybe I’ve flooded it,” I thought. Mashing the gas pedal to the floor, I cranked it again and again and again. The Saturn wouldn’t start. I dug deeper into the wiring seeing if, perhaps, I’d overlooked something, but it looked fine.

A bright light brushed the top of my head, and I ducked flat on the floorboard as if struck by a bullet. “Oh, man. I hope he didn’t see me,” I hissed. The cab lit up like Richard Dreyfuss’s truck in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The patrol was back. I’d taken my eyes off the road for a second. He must have turned around after patrolling downtown. I waited for him to order me out of the car. But the light passed over the hood and he was gone. I’d gotten lucky.

I laid there in the Saturn reflecting on the signs. The last couple of years had taught me to watch the signs. For those who live in relative comfort and ease, life can seem like a series of random events in a universe without design. But for those who sleep with death, life unfolds according to a predetermined plan in a universe of very definite design. Everything happens for a reason. To stay in the land of the living, I had to heed the signs and stay in the good graces of the Designer; I had to look for the patterns of Providence in the events unfolding around me. What might have looked like a series of innocuous events to most folks had profound significance for me. A freak thunderstorm, a gimpy Bubba truck, an uncooperative Saturn – these were signs that God was throwing up roadblocks in my path. The mission to Asheville wasn’t part of the plan.

In 1998, I’d have gone ahead with it, despite the obstacles. I’d have tried to drive that worthless Bubba truck regardless of the risks. Or, I’d have found another vehicle and made it run, somehow. That’s

what happened in Birmingham. I knew that plan had flaws but I pushed ahead with it anyway. Look where that got me.

* * *

Back at camp, I brooded while the election passed without my vote. I was angry. I'd spent months planning and preparing for the operation, all for nothing it seemed. "My work won't go to waste," I said to myself. "If not the abortion mill in Asheville, then the armory here in Murphy. Your sentimentalizing over that FBI agent almost got you caught. You'd have ended up broken down in that Bubba truck – halfway to Asheville with a bomb on the front seat, with no money, and looking around for another vehicle to carry you the rest of the way. The agent at the armory volunteered to carry arms for Washington. This is war and he's a legitimate target. Stop being such a pussy!"

Having settled the debate in my mind, I settled my sights back on the armory. The escape was the key to a successful attack on the task force. A vehicle would've worked best for a getaway, but using one posed problems for me. The agent's schedule was irregular. Most of the time he arrived early in the morning and stayed for less than an hour. Occasionally, he arrived late in the afternoon. Other times he didn't show up at all. I might have to sit on the Ridge for a few days waiting for the right moment to trigger the bomb. Keeping a stolen vehicle for a few days was too risky. Besides, I was having no luck with automobiles lately. I would escape on foot. The FBI had dumped all of its air support. With no agents and no helicopters on hand, the FBI would be hard-pressed to organize a quick pursuit. By the time they gathered enough people together and figured out that the bomb had been detonated remotely from the Ridge across Highway 19, I'd be long gone.

Winter hit the highlands hard in November of 2000. Night time temperatures plummeted into the teens every night for weeks. I'd never experienced a November that cold. As usual I wasn't equipped for the cold. It was miserable prowling around at night, putting the finishing touches on my plan.

Because my primary food caches were all south of Highway 19, my plan was designed to lead the feds on a false trail to the north of the highway before turning back south toward Standing Indian. First, I'd drag them through the clear-cuts of Marble Creek, making it look as if I were headed for the Tennessee border. From Marble Creek, I'd mapped out two possible escape routes, depending on what time of day the agents arrived at the armory. If they came in the morning, I'd make it to the headwaters of Marble Creek, after detonating the bomb, well before midday. With that much daylight left I figured it was best to climb over the mountains to the east, which would take me into Snowbird. The extensive road network in Snowbird would allow me to break the scent trail that night. Once I was east of Andrews, I'd turn south and cross back over Highway 19 somewhere near the Tipton Gap.

The other escape trail led west. If the agents arrived late in the afternoon, I'd reach the end of Marble Creek around nightfall. Waiting for the roads to clear, I'd walk down Owl Creek to Hanging Dog. There, I'd run into an obstacle. Due west was Lake Hiawassee, which stretched for many miles north-south. It would take me a couple of nights to walk around the lake to the north. Too much time, I figured. I wanted to be south of Highway 19 on the night of the attack. The only alternatives were to cross the lake, or to walk around it to the south – through downtown Murphy. If I could make it through town, I could easily skirt Fatback's Citgo using Rocky Fence Ridge to reach Cane Creek. From there, the back roads of Martins Creek led south through Tusquitee to my destination in Standing Indian. In effect, I'd be traveling a huge half circle through a good portion of western North Carolina.

To help slow down my pursuers and warn me of anyone close on my heels, I'd string a couple of booby traps on my trail through the Marble Creek clear-cuts. Once the feds figured out that the bomb had been detonated from the Ridge across the highway, they would have hounds on my trail within hours. But once they tripped over that first booby trap, their pursuit would slow to a crawl. My scent trail would evaporate as they wasted time searching for more booby traps. My last know location would be north of

Highway 19, and headed for the Tennessee border. Meanwhile, I'd be at Standing Indian on the Georgia border, over 40 miles away.

The western trail was long, a massive jigsaw puzzle of logging trails, roads, creek beds, and riverbanks. Most of it I knew from experience, but there was one piece of the puzzle I still hadn't put in place: Murphy. I had to find out for sure whether I could make it through the town on the night of the bombing.

Old Murphy sat at the point where the Valley and the Hiawassee rivers join together to form Lake Hiawassee. To get to Murphy from Owl Creek I'd take Joe Brown Highway, a two-lane blacktop that crossed the Valley River into downtown. Next to the highway bridge was an old railroad bridge. That was my point of entry. The railroad no longer ran through Murphy, but the iron bridge still stood there. Over the bridge, the tracks skirted downtown, following the shoreline of the lake to an old red-brick depot. Abandoned for decades, the depot had recently been renovated as a florist shop. Another railroad bridge used to span the Hiawassee River just beyond the depot, but they dismantled it along with the tracks that continued on to Tennessee. The only structure crossing the Hiawassee next to the depot was the Valley River Avenue Bridge. The used car lot where I'd tried to boost the Saturn lay across the bridge. Well-lighted and close to the police station, the bridge would be dangerous to cross on foot. I'd have to find some other way to get to the other side of the river.

Highway 19 spanned the Hiawassee River a quarter of a mile upstream from the depot. I might be able to reach the bridge by following the kudzu-choked riverbank. But that bridge was difficult to cross as well. About 50 yards across, I could span it only when the traffic was at its lightest, between 1:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. On the night of the attack, there was no telling what time I might arrive at the bridge. I wanted to put as much distance as possible between myself and the armory that first night. There was no time to wait for traffic to thin, and besides, I had to assume that in the hours immediately after the blast, government agents would arrive in the area in droves, and that the roads around Murphy would be crawling with feds. There had to be a better way.

Weighed down with enough gear to simulate a full pack, I arrived at the Valley River Avenue bridge ready for a swim. It was around 2:00 a.m., and temperatures ranged in the low twenties. I was risking hypothermia but I knew I could reduce that risk if I kept my core body temperature warm. One of the items I'd found in that homeless camp under the bridge was a thermos. I never thought I'd be able to use it – until tonight. Before leaving Owl Creek, I'd filled it with boiling hot blackberry tea.

My destination was a boat ramp that lay across the river. Near the river's edge I spread a sheet of plastic in the weeds, and stripped naked. The cold air stung my bare flesh. I worked fast. Bundling my clothes and the ALICE pack into Hefty Bags, I plopped everything in the center of the plastic. A couple of empty liter bottles with their lids tightened were secured around the pack to give the bundle buoyancy. I cinched the sheet of plastic at the top using a quick-release knot. Then I hefted the bundle down the steep, overgrown riverbank and eased into the frigid water. I dragged the heavy bundle through the water with a harness rope loosely tied around my waist. The water was so cold my heart felt like it had frozen the second I hit the water. My body wanted to shut down and retreat into its warm inner core, but I couldn't stop, and it was too late to turn back. I was fighting the current to swim under the bridge and over to the boat ramp. I had to swim or die.

Emerging on the other side, I hurriedly wrestled the bundle up the boat ramp and into the high weeds. I could feel ice forming in my hair and beard. My hands were now useless blocks of ice. I started shaking like one of those paint mixers at Sherwin-Williams. No need for fingers, luckily – I bit the icy quick-release knot with my chattering teeth and pulled hard. Inside the plastic bag I retrieved my towel and rubbed my frozen flesh dry. Ice crystals fell from my hair like party glitter. I was in a bad way and needed to raise my body temperature quickly. Donning dry clothes, I knelt down and unscrewed the thermos with my teeth. Violent shaking made it nearly impossible to sip the hot liquid without spilling it

all down the front of my chest. But eventually I got enough in me to warm my core. The tea breathed new life into me. It was a brutal swim but I knew it could be done. I'd fitted the last piece of the puzzle in place. I was ready.

* * *

It felt like an inexorable force was pulling me forward. Fully focused on the mission, I closed off all peripheral thought. The camp below Will Scott Mountain was sanitized, the leaves around my shelter incinerated to eliminate any hairs or fibers. I defecated in Ziplock Bags and burned it; urinated in soda bottles and poured it into the creek. I spread fresh leaves and branches liberally. And every night I snagged a *USA Today* newspaper from the machine in front of Rite Aid Drugs to study weather patterns.

Destiny's tectonic plates were shifting beneath my feet, and I wondered if I'd be left standing when it was all over with. I could feel the tension building as I walked Regal Road to the Ridge. For some reason I paused next to the old mining shack where I'd taken shelter the night of the intense storm. It looked different. The shack's four walls stood like an open box. I had been right about that roof; it had collapsed. Fortunately, I wasn't underneath it. Unfurling my bedroll at the base of the Ridge, I waited for dawn. There was one more task to complete.

Slowing my pursuers was critical to the getaway. A couple of booby traps planted in the Marble Creek clear-cut ought to stop the feds cold in their tracks. I packed dynamite and bolts into two coffee cans and used improvised trip wire triggers. Heading west into the clear-cuts along Marble Creek, I laid down a scent trail for the bloodhounds to follow, stopping every ten yards to roll around on the ground. I found a nice head-high stump to conceal the first trap, which would be planted above the dog's nose level. The trigger was a simple clothespin. After wrapping the bare ends of the wire around the jaws of a clothespin, I inserted a piece of hard plastic between the jaws to interrupt the circuit. Attaching fish line to the piece of plastic, I ran the line down the stump and then stretched it across the trail at shin level. If someone tripped over the fishing line, releasing the piece of plastic, the jaws of the clothespin would close – BOOM. Leaving the trap on the trail beside the stump, I proceeded to the next spot. Set on a hair trigger, the traps would be dangerous to disarm. To the trip wire I attached a safety line, which was played out to a nearby hillock. If I had to come back to neutralize it, I could do it with the safety line from behind cover. Backtracking, I strung the other trap in the same fashion. Both traps were far from any trail, road, or house, so the chance of a civilian tripping over them was extremely remote.

It was well past midnight when I went to plant the IED at the armory. Carried in my backpack, the 40-pound bomb was live, ready to receive a signal. Any freak transmission on the same frequency, such as a passing truck's CB radio, might detonate the device. I thought it wouldn't be a bad way to go; it would be painless. I slipped down Regal Road, taking light steps, and crossed Highway 19. After the frigid weather in November, the night felt warm like springtime.

From the shadows below the gravel driveway west of the armory, I looked at the two boxwood bushes as if they were on the far side of a deep crevasse. "Just a few more steps," I told myself. "Get it to the bushes; that's all." The device was carefully removed from the ALICE pack. I jogged for the entrance, cradling the heavy bomb like a baby. I pushed it between the boxwoods and quickly unraveled the antenna wire and threaded it through the bush nearest the parking lot and tied it off. Within seconds, I was back in the shadows of the gravel driveway, my heart pounding a million beats per minute.

I didn't get much sleep that night. My eyes jolted open at the slightest sound. When I saw the grey-dawn sky through the trees, my eyes were heavy for lack of sleep. I quickly scrolled up my sleeping pad and secured it in the straps of my ruck. After devouring a baggie of prepared gruel, I filled a Coke bottle with urine and hurried to the lookout.

I sat cross-legged with my binoculars looped around my neck. It was still early. I removed the transmitter from the bag, extended its antenna, and laid it next to me. The morning sun was concealed

behind slate grey sky. Warm for that time of year, a low front was expected later in the day. Rush hour traffic flowed past me. I trained the binoculars on the two boxwoods at the armory's entrance to see if I could spot any part of the bomb. It was well hidden. The agents would never know what hit them.

A late model sedan pulled down the armory driveway and parked in front of the entrance. The lone occupant sat in the car. I'd seen him there before, about a month earlier. Focusing back on the entrance, I spotted the familiar blue suburban and the agent with the shock of white hair, Todd Letcher. Positioning the transmitter in my lap, I prepared to detonate the bomb. When I pushed the button the servo would complete the circuit to the detonator. The device would kill both men instantly.

Agent Letcher spoke with the other man briefly, then both men walked to the front door. I placed my thumb on the button as the agent inserted the key into the lock. "Now!" I said. "Do it now!" Looking at my thumb on the button, I froze, then slowly moved my thumb away.

* * *

I don't know exactly why I didn't push the button. Perhaps, after all those days on the Ridge watching Agent Letcher, his humanity began to show through the uniform. I came to know him in a strange sort of way, and I just couldn't bring myself to kill him.

There were other reasons beyond those personal ones. I'd come to realize that the attack on the armory would serve no purpose. The American people continued to support the Washington government. It's sad but true. They profess to see the sickness growing in our country but they refuse to do anything about the source of the infection. They still believe that they can find a cure on Capitol Hill. And their cowardly "conservative" leaders have convinced them that one election, one Supreme Court decision, will turn back the Marxist tide. But our grandfathers gave our country away decades ago. Today, liberal-progressives, sons and daughters of the counterculture, dominate every institution of power in this country. "Politics by other means," as the 18th century political theorist Clausewitz called it, is the only way to remove them. But such an effort will fail without the support of a large segment of the American people. And in the winter of 2000, that support simply wasn't there.

While millions of decent Americans sympathized with my attacks on the abortionists and homosexuals in Atlanta and Birmingham, very few sympathized with my attacks on the government agents. The same would have held true for the FBI agents at the Murphy armory. I'd have received no support for such an unprovoked attack.

But I knew that loyalty to the Washington regime was slipping, and every year it would slip a little more. The mask of deception was slowly coming down. The watchdogs (cops, soldiers, politicians) couldn't help but feel disgust at obeying the decrees issued by tyrants like Bill Clinton, Janet Reno, and Barney Frank. The façade of constitutional government was crumbling. The disgust would grow as the regime continued to show its true crimson colors. The watchdogs would tire of serving masters who kicked them at every turn. Sooner or later they would turn and bite. After years in the mountains I'd come to realize that we couldn't take back our country without the help of at least some part of the present police-military-government establishment. And that help would only come after a period of intense alienation. A good chunk of the American heartland must begin to view the government in Washington as alien, foreign, and illegitimate. Once we have that, we will make short work of the liberals.

* * *

Later that night I retrieved the bomb from behind the two boxwood bushes. Disarming it at the driveway, I lugged the heavy bucket of dynamite and bolts back to the Ridge. That next morning dawned bright and rosy, the best weather in over a month. I took care of the booby traps first. Not wanting to approach the hair-trigger traps, I neutralized them using the safety lines one at a time. Safely behind the hillock, staring up at the sky, I yanked on the line and BOOM, the ground shuddered and branches above fell over on top of me. The explosion had shredded everything within a 10-yard radius.

The big bomb was buried on the Ridge overlooking the armory. Twenty yards west of the lookout, I scooped out a hole beside the highway fence. After pressing the dirt over the bucket, I placed a large rock on top to mark the spot. Marking the spot was an old habit. But I knew I'd never be back to dig it up – because I buried a part of my life along with that bomb. Brushing the orange dirt off my hands, I wondered what I would do now.

CHAPTER 18

Murphy, NC • 2000-03 • The Written Word

After the aborted plan to attack the agents at the armory, I broke camp below Will Scott Mountain and prepared to return to Fires Creek for the winter. On the way through Peachtree, I trudged through a frozen wasteland. Barely conscious of my surroundings, I hobbled along like a lame horse. The temperature hovered around zero. Shriveled rhododendron leaves rattled in the breeze. The frozen earth crackled beneath my feet like broken glass. It was Christmas Eve, 2000, and the candy-colored lights of the houses in Peachtree seemed more brilliant in the arctic air. I envied the happy people snug in their warm beds. Tomorrow they will gather with family to celebrate Christmas, eating turkey and pumpkin pie. I will dine on frozen tacos and sleep under a pile of leaves. Winter was hell.

There was a time when my mission kept me warm at night. It gave me a sense of purpose, helped me endure the suffering. That time had passed. I was now a man without a mission, without a purpose, and the suffering no longer seemed to be worthwhile.

For years I knew my course, and how it would end. In 1996, when I reached inside that ALICE pack in Centennial Olympic Park to set that timer in motion, I initiated a time line that I knew would end in a few years at the most. I'd fight until the feds killed or captured me. That was the plan from the beginning.

It changes you when your life expectancy shrinks. On the one hand, it's crushing. But, on the other hand, it's liberating because you don't have to worry about the distant future.

I had no delusions about my long-term prospects. Eventually they would find me. After they identified my truck in Birmingham, the time line shrank to a few months. Honestly, I didn't expect to live through that first year. But by the grace of God I did survive, and in the process I'd managed to haul over two tons of food into the mountains. I then staked everything on one final blow at the feds in Murphy. Surely, I wouldn't last long after attacking the armory, not with the resulting onslaught of feds returning to the highlands in full force. But then I froze, my thumb just an inch above the detonator button.

Now, I had to husband my resources. I knew what to do. During the winter, I'd hunt and gather acorns. In the summer, I'd dry fruit and vegetables and eat food from Save-A-Lot and Taco Bell. Using these supplemental sources I should be able to nearly double my food supply and time line. If I could keep the bears out of my remaining caches, I might have enough food for six to eight years.

And so here I was, with an expanded time line and an uncertain future.

The American people also faced an uncertain future, though they might not realize it in their cozy beds this Christmas eve, dreaming of sugar plums and bright colored packages. But I knew it, and so did every conservative leader.

The Republican Party focused on protecting the interests of multi-national corporations and the money-grubbing rich, while every decade another 10 million jobs were shipped overseas and another 10 million Third World aliens seeped into our country.

The National Right to Life Committee, content with gradual, incremental politics, stood watch over the murder of more than a million unborn babies every year. William F. Buckley, Jr. was willing to "stand athwart history," while the liberals went right on making history. Televangelists busily turned Protestant Christianity into a self-help cult for weaklings and women. Marxist priests were transforming Catholicism into a pacifist social philosophy. The masses regarded Vatican City as a kind of Disney World, and the Pope as Mickey Mouse — an interesting figure, but certainly not a moral authority affecting their lives. Pop culture became the new religion and Hollywood the new Magisterium. Our new-found moral authority came from the likes of Tom Hanks, Bono, and Oprah. All indicators pointed to the "death of the

West,” as Patrick J. Buchanan called it. Normally, when people are threatened with extinction, they fight back. But to a man, our so-called conservative leaders were determined to go down with a whimper.

That’s why I became a militant: to fight for America’s future. To me this passivity was incomprehensible. It seemed like all the great men and glowing ideas had died before I was even born. There were no more George Washingtons or Oliver Cromwells to lead the way. Fate had thrown me into an age of small men and small ideas — the age of democracy, socialism, materialism, Jerry Springer, MTV, and Madonna. Finding no action in the mainstream conservative movement, I gravitated to the fringe, to the Patriot movement. But for the most part, I found only frightened old men hiding on their 100-acre compounds waiting for the “Millennium,” the “Collapse,” “Y2K,” “Planet X,” “2012” or whatever name they chose to label their own cowardice. So I decided to make my own opposition, fully expecting to be swallowed by the violence that I unleashed.

But that day at the armory, as the FBI agent with the shock of white hair stood in my crosshairs, I lost that purpose. Like a rudderless ship, I now drifted on the currents of time, hoping for a favorable breeze to blow me in some new direction.

Before that day, I’d never really thought about leaving the country. Why should I? The fight was here in America, not in Mexico or some other nation. Yet now I began mulling over this idea.

To have any chance of survival in a foreign land, I would need to know the country and the language. Also, I’d need excellent false ID, plenty of cash, and constant movement from one place to another. Of course, I could do that if I had help, if I had a network of trusted friends —people unknown to the feds — to hide me in safe houses. Heck, if I had a network of trusted friends to hide me in safe houses, there’d be no need to leave the country.

Leaving the country won’t solve anything, not in my situation. Perhaps if I were wanted for back taxes I could hide in a foreign country. But not when I’m one of the most wanted men in the world. Sooner or later, that small-town cop in Costa Rica will ask questions about the new gringo in town; that motel clerk in Canada will recognize my resemblance to the face on the wanted poster she keeps in the office; that employer in the Philippines will wonder why a Westerner has applied for a job cleaning fish.

In the movies, the fugitive makes it across the Rio Grande River, and then lives out the remainder of his life on a tropical beach sipping piña coladas. But that’s only in the movies. In real life, if you make it onto the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list, with a \$1 million reward on your head, there are few places on this planet where you can find sanctuary. The FBI will come looking for you regardless of your location. I concluded that I wouldn’t make it in Canada or Costa Rica or any other place.

I was better off sticking with what I knew best. Step outside my area of expertise and I’d get caught. What I knew best were those areas outside society’s gated walls, those forgotten places between the lines of drift. I’d always made an effort to stay off the information grid rather than try to beat it. For years I paid no taxes, kept no credit cards or bank accounts, and had no telephone. My truck had been registered to a dummy address. I paid for everything in cash. I lived in cheap dives under assumed names and moved to new lodgings every six months. I kept my paper trail to a bare minimum.

My decision to hide in the hills, which seems strange to people who live their lives tethered to the grid, was merely a logical extension of that approach. There is no grid in the mountains: insects don’t ask for ID, squirrels don’t squeal on you, deer don’t drop dime, and bears don’t watch America’s Most Wanted. If I could avoid people and a paper trail, I could avoid problems. The woods were my element. If the feds decided to come into my element, I knew I could beat them. That strategy had worked for me in the past. It would continue to work for me in the future.

During my years of hiding, I learned to live in the wild. I had water, shelter, and plenty of food. I’d risked life and limb to acquire that food and knowledge. The helicopters and hound dogs were gone. Why trade the certainty of these accommodations for the uncertainty of life on the run in a foreign country?

Why trade the incomparable beauty of the Appalachian Mountains for some foreign slum? My new strategy entailed staying alive for as long as possible in these God-inspiring mountains.

* * *

The old campsite on Tarkiln looked indistinguishable from the surrounding forest. Weather and time had blended everything together. Not a second to lose. I had a couple hours of light left before sundown. Retrieving my shovel from the top of a nearby oak tree, I hurried to the caches. I shuddered when I remembered the blue barrel on Snowbird full of rotting leaves and fetid water. But everything was fine. I excavated the few caches needed to set up camp and pushed the dirt back over them.

That night I was awakened by something above camp. I heard shuffling in the dry leaves. Animals passed my camp all the time, especially in the first weeks after a long absence. I thought nothing of it and quickly went back to sleep.

Examining the trail the next morning, I noticed it led in the direction of the caches. And worse, a bear had made the trail. Bad feelings settled in the pit of my stomach. Twenty yards from the caches, I stopped to peek through the underbrush. Seeing fresh orange dirt, I knew a bear had dug up all of the caches that had no protective fence. It was Snowbird all over again. The worst one hit, a large Roll-A-Waste container holding two years of staples and two gallons of precious cooking oil, looked like someone had stuffed a live grenade inside and closed the lid. A berm of orange dirt surrounded it. Half of the grain had spilled out of the huge container. Mixed in with a ton of moist dirt and rock, the grain was worthless. Fortunately, the other half remained intact. The two empty oil jugs lay off to the side, bitten and mangled. Farther along the slope, the bear had pried open the barrel that I'd used to store some of my gear. Clothes and equipment were ripped and hanging in the bushes. My pair of Gortex pants, shredded. My socks and shirts, chewed beyond recognition. He had ravaged another cache too, a 25-gallon barrel containing soybeans and corn. "Damn bears!" I cursed. I sat in silence for several gloomy minutes surveying the scene of destruction.

But I had to keep moving forward if I wanted to survive. No stinking bear would do me in. The tracks left in the soft dirt indicated one bear, probably a large male. He had spent a good two hours working over my caches. Last night, while I lay sleeping 200 yards away, he was over here having a good ol' time destroying my stuff.

The bear's trail meandered down the slope. He was searching for more food. The caches covered with fence had paw marks in the dirt around the sides of the fence, but they were otherwise intact. Apparently, he couldn't get inside, which gave me some satisfaction; at least the fence worked.

Actually, I'd been lucky. The grain that remained in the Roll-A-Waste container was salvageable. Using a window screen, I could sift out the dirt and rocks. The plastic containers were punctured and covered in bear spit, but I could plug the holes and wash off the spit. It could've been much worse. If the bear had torn into the caches over the summer, while I was in Murphy, I'd have lost two year's worth of grain and a lot more clothes and equipment. I swore I would lose no more. This was the last time bears would maul my things.

Working like a sled dog, I excavated the damaged caches and hauled everything to my camp, where I stockpiled it until I could find a better storage method.

My attitude toward the bears had evolved over the years. In the beginning, I was ambivalent about the shaggy beasts. I never considered hunting them. Bears are hard to capture, and their meat leaves much to be desired. I figured if they left me alone, I'd leave them alone. But they wouldn't leave me alone. Experience taught me to see them as a serious threat. Bears have an incredible sense of smell, and they can climb trees like monkeys. And they absolutely love people food. They associate human scent with human food. A black bear will tear the doors off a pickup truck just to get a Snickers bar on the front seat. They will shred anything with human scent: clothes, boots, and buckets, as well as shovel handles.

Relying on my food and equipment to survive, I didn't have the luxury of indulging their appetite. Bears had become the enemy.

* * *

Sometime later, as the ground began to thaw, I developed an idea about the caches. Everything essential would go in the trees; everything else would go in the heavy-duty underground caches. During those hectic early years in hiding, because of the active search effort, I stashed everything below ground before going anywhere. Now I began to fear the bears more than the feds.

I buried a Roll-A-Waste container near my cooking slab and a 25-gallon barrel below the tent. Both contained the remainder of the salvaged grain plus another of the surplus grain caches. Unlike the other caches still buried along the slope, these would be covered with fence and huge rocks. My one-ton winch proved invaluable. A hand crank winch, the Come-A-Long readily pulled large rocks from the outcroppings below camp. I laid a path of runners to help the rocks glide over the ground. Then I arranged them atop the fence like a jigsaw puzzle and secured the slabs of granite to the fence with barbed wire. To get at the food, bears would have to pull aside the entire pile of rocks.

High in the trees, I put my essential gear in the 55-gallon blue barrel. Cooking gear and non-essentials went in a Roll-A-Waste container. Another 25-gallon container I reserved for the Come-A-Long. Ten feet off of terra firma and dangling six feet below a sturdy oak branch, the caches would remain inaccessible to the bears. The shaggy scumbags lack opposable thumbs, which makes it difficult for them to manipulate knots. The voracious vandals were out-specied. "Who has the thumbs on this mountain?" I shouted, holding forth my digits. "I do!"

Mice, my old enemy, also plagued me. They can sprint up a tree faster than a bear can climb. Unlike black bear, the mice could also climb down suspension lines to access the caches. And the rapacious rodents don't need thumbs to get inside the caches. Their razor sharp teeth can tunnel right through the hard plastic. It had happened before. I'd suspended several five-gallon buckets of food from a tree; when I returned a week later, mice had bored a hole in one bucket and had sent another one tumbling to the ground.

But mice cannot munch through metal. I used two harnesses for each container. One was constructed of braided barbed wire with the barbs snipped off. The other harness was fashioned from a nylon tie-down strap, the kind used on flat bed tractor-trailers. Twenty feet long and six inches wide, the strap was sliced lengthwise into three smaller straps and sewed into harnesses for the caches. If a mouse got through the nylon, the wire should hold; if the wire fatigued and broke, the nylon should keep the cache up.

I couldn't sleep that night for thinking about the mice. They have these tiny needle-like claws that can climb about anything. Despite my set up, a mouse could still climb down the suspension line and gnaw into the cache. But the rodents have a hard time climbing on glass, metal, or hard plastic.

The next day, I cut an old garbage can into two-foot wide bands. I wrapped them around the base of each cache tree and nailed them fast. No rodent would be able to scurry up the smooth metallic sleeve. I then pruned the trees butting up against the caches so as to prevent the critters from getting to the barrels from an adjoining tree. However, I still wasn't satisfied. I needed to put something else in the path of the vexatious vermin. Taking a Forest Service sign, one of those small triangular signs that are tacked to trees, I punched a hole in the center and ran the suspension line through the hole. The sign was positioned midway between the branch and the barrel. That way if a mouse made it past all of my other obstacles, he would have to climb down the suspension line, out to the edge of the sign, then back to the suspension line again while hanging upside down on the hard aluminum surface. Redundancy is a virtue in wilderness survival.

* * *

In the spring of 2001 I migrated to Murphy, but the spurs below Will Scott Mountain felt haunted. The ghosts of last year's plan lingered. I disliked the place. If not for the Save-A-Lot, I'd never have returned to Murphy. My plan for the summer was to stay just long enough to dry the vegetables sufficient for a couple of winters. The process would take a few months.

For the time being, the dumpster at the Save-A-Lot was vital to my plans. It offered a year-round supply of produce, and I needed every morsel I could get. Not only did the desiccated produce greatly extend my time line, it made life bearable during the long winters. Vegetables and fruits ended the monotony of eating venison and gruel every day. It added essential vitamins and minerals to my piss-poor diet, preventing scurvy and skull-splitting headaches. If I was going to live in the woods, I was going to live well.

The dumpster, although critical to my survival, was also my Achilles' heel, the weak link in my food chain. The police patrolled the area religiously. However, I figured by limiting my trips to the bare minimum needed, I'd reduce the risk of being caught. "Get in and get out," I thought. "Maybe next summer I'll search for safer sources of produce."

Nights were spent searching for bruised bananas, tomatoes, and strawberries. During the day, I washed, sliced, and dried the stuff.

Prowling the Murphy area was risky, so I stayed put in my camp. But there wasn't much work around camp to keep me busy, and sitting still all day staring at the trees gets old. I yearned for some stimuli. The occasional *USA Today* or *Newsweek* I found behind Rite Aid Drugs didn't satisfy me; I wanted more. What had started two years earlier with the little pocket Bible had grown into a tremendous appetite for the written word. Improving my quality of life became the new program, and nothing would achieve that better than having something to read.

One day, I read in the local *Cherokee Scout* about a recycling center on Cane Creek, down where I'd rented the trailer in 1998. I knew the center would have large stacks of old newspapers. It wasn't far away, but to get there I'd have to walk through town.

Simple enough, I thought. But true to form, fate would intrude on my plans.

It was past midnight when I crossed the Hiawassee River on the four-lane bridge. I bypassed Fatback's CITGO using the riverbank. The ground there was muddy and soft, the weeds up to my head.

Suddenly my leg plunged into a mud hole, and my left knee popped, sounding like a child clucking his tongue. Pain stabbed through the knee. I winced and doubled over, unable to move. Fearing serious damage, I decided to give it a rest. Ten minutes later I tested it again. To my delighted surprise, when I put weight on it, the knee felt good to go.

I pushed on around Lake Hiawassee. Up ahead, a standpipe jutted from the hillside, gushing crystal clear spring water. It was Hillbilly Evian. I gulped the sweet water and let it run over my head for a few seconds. I filled my canteens, then climbed the bank to the top of Rocky Fence Ridge where I hiked the lonely gravel road that cuts along the crest. After passing a telecommunication tower and several summer homes, the road sliced down the southern flank of the small ridge where it joined Highway 19. I was a couple of miles beyond Fatback's. The ditch on the side of the highway took me the rest of the way to Cane Creek.

I'd used up the optimal time to travel Highway 19 without being seen. It was getting late in the morning, and already the sparse traffic had increased. I'd have to spend another day on this side of town, then head back to Will Scott the next night. Where better to camp than on the ridge behind my old trailer.

The trailer's porch light barely penetrated the morning darkness as I passed. Two snarling dogs charged out to greet me. Grabbing a handful of gravel, I hit them with a buckshot pattern, and the mutts scampered away.

After finding a suitable place on the ridge behind the trailer, I settled down to rest. I must have dozed a couple of hours before waking to find flies crawling in and out of my nose. Worse, I felt a searing pain in my knee.

Last night, thinking the twisted knee was nothing serious, I pressed myself to walk and even climb a couple of ridges. It turned out to be a little more serious than I thought. The knee had blown up the size of a cantaloupe.

Bending the knee proved impossible, and walking caused excruciating pain after only a few steps. I was in trouble. Without my knee, I couldn't survive long-term in the woods. In the short term, I had to return to Will Scott tonight. With only a day's worth of food in my backpack, I didn't have the resources to stay on Cane Creek.

After running ice-cold spring water over the swollen knee for half an hour, I cut my t-shirt into long strips and wrapped the knee tight. I carved a solid walking stick, figuring I'd need it later. Right now, my only choice was to sit still and hope the knee improves by nightfall.

From the thick laurel above the creek, I watched the trailer, which had been a rundown heap with a stinking interior when I lived there. Since then, the landlady had given it a new tin roof and fixed a few parts around front.

A family of evangelicals lived there now. Out front, a man worked on a pickup truck while several barefooted children played in the yard. Gospel music blared from a loudspeaker. The man shuffled back and forth between his truck and his toolbox as the kids played catch with a Nerf football. The Gospel music wailed and rejoiced all day long, the same album over and over.

I drifted off to sleep for a couple more hours and awoke in the dark. Slowly, I hobbled off the ridge and out to the highway. There were few cars, so I knew it was late. I picked up the pace, limping along with my walking stick as quickly as I could.

I finally located the recycling center on a little side road. It was a gravel lot surrounded by a 10-foot barbed-wire fence. Several huge cardboard boxes containing recyclables sat on a series of pallets under a long shed. I relied on upper body strength to claw my way up the fence and through the crack where the gate swiveled. Pain signals shot through my synapses.

Once inside the lot, I quickly grabbed newspapers from two of the boxes and piled the papers into knee-high stacks, categorizing them by date and by publisher: *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Times*, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, and *USA Today*. Some papers were three months old, others only three days old. Not surprisingly, I over did it; I'd grabbed too many papers. I then selected the best ones and stuffed my backpack full. There must have been over 80 pounds of paper in my backpack.

By the time I reached the bridge over the Hiawassee River, traffic had greatly increased. Not good. I had overslept and spent too much time sorting the newspapers. And limping on that bum leg with a pack full of papers had slowed my progress to a crawl. The bones in my knee had rubbed each other raw. But I wouldn't let go of my newspapers. If I had to scoot along on my belly, those papers were coming with me. A half hour more and the traffic would close Highway 19 to me. In my condition, I'd never make it across the bridge before a car forced me back, or forced me to hang over the guardrail. Unlike the bridge spanning the Valley River, this one towered 100 feet above shallow water – a real back-breaking fall.

Cars pulled into the westbound lanes from the intersection on the far side. A small break in traffic developed, and I hobbled out onto the concrete span. Right leg, stick, right leg, stick – galloping as fast as my bruised body would carry me.

I was not even halfway across the bridge when a car turned my way. I had to act quickly.

I pitched the walking stick and bellied over the guardrail. Straddling the aluminum rail, my heart raced as I planted my good foot on the small ledge and eased down into a one-legged squat on the water side of the rails, my bad leg dangling in the air. The sound of water rippling against the rocks and pylons a hundred feet below rushed over me.

The weight of the papers tugged me down. One hand slipped off the dewy rail, and I twirled out into space. The momentum pulled my other arm straight. “Whoa!” I gasped, swinging like an acrobat.

Pulling with all my strength, I willed myself back to the rail. Able to grab the rail with both hands, I made one final lunge for the other side. Barely taking a moment to breathe, I snatched up the walking stick and rushed across the bridge.

A bad knee and a brush with certain death on the guardrail might seem more trouble than it was worth, but carrying those newspapers on my back brought a grin to my face. And fortunately, I did no permanent damage to the knee. Exercising it lightly over the next month, the joint gradually improved.

* * *

While the bananas curled in the summer sun, I lay on my sweat-stained sleeping mat reading old newspapers. I swatted flies and railed against liberalism; I had a good ol’ time. Done with one paper, I took another off the stack. Aside from my occasional outburst, it was a time of quiet introspection.

That was about to change.

Over the weeks, I’d built up a small compost pile of banana peels, discarded tomatoes, and moldy strawberries. Normally, I didn’t keep scraps around camp. Scraps draw bears and skunks. But because I was so close to town, I didn’t think I’d have a “wildlife problem” as they say. Boy was I wrong.

It sounded like a possum. Possums sometimes cruised my camp late at night to dig in the compost pile. Grabbing my flashlight, I poked a beam of light at the compost heap. Instead of the close-set eyes of a possum, I saw a pair of huge yellow marbles staring back at me.

“Bear,” I gasped.

Scanning the huge beast, I guessed his weight at 350 pounds, a big bear for the southern Appalachians. Most troubling: he didn’t run. He stood there glaring at me with those yellow marble eyes. Every bear I ever encountered ran away the moment he identified me. I had watched monster bears scoot like scared schoolgirls at the mere sound of my voice. Snort and run, that’s what black bears do. Bears are natural cowards, said the book. Confronted by a bear, stand your ground, shout out loud, and throw sticks and stones. He’ll run away. Obviously this bear had not read that book because he wasn’t going anywhere. But then again, neither was I.

Bags of dried bananas, strawberries, onions, tomatoes, potatoes – a month’s labor – sat in the buckets behind me. My entire summer kit lay under my shelter. The bears had taken enough from me already. He’d have to kill me to get any more.

I was practically defenseless against the bear. After 2000 when the Southeast Bomb Task Force downsized its operation here, I quit bringing my rifle to town. The feds were mostly gone, and I figured a firearm would do more harm than good. I’d have ended up in a gunfight with the local people. But now that I was staring down the nose of a 350-pound black bear, I wished I had that rifle.

One bite, one swat from this bear and I’d be forest fertilizer. The idea of being shot to death was bad enough, but the thought of being eaten alive paralyzed me – but only for a moment.

I remembered my destroyed caches, and the fear boiled into rage. I grabbed a stick of firewood and charged the bear. Screaming like a banshee, I heaved the stick as hard as I could, smacking him in the

head with a loud thud. He stumbled backwards, stood there for a few seconds, and then casually returned to the pile of rotting peels.

“Get out of here!” I screamed. “Get going, bear!” He rooted in the compost as if I wasn’t there. I should’ve brought that rifle.

The worst kind of bear is the one that doesn’t fear humans. “Garbage bears” they call them. They acquire a taste for human food and start to subsist on people’s trash rather than wild food. Next thing you know, they’re gnawing on grandma in the back yard.

With all the produce lying around my camp, the bear had found a source of sustenance. Unless I found a way to get rid of him, he’d keep coming back for more.

I snatched another piece of wood and rushed at him. “Get out of here!” The stick nailed him; he flinched, and to my surprise he retreated into the shadows. When I could no longer see him, I turned my light off and listened to the woods. Silence. Fifteen minutes passed without a sound. Then I heard rustling leaves, this time on the other side of camp. Running over, I stabbed a beam of light through the trees. There he stood, those yellow eyes marking me.

I ran at him with another stick. Let fly, the stick of dead hickory caught the beast across the nose. Finding a tender place, the stick made him jump back. He snorted loudly, turned, and trotted away. I charged him, yelling at the top of my lungs. After a hundred yards I lost him. Far out in front I heard him still running. He was gone. But I knew he’d be back, if not tonight then tomorrow night. Bears like that always come back. What then?

“I have to kill him,” I thought. If I don’t kill him, he might kill me. But how – without a rifle? An idea came to me. I remembered seeing a gallon jug of antifreeze in the carport of the brick house next to Bi-Lo. If ingested, antifreeze will kill anything that walks, talks, or crawls. “Feed it to the bear and he’ll never come back,” I thought. “But I have to get it tonight and be ready for him tomorrow.”

Racing across the highway bridge, I headed for the lone house in the shadows of the ancient oak trees. It was there, where I’d seen it last fall: half of a jug of Prestone antifreeze. On my way back, I stopped at the Save-A-Lot dumpster and dug up a package of aging ground beef. Then I returned to camp and prepared a perfect meal for my furry guest. The mixture, when nose tested, retained its meaty smell. I spooned it out carefully into three plastic bags and poked air holes through the sides. “Let him get a good whiff of that.” Laying out the bear buffet, the bags of poisonous meat were hung at nose level in saplings surrounding my camp. My food and equipment, everything except my poncho shelter, was sealed in plastic bags and suspended high in the trees.

That night, a light rain and gusting winds blew up. With the leaves wet and the wind moaning it was impossible to hear anything approaching camp. At 10-minute intervals I went out in the rain with my Maglite, searching the woods for those yellow eyes. I kept thinking the bear was standing behind me. I spun and shined the light, but the woods were empty.

Hours later, I lay down to rest my eyes for a minute or two, and quietly slipped into unconsciousness. I awoke to grey, wet, dripping woods. It was dawn. “Fell asleep,” I chided myself. First thing I did was check the bait. It was untouched, all three bags exactly as I had left them last night. The bear would have eaten the meat had he come. Guess I’d overreacted.

Relieved that the bear had gone, I celebrated my victory with a big breakfast of burritos and boiled potatoes. Burritos digested better with apples. I had a 10-pound bag somewhere, but curiously couldn’t find it. I was sure I had hung it in the trees last night with the other food. “Or did I?”

I searched under a group of small pine trees where I usually kept my fresh fruit. There, in the leaves, I discovered a half-eaten apple. And the teeth marks were not human. A chill ran down my spine

as I realized that the bear had come in the night to snatch the bag of apples while I lay sleeping only 10 feet away.

I circled the camp searching the soft, wet leaves for bear tracks. Sure enough, a trail of huge paw prints led up the spur toward Will Scott Mountain. I could put my entire hand inside the prints. The chill grew colder. About 50 yards up, I saw the empty bag and a few mangled apple cores lying beside a downed pine tree.

I stayed awake every night for two weeks straight after that, waiting for the bear, watching my bags of bait. During the day I snuck a few hours of sleep. I couldn't go into town for food. The bear might raid my camp while I was gone. And putting everything in the trees every time I went for food was untenable. That bear had to die.

I waited in the dark, jumping at the slightest sound. Every night I prepared for a death struggle, and every night nothing happened. He never returned. Like a phantom, the bear simply disappeared into the void.

* * *

In August of 2001, the collards finally came in. By September, I'd harvested the greens and dried and pressed them into a dense block. I was ready to roll back to Fires Creek, when something held me back – an idea. The idea had been cooking in my head for months, but it was still half-baked. Not surprisingly, it involved new ways to obtain the written word.

However, while it finished baking, world-changing events were taking place in front of my nose.

I'd been watching the people across the river through my binoculars. I had given the Taco Bell employees names. One guy had this huge torso and tiny legs, so I called him "Beefsteak." The beautiful counter girl with the auburn hair was "Red Delicious." The over-bearing manager, I called "Crabapple." Everything was about food in those days.

Crabapple was chastising Beefsteak one day about keeping a clean ashtray in the outside dining area, when I noticed something strange. Posted on the Taco Bell marquee were the words "God Bless America." I had never seen that one before. The usual postings advertised "\$.99 cent tacos" and "\$1.10 burritos," and things of the like. The next day the marquee at Burger King had the same words. Now I knew something was up. Several trucks at Ingles grocery had full-size American flags flying from their bumpers. "Got to be something big," I thought.

Western North Carolina has a lot of religion and patriotism, but they typically come in more discrete doses. Seeing such a public display, I knew something significant had happened. The last time I had seen such outpourings of sympathy was after the death of Dale Earnhardt. "Wow, this is big," I said, looking across the river. "Either Steve 'Stone Cold' Austin has died, or America is at war."

I'd had no news for a couple of weeks. All the newspapers from the recycling center were a month old. I wanted to find out what had happened, and there was only one way to do that.

After midnight, I climbed off the spur with my newspaper snagger: a two-foot stick with a pair of pliers attached to the end. A pull-string operated the tongs of the pliers. I used it to snag leftover newspapers from the machine in front of Rite Aid Drugs. The procedure was performed only in emergencies, and this was an emergency.

Prying open the door on the *USA Today* machine, I slipped a stick in the crack to keep the door propped open, pushed the snagger through the open crack, and snapped the tongs closed on a newspaper. I had to work fast. The paper machine was in front of the long shopping center, exposing me to the highway. I watched for the patrol as I fished the paper through the crack. Squeezing it through the tight

opening scraped off part of the front page, but I got it. Confetti fluttered in my wake as I ran for the field next to Taco Bell.

On the side of the lonesome highway, floodlights splashed across the front of a small billboard advertising horse stables. I pushed through the waist-high weeds and sat down on the stack of cinderblocks under the billboard. There the light was good enough for reading. I straightened the wrinkled front page to see what looked like a demolished building. The newspaper said that the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were in ruins, and thousands were dead. The country was in a state of emergency. “Well I guess Steve ‘Stone Cold’ Austin is alive after all, and Washington is at war.”

During the next few days and weeks, I tried to follow the fast-moving events as best as I could. Based in Afghanistan and living under the protection of the Taliban, Osama bin Laden and his band of Muslim Jihadists (al Qaeda) took credit for what came to be called the 9/11 attacks. Every week came a new escalation of the crisis. Washington’s forces invaded Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban in a matter of weeks. Bin Laden and the remnants of al Qaeda fled into the mountains of Pakistan. Soon after, I heard talk of taking down Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi regime.

The whole thing seemed surreal. The blame-America-first crowd had gone into hiding. The American people had been viciously attacked, and the government in Washington was responding as governments should. The whole country seemed united behind a just cause. The liberal cynicism that poisons public discourse had fled. It was the first time in 40 years that one could breathe without inhaling the pollution of political correctness.

But, of course, it wouldn’t last. Marxist maggots dominate our society. The fires of 9/11 had burned away their lies and forced them underground, but only temporarily. They would soon crawl from their nests and resume decomposing the truth, recycling their stale lies.

Within a month of 9/11 the liberal-Marxists began to caution Americans against “intolerance” and “racial-religious profiling.” They assured Americans that Islam was a “peace-loving religion,” even though millions of Muslims danced in the streets of Cairo, Baghdad, and Amman after hearing of the 9/11 attacks. The liberals wanted us to know that al Qaeda wasn’t representative of the Muslim mainstream, despite the fact that the majority of Muslims in the Middle East consider Osama bin Laden to be a good Muslim. The commissars from the Southern Poverty Law Center warned of an “alarming rise in the number of Hate Crimes against Muslims.” Terrorism wasn’t exclusive to Islam, said the pimps at the *New York Times*. Just “look at those Christians who shoot abortion doctors.” Our biggest concern isn’t Osama bin Laden; it’s this climate of “out-of-control patriotism.” Remember the “internment of Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor.” Such patriotic fervor threatens our “most basic liberties.”

My stack of unread newspapers grew smaller. I devoured the papers greedily, but it was kind of like eating wedding cake; one slice was okay, but after two slices I wanted to throw up. Journalism remains the lowest form of literature. By focusing on events that happened days or hours earlier, journalism lacks depth. That, and the liberal bias of the average journalist sickened me.

I craved books.

* * *

I beat myself up every time I thought about the hundreds of books I had left behind at my trailer and storage unit. There were literally boxes of books – classics, history, philosophy, novels, – stacked from floor to ceiling. I had always wanted more time to read them. Now that I had all the time in the world, I had no books. They were all rotting in some FBI storage unit.

Having no money to buy books, I could think of only one place with plenty of books: the civic library in downtown Murphy. The idea that had been cooking in my head was now fully baked; I would go “check-out” some books.

The idea of a book heist came to me after reading in the local paper about plans for a major renovation to the library. The plans called for a new computer lab. I figured with all that construction going on, I might be able to slip in there and liberate an armload of books. I'd bring them back after a few years to exchange them for some new ones. Thus began the Great Book Heist of 2001.

Resembling a Sizzler Steak House, the government library was located downtown off the main strip. Getting in there could pose a problem for me. I would have to walk downtown, and there were people downtown. This violated my avoid-people-avoid-problems rule. Someone might recognize me. To limit my exposure I would do it in the dark.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the library stayed open until 7:00 PM. In the fall it got dark around 6:00 PM, which should give me an hour of darkness to work with. Moving closer to the target the night before the heist would shorten the distance that I would have to walk in the open. Perusing my map, I pinpointed a scrubby ridge a mile west of my camp. On the side of Highway 19, the scrubby ridge sloped down to the Valley River. Sunset Cemetery was nearby, and Valley River Avenue ran below the graveyard. From there, the library was a short walk.

I pored over my maps, plotted my getaway, and developed contingency plans in case things went wrong. I felt the familiar tension rise inside and excite me. I had a plan and was working out the means of accomplishing it. My thinking became sharper. I was back to my old self again, and it felt good.

The tension intensified as I realized that getting out of the library with books might prove more difficult than I had thought. I used to visit the library once every couple of weeks when I lived on Cane Creek. At least a few of the regular employees knew my face. That was a potential problem. My severe weight loss, full beard, and the hat would help alter my appearance, but one of them might recognize me underneath the thin disguise. They wouldn't have to go far to find a cop; the Cherokee County courthouse and Sheriff's Department were right next-door.

I broke camp below Will Scott Mountain and packed everything. If things went bad for me at the library, I wanted a quick exit.

After midnight, I followed the empty highway down to the scrubby ridge. A small terrace cut into the side of the ridge with just enough space to unfurl my bedroll. I spent the next day on the ridge overlooking baseball fields across the river. Glassing over with my binoculars, I watched the kids practice. Listening to the ping of the aluminum bats brought back memories of Southwest Little League. Oh, to be young again.

As evening approached, I donned a pair of blue jeans and a Taco Bell shirt and hat, and prepared to make my move.

The blue shadows of night descended on the small mountain town. Climbing down the scrubby ridge, I followed the road below Sunset Cemetery and turned left on Valley River Avenue. As the main thoroughfare in downtown Murphy, the avenue was thick with cars. "You're just another pedestrian out for an evening stroll," I told myself. "Just another citizen." Past the Post Office and elementary school, I turned into the side street below the courthouse. A small footpath led up a steep embankment to the library's parking lot. My heart was pounding; my ears tingled.

But I worried for nothing. It turned out to be a dry run. Circling around to see the front desk through the pane windows, I noticed a familiar face, one of the regulars: a pudgy man with a goatee. I couldn't go in. However, the trip wasn't a total loss. I had taken the first steps. It would be easier next time.

If the guy with the goatee worked Thursdays, chances were good that he would be off on the weekends. The library opened for a few hours in the morning on Saturday. I would try it then.

On Saturday, the parking lot was nearly empty. No renovations were in progress, not yet. The carport in the rear of the library was wide open. Used for parking the bookmobile, the carport had two roll up garage doors on both sides of the library. What caught my eye was the floor-to-ceiling bookshelf along the back wall of the carport. Must have been over a thousand books. And there was no one around, and the books had no security tags.

With all these books in front of my face, my heart pounded excitedly. I felt like a kid in a candy store. “Why go inside the library and run the risk of being recognized when I have a whole shelf of books right in front of me?” I asked myself. A new plan developed.

Ducking into the carport, I read the titles as fast as I could, looking for books on history, philosophy, and biographies — anything substantial. “There’s nothing here, nothing,” I cursed. Any moment the steel door that led into the library might swing open. I grabbed four books and fled down the path to Valley River Avenue.

Examining my take back at the scrubby spur beside Sunset Cemetery, I bit my lip in frustration; it was a poor selection. I should have stuck to the original plan. All of the titles somehow related to North Carolina. One book contained the memoirs of Josephus Daniels, a politician from North Carolina. An incredible bore, he served as Wilson’s Secretary of Navy and later as Franklin D. Roosevelt’s ambassador to Mexico. A better read was the *Travels of John Lawson*. In the early days of Carolina, the Governor sent Lawson to explore the interior of the colony. He eventually settled in New Bern, where he continued his travels into the backcountry. The Tuscarora Indians captured him in 1713 and made sport of torturing him to death. The best book in the lot was the *Tales of O. Henry*, a collection of short stories by a great writer.

I devoured the books quickly, but they only wetted my appetite. I had to go back. Josephus Daniels couldn’t satisfy my mind for years to come. I caressed the comely volumes gently, then buried my nose in the bindings and took big whiffs. “Oh, lovely hardbacks. Why do you tempt me so?”

On my next run to the library, I was struck by the absurdity of it all. Here I was, one of the most wanted men in America, with a \$1 million reward on my head, facing the death penalty in four jurisdictions, and risking capture to get a few books from the government library. Most people in my position would be trying to cross the border into Canada. Not me – I just wanted a handful of history books to keep me company during the long, cold winters.

The library’s back door was propped open, and a green dumpster sat out back with protruding pieces of broken drywall. They were renovating, finally. My timing couldn’t have been better. Rarely kept unlocked, the backdoor was hidden behind the bookshelves in the history section, the least visited part of the library. The books I wanted were right there inside the open door.

I had to fight a strong urge to grab the books and run. I couldn’t be certain that the door alarm was turned off. Plus, the security tags would have to be removed, and that would take time.

Walls were missing in the library, and sheetrock dust coated the carpet. I eyed the front desk through the shelves; I didn’t recognize any of the employees, and hopefully, they wouldn’t recognize me. The woman at the front desk flipped through a magazine without noticing me. I put Josephus Daniels’ memoirs and the *Travels of John Lawson* on a table. One of the librarians would pick them up later. In the back aisle I located a copy of Page Smith’s *Trial by Fire*, a history of the Civil War. I sat in one of the old lounge chairs near the window. Glancing out the window, I saw two sheriff’s deputies. They were in the courthouse parking lot, standing next to their cruiser. “Don’t mess up,” I reminded myself.

After removing the security tags, I placed the book on the shelf nearest the back door. I selected another book, this one a history of Rome. Once the bar code was removed from it, I found a history of early America: *The Colonial Experience*. “Enough,” I said. “Let’s go. Spending too much time in here.”

I snuck into the restroom, where I hastily wrapped the security tags in toilet paper and flushed them down the commode. I glanced out the bathroom door. The back of the library was empty; time to make my move. I bagged the books and retreated out of the back door. Bracing myself, I half expected an alarm to sound. “Maybe they have a security tag inside the binding.” But I was surrounded by silence.

I walked away briskly. It was a sunny day and I had books.

* * *

That winter on Tarkiln Ridge I must have read those books four times. Come spring, I read them again. I held running debates with myself, on the Civil War, socialism, the Gracchan Crisis of ancient Rome. At times it became absurd. One morning, while cooking breakfast in a rainstorm, I had a particularly heated discussion about the problems of post-Civil War Reconstruction. The rain pounding on the tarp overhead made it difficult to hear myself, so I spoke louder and louder. Pretty soon, I was shouting. Here I was, squatting next to a fire stirring gruel, and shouting at myself about the merits of Reconstruction. Stopping to look out at the raging storm, I caught myself. “What are you going on about?” I asked. I laughed, the first good laugh in a long time. The books had turned my rage into laughter, like a thunderstorm giving way to sunshine.

But all of these books only made me crave more. Thus my plans for the summer of 2002, besides drying produce, included another run at the library. Ideas had entered my system, and I required an ever-constant supply to sustain my high. I was a junky in search of another fix, a drunk trying to satiate my unquenchable thirst.

By late summer, I had collected enough books to keep my mind occupied for years. Some titles were familiar. Before going into hiding, I owned a set of Will Durant’s *History of Civilization* and many other good titles. But I never had time to read them all, and ended up leaving them behind for the feds. They were big dense books containing a lot of information. Naturally, when I saw the same volumes gathering dust on the shelf at the Murphy library, I simply had to have them. I had never owned Shelby Foote’s three-volume history of the Civil War, but always wanted to read it. I found these precious gems on the back shelf growing mold, so I brushed the mold off – inside my coat. A few other books were also liberated: a biography of Mohandas Gandhi, a *History of the Twentieth Century* by Martin Gilbert, plus a book about insects.

Fall came early in 2002. As the leaves yellowed, I packed four volumes to take back with me to the mountains. I then stored the rest of my library in five-gallon buckets and buried them in the ground just south of camp. My haul would get me through the winter.

* * *

Meanwhile, Washington charged headlong into a foreign policy brick wall, and the country became outraged when college professor Ward Churchill called the victims in The World Trade Center “Little Eichmanns.” The controversy had more to do with context than content because Churchill merely said what liberals have been saying for decades. It was a difference of subtlety rather than substance. However tactless and crude, Churchill’s comment is orthodoxy among America’s liberal elite. Professors Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky, for example, have been spouting such rhetoric since the 1960s. The West, they say, is the root cause of all evil in the world. It has stolen its wealth from the poor. It has built capitalist empires on the backs of the exploited Third World. When the exploited people of the world rise up to protest their enslavement, the West sends armies and fleets to blast them into submission. It was the same with the Indians, Mexicans, blacks, Phillipinos, and Vietnamese. America is bad, bad, bad. I’ve been hearing that crap since the first grade.

According to this “enlightened” liberal perspective (it’s actually a Marxist perspective but folks like Zinn and Chomsky found it prudent to call themselves progressives or liberals), the bourgeois businessmen in the World Trade Center were the equivalent of Nazi bureaucrats (“Little Eichmanns”),

cogs in a capitalist machine that indirectly causes the mass murder of millions of Third World peoples. And it was only natural that the victims' relatives would fly planes into the Nazi buildings. After all, America's corporations and military were doing far worse in the Middle East. The 9/11 hijackers were freedom fighters retaliating against capitalist oppression. If America wants to prevent another 9/11 it should send reparations to the Third World rather than smart bombs, say the Liberal-Marxist pimps.

You can hear this perspective in the motion pictures, schools, and universities. You can read such opinions in the editorial pages of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *The Nation*. Among "educated" people, this is the party line today. Ward Churchill merely voiced mainstream academic opinion; however, he did it at the wrong time, and in the wrong way.

Churchill's comment revealed the fundamental divide between the liberal Establishment and the American people, and it highlighted the fundamental problem facing any foreign policy-maker in dealing with a crisis like 9/11. The liberal Establishment hates Western Civilization and would like nothing better than to deliver it into the hands of our enemies. Faced with an attack on our civilization, liberals will do everything in their power to undermine our defenses. But here is the strange part: any astute policy-maker in Washington, of either political party, realizes this and defers to this liberal self-loathing orthodoxy. No major policy or endeavor, such as a war, will survive without the support of this nihilistic intellectual class.

Yet in the months after 9/11, Bush and his neoconservative advisors behaved as if the attacks on the World Trade Center had forever changed this political reality. Military adventures were being planned as if it was 1942 rather than 2002. The military would fight Israel's wars, they believed. They would give the entire Middle East a political makeover. First, they would rebuild Afghanistan; then they would remove Saddam Hussein; after that they'd take out the Mullahs in Iran. In 10 years the entire region will be a model of democracy, with regular elections, women's rights, Starbucks, and pornography. Bush would accomplish all this without the support of the liberal Establishment.

The neoconservative's stupidity was astonishing. I could see Washington rushing into the worst foreign policy debacle since Vietnam. The whole thing unfolded before my mind's eye: Bush would invade Iraq without the support of the liberal Establishment in America. The Marxist regimes in Europe would give him no support either. Iraq, being a fractious place — divided into hostile blocks of Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites — would prove difficult to pacify. Some element would resist the American presence and seek to undermine any government put in the place of Hussein's Baathist regime. Afghanistan would prove equally impossible to govern. With the Taliban operating from the safe havens in the mountains of Pakistan, Washington would have a 20-year war on its hands.

I predicted that the two wars would produce a steady stream of difficulties and casualties. Then the Left would pounce. Using their control of the media, liberals would gradually turn the American people against Bush's War. They would write countless books, articles, and editorials showing how the war was immoral, unjustified, and ultimately unwinnable. Hollywood would churn out antiwar films. Meanwhile, the memories of 9/11 would fade and the media would help them fade. The American people would go back to football, American Idol, and Jerry Springer. Bush's War was lost before it began.

The long-term consequences would prove immeasurable. Because Bush called himself a "conservative" the Left would use the defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq to discredit the Right for a decade to come. They would seat a radical left-wing government in Washington. The new government would come with a tremendous mandate and a laundry list of liberal programs. The troops would eventually pull out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Once removed, they would never be sent back in. New, hostile regimes would replace Bush's puppet governments. Emboldened by Washington's retreat, Iran would increase its power in a Shiite dominated Iraq and ultimately build a nuclear bomb, leaving America's strategic position in the Middle East weaker than it was before those 19 hijackers crashed planes into buildings in

Washington and New York. If Osama bin Laden's plan was to undermine Israeli-American dominance in the Middle East, then he would eventually succeed beyond his wildest dreams.

Politics being the art of the possible, I saw several potential outcomes from the crisis. From the ashes of defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq could grow the seeds of national regeneration. Millions of Americans would never forget 9/11, no matter how much propaganda the liberals fed them. Millions might support Bush's War, only to see their efforts frustrated at every turn, not by al Qaeda or the Taliban, but by liberals here at home. Military and intelligence professionals tasked with defeating the Muslim threat would see their work defeated by ACLU lawyers. While the soldiers battled jihadists in the mountains of Afghanistan and in the slums of Baghdad, liberal politicians would sneak up behind them and cut their throats. Their sacrifices would be in vain. These millions of patriotic Americans would receive a first class political education. They would learn that their most lethal enemies are here in America, the real terrorists are in the Halls of Congress, the genuine subversives are at the *New York Times*, and the biggest killers of American youth are in Hollywood.

In a backhanded way, the war could end up saving America. We need the support of some part of the government-military establishment; we need generals, CIA agents, and senators; we need an angry Heartland determined to take back their country.

I could see it all like a vision swept down from heaven. Maybe the fool Bush was sowing the seed of national regeneration. If so, my attempt to derail his candidacy two years earlier was premature. Bush was doing God's work and he didn't even know it.

* * *

It's amazing what you can find in the trash. During those brief summer months camped next to Murphy, I had accumulated a lot of fascinating things. Each fall, before going back to the mountains for winter, I stored it in five-gallon buckets and buried it in a slit trench. It filled my hungry body and mind.

I wouldn't be returning to Murphy after the summer of 2003. The place had become too crowded. Development was closing in around Will Scott Mountain, and last summer they began construction on a BP gas station across from the high school. Just down the hill from it, they were planning to build something big in place of the collard field. And fill dirt was being dumped in the bottomland behind Save-A-Lot, in preparation for some other project.

I had other reasons to avoid Murphy, more pressing than the development. My trips to the Save-A-Lot dumpster were too dangerous. Sooner or later the police patrol and I would come face to face. I'd rather avoid it. I needed another summer home.

"One more summer," I told myself. That's all I need to dry enough produce for three winters. At the end of the season, I'll backpack all of my extra gear into the mountains. Should take me two or three trips. In a couple of years, I'll go back to Andrews, or perhaps Hayesville. Don't worry about the patrol. If I'm caught, then it's part of the plan.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, for He is with you always, even unto the end."

About the Author

In 1998 Eric Rudolph was added to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list and became the focus of the bureau's largest and most intensive manhunt. Suspected of committing four bombings, including the bombing at the 1996 Olympic Games, Rudolph fled into the mountains of Western North Carolina. There he remained hidden for five and a half years.

Finally captured in 2003, Rudolph is now serving a life sentence at the Administrative Maximum prison (often called SuperMax) in Colorado.

Other than discussing the motives for his actions, Rudolph has never before spoken about his case. For the first time, he recounts his harrowing ordeals in the mountains: how he survived by hunting deer and gathering acorns; how he managed to elude a small army of FBI agents, helicopters, and hound dogs; how he maintained body and mind through sheer will and deep-seated beliefs.

The memoirs also focus on his upbringing, where along with strong family bonds and childhood discovery, he learned about violence and hypocrisy in the public schools. Never one to bow his head and obey, the book reveals Eric's integrity and steadfast aptitude for speaking truth to power.

Finally, the book recounts the Atlanta and Birmingham bombings, presenting the only true, first-person account of these events. Whether or not you agree with Eric's actions, he is a man of strong conviction and compelling ideas, a person with more depth and complexity than many out there would have you believe.

To write to Eric, see <http://www.armyofgod.com/EricRudolphHomepage.html>