

During the Cold War, the U. S. conducted airborne communications reconnaissance flights near the Russian coastline. This book is a novel about one of those aircraft, which was brought down by Soviet fighters, with part of the crew being captured and interrogated, and then escaping.

Burning Amber

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BURNING AMBER

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TEN
CAPTURE

20 November 1971

0300Z

On the ice pack in the Gulf of Anadyr'

Willie quickly brought the radio to his mouth, touched the transmit button and fairly screamed into the small microphone, "Russian chopper...."

The staccato sound of automatic rifle fire erupted from the open door, and a line of small bursts of snow and ice exploded at our feet. The voice from the bullhorn sounded again, "Do not attempt to call your comrades, American. Put down your radio and place your hands on your heads or my soldier will raise his aim."

I quickly flipped my radio over into the snow as Willie did the same. "Might as well do what he says, guys. There's no way we can get away from them." Greg's voice showed the resignation that I felt, and I am sure Harold and Willie felt the same. The four of us turned to face the Russians and raised our hands over our heads.

The helicopter flew a little closer then settled to the ice. Several white-clad soldiers jumped from the open side door and ran toward us.

"Do not attempt to escape. My soldiers would not hesitate to kill you and you would be perfect targets on this ice." The voice was coming from a tall Russian officer standing in the doorway. He was dressed in the brown dress

uniform that I have seen in pictures of Soviet military men. He was holding a microphone in his hand and his voice came from a loudspeaker mounted on the side of the chopper.

As the soldiers approached us, the voice spoke again, "You are under arrest for violating Soviet airspace. Come to the door of the helicopter and surrender to me. If you make any attempt to escape, you will be shot."

We slowly began to walk toward the chopper. Apparently I wasn't moving fast enough because one of the soldiers prodded me sharply in the back. I jerked around, drew back my hand as though to hit him, then froze as he snapped the mechanism on his rifle and pointed it at me.

"Wow, these guys are serious," I burst out before thinking.

"Yeah, so take it easy, Jerry." Greg spoke softly, but the Russian officer heard him.

"Yes, we are serious. Do not speak again unless you are instructed to do so. Is that understood?"

We nodded in the affirmative and continued to approach the door. Willie was the first to reach the steps that led to the entrance. Before he could begin to climb, one of the soldiers jumped in front of him and forced him back. The officer spoke again, "Place your hands on the top step and spread your legs so that my men can search you for weapons. When you have been searched, you will climb the stairs and enter the helicopter."

He barked a few orders in Russian that I didn't understand, and I wondered if Willie and Greg did. I tried to read their faces, but they showed no sign of understanding. I hoped that the officer read the same thing.

Willie leaned forward, put out his hands, outspread, on the top step, and spread his feet as far apart as possible. One of the soldiers put a mukluk boot in front of Willie's left foot

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while another began to pat his arms, around his body, and down his legs. He found the survival knife in the pocket of Willie's flight suit and removed it. When they were satisfied that he carried no other weapons, they helped him stand straight and climb into the chopper. One by one the rest of us received the same treatment.

I was the last to be searched and when they found nothing but my knife to interest them, they shoved me into the door, then went back to gather up our equipment. Several of them had started to open and search through the survival kits when the voice from the bull horn barked several Russian words. The soldiers immediately picked up the kits, ran back to the chopper, climbed aboard and pulled the steps in with them.

When they were all aboard and the door had been shut, two of the soldiers grabbed my arms and pushed them behind my back while a third soldier peeled a couple of feet of what appeared to be duct tape from a roll, and wrapped my wrists together. The tape was as effective as handcuffs. One of the soldiers prodded me with his rifle and pointed to a row of web seats and motioned for me to sit down.

Willie, Greg, and Harold had already been taped and strapped into the seats. I was forced into a seat and a soldier groped for a seat belt, found both ends and buckled them around me. I struggled to find a comfortable position to sit, but with my hands behind me, it was virtually impossible. I have seen people in the movies sit with their hands cuffed or tied behind them, but I had no idea that it was so uncomfortable.

I didn't have too much time to worry about it right then, however. The Russian officer began to speak again. "You have been arrested for violating Soviet airspace. At this time your comrades are also being arrested. Your actions since

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you crashed in the ice have led us to believe that you were conducting illegal spying activities, and your attempt to escape by splitting into several groups reinforces that presumption. You will be taken to our regional headquarters at Anadyr' where you will be interrogated, and then we will decide what will be done with you. You will not be permitted to speak unless I specifically request an answer. If you attempt to communicate with each other, you will be punished severely. Is that understood?"

When we nodded in the affirmative, he continued, "Good. You must remain seated where you are until we land. If you follow my instructions, you will not be harmed."

He snapped a few words to the soldiers, they turned and climbed the stairway to the flight deck.

The chopper's engine had not been shut down during the landing, and now I heard and felt the increase in noise level as the pilot powered up to take off. When it had achieved full power, there was a slight lurch and we rose into the air. After climbing for a few seconds, the chopper banked to the left and began to fly toward the Russian coast.

I thought back to the words of the officer and wondered what he meant when he said that our "comrades" were also being arrested. I know I heard the communications when Major Barnhart was talking to the rescue mission and I was sure that his group had been picked up. The Russians could not possibly have had the information that the rescue pilot had used to identify the major. We also had been listening as the second rescue bird was picking up group two. The only other group that could have been arrested was group three, but how did they do it?

Then it came to me that they had listened to the vectors that we had been using to lead the rescue helicopter to us. They were only a few hundred yards away from our rescue

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flight and we had vectored them right into our position. That was why Clambake Three Seven had not been able to locate us. He was several hundred yards to the east of us and by the time we realized it, it was too late for him to do anything.

Since the emergency frequencies, 243 and 121.5 MHz, are international, it was easy to intercept our communications. Also, the Russian officer spoke very good English, so it was no trouble at all to use the bearings that we thought we were sending to bring our rescue chopper toward us. Apparently there was more than one Russian helicopter in the area, also with someone aboard who spoke English, because we had been told that our “comrades” had also been arrested. Even though some of us had been caught, I knew that two groups had escaped.

We at least had a chance to get back home because some of the crew had been rescued and they would tell the world that the rest of us had been captured alive. The Russians could not claim that we had died in the crash and that they didn’t know anything about us, then extract all that they could from us and either imprison or execute us.

After realizing that we were at least temporarily safe, I forced thoughts of our immediate future out of my mind and tried to look around the helicopter. The Russian officer had ordered us to refrain from talking but I tried to see if I could make eye contact with the other guys. I twisted around but one of the soldiers sitting near me jabbed my side with his AK-47, so I restricted my movements to just looking around.

I was sitting in a seat made of what appeared to be a heavy canvas material, the seat being one piece and the back made of strips woven into a web. The frame was made of aluminum tubing attached to the wall and the seats were attached to the frame similar to a lawn chair. There were eight seats along each wall and each seat, except for those

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occupied by me and the rest of my group, had a white clad Russian soldier, holding an AK-47, strapped into it. Four soldiers were sitting on the floor at the rear, so we had displaced them from their seats.

The helicopter itself was painted the dull brown so common with Russian aircraft that I had seen when it first approached us. The big, red star with the white border had been visible also, as well as the letters, CCCP, over the windows and just beneath the huge main rotor. Two auxiliary fuel tanks were slung on each side near the main landing gear, and two large intake tubes were built into the top of the fuselage. The shape of the tubes and the pods indicated that the power came from turbine engines. In fact, when the pilot increased the power to take off, the sound reminded me of the times I flew in a C-130.

Although the craft was several years old, I noticed how clean and organized everything was. The Russians must have had very little to do except keep things clean. The floor was covered with a black, non-slip material, thin and worn, but there were no stains or blemishes anywhere. Several boxes with hinged lids were bolted to the floor near the cockpit entrance. They appeared to be for tools or parts storage, and they had been freshly painted with the same dull brown color as the exterior. Several Russian words were stenciled on the covers and I momentarily wondered what they meant.

The pain in my arms and hands became very intense, so I tried to shift my position to get some relief. I twisted around so that I could see out the round window behind my left shoulder and spotted another helicopter like this one flying a few hundred yards away. I wondered if the had been successful in capturing the other group so I squinted into the distance, trying to see someone besides Russians. They were too far away for me to see, however.

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I turned back around when a Russian jabbed me again. “Take it easy, man. My hands are hurting and I’m trying to ease them up a little.” I realized that he couldn’t understand me so I tried to indicate to him what I meant. He just scowled at me and shook his head. I squirmed around to get as comfortable as possible to wait for the end of this ride.

I wondered what the other guys were thinking. I also wondered again just what kind of treatment we would receive after we landed at Anadyr’. We had all been through survival training and many hours were spent learning how to resist interrogation and possible severe punishment. The one aspect that stands out most clearly was the simple statement, “Don’t give up.” No matter what they did to you, as long as you were alive, there was a chance to survive. Once you give up and die, there are no more chances.

Some things a man can do to resist include giving vague, misleading answers to questions, feigning a lack of memory of details, or even sometimes just refusing to answer. The latter, however, can bring rapid punishment, but it is better to accept punishment than to give away important military secrets. A good method is to try to give answers that you think the interrogator wants to hear. If you can satisfy him without actually providing any useful information, you can prolong the process, and the longer you can stall, the better your chances become of being rescued or released.

Always believe that the government is doing everything they can to secure your return home. Maintain a positive attitude about everything, including the situation of your family and friends. Believe that they are aware of your condition and that they are being taken care of.

The one thing emphasized probably more than any other was do not try to prefabricate a story and make your captors believe it. You will be caught sometime or other with some

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little details that are not consistent. It is best to pretend ignorance rather than try to dream up some elaborate tale, hoping to divert their attention from you.

It seemed like several hours that I had been sitting on my hands when the sound of the chopper's engine suddenly changed. We must be getting close to landing, I thought, when the Russian officer came out of the cockpit, barked a few words, then turned and went back. Two of the soldiers that were sitting in the rear stood up, came forward to the tool boxes, fished around and found the rolls of tape that had been stored there. They went over to Greg where one of them held him down and the other ripped a six or eight inch strip of tape from the roll and stretched it over his eyes.

They must have something that they don't want us to see, I thought. And this tape is not going to be very pleasant. They went to each of us in turn until we had all been blindfolded. I began to feel completely helpless.

The noise of the chopper began to change again and I knew that we were near the ground. With a slight lurch the machine settled on to its landing gear, then powered up a little and we began to roll along the runway. At least I thought that it must be a runway, even though I could not see anything.

I felt the rocking and bumping as we taxied along, then felt the lurch as the pilot braked to a stop. I could hear and feel the soldiers starting to unbuckle seat belts and stir around. With a dying whine, the chopper's engine was shut down, again reminding me of a C-130 being parked after a day's mission. It is a sound almost like a huge sigh of relief as all the energy is drained from the body.

I heard the sound of the door being opened and then the sound of another helicopter engine just as it was being shut

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down. The one that I had seen earlier must have also just landed nearby.

I felt the sudden pressure of someone's hands groping for the seat belt that was buckled around me, felt them release it, then grip my shoulders and force me to stand up. I was led to the door, pulled to a stop, and not so gently pushed forward until I felt the edge of the floor. I slid my foot a little at a time until I was sure that it was clear, then eased it down until I found the first step. The hands on my shoulder were providing the balance, but it was still a very frightening experience stepping out into nothingness, not knowing or seeing where I was going.

Just as I felt my foot on solid ground again, I heard the sound of the door of the other chopper being opened. I walked for a few feet, waiting for time for anyone to emerge, then took a big chance and immediately paid for it.

"Any Americans on that other chop..." I screamed as loudly as I could. I was cut off in mid word by a gun butt or something equally as hard being slammed into my back between my shoulder blades. I was knocked to the pavement of the parking ramp and I saw stars for a few seconds. Either there were no Americans there or they were too scared to answer, because I heard no response.

The voice of the Russian officer snapped, "Do not try that again or you will not be treated so gently next time."

Gently! I thought. If that's gentle, I sure don't want to be treated rough. Before the pain in my back subsided, I was pulled to my feet by several hands and pushed forward. I walked as well as I could, considering that I couldn't see a thing.

I had no idea what my surroundings were, but I could hear engines running. They could have been power generators or cars or trucks, but I couldn't tell for sure.

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After a few minutes of groping my way along, being led by two people, one on either side, I realized that we were approaching the sound of one of the engines. I was forced to stop and one of the soldiers leading me tapped me on the back of my left leg. I shrugged my shoulders and shook my head because I didn't understand what he wanted. He then grabbed my ankle and yanked my foot up and pushed it forward. I then felt what must have been a step of some kind. I put my foot down and then, with a soldier pushing me from behind, I lifted myself up onto the step. I eased the other foot forward until I found the other step and climbed up it. I eased forward again, and when I felt no more steps, hands guided me to a seat and pushed me down into it, hands still taped together behind my back. I could hear the other guys being treated in the same manner.

After a few minutes of sitting quietly, I heard the crunching of gears in the bus's transmission. The engine revved up and the bus lurched forward. It lurched again as the driver shifted gears a couple of times, then settled into a cruising drone. I wanted to try to talk to the other guys, but I knew the treatment I would receive if I even made a sound.

Again I tried to gather my thoughts and plan some method of resisting any interrogation that I might receive. An idea began to take shape, even though I had been taught not to try to make up a story. This one, however, would be so simple that there would be no way I could be tripped up. If I could convince them that I was just a passenger on the plane, hitching a ride to Okinawa, maybe I could pull it off. Greg and Willie likely couldn't make something like that believable because of their knowledge of the Russian language. There was a more than even chance that their ability would be learned by any competent interrogator. I didn't know any Russian, so I wouldn't be faking. If Harold

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didn't break and tell everything about the mission, maybe I could pull it off.

It seemed like we must have driven for ages over some of the roughest roads on earth before the bus finally came to a stop. We had made several turns and stops, as though we were driving in a city or in some kind of traffic, but I never heard the sounds of any other vehicles. When we stopped this time, the hands grabbed my shoulders again and I was led off the bus. I was left alone for a couple of minutes as they were leading the other guys. Hands again grabbed my shoulders, pushed me along, stumbling over something, being roughly jerked up, and pushed again. I was stopped at some steps, made of wood by the sound and feel of them, led up, stopped again as the sounds of locks being operated, and I was led into a building of some kind. I felt the heat as the door was opened.

I heard voices speaking Russian and the soldiers apparently greeted each other. Laughter, as the story about our capture was probably being told. I didn't know for sure, but it sounded like the people who were in the building were getting a detailed description of how the American spies had been snatched from under the noses of their rescuers.

Hands again leading me, this time it seemed like a hallway of some kind, then the sound of more locks being worked and the sound of doors being opened. I was pushed through a door, grabbed by the arms as hands began to rip the tape that was wrapped around my wrists, and pushed farther into a room, and the door was closed behind me. At least, I still had my Arctic mittens on so the tape didn't tear my skin off with it.

I groped my way around the room, banged my shins on something metal, felt around and realized that it was a bed. I sat down, took off my mittens and picked at the tape over my

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eyes with a fingernail. I managed to prick a corner of the tape and pulled it off my face. It wasn't very good tape because it came off without too much trouble.

I looked around and found that I was apparently in a jail cell. It was a room about ten feet by ten feet with a heavy wooden door that had a small, square window in it at about eye level. Little bars covered the window and it appeared to have a sliding door that could only be opened from the outside. On the wall opposite the door was another window, somewhat larger and higher than the one in the door. It also had bars and there was also a pane of very thick glass set in it.

The bed on which I was sitting was made of a metal frame with a spring made of woven wire and a mattress that was little more than a straw-stuffed canvas sack. Two brown, wooly blankets were folded and stacked at one end, but there were no sheets, pillows, or pillow cases. The frame was attached to the wall by hinges on one side, the other side being supported by chains that allowed the bed to be folded flush against the wall.

A further inspection of the room revealed a metal can, about a gallon size, sitting in a corner. Nice, sanitary conditions, I thought, as I realized what the can was for. There was nothing else in the room, no chair, no table, nothing.

I fought back the beginnings of despair. There is always hope, I thought. As long as I am alive, I have a chance to get out of this mess. A few hours ago, I was riding along in a nice, safe airplane. Now here I was, sitting in a Russian prison, a helpless captive who has no idea what the immediate future holds. I sat on the bed, put my face in my hands, tried to collect my thoughts, and plan the story that I

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would try to tell the interrogators that I knew I would inevitably encounter.

ELEVEN

INTERROGATION

20 November 1971

0630Z

Military prison on Anadyr' Air Base

As I sat there on the cot, trying to gather my thoughts, I realized that the Russians had not searched my pockets and taken my identification and other stuff. They had only patted me down, looking for weapons before they pushed me into the helicopter. I still had my GI wristwatch that I carried in my pocket. I had removed the band because I simply could not wear a watch. It would either irritate my arm, or something in my chemistry would cause the band to deteriorate. It was nothing more than a cheap, stem-wound thing called a "hack" watch, but I knew that it would be a good thing to keep if I could find a place to hide it. I looked around the room, paying a little closer attention to details, trying to find a crack or hole. The back wall, to which the bed was attached, was made of concrete blocks, painted a flat light green color. The other three walls were apparently constructed of wood, painted the same color, leading me to think that the concrete side was an exterior wall. Near one of the attaching points of the bed I found a small hole that appeared to have been made when an attaching bolt reamed and had been replaced, causing the bed to be moved to one side an inch or so. I stuck my finger into the hole, explored

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around to make sure that it wasn't a bottomless pit, and decided that it would do the trick.

I fished the watch out of my flight suit pocket and pushed it into the hole and off to one side. It was a tight fit, but, because of the missing band, there was enough room for me to stick my finger in and slip it out when I wanted to. Maybe it would stay hidden if I didn't get careless and have it out when one of the Russians came into the cell.

I had barely hidden the watch and turned back to face the cell door when I heard sounds outside. The lock was being worked and the door was pushed open. Two soldiers entered the room, one of them carrying an assault rifle in the ready position across his chest. He was the larger of the two, slightly over six feet tall, not much more than 22 or 23 years old. The other was shorter, heavier, and older, maybe in his early thirties, and he was carrying a roll of duct tape. Both were wearing the brown, wooly uniform of the Russian enlisted man. I didn't recognize the rank insignia that they were wearing, but I guessed that the older man was at least a sergeant.

He motioned for me to stand up and rattled off a few words of Russian. I gave him a blank stare, so he came a few steps closer and virtually shouted in my face. I thought I recognized the words for "American spy" somewhere in his tirade. When I didn't move fast enough for him, he grabbed my arms, jerked me upright and shoved me toward the door. I twisted away and almost turned to face him when the other soldier cocked his weapon. I decided not to push the situation and allowed them to lead me.

Before we reached the open door, the sergeant peeled off a foot or two of the duct tape and plastered it over my eyes. Apparently there was something around here that they

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didn't want me to see. Or maybe it was just a method to demoralize me.

When they were satisfied that I was rendered totally blind, each took one of my arms and began to lead me out of the cell. I tried to memorize the steps and turns that we took so I would have some idea of the layout, but it didn't work. It seemed like they were intentionally leading me in circles so I would be confused. The only things I could remember were that we turned right after we exited the cell, walked for maybe ten steps, turned right again, and walked fifteen more steps, then climbed stairs to a landing, made a turn and climbed again. Several more turns, opening of doors, and climbing of stairs, and it began to fade into obscurity. I don't even know if we were in large rooms or in corridors. We did stay inside the building, however, because I never detected the opening of outer doors and the resulting Arctic weather.

We finally reached our destination when the soldiers opened a door, pushed me through it, and pulled me to a stop. They released their grips on my arms and just left me standing there. I heard the sound of a door closing, so after couple of minutes waiting, I began to pick at the tape covering my eyes. I pulled it off and found myself standing in what appeared to be a doctor's office. There was a small desk next to one wall, and an examination table near the opposite wall. Several shelves were attached to the wall between them that were covered with medical equipment and supplies. A small stool stood near the table and a straight chair was beside the desk.

Like the helicopter, the room was clean, but it was not nearly as organized and well equipped as an American doctor's office would be. The desk was cluttered with papers and books, all, of course, written in Russian. I didn't have a chance to give the room a closer look because the door

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opened and a small man wearing a white smock entered. He appeared to be in his fifties or sixties, about 5'5" or so, fairly thin, with thin brown hair, a bushy moustache, and dark, deep-set eyes. He seemed somewhat stoop-shouldered and sunken chested. He reminded me of a combination of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.

Behind him entered the same two soldiers who had escorted me from my cell. Both were carrying weapons at the ready position. They came into the room, went to a corner and stood at parade rest.

The doctor – I assumed he was a doctor – began to speak and to my surprise, in English. Admittedly, it was slow, halting English with a thick Russian accent, but I could understand his words.

“Remove clothing, please.”

I knew what he said, but his instructions caught me by surprise. “Huh?”

He repeated, “Remove all clothing now, please.”

“Yes, sir,” I replied, and began to unzip my parka. I removed it, unzipped my flight suit and pulled it from my shoulders. I sat down on the stool, unzipped my boots and removed them. As I took off something, the Russian sergeant would take it, search any pockets attached, remove the contents and lay them on the desk. He would then lay the article of clothing in a pile in one corner of the room. In a few minutes, I was wearing nothing but my underwear. Reluctant to remove it and be completely defenseless, I stood there for several seconds, feeling extremely self-conscious. The doctor became impatient.

“Remove, also,” he snapped.

Rather than draw the attention of the soldiers and their rifles, I slowly pulled the shorts down, let them fall to the

floor, and kicked them over to the sergeant. I stood there completely naked and helpless.

The doctor motioned to the examination table. "Sit there, please."

I knew that his use of "please" was not necessarily polite, but an emphasis of an order.

I lifted myself to the table and sat there. The doctor started at the top of my head and examined virtually every inch of my body, making notes in a small notebook as he saw something that he considered significant. He made me open my mouth, examined my teeth, which are all there and in perfect condition, and looked down my throat. He made me tilt my head back, looked up my nose, and then examined my ears. He went to his desk, shuffled the papers around, found a stethoscope, came back to me, jammed the instrument against my chest, and listened to my heartbeat, which was probably considerably high. When he was satisfied that I had a heart, he told me to lie on my back while he prodded and jabbed my stomach and lower abdomen. His hands were as icy as the stethoscope and I cringed each time he touched me. It was also very cold in the room, made even colder by the fact that I had no clothes on at all. He even carefully examined my genital area, constantly making notes.

He ordered me to stand on the floor again, then turned me around and pushed me into a bending position. It is bad enough to be examined by a doctor under any circumstances, but to have a rectal examination performed in front of witnesses is almost too much to bear. I suspected that it was part of the process to lower my resistance to interrogation, so I gathered all the resolve I could muster, trying to avoid showing any embarrassment.

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Finally, he completed his examination. He motioned to the soldiers, and the taller one left the room for a few minutes. The doctor turned to his desk and began to sift through the personal effects that had been removed from my pockets. After he had separated them, he looked at me again and asked, "Where is your wristwatch? I know that all American GIs wear wristwatches."

I almost lost control when he asked the question. I managed to answer calmly, "I don't."

"Why not?"

"I just don't like them. Besides, they tear up on my arm."

He came back to me, grabbed my arm and examined my wrist carefully. When he saw no marks on my left arm, he checked the right one, and again found no trace of a wristwatch. I wondered why he thought all Americans wore watches.

"Maybe you are telling the truth. I have pictures of Americans soldiers in Viet Nam and all wear watches."

Well, that answered that. "Not all Americans are alike, just as all Russians are not alike," I said.

"May be true. If you try to hide something, it will bring punishment."

I didn't know what to say about that. Now I was more determined than ever to hang onto the watch as long as I could.

I sat on the table for a few more minutes as the doctor wrote his notes. The soldier who had left the room came back carrying what appeared to be a uniform of some type. He handed it to me and motioned for me to put it on. I jumped down from the table, took the clothes and separated them and looked them over. There were one pair of pants that looked to be too large, a heavy brown, woolen shirt, and

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a pair of heavy black socks. No shoes or underwear, just dull colored prison apparel.

I held up the pants, shook them out and stepped into them. As I suspected, they were several inches too big around the middle, and there was no belt to use with them. When I tried to put the shirt on, the pants fell around my knees and the Russians in the room thought that was the most hilarious thing that they had ever witnessed. I left the pants hanging as I buttoned the shirt, then as calmly as possible, I pulled them back up, leaned against the table to put on the socks, then stood up and held the pants up with one hand.

I tried my best to cover the boiling anger that I was feeling inside. I knew that if I allowed my temper to explode, I would be immediately attacked and possibly severely injured, and I wouldn't be able to do anything to prevent it, since they had the weapons. Another part of our survival training stressed keeping your emotions under control. If they think they have found a weak spot, they will exploit it to the maximum.

That point was driven home in an incident that happened while I was in the interrogation phase of the survival training. There were several guys from my airborne training class that were sent to survival school together, one of whom was named Weiner, pronounced WINE-er. As I was being led from one place to another, I heard the voice of Weiner and his interrogator coming from somewhere close. The interrogator was calling him WEEN-er, which Weiner was loudly trying to correct, which brought even louder calls of WEENER, WEENER, WEENER, until the poor man apparently cracked completely and began to weep uncontrollably. Even though it was a training situation, the

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instructor had found a weak point and was using it to his advantage.

The Russian sergeant looked around the room, located his roll of tape, tore a strip from the roll, and put it across my eyes. I wondered again just what they were trying to hide, or was this just another method to keep me helpless as they led me around? Whatever their reasons, their methods were most effective.

The two soldiers positioned themselves on each side of me and led me back to the cell. When I was shoved back into the room, one of them picked a corner of the tape over my eyes, developed a place to grasp it, then yanked it quickly away. Even though the tape didn't stick very well, it still hurt when it was so roughly ripped off. The sudden pain made me double over and cover my eyes. I groped my way to the cot, sat down and waited for the pain to subside. As I sat there, I heard the sound of the cell door being locked.

I wondered what was to come next. They would probably just let me sit there and sweat for a while, something I definitely would not do. Since my clothes had been confiscated, I began to realize just how cold it was in that room. The wool shirt, pants, and socks did very little to retain my body heat, and I could not locate any possible source of warmth in the room. There was no duct outlet for a central heat, or a radiator, or a fireplace.

I picked up one of the wooly blankets on the bed, unfolded it and wrapped it around me. I lay back on the bed and apparently fell asleep because it seemed like only a few minutes before I heard noises outside the cell. I sat up again just as the door came open, and a guard with a rifle came in, followed by another Russian, this one wearing a white cook's apron over his uniform. He was carrying a metal tray,

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very similar to those used in Air Force mess halls, that appeared to have some kind of food on it.

I was very surprised because I fully expected to be deprived of food, a technique known to be used as a psychological weapon by communist interrogators since the Korean War. Regardless of what else they had planned for me, at least I wasn't going to be starved. Then again, after looking at what was on the tray, maybe they were attempting psychological warfare. It appeared to be some kind of meat stew with a small amount of rice on the side. I thought it was rice, but I really wasn't sure. Also on the tray were spoon and a cup. The cup had some kind of liquid that appeared to be weak tea.

The cook handed me the tray as the guard covered me with his weapon. I really didn't know what he was worried about because I wasn't about to try anything. Even if I did manage to get out of the cell and building, I would still be in Siberia, at the beginning of winter, and with no knowledge of the language or the lay of the land. I took the tray and both men backed out of the cell.

I gingerly tasted the food, found it to be at least edible, if not necessarily appealing, and began to eat. I also tried the liquid and it was tea of some kind, tepid, but drinkable. I finished off the meal and sat back to study my situation again.

I had to remember that I was only a passenger on the plane; I had hitched a ride because I needed to go to Japan and this was the only ride available. I could go from Okinawa to Tokyo without too much trouble. I knew that I would be interrogated sooner or later, and the longer they waited, the better chance I had to iron out all the details of the story I would tell. I knew that I was running a great risk by trying to fool them, but I felt that it was worth it.

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A few minutes passed, then the guards came around again to remove the eating utensils. After they left, I looked around the cell again. I stood up, stretched, then went to one of the side walls and began to tap on it. I figured I could contact anyone who might be there and maybe communicate with them. Several taps on the left wall produced no answer, so I went to the right wall and before I had tapped twice, I received a reply. I started to use the grid code message system to see if it were one of my crew members in the other cell.

The grid code system was taught to us in survival school. It arranges the letters of the alphabet into a five by five matrix and assigns number to the rows and columns. By tapping on a wall, a pipe, or other hard surface, messages can be passed back and forth right under the noses of anyone who doesn't know the code. The grid looks like this:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1 | A | B | D | E | F |
| 2 | G | H | I | J | K |
| 3 | L | M | N | O | P |
| 4 | Q | R | S | T | U |
| 5 | V | W | X | Y | Z |

To send the letter “A”, the user taps once, pauses for a split second, then taps once again. “G” would be two quick taps, short pause, and one tap. “O” would be three taps, pause, four taps. Longer pauses would be between letters, and still longer taps between words. Notice that the letter “C” is missing. It can be replaced by either “K” or “S.”

When I received a response to my first taps, I quickly signaled, “Who U?” and received the reply, “Williams. U?”

I sent “Rogers, they talk U yet?”

“Only doctor, U?”

“R”

Willie would know that the “R” meant Roger, only the doctor. One of the techniques required by this system is the use of abbreviations whenever possible, as well as ignoring proper grammar. The system is slow, but in a prison, a man has plenty of time. With a little practice, he can gain considerable proficiency.

Willie and I “talked” to each other for a while, sharing similar experiences in the room with the doctor, being given the Russian clothes; in his case, the clothes were too small. We discussed the meal that we had been given, and speculated a little about what we might expect at the hands of our captors.

After about half an hour or so, I told Willie that my knuckles were about to crack; he felt the same, so we stopped rapping. I went back to the bunk, rolled up into the blankets – with my clothes still on – and went to sleep.

I awoke in total darkness sometime later. I felt around for the hole where my watch was stowed, stuck my finger in and pulled the watch out. The hands and numbers glow in the dark, so I could tell the time; it showed a few minutes

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after seven, so I mentally tried to convert Omaha time into Anadyr' time. Add about six hours, plus one day – that would make it a little after one in the morning. I decided to try to continue sleep until someone interrupted me.

Several hours of rolling and turning, trying to get comfortable, thinking of home and Lois and the boys, trying to sleep, alternating between almost panic and total calm, and thinking of what might be in store for me were punctuated by periods of fitful sleep filled with crazy dreams. I saw the body of Chuck Vines, his crushed head turned grotesquely to one side, lying on the bottom of the ocean. I didn't understand why he was in the water because he had been on the plane when it was destroyed. He suddenly turned his head, looking at me accusingly, as if I had been the cause of his death, then his face gradually became my own face. I awoke from that one in a cold sweat, not really wanting to go back to sleep. However, I almost immediately found myself dreaming again, this time about an unknown number of MiG aircraft chasing our plane through forests of large trees, firing air-to-air missiles one right after the other, somehow missing every time.

Suddenly the light bulb in the cell came on, and I tried to open my eyes, realizing that I had been sleeping restfully for 30 or 40 minutes, not nearly enough to be satisfied. I lay there for several minutes, almost going back to sleep, when the door was opened and a guard and a cook came in. The cook handed me a tray then both men departed.

There were a piece of bread, and egg still in the shell, and a chunk of what appeared to be cheese on the tray, along with a cup of steaming liquid. I sniffed the cheese and it almost took my nose off, but I am a cheese lover. I tried a small taste and found it quite good. I cracked the egg, found it to be soft boiled, and used the bread to dip the uncooked

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yolk. I ate the entire meal, then sipped the hot liquid, which was again some kind of bitter tea. It wasn't too bad, and it was hot. I put the utensils together and waited for the guards to come back.

This time, however, four guards came into the cell. Two of them removed the tray and the other two were there to lead me to somewhere else in the building. They didn't cover my eyes with tape this time, but they did put some kind of cloth bag over my head. They led me down several hallways, around a number of corners, and through a few doors until we entered a room. The guards led me to a chair, pushed me to a sitting position, and left the room.

I removed the bag from my head and found that I was in a small office of some kind, an almost bare room with nothing more than a desk and two chairs, one a typical executive office chair behind the desk and the other, a straight back, wooden chair somewhat like a kitchen chair in front. The desk was little more than a box made of wood, but it would serve its purpose, that being to provide a barrier between the two people sitting on opposite sides. There was a wood name plate with Russian letters sitting near the front edge of the desk.

The room was lighted by a small single bulb with no cover in the center of the ceiling. The walls and ceiling were painted a dull off-white, except for the lower third, which was a soft green. Three pictures hung on the wall behind the desk; Lenin, Stalin, and Brezhnev. There were no windows and only the one door. It was obviously the office of the base commander, or of some other high ranking officer.

I heard voices outside the door which was suddenly opened. Two Russians entered the room; one of them was the officer who had been on the helicopter, the other was a younger man, about 30 or so, very sharp in his winter dress

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uniform. The officer was carrying a folder with some papers in it and the other man carried an AK-47. He went to one corner of the room and assumed the parade rest position with the weapon across his chest, butt at the lower right, barrel upper left.

The officer went to the desk, sat on the front edge, and opened the folder. He studied the contents for a few seconds, and then spoke excellent English with only a slight accent.

“You are Sergeant Jerry D. Rogers?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What is your service number?”

“252-99-0366.”

“So, Sergeant Rogers, have your accommodations been satisfactory?”

The question caught me somewhat off guard. I hesitated for several seconds before answering. “Actually, sir, better than I expected.”

“Did you rest well?”

“No, sir, not really. I woke up several times wondering where I was.”

“That is understandable. Were your meals sufficient?”

“Yes, sir, they were OK.”

“Good. I need to ask you a few questions in order to expedite your return to your country. I expect you to provide truthful answers.”

Again I was caught by surprise. They planned to send us home! I suddenly became wary. This did not agree with what I had been taught about Russian interrogation.

“I am Colonel Vassily Yevkovitch, Sergeant Rogers. I am the commander of this military installation and you are not technically a prisoner. You were rescued from a downed aircraft that was flying in Soviet airspace. You are not bound by the normal rules of war to give only your name, rank,

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serial number, and date of birth so I expect your cooperation.”

“I must respectfully disagree with you, sir. We were shot down by one of your fighters, and as far as I know, we were over international waters. You then intercepted our efforts to direct one of our own helicopters to our position and forcibly arrested us.

“That is not for you to say. You were flying in Soviet airspace, conducting illegal espionage activities, when your aircraft became disabled and you crash landed on the ice. Our forces joined your rescue efforts and we were the first to reach you. Remember, you are not a prisoner, but if you insist on contradicting me, you will be treated like one. Now, why were you flying so low in the Gulf of Anadyr?”

I tried to keep my voice steady. “Where, sir?”

“Don’t try to evade me Sgt Rogers. You know very well where I mean. Why was your aircraft flying in the Gulf, directly toward the city of Anadyr?”

“I didn’t have anything to do with flying the plane, sir. I was just a passenger. In our Air Force only commissioned officers are allowed to be pilots or navigators.”

“I am aware of that, Sgt Rogers. However, I am sure that you were very much aware of your location and reason for being there.”

“No, sir, I wasn’t.” I was not telling the truth but I was sure that he had no way of knowing that.

“Then why were you on an aircraft that was conducting a mission inside Soviet airspace?”

“I didn’t know it was in Soviet airspace, sir.”

“Regardless, why were you aboard?”

“I was just hitching a ride, sir. I needed to be in Japan by the first of December.”

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His eyes narrowed as he peered at me intently. Maybe he is buying my story, I thought. Suddenly, he slammed his palm against the top of the desk. "I do not believe you, Sgt Rogers. Your Air Force does not permit just anyone to ride on their reconnaissance aircraft. You were engaged in espionage activities, and I want to know what you were doing!"

"Sir, I don't know anything about any recon aircraft. I told you I was just a passenger."

A very faint trace of uncertainty seemed to cross his face, but maybe it was just my imagination. I was trying desperately to keep my voice steady and my expression totally blank. He apparently decided to change tactics.

"Why was the aircraft flying in our airspace?"

"I told you, sir. I don't know anything about that."

"Maybe you don't and maybe you do. However, we will determine that later."

He snapped orders in Russian and the guard picked up the bag and placed it over my head again. He took my arm, pulled me up, and led me out of the door where another guard took my other arm. They led me back to the cell, pushed me in, removed the bag and closed the door. Apparently Colonel Yevkovitch had accomplished all he wanted with me at this time, or he decided to try someone else.

I sat down on the bed, took several deep breaths, and thought, well, that wasn't too bad. Maybe they will turn us loose pretty soon. The main thing I began to be concerned about was the possibility of one of our crew breaking down and confessing to whatever the Russians wanted to know. Regardless, I was determined to take whatever they could do to me, short of outright physical torture, before I would crack.

Since I had only been in the colonel's office for a few minutes, I figured it would be a while before my lunch would be brought, so I went to the wall to try to check on Willie. After several taps I realized that he wasn't there to answer me. It was probably his turn in the interrogation room.

Just for the sake of checking, I went to the other wall and tapped a few times. To my surprise I heard a tapping reply.

"Who U?" I quickly signaled.

"Jones. U?"

I told him who I was and we each informed the other of our recent developments. Greg said that he had been singled out for intensive interrogation and had been questioned for several hours yesterday evening. Colonel Yevkovitch had hammered at him to sign a confession of conducting espionage in Soviet airspace. So far, he had managed to avoid giving any useable information or signing, even though several times he had tried to trick him into showing his knowledge of the language.

I told him of the short session that I had, and that I tried to convince the colonel that I had been only a passenger. Greg advised me that it might work, if I just stuck with it. I asked him who, if anybody, was on the other side of him, and he told me that it was Harold Miller. I told him about Willie's being on the other side of me, so we now knew where the four of us from our group were. We still didn't know if any others of the crew had been caught.

Since the tapping method is so slow, the exchange had taken the better part of an hour, plus both out hands were getting sore from the knocking so we signed off until later. I had nothing else to do, so I settled back on the bunk to await whatever the Russians were going to throw at me.

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It proved to take a lot more time to arrive than I expected. The only activity that broke the monotony of the next few days was the regular arrival of the meals, and they were monotonous, themselves. I wondered if the Russian soldiers were being required to eat the same kind of food. If they were, it would be easy to understand why morale and discipline in the ranks would be so low.

Even communications through the walls with the other guys became boring, to say nothing about rough on the knuckles. We dropped off so much that on the third day of sitting in the cells, we only established contact in the morning and didn't "talk" again until the next morning.

When the monotony was broken, it was with a vengeance. After the morning meal on the fourth day, the guards came in with their rifles and head cover and led me to a session of interrogation that I will never forget.

It began basically the same as the other, except that Colonel Yevkovitch was already waiting in the room. As soon as I was sitting in the chair and the bag had been removed, he began his questioning pleasantly.

"Well, Sgt Rogers, we meet again. I trust you have been treated well for the past four days."

"Considering the circumstances, I shouldn't complain. The sanitation could be better, I suppose. And I haven't been allowed to clean up since I have been here."

I rubbed the five day old stubble accumulating on my chin.

"This is the best that can be done, Sgt Rogers. We could not allow you to move freely about because this is a military facility. The cells in which you and your comrades must be kept are normally used to keep our disobedient soldiers."

"You could at least allow us to use a shower or a proper latrine. Surely we couldn't see anything from inside a

shower, and you have kept my head or eyes covered anytime I was moved from the cell.”

“I’ll make a note of that. Perhaps you are right; we have been somewhat inconsiderate.

“Now let us get down to more serious business. I need some personal information from you. When you were examined and searched, we found two different sets of identification among your possessions. You are Technical Sergeant Jerry D. Rogers, are you not?”

“Yes, sir, that is correct.”

“Then who is Airman Charles T. Vines?”

“He was one of the other guys on the plane. He was killed when we crashed on the ice. I took his personal things so I could send them to his family if and when I get back home.”

“What was his purpose on the aircraft?”

“I don’t know, sir. We didn’t talk very much.”

“Was he merely a passenger as you claim to be?”

“He could have been. I don’t know what he was doing.”

“You were a passenger on an American spy plane, yet you don’t know what the other men were doing?”

“I didn’t even know that it was a spy plane. I didn’t see any spies on board.”

“Don’t be foolish with me, Sgt Rogers. I can make life most unpleasant for you.”

“I am sure you can, sir, but I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“Very well, we will go to another subject. Which base did you come from?”

“Offutt Air Force Base, sir.”

“That is in Nebraska, and is the headquarters for your Strategic Air Command, is it not?”

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I knew that I was getting on shaky ground, but I figured that he already knew the answers, so I responded in the positive.

“And to which unit were you assigned?”

I hesitated on that one. I didn't want to tell him that I was part of an airborne recon unit, but I didn't know much about any of the other outfits there at Offutt. I had heard of the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, and I certainly didn't want to admit to being assigned to that one.

“I don't think I should answer that, sir. You don't need that information to send me home.”

“I will determine which information I need.” His mood began to turn a little nasty. I didn't want to upset him too much, but I didn't want to give him anything useful, either. If I told him which unit I was assigned to, it would confirm the location of a military operation.

“I still don't think I should answer at this time, sir.”

“Then to which unit were the other men assigned?”

“I don't know that.”

“I think you do. However, it is not important. Why did you destroy the aircraft after you crash landed on the ice?”

“Sir, the aircraft commander did that. I didn't have anything to do with it.”

“How was it done?”

“I guess it had something built in. We were all told to get away, and a few minutes later, the plane just blew up.”

“If it was not engaged in reconnaissance, why was it necessary to destroy it, then attempt to leave the area?”

“That's not for me to say. All I know is that I was trying to get to Japan, and your fighter shot us down. Whatever happened after that, I was just following orders.”

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Colonel Yevkovitch stood up, leaned over the desk, his eyes narrowed and he spoke through clenched teeth with a voice almost hissing like vicious snake.

“You are lying with every word you speak, Sgt Rogers. I know for a fact that you were trained in International Morse Code radio procedures and have been intercepting our communications since you arrived at your first duty station.”

The hair on my neck began to stand up as a chill surged over me. Someone had completely spilled everything he knew and now I was in trouble for it. As I sat there trying to figure out what to do next, he opened the folder of papers, removed several sheets and showed them to me. Clipped to the top sheet was a small passport type photograph of me. The papers were all written in Russian, but I was smart enough to recognize a dossier of an intelligence agent when I saw one.

I had heard rumors for years that the Soviets had agents in place near all of our overseas bases, just waiting for the chance to extract information from some unsuspecting operator, but I had no idea that it went deep enough to gather information about specific individuals. There had even been talk that just such dossiers were being compiled about all of us, but I had passed it off as just scuttlebutt. As nothing more than an enlisted man, going to work in an operations building, I had no idea that I was important enough for an agent to gather personal information about me.

“What do have to say about that, Sgt Rogers?”

He virtually bristled with hostility, and was almost shaking the papers in my face.

I tried to keep my voice from breaking as I answered, “I don’t have anything to say about it. I can’t read your language, so I really don’t know what it says.”

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“Very well. I will read it for you. This is a complete history of you from the time you were selected for training and assignment to your U. S. Air Force Security Service. You received training in International Morse Code, radio and communications procedures at Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi. You were then transferred to the 6911 Radio Group Mobile in Darmstadt, Germany, where you served three years. You met and married your wife there. While you were there, you engaged in illegal monitoring and copying of the Morse communications of the Soviet Air Forces. When your assignment ended, you were sent back to Keesler to be an instructor, and after three years, you went back to Germany. Following that, you volunteered to join the Airborne Reconnaissance program and were selected for the specialized training at Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas. You were then sent to the 6988th Security Squadron at Yokota Air Base near Tokyo, Japan, where you spent three years. During that time, you made several temporary duty trips to Osan Air Base in Korea. When that assignment was completed, you transferred to Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. So you see, Sgt Rogers, I know virtually everything about your military career and your involvement with your country’s espionage activities.”

My thoughts were racing out of control. Where had he gotten his information? Were there really Russian spies everywhere? The rumors were true, and all the training propaganda that we had been given about being aware of possible agents wasn’t just nonsense. They really were everywhere.

“As a matter of fact, I have similar information about the rest of your crew, and it appears that we have it on every member of your Security Service. However, this is the first time that we have had the opportunity to use any of it. As

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soon as we can arrange transportation, you and your crew will be sent to Moscow and will be tried under Soviet law as spies. We have the necessary evidence to convict all of you and sentence you to prison for many years, and maybe enough to justify your execution.”

Colonel Yevkovitch stood up, closed the folder, snapped orders in Russian, and left the room. The guards came in, put the bag over my head and led me back to the cell.

During the Cold War, the U. S. conducted airborne communications reconnaissance flights near the Russian coastline. This book is a novel about one of those aircraft, which was brought down by Soviet fighters, with part of the crew being captured and interrogated, and then escaping.

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