

Deadly action on the high seas against ruthless remnants of WWII

## **Florida Straights**

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## **Prologue**

South Atlantic Ocean  
Early January 1945  
41°-56' South Latitude  
64°-37' West Longitude

The U-boat stood two thousand yards off-shore in total darkness, with only the conning tower surfaced, a signalman manning the hooded light device and two officers topside, both looking intently shoreward through binoculars, searching the horizon for a signal.

The boat was one of the newest diesel-electric prototype breathers, the “snorkel”, launched in early 1944 before the subs were destroyed by the blockbuster bombs that had been falling from the B29’s ever increasingly.

This true U-boat had crossed the Atlantic, mostly submerged, cruising at periscope depth, at night, using diesel engine power while submerged, and during daylight hours, the U-boat operated on the newest electric engine mode, almost always submerged and very quiet.

They had been running for twenty-two consecutive days, on a mission of the greatest urgency for the Third Reich. This one would cripple the Allies if it could be implemented soon enough and if Germany could survive at war for just one more year.

Then, with the powerful new weapons being developed, and for the Allies, the most adverse economic chaos of this latest venture would be enough to bring Germany to certain victory.

A faint red signal appeared low on the horizon. Someone was signaling from the rocky beach near the mouth of a river, far from any population center. Even the smallest village was a long distance away. This was the ideal place to hide from prying eyes

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and curious peasants. The great overhanging trees would shield the submarine from the daytime sun and any chance observation from the sky.

They had done it! The boat surfaced and using a hooded low-intensity searchlight on its bow, moved into the estuary, making almost no sound, slow and deliberate, until it disappeared under the dense vegetation around the river mouth.

## **Chapter 1**

### **NORTH KOREA EAST OF THE CHOSEN RESERVOIR MID-JANUARY 1952**

“Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! I’ve been hit. This is Thresher Five. Out of control...going down...can anyone see me. I’m out of control...I’m going down. Can anyone see my position? I have several wounded on board. We are going to need help. Anybody read me? Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!”

The call was from a helicopter that was on the biggest rescue mission of the Korean War. The pilot, Rex Bell, was trying to stabilize a rotary wing aircraft spinning out of control. The ship had taken fire from a strafing Mig while picking up survivors from an entrapped land force. Then, as the chopper lifted off, ground fire hit the stabilizer tail rotor, causing it to fail, and the chopper spun out of control.

The trapped army, over twenty thousand men, had little chance of survival until the big breakthrough that was launched by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armor Division, U.S. Army, in a daring advance, against incredible odds. The only thing that would work with such an imbalance of firepower was surprise. The U.S. forces were engaged in a massive counter attack and rescue mission in retaliation for the Chinese sending 200,000 troops across the border, openly entering the war.

Mid-winter in the northern part of the Korean Peninsula was extremely hostile, to say nothing of the rugged terrain that was less than hospitable. The Americans and South Koreans had been surrounded, cut off to the east and south by a much superior force, with the Chosen Reservoir and Manchuria at their backs, offering no place to retreat. They had been out of food for five days and

had very little ammunition left. They were freezing and starving, and in no condition to offer much more resistance to the Red Chinese Army. It had seemed hopeless.

The big surprise to the United Nations forces, mostly American and South Korean, was when the Chinese Red army crossed the Yalu River from Manchuria. That was not supposed to happen, the American politicians said so. The Chinese were protecting their own border, the American Army was told, not massed there for attack.

The pilot managed to get his damaged craft back to earth, but the main rotor struck a rock outcropping on landing and the aircraft flipped over onto its side. Two crew members climbed out and took up defensive positions with Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs) to protect the aircraft, while the pilot and some walking wounded helped the more seriously disabled out of the smoldering wreckage.

“Roger, Thresher Five, we have you spotted. Hang on. We’re coming to get you.”

The new voice called to another pilot. “Jackie, can you cover me? I’m going to get those people out of there or they will be slaughtered.”

“Ah, Roger, we can cover you both. I have some help here. We will hold them off, but you had better be quick. I can see plenty of goons down there. We’ll give them a few camp fires to help keep them warm.” He was referring to phosphorous magnesium rockets that made fires of intense heat and burned through anything when they exploded, sending hundreds of deadly fragments into a one hundred-foot radius.

The two defending ships immediately launched a barrage of those deadly incendiary rockets at the advancing Chinese troops. The Chinese and North Koreans hated phosphorous-magnesium, ordinance. If even a small spec of it got on you, it burned a hole all the way through. You could not stop a fire like that by rolling in

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the snow. It was an effective deterrent but not enough to stop such superior numbers.

When the rescue chopper landed close to the wreckage of Thresher Five, Captain Rex Bell, its pilot, carried several of the critically disabled men from the wreck to the waiting rescue ship. Some of the ambulatory survivors ran to it and climbed in on their own. The ground fire from the Chinese increased as the enemy advanced around the fires toward the wreckage. There was very little time left. As Rex deposited the last man into the cabin, automatic-weapons fire opened up from a new position.

The Chinese had encircled the crash site, and were advancing with all the firepower they had. American gunners were trying to hold them off, but they were grossly outnumbered.

As Captain Bell sprinted to the waiting aircraft, several rounds ricocheted off the skids and armor of the chopper. It was just lifting off as he hoisted himself aboard and the projectiles pierced the Plexiglas on the observation ports. He made it, but was covered with blood. Friendly hands dragged him into the confines of the cabin. At that instant the crashed helicopter burst into flames, then exploded into a giant fireball, the shock waves rocking the rescue helicopter dangerously. Aviation fuel and the remainder of the explosive munitions that were still on board produced some intense thermal activity. They could actually feel the heat inside the ascending helicopter, even though they were now better than one hundred feet from the ground.

It was discovered that Captain Bell had been hit in the left thigh and the lower left arm. He was fortunate that they were headed for a field hospital, because he was bleeding profusely, and seriously wounded.

## Chapter 2

### FIELD HOSPITAL WONSAN SOUTH KOREA MASSACHUSETTS 110<sup>th</sup> AIR NATIONAL GUARD DETACHMENT OF THE 102<sup>nd</sup> AIRBORNE DIVISION

Rex Bell awoke, feeling very constrained. His left arm was aching, wrapped in a heavy layer of bandages that held the arm to his body, so that he could not move it at all. The arm, beneath the bandages, was in a full plaster cast, wrist to shoulder. He tried to change position until he realized his left leg was in a full cast as well.

As he glanced around at the unfamiliar surroundings, he noticed that the cast was held in mid-air by pulleys and ropes. The leg was elevated for some reason. His head throbbed, and it too was wrapped in bandages. He could see all right, but everything hurt, especially the leg pointed upward like a cannon.

His first sounds were a groan, then a grunt. A corpsman suddenly appeared next to his bed. "Welcome back to the living, Captain Bell. Do you know where you are?"

"Wash thish place? I'm in hoshpidal?" He sounded drunk. Must be drugged he thought.

"Yes sir. You're going to be evacuated to Japan in a few hours. Then you're going home. You got shot yesterday. But you are going to be okay. You're doing just fine. Lost some blood, but they brought you here in time. One bullet grazed your left femur. It took a chunk of bone with it but you were lucky. It did not go through, just chipped it. The surgeons were able to remove all the fragments, so it will begin healing immediately. Not so lucky on your arm wound though. That one was a clean break. Some bone splintering, but the surgeons got it all out and you will have full use of the arm in a couple of months. The leg may take a little

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longer. Would you like something to drink?"

"Gotanythin' for pain?" he slurred. "I am hurttin' all over."

"Yes, sir. It's time for your painkiller shot. I'll get you some juice and ice water too. It will be chow call in another hour, but I can get you something to eat now if you like."

"No. Jus' juice an painkill...Tha's all." With that, Rex lapsed back to a dream sleep.

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In his dream he was back at the front in Europe, during WW II, at a small advance airbase with sod runways, near the Belgium-German border. Memories of old passed through his half dream-state mind, flashbacks of a time long past.

He was the pilot of a small single engine observation plane in that war, a glorified kite that flew over enemy positions and called in artillery fire for the advancing U.S. Army. It was a risky job, flying a slow-moving aircraft at low altitudes, over enemy territory. He flew too low to take anti aircraft fire, but there was plenty of small arms fire and enemy gunners trying to knock him out of the sky. He was lucky in that action. He never even got a scratch.

When the war began on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941, he was a student at Boston University. He had been granted a scholarship there due to his exceptional achievements in math and physics in high school. He had been a fullback on the high school varsity football team and was encouraged, due to his long legs and broad shoulders, to try out for rowing at Boston University. After intense training he earned a seat on the varsity heavyweight crew. In his sophomore year, at age twenty-one he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force;



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that was in late January 1942.

Rex had a rugged but handsome face. Standing six foot two inches in his bare feet, carrying two hundred ten pounds of lean muscle, he looked even taller. His blond hair and hazel eyes attracted many female glances. His square features and crew cut, along with naturally broad shoulders, gave him the image of an athlete, which he most certainly was.

He was an Adonis, but innocently unaware at that age, of his very strong sex appeal to the ladies. In summers he sported a golden bronze tan that was the envy of men and women alike. The tan and the blond hair gave him a special glow that made him a standout in a crowd.

He dated randomly through high school and his first year of college, but never had any serious feelings for a particular female. He studied and partied like many of the students, did well in his scholastic pursuits and was eagerly accepted into the service. They loved the college boys in the U.S. Army Air Force. College students had the jump on other recruits, and were rapidly advanced in rank.

Rex went to ground school, then flight school, was commissioned as a second lieutenant, and immediately went to England for advance training as the pilot of an observation aircraft. After flying twenty-five missions as an artillery spotter he was promoted to first lieutenant.

When the war ended he had successfully flown sixty-three missions without a scratch, although he nearly bought the farm when engine failure caused him to land, dead stick, in a farm field in France, where an unseen drainage ditch caused his plane to flip upside-down, on landing. Fortunately he was almost out of gas, which prevented a fire and/or explosion when the plane impacted. He had just walked away from that one, laughing at his escape from the grim reaper.

After discharge from the Air Force, he returned to college at

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Boston University, under the G.I. Bill and earned a degree in Physical Science. He was in his first year of post-graduate studies when he met the woman he would marry. Her name was Nancy Kile.

She was a senior, studying art and literature. She was very popular with men, always had plenty of male attention, which was understandable due to her being very well built, with a toothpaste-ad smile, a scintillating personality and an outgoing, friendly attitude that made people comfortable with her. Dark brown hair, brown sparkling eyes, and an easy manner around men made for her great popularity among the masculine gender and created much jealousy amongst her female acquaintances.

She had the reputation of being “very forward” with men and wearing the most provocative clothing to insure an attentive male audience. This practice was interpreted as ‘loose’, amongst those most jealous of her success with the boys.

She met Rex at the final rowing regatta of the season, that Labor Day weekend, 1949, just after his crew won a very important race against archrival, Boston College.

The crew had been asked to pose for pictures for the newspapers, and after the photo shoot, a very alluring young woman walked up to Rex and asked, “How about taking me out for a drink or something after you get dressed. That is if you’re not doing anything or don’t have a date. My name is Nancy Kile, by the way. I know who you are, Rex Bell. That was a fantastic race. Congratulations.”

Rex was flabbergasted. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. A very attractive female had just walked up to him, in front of many other oarsmen and asked him to take her out and he did not even know her. This was an all- time first, and he was very flattered.

She was petite, with a golden, olive-skin complexion, probably five foot four inches, and about one hundred ten pounds, he

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estimated. Voluptuous, overly so for her size, but otherwise trim, with a slender torso, small girth, and a perfectly formed fanny. She had mischievous eyes, fluttering eyelashes, and a sensual mouth.

“Okay, Nancy,” Rex replied, nervously. “Would you like to meet me someplace or will you wait ‘til I get showered and dressed?” He was still not too sure she really meant it, about him taking her out.

“I’ll just wait on you,” she said. “There is one more race, and I want to see that one too. I’ll be right here, big fella. Right in this place. Come and find me when you are ready. Okay?”

“Sure thing.” He hurried off to the dressing room, looking back once to make sure he wasn’t dreaming.

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They drove in his war-surplus Jeep, completely open to the elements, which were quite pleasant on that particular day. “What do you do when it rains, hold a big umbrella over the top of this thing?” She glanced up at the sky, as if to make sure it was not raining at that moment.

Rex laughed at the mental picture it conjured and replied. “Well, I do just like they do in China, when it rains. I just let it rain.” She laughed at the tired old joke. “Seriously,” he said in a serious tone, “I do have a canvas top that fits on this thing, but it hardly keeps you dry in a rainstorm, so I just leave it off until the cold weather comes. Then I put it back on, although it hardly makes any difference. You can’t keep one of these things warm in winter. I don’t drive it then. I have an old pick-up truck my dad gave me for winter. It even has a heater.”

They turned into the parking lot of an open-air market arcade

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along the Back Bay, where Rex parked the Jeep. Nancy scooted out on his side and caught his hand in hers, walking along, arms entwined like lovers. He was still having difficulty believing what was happening.

“Do you like seafood?” he asked, as they strolled towards a building that had an attached pier built out over the water. “This place has the best clams and oysters in town. Are you game or squeamish?”

“Oh, no. I love shellfish. I love anything that comes from the sea,” waving her arm toward the waterfront. “I’m a native of these parts, I’ll have you know. Take me to it.”

They sat at a raw bar, and feasted on clams, shrimp and oysters. Nancy went through some amusing antics while eating the shellfish, holding the opened half-shell up above her lips, head tilted back, like she was going to gargle, then with loud slurping noises, sucked the morsels from their shells. It was very exaggerated, and even sensual, all to keep Rex watching her comic movements. She was funny and he laughed deeply, beaming a broad smile at his newfound interest.

Then Rex ordered lobster rolls for each of them. They had several draft beers, and Rex explained that he never drank during rowing season, but since today had marked the last races of the year, he allowed himself a few beers.

Nancy picked a nickel from the change spread on the counter and walked to the nearby jukebox. In a moment, Lena Horne was singing.

***“I want to be loved. . . with inspiration. . .  
I want to be loved . . .starting tonight . . .”***

Nancy returned to where Rex was sitting and held out her arms. “Dance with me. You do dance, don’t you?”  
Rex nearly picked her up off the floor when he put his arms

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around her. "How did you know my name today, when we met?" he asked.

"Oh, I thought you knew. I used to date Mel Thronton. He was your roommate a few years back. Remember him? I saw you several times when I was out with Mel, but you never seemed to notice lil' ol' me."

"Mel? Sure! I remember good old Mel. I must have had something on my mind to not recall seeing such a very fetching lady."

"Yes, it was Mel who told me about you," she revealed.

"I have a good memory, and when I saw you at the regatta, with your fantastic tan and wonderfully developed body," she flexed her arms in jest, "I thought it was time for us to know each other. Are you glad? Or sorry?"

"Definitely glad." Rex was very flattered at the complement about his body. He actually puffed up a little when she extended the praise.

"Good! Because I really think we're going to hit it off big. I like you Rex Bell." She squeezed him, looked straight into his eyes and smiled her beguiling smile. She is a beauty, he thought to himself. What a find!

"I like you too, you cute lil' ol' you," he mimicked.

They had spent the rest of the day together, enjoying a picnic style dinner in a park near where Rex shared a small apartment with a fellow oarsman named Denny Roland. When it got late, Rex expected to drive her home, but when he mentioned the hour, she interrupted with a sensational idea. "I have a sensational idea," she announced. "Let's just sleep out here tonight. It's nice and warm. Do you live close enough for us to borrow a blanket or two from your place? Maybe even a pillow?"

"Sure," Rex replied. "It's just up the street. Do you think we'll get arrested for vagrancy, sleeping in a public park?"

"Well, I've never done it before but I doubt anybody would

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mind. Besides,” she reasoned, “who is going to turn us in? Some hobos or derelicts who sleep in public parks?”

They arrived at Rex’s apartment just after ten P.M. The place was neat, sparsely furnished and there was nobody home. “Where’s your roommate?” Nancy inquired.

“He went away for a couple of weeks,” was Rex’s reply. “He won’t be back til around the 20<sup>th</sup>, when the next semester starts.”

“I just thought of a fantastic idea,” Nancy blurted out. “Why don’t we just stay here? We will not be bothered by anybody, will we? You’re not expecting any company are you?”

Rex was once again surprised out of his wits. First time he had ever been out with this lady and here she was proposing to stay here overnight. He liked the idea but was not prepared for such a liaison this early in a new relationship, if it was indeed a relationship at all. He managed to stammer an answer that was not what he would have preferred. “I guess Denny would not mind if you slept in his bed.”

“That’s not what I meant,” she exclaimed. “You are not afraid to sleep in the same bed with me are you? A big strong athlete like you should be able to protect himself from a little girl like me, and I promise not to bite,” she teased. “I’m no angel, are you? You’re not still a virgin are you Rex?”

The statement and question were totally unexpected and came as another jolt to him, but she did not give him a chance to reply. She reached her arms around his back and standing on tiptoe kissed him passionately, undulating her pelvis in a manner that left no doubt as to her desires. Rex immediately became aroused and responded, his tongue searching between her lips. Then she reacted by actually sucking his tongue it into her mouth, hungrily, tantalizing him beyond his endurance.

She reached down and rubbed the bulge in his pants, while managing to straddle his leg, actually riding it like it was a horse. She was breathing hard, but not as hard as Rex. He stroked her

breasts, reaching down inside her blouse, then inside her brassier, rubbing a hardened nipple. Passion overwhelmed them both, and in an instant, they were tearing each other's clothing off. As he stood naked she put her hand around his penis, massaging it and asked, "Do you have a safe? I can't get knocked up. You have to use some protection."

Rex did happen to keep a few condoms around, just in case. "Yes, I have rubbers." He led her into his bedroom, flipped on an overhead light, opened the drawer of the nightstand, and rolled a condom onto his erection. Then she pushed him down onto the bed, mounted him and guided his penis into herself. "I like to be on top. It is much better for me this way." Nobody took the time to turn off the bright overhead light.

She undulated rapidly, groaning her pleasure, then kissed him wildly while bouncing to her first orgasmic conclusion. He was just finishing his first when she shrieked her second and third in rapid succession, her wetness spreading over his groin like a flood. She seemed unable to stop, alternately kissing and moaning, then crying out something unintelligible, "One more...Oh, pleaseeease!...one more," it sounded like to Rex.

She rode him through his second orgasm and was still gyrating wildly, only slowing down and collapsing onto his chest after what seemed like her finale'. "Holy cats, Rex, but you gave me some fantastic sensations. Oh, man, I loved it, my wild stallion. God! I'm going to want more. Are you game?"

This woman is insatiable, he thought to himself. What a lucky find for me. "I am if you are," he answered, still panting from the expended physical effort. "You just have to give me a rest once in a while, but I'll be able again in just a few moments. You have a great method for getting me excited." Rex pulled her back onto his chest. "Mount up my lovely, and show me how you can ride a bucking horse."

"Okay, cowboy! Soon as I get mounted up, turn him loose."

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They merged, almost melting into one another, their bodies slick with sweat and the fluids of lovemaking, the scents of past orgasms permeating the atmosphere of the tiny bedroom, inciting them to ever greater lust.

It was a very wild ride indeed, that first union, and the lovemaking was repeated many times during the night, until exhaustion caused them to pause for a period of rest.

It all started over again in the early morning hours, two hungry animals trying to devour each other. They slept till noon, and after one more sexual exchange, they showered, dressed and went out for breakfast.

During one of their moments of relaxation Rex made some off-hand inquiries about her, like where she was originally from, the whereabouts of her family, just enough to prompt her to divulge some not too personal information. Here I am, he thought, totally immersed in this new relationship with this fantastic creature, and I don't even know her.

She was quick to respond, and also had many questions for him. "Well, my mother is dead. She died in 1941 when I was 16 years old. My father tells everyone she died of pneumonia, but it was acute alcohol poisoning. She passed out on our veranda trying to find the keyhole to our front door one night, in a drunken stupor. Nobody discovered her until the next morning, and it was wintertime, with below freezing temperatures, all night long. She just lay there until the milkman found her at five o'clock in the morning.

"It may as well have been called suicide, which it truly was," she added. "She drank herself into an early grave. She and my father were constantly at each other's throats, mostly over his philandering. They never got along once my father got into politics. He used his office to entice many young women into his hotel rooms when he was away from home. We did not find out about all that until later.



“Once I even caught him in our house with some floozy he brought home with him, when my mother was away getting dried out in a private sanatorium. Our lives were peaceful until he was elected as a state senator. Once he had the power of a political office, he went female crazy. If it had a vagina, he was chasing it.

“He’s a lawyer, and lives in upstate New York. Saratoga Springs, to be exact. Has to be there with all the high society phonies. He’s remarried to a person I absolutely detest. She’s not much older than me, just seven years difference between us; she’s nothing but a pure hussy-gold-digger, slut.

“My father sends me money for school and such, out of guilt, but he doesn’t really want me around, because I can see through that female pig he is so enamored by. God! It makes me want to puke, just thinking about her.”

“Sorry.” Rex apologized. “I did not mean to raise demons and skeletons from your family closet. I’m sorry if I made you angry.”

“Oh, no, dear man. I am not angry with you,” she stated, patting him on the cheek. “Just my father, for doing something so stupid. That bitch will take him for every last cent he has, and sooner or later she’ll dump him like a sack of garbage. I think his brain is in his pecker. All she has to offer him is her big tits and a flabby ass, nothing but a sex queen. She doesn’t have a brain in her head or anything else to offer but her body. Just a street-whore-floozy he met. She was a waitress in a restaurant in Albany. That’s where he found his prize.

“He’s deep into politics, where phonies like him belong. Nothing but a big blowhard.” She seemed out of breath after the long tirade. She gave up on the dissertation about the evils of her father and asked him about his family. “What about you? Are your folks still living?”

“Yes.” He gathered his thoughts and began to explain. “They are retired and are quite old; they didn’t marry until they were in their thirties. I came along when my mother was thirty-five. They

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moved out to Arizona for health reasons, in 1940. My mom has rheumatoid arthritis. I was just about to start college on a scholarship, when she was diagnosed. They eventually sold the house and my dad's fishing trawler and moved out to Phoenix. That's the only money they have to live out the rest of their lives.

"I stayed here and lived with an aunt while I went to school. My parents did not have the resources to send me to college, so I was lucky to have the scholarship. Otherwise, I would not have been able to afford Boston U. After the war I had the G.I. Bill. That's how I have managed thus far." Rex was holding her close while talking about his past, like she was his childhood teddy bear or favorite blanket.

"My dad was a commercial fisherman and lobster man," Rex continued. "The economics of our lives were a roller coaster ride; feast or famine." He demonstrated the up and down path of a roller coaster ride with his hand. "We lived in Bucksport, Maine. That's my hometown. It's right on Penobscot Bay. I loved the water, did a lot of sailing on a little sailboat that my dad bought for me. I have been a saltwater sailor since I was twelve. I have sailed all over the New England coast in that twenty-six footer. She was nothing fancy but I loved every minute I have ever spent on the ocean. Do you like sailing?"

"Yuk!" She pushed away from him in mock horror, making a face and then smiling in a very beguiling way. She kissed him and snuggled against his body. "I get seasick just talking about boats. Sorry! I was not cut out for any kind of boating activity. The mere thought sends shivers up my spine."

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Two weeks later they moved into a small apartment together, near campus, where they remained until late January of 1950. Then a justice of the peace married them. Rex received a good job offer in Haverhill, Massachusetts, where they rented an apartment near Rex's new employment. He had joined a National Guard unit after his discharge from the Air Force, and was assigned to the 110th Helicopter Squadron of the Massachusetts Air National Guard, a detachment of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, much to his pleasure.

Nancy enrolled in a nearby collage to continue her studies, while Rex brought home the bacon. They seemed happy as larks, bringing into reality every sexual fantasy either of them had ever imagined. They spent most of their free time in bed, exchanging sexual favors, tirelessly.

In June of that year, the Korean War erupted and changed the lives of millions of people forever, including Rex and Nancy Kile Bell.

In September of 1950, President Harry S. Truman, activated many units of the National Guard to support the South Korean Army, and South Korea, both of which had been overrun by the army of the communist regime of North Korea. Rex's unit was among those recalled to active duty.

It did not seem like a serious situation in the beginning, but Red China began a threatening rhetoric and the 'police action' turned into a deadly, full-scale war. The U.S. who had just won "the war to end all wars" was once again defending freedom and democracy for mankind.

When Rex departed for the West Coast, Nancy decided to look for a smaller and less expensive apartment, since she would not need as much space with him gone. She found something "suitable" as she later informed Rex, in one of the few letters she ever sent to him. The letters were mainly about the allotment checks she was to receive from the government, as the spouse of a

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serviceman, while he was on active duty.

He served in the Korean theater for most of his active duty tour. He rarely heard anything from his new bride. Her letters were mostly about her hardships with him gone, her being so busy that she hardly had time to write, "with school and her part-time job and all". She was waiting table at a local bistro on weekends. She said she missed him terribly. She could not wait until he came home, she had informed him. He did not get the true meaning of that statement until sometime much later.

## **Chapter 3**

### **HOSPITAL SHIP USS MERCY CENTRAL PACIFIC EN ROUTE TO SAN DIEGO**

Rex became aware of a white blur next to his bed. He was in a half-dream state from the painkillers and sedation he was receiving. He was still very uncomfortable, having recovered to a point where he was more aware of the pain than when he was first wounded and less conscious of the serious nature of his condition.

“Are you awake Captain Bell?” were the words spoken from the blur. His vision cleared and he realized that the voice was that of a very attractive female nurse, dressed in her hospital whites. There were insignias on her uniform, indicating that she was a major in the U.S. Army. Her next words informed him that she was not a nurse.

“I’m, Major Dorathea Irving. I’m an orthopedic surgeon. You are my patient. I am going to make you better. How are you feeling? Do you think you are up to talking to someone about the mission? They have been waiting until you feel fit enough. Think you can talk about it this morning?”

Rex had to think about ‘it’ for a moment before he answered. “I’m hurting all over, doctor. Am I going to feel like this forever?”

“No, but you were pretty banged up. You will feel better as the days pass. It’s just a matter of time. You’re coming along very well. That in itself is amazing considering your injuries and the condition you were in when you came aboard. In case you did not know it, you are on the hospital ship, USS Mercy. We are heading for San Diego. I think we will arrive there in three more days or so. Have I got you up to speed now, Captain?”

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“Yes Ma’m. I understand what you just said. About the ship. And about somebody wanting to talk to me. I think I can talk okay. Can you understand what I’m saying to you?”

She smiled at the pun, and answered. “A Colonel Williams, from Army Public Relations is the person who would like to speak with you first. It’s about the rescue mission you were on when you were wounded. Do you feel you can talk about it today? If not he will interview you later.”

“I guess. I hope it does not take too long. I’m still woozy.”

“He insists it will not take very long,” Doctor Irving assured him. “Besides, he has plenty of time. You’re not going any place and neither is he, just now.” She winked at him, then added, “I’ll send him in to see you. Don’t go back to sleep right away. Okay?”

“Yes Ma’am. I’ll try to stay awake.”

It was nearly a half hour later that a very stately gentleman officer pulled up a chair and sat beside his bed. Rex looked up and said, “Good morning sir.”

“Good morning, Captain Bell. I’m very happy to meet you. I’m Colonel Williams. I just want to review the events of the rescue mission in which you were a very important participant, last week. You can give me short answers today, but I may want you to elaborate on the action that brought back some people who were just about die or surrender to the Chinese. Later on I will want you to be more specific regarding everything you remember about the mission . . .” the colonel paused and removed a pad and pencil from the briefcase he had brought along, “after you have had a chance to think about the subjects I will discuss with you this morning. Are you feeling well enough to talk about it?”

“I think so, sir.” Rex then made a request. “Would you please raise the head of my bed a little? I can’t see you too well from this angle.” The colonel pressed some buttons on the control bar until he found the correct one to lift Rex upward a little, from horizontal. “I’m not sure that I remember about what happened out

there. It's all like a blur to me," Rex replied. "It was crazy. I have not been clear-headed enough lately to know what really went on. It was a mess, that I know for sure."

"Quite a mess," Colonel Williams agreed. "I am trying to corroborate the testimony of several witnesses who gave first hand accounts of the rescue operation."

Rex interrupted the man, annoyed. "What do you mean testified? Is there some kind of trial going on?"

"No, no. Of course not. I am merely setting the record straight about the events in which you were involved during the rescue mission."

"Just briefly, if you will, Captain, recount to me what you remember about the circumstances of the crash of your helicopter. That would be a good place to start. I know about the number of rescue missions your squadron flew on this operation. I want your personal views as to what happened."

Colonel Williams was a fatherly looking man, probably in his late fifties or early sixties, Rex thought. He had white hair, brown eyes, behind dark rim glasses, a ruddy complexion, overly big nose, like W.C. Field's whisky nose, but with a pleasant, friendly face. He looks too old to be in the service, Rex thought.

"We received orders, my squadron that is, to help with a rescue effort up by the Chosen Reservoir. There were a lot of our guys trapped there when the goons...er, the Chinese Red Army, came across the Yalu River and cut them off. Our ground forces were in the wrong places to set up any immediate counter offensive and those people were stuck there without much food and ammo. There was nobody around to help them out. The Chinese were just massed along the Yalu River to defend their own border', the politicians assured everybody. They were not going to bother us or intervene." Rex was agitated talking about it. "Huh!" he exclaimed, disgustedly. "Two hundred thousand of them did not get that message. How can twenty thousand of our guys fight

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against something like that?”

General Douglas Mac Arthur had chased the North Koreans all the way up to Manchuria, and wanted to cross over into their sanctuary to finish the fight, but President Truman forbade the U.S. forces from crossing over into China. It could have ended there or caused WW III. Nobody wanted to take the chance, except Mac Arthur and the U.S. ground force commanders. But the answer from the president was a very resounding, NO!

Mac Arthur was so frustrated and infuriated with that turn of events that he began a long tedious argument with the President of the United States, which he lost. He was relieved as commander of American forces in Korea, and recalled to the U.S., by President Truman. Mac Arthur was going home as hero or disobedient bad-boy, depending on your point of view.

Rex thought about all of that history for a moment before continuing. “It was bitter cold, way below zero and those poor bastards were surrounded, starving and freezing, trying to hold off a few hundred thousand of the enemy. It had been five days for them, just trying to stay alive in that hostile, godforsaken place.

“We had thirty-five, Sk 72-A, rescue and recon ‘copters in our squadron. There were many other units going in to bring out the survivors. I have no idea of the total involvement, but I saw lots of them.

“We got several wounded out, some of them so cold they were unable to walk. They were first priority. Then the defensive people who were trying in vain to protect what was left of the Americans. Gads! Some of those guys were frozen like ice cubes. They did not even feel anything when the medics stuck pins in their feet. No feeling at all!”

“How did you get shot down?” Colonel Williams inquired. “Can you remember anything about that?”

“I remember that we took strafing fire from a Russian Mig.” Rex stared up at the ceiling, a grim look on his face, recalling the



scene. After a long pause he began again. "There may have been more than one Mig. But I remember seeing one of them swoop down on our position, as we were loading wounded. I had landed and was just getting ready to lift off when the Mig started firing. I think the ship was hit, but I did not know how seriously. When I lifted off she was acting funny, sort of out of control. I could not gain much altitude, and just hovered there for a minute or two trying to get more power out of her. That's when I took some ground fire, automatic weapons, and tracers hitting the stabilizing rotor on the boom. I started to spin out of control. Then we went down and hit something that made the ship turn over on her side. There was lots of smoke.

"My gunners were okay and I was not hurt. We only fell about twenty feet, but the wounded were badly shook up. They were in a pile in the back. So we needed to work fast so somebody did not die under the weight of the other guys on top of them. Most of them were in very bad shape before we reached them, and the crash could have caused many of them further injury.

"Another chopper set down to help us and we carried the wounded guys to the other ship. Somehow we got out. They saved us from being killed, or worse, captured. That's what I remember." Rex seemed very tired, slightly disoriented.

"That's going to be enough for today, Captain," the colonel concluded. "Only one more quick question. Do you know a Sergeant Vincelli?"

"One of our guys from the 110th? I don't recall that name."

"I don't think he was from your squadron," the Colonel remarked. "He thinks you are the luckiest thing that ever happened to him. You carried this big man, 240 pounds, six foot five, in your arms, like he was a little baby. His feet were frozen solid; he could not walk. He lost both of them to extreme frostbite. He says you were like superhuman out there."

"Sorry, colonel. I have no recollection. I don't feel very good

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right now. Can you call a nurse? I think I'm going to be sick!"

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Interviews on the following three days confirmed the whole story about Rex Bell and the rescue missions, that awesome day at the Chosen Reservoir.

He had a chopper shot out from under him, and then under heavy enemy fire, carried no less than twelve severely wounded men from a smoldering wreck, to a waiting rescue ship. He ran like a man possessed, not stopping for anything, while under very heavy automatic weapons fire. His defending gunners were both killed in that skirmish, so he did the physical moving of the survivors alone, unassisted. He had some other protective fire from friendly helicopters, hovering over the rescue site, but they could do no more than slow the enemy onslaught, using rockets and machine guns to retard the progress of the advancing hoard of Chinese troops, who were converging on the scene.

It was an absolutely miraculous feat, and was attested to by no less than ten eyewitnesses in the rescue helicopter. Rex Bell had been commended for bravery above and beyond the call of duty. He was being recommended for the Silver Star Medal, second only to the Medal of Honor, the highest military award ever granted. The people whom he had rescued labeled him another Audie Murphy, the WW II Medal of Honor hero.

Deadly action on the high seas against ruthless remnants of WWII

## **Florida Straits**

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