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## **MISSION: IMPROBABLE**

by Ron Chaffee

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**RON CHAFFEE**

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## Chapter 1

“Otter niner-whiskey-echo, you are cleared to land, runway one-zero. Welcome to Puerto Rico.” Those words were music to the ears for Mike *Maddog* Malone. Coming from the smooth voice of a female air traffic controller with a Spanish accent made him smile even more. He had just piloted his de Havilland DHC-6 twin Otter from Miami.

Over the decades, Maddog had thousands of landings. But this landing at Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport in San Juan was the most important of all. He had left the States and all ties behind him. Maddog was about to embark on his dream of retirement in the Caribbean.

“San Juan ground control, this is Otter niner-whiskey-echo requesting taxi to the Aero del Mar admin building.” Aero del Mar was his first business meeting on the island.

“Otter whiskey-echo, request denied. Please take taxiway Juliet to apron twelve and hold.” A perplexing instruction, he thought.

Per protocol he repeated the tower’s instructions and complied. As Maddog turned his Otter onto Apron 12, ground control radioed, “Otter whiskey-echo, come to a complete stop and shut down your engines.”

This was not a good sign. Maddog responded, “Otter whiskey-echo, stopping and shutting down. Ground control, why am I shutting down here?”

“Otter, just comply with the instructions.” The flashing lights of police cars surrounded his aircraft.

“Otter pilot, please exit your aircraft now.” Maddog loved the accent of the traffic controller. He wondered what she looked like.

He responded, “Otter pilot exiting the aircraft. Thanks for the welcome party.”

As Maddog descended the rear stairs of his aircraft, he was met by a half-dozen men in dark suits and sunglasses. Subtle, he thought. The tall one standing in the middle asked, “Mr. Malone, are there any weapons on your person or in the aircraft?”

“No. Who the hell are you?”

“CIA, Mr. Malone. Raise your hands so we can pat you down to confirm you have no weapons.” Maddog turned, lifting his arms, wondering why his government tracked him to Puerto Rico. Two of the men searched him and were satisfied he spoke the truth. “Mr. Malone, please come with us.”

“What do you want from me?”

“We have some questions. If you cooperate with us, you will be on your way shortly.” They placed Maddog in the middle seat of a black-windowed van and drove to a nearby military hangar. The Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport also served as a military airport for the United States.

The van and other cars pulled into the hangar and the door slid closed behind them. The hangar was mostly empty. It was dark, but enough sunshine filtered through the small high windows to illuminate a few dusty crates,

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tool boxes and some old aircraft parts along one wall. Toward the back was an incandescent light under a green, metal light-shade hanging over an old wooden table with one chair. The furniture looked to be around the 30's or 40's vintage. The tall one gestured to Maddog to sit down, which he did. The other five CIA goons stood around the ensemble with the tall one standing across the table from Maddog. He leaned over, put his hands on the edge of the table, stared at Maddog then demanded, "Mr. Malone, tell us about the explosion that derailed that freight train in Nebraska last week."

"Really? A dark room and a bright light? Sunglasses? You guys are straight from a bad movie."

"Just answer the question, Mr. Malone."

"You can't even get the dark room part right. You should have blacked out those little windows up there."

The interrogator leaned further, pounded his fist on the table and yelled, "Answer the question! What do you know about the derailed freight train?"

"The first I heard about it was on the news. It was a quick bit towards the end of the newscast. The story was hardly worth broadcasting. Why is the CIA so interested in a train derailment?"

"What do you know about the 300 pounds of cocaine seized at the Port of New Jersey?"

"I have never heard about that."

"What do you know about the Russian ambassador's private jet exploding at Teterboro?"

“Listen up, fools! I don’t know jack about whatever you are fishing for. Take your circus to someone else!”

“Mr. Malone, just answer the questions and skip the bullshit.”

Maddog quickly stood up, knocking his chair over and said, “The only bullshit is this questioning. I used to work for the CIA, so I know how this rolls. You’ve got nothing on me or I’d be in handcuffs. I have no idea what your questions are about. I’m going back to my airplane now.”

“Mr. Malone, have you ever served your country?”

“Don’t dick with me. You’re the CIA. You already know I was a captain in the army with an exemplary military record, and that I have two purple hearts, a silver star, a Congressional Medal of Honor and a drawer full of medals for things I’ve done that your pussy-ass would go cry to mama if you were there. The only combat you’ve seen is the target range! You should be embarrassed that you’re asking *ME* these questions. You fools are in Puerto Rico chasing my ass around rather than figuring whatever truth you seek. Now which one of you is giving me a ride back to my plane? And you better stand up and salute this soldier as I leave.” The tall one looked down, shaking his head. He gave the signal to one of the other agents to give the ride. In support of their leader, none of the CIA agents stood as Maddog walked away, but the tall one said one last note: “Maddog, we’re onto you. It’s only a matter of time. The Caribbean isn’t large enough for you to hide.”

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Maddog turned back and spoke sternly, “I’m here to retire, not hide. If you want to find me, just Google *Maddog Airlines*. *Maddog Snorkel Charters*. *Maddog Seaplane Adventures*. *Maddog Beach Resort and Scooter Rentals*. Maddog whatever the hell I end up doing down here!”

Across the airport was the San Juan Grand Hotel & Beach Club. All rooms had mini balconies. The northern facing rooms were prime, as they overlooked the beach and Atlantic Ocean. The southern facing rooms overlooked the airport. On the top floor of southern side, a man sat on his balcony with high-power binoculars aimed toward the airport. He followed the black van to Maddog’s plane and watched him get out. The man’s head was tilted to pinch his cell phone between his chins and his shoulder. As Maddog got back into his airplane, the man said into his cell phone, “He’s here.”



## Chapter 2

Luquillo Beach is approximately 25 miles east of Isla Verde, which is where the airport lies. It is a nice local's beach, but the savvy tourists also know about this gem. It is not the typical white sand beach, but rather a medium to light brown whose granules are finer than most. The water is crystal clear.

In the middle of Luquillo Beach, near the largest parking lot, lies a plethora of beach umbrellas rolled up and stacked together, white plastic lounge chairs stacked tall, racks full of kayaks and paddle-boards, sailboats and a row of jet-skis on trailers.

The sun had just risen, casting palm shadows stretching towards the ocean. Enrique and his helper, Juan, were busy unchaining and unlocking his large inventory of beach and water toys for rent. They spread out dozens of pairs of lounge chairs with an umbrella stuck between each pair, carefully angled toward the morning sun to make the mini-haciendas look inviting and worth the \$10 rental fee. They had launched his fleet of jet skis, tied them all floating together, and anchored them in the mild surf waiting for the first customer. They dragged the kayaks and paddle boards to the water's edge as well as the catamaran sailboats. The rental shack made of 2x4's and plywood was painted bright blue, yellow, red and green to attract attention. It was on wheels so it could be easily hauled from the storage area to be close to his fleet to keep an eye

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on it. Also, by the inventory storage area near the parking lot were two dozen rental scooters chained together.

This was Enrique's business, and he performed this routine for well over 20 years. He splayed out his wares at dawn, then put them all back in their places at sunset. Christmas and Easter were his only days off. He made a good living, but he feared hurricanes. Hurricane Hugo wiped out his entire inventory. He persevered and was able to rebuild his business and inventory over the following year.

Enrique was knee-deep in the water tinkering with a jet-ski when suddenly from behind him, just above the palm trees at the back of the beach, a twin-engine seaplane roared over him, startling the hell out of him as the plane headed out over the ocean. He yelled, cursed and flipped off the airplane. The plane turned left, did a  $\frac{3}{4}$  circle then landed in the ocean parallel to the beach. It then changed course toward the beach where Enrique watched the plane, still standing with a jet-ski lanyard in his hand. He quickly put it back on the ski then walked back to his rental shack and grabbed a large wrench just in case the pilot was looking for trouble. Juan noticed Enrique's concern and stood next to him.

The plane came to shore with its outer wing just over the fleet of jet skis. Enrique stood by his shack and waited. The aircraft's engines shut down, its pontoons skidded onto the sand, the pilot door opened and Maddog jumped onto the pontoon with his arms open wide, then shouted,

“Enrique, I told you this rental business would never work!”

“Señor Maddog! *Como estás?*” Enrique ran into the water to the side of the plane.

“*Muy bien*, you old man! You look great! When did your hair turn grey? Is that from the navy days?” Maddog asked as he stepped down into the water, smiling.

“This is because of you, *hombre*. It was a delayed reaction from the time I spent with you at the old naval air station. All the stress and bullshit you gave me, it built up. Then once you left, it exploded into my hair as the color grey.”

“Are you sure it’s not from having to deal with the gringo tourists?” Maddog gestured towards the rental fleet.

“You’re the only gringo I’ve ever had to deal with.”

“You’re the only Puerto Rican that’s been a pain in my ass.”

Maddog and Enrique then hugged each other like long lost brothers. Enrique’s never-ending smile, and his one front gold tooth reminded Maddog of the old days. Enrique’s bright grin was a contrast to his now darkened, wrinkled skin from working in the sun. The old days were back in the late 80’s when Maddog worked as a civilian contractor for the U.S. Navy at the old navy base at Roosevelt Roads. Enrique was in the navy at that time and was stationed at the base which sat at the eastern end of the island.

“Hey Maddog, this is Juan. He’s my helper.”

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Juan smiled, nodded and shook Maddog's hand, not speaking due to his lack of English.

"I'm glad to see you have some help, Enrique. Aren't you getting too old for this?"

"I like the exercise. It keeps me youthful."

"It's not working."

"That's the Maddog I know and love. So, what brings you back to Puerto Rico?"

"I've retired, so I'm moving here for a while."

"C'mon Maddog, I know you too well. What kind of deal are you scheming down here?"

"No, seriously. I've been planning this for a while. Then I had a mild heart attack and my doctor said between that and my high blood pressure, if I don't slow down I'm gonna die. Retirement suddenly became a priority. I wrapped up all my business dealings, left all ties behind, and here I am! I just want to go fishing, drink margaritas, hook up with a señorita and find something to pass the time."

"Well, welcome back!"

"Enrique, on a different subject, I want you to know that I'm very sorry I couldn't be here with you and your boys for Isabel's funeral.

"Maddog, I told you before not to worry about it. My boys and I knew that if you could have been here, you would have. Isabel also knew that. We knew your heart and thoughts were here. My family, our church, and our community here are forever grateful for your donation that

allowed us to build the school for the church. It was dedicated in Isabel's name and memory as you wished. All our community's children are blessed for that. Thank you."

"So how are your boys? What are they doing now that they've grown up?"

"Ray just passed the bar exam and is now a lawyer working at a Manhattan law firm. Carlos got a political science degree and is a city council member for San Juan. He also does something else at the state level, though I'm not sure what that is."

"I had no idea that renting kayaks and jet-skis could pay for that kind of education."

"Believe me, this didn't pay for it all," as he waived towards his fleet. "Both the boys worked hard to help pay for it."

"That's great, Enrique! I'm so glad they're both doing well."

"So Maddog, is that your Otter?"

"Yes it is. It's my retirement gift to myself."

"That's a nice plane. It sure ain't no Piper Cub!" Enrique knew airplanes from his time at the naval air station.

"Well my friend, it's great to see you. I'm gonna shove off and head over to the old airfield to see if any of the old gang is there." The two hugged again. "I'll be back to see you. *Hasta luego!*"

"Hasta luego, Maddog!" Enrique pushed the airplane off the sand. He spun it so it was headed toward the ocean.

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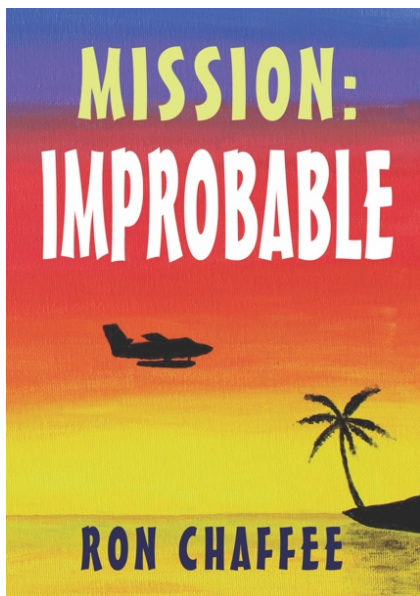
Maddog yelled out the open side window, "Fire in the hole!"

"All clear!" Enrique responded.

Then the whine of an engine slowly turning, then a puff of smoke and the engine started. Then the other. A minute later the plane rose out of the prop-wash spray and banked right for Roosevelt Roads airfield, now a civilian airport after the Navy left in 2004.

The man in the van in the parking lot put away his binoculars and shotgun microphone. He called a number on his cell phone.

"He's heading to the old Roosevelt Roads airfield."



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