

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC



**OPERATION
JOINT SUPPRESSION**

**MICHAEL
KARPOVAGE**

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CHAPTER 1 – ESCALATION

3 February 2005. *Globe and Mail*, Toronto. Newspaper Brief:

QUEBEC VOTES “YES” TO SECESSION! COURT BATTLE AHEAD. In an overwhelming victory for Quebec Premier Jacques DeMars and the Parti Quebecois, the province voted to secede from the Canadian federal union yesterday after decades of unsuccessful attempts. Quebec residents turned out in record numbers to pass the sovereignty referendum with a seventy-percent majority voting “Yes.” However, setbacks loom large as several aboriginal Indian nations within the Quebec province voted to remain a part of the Canadian union setting the stage for a prolonged court battle.

Canadian Prime Minister Peter Wilson, DeMars’s most outspoken federalist opponent on secession, immediately issued a statement in response to the vote. Wilson laid down the gauntlet by stating that separatist referendums by any Canadian province is an illegal act, even with a so-called mandate from its provincial citizens. He added, “The threat of military action is justified to keep the federation solvent especially in the case of Quebec separatism. Quebec’s politics of emotional nationalism will lead to its downward slope in trying to maintain its self-control of French culture. As shown in his past, DeMars will resort to illegal activities, of which Canada will not tolerate,” said Wilson.

Wilson’s statement seems to be in contradiction to the 1998 Canadian Supreme Court ruling on the Quebec secessionist case. Although the court said Quebec did not have the right to claim unilateral independence without the federal government’s consent, it did have the right to vote in a fair referendum. And if a clear majority of Quebecers voted for independence then it was the federal authority’s duty to conduct negotiations.

In DeMars’ victory speech late last night he stated, “Quebeckers are now a proud and free people. We are an independent country who made a courageous break from the bonds of our Anglo-Saxon oppressors. Quebec is now a distinct society in North America. We have resolved the issue of our minority status on this Anglo-Saxon continent once and for all. No more do

we have anything to fear, no more do we have to answer to the English, no more must we even speak their language. We have the future ahead of us. A free and just future decided by our own hand.”

Although defiant even in victory, DeMars is expected to honor a Supreme Court ruling to conduct sovereignty negotiations with the Canadian federal government in order to discuss the legality of the secessionist vote. The Indian nations who voted to remain with Canada are expected to participate as well.

Once a member of the Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) during the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, the 57-year-old DeMars expressed gratitude for all of his supporters over his lifelong commitment to secession. Yesterday’s vote culminates over forty years of secessionist controversy starting with the “Quiet Revolution” in the 1960s. In the October Crisis of 1970 armed FLQ members kidnapped Britain’s Trade Commissioner James Cross and Quebec Labor Minister Pierre Laporte. The Canadian government imposed the War Measures Act and imprisoned hundreds of Quebeckers. Laporte was found dead while Cross was released unharmed. As a young FLQ member, Jacques DeMars was convicted of aiding in the kidnap and murder and sentenced to five years in prison. He served three and was released on probation...
Continued on page A-7.

19 April 2005. Ottawa Citizen, Ottawa. Newspaper Brief:

THE ROYALS PULL OUT. In a sign of good faith negotiations for the start of a peaceful dialogue on Quebec secession, the Canadian federal government lifted control of one of the oldest, most symbolic, if not controversial vestiges of English rule in the province. The Citadelle, a star-shaped fortification dominating the eastern flank of old Quebec City and occupied by the Royal 22e Regiment of the Canadian Forces since 1920, will be turned over to Quebec government control today.

Built in the early 1800s, the Citadelle was the largest fortified group of buildings occupied by troops in North America. The Royal 22e Regiment will be disbanded in an official ceremony today at 4 P.M. The fort is expected to be turned into a museum to boost Quebec City’s tourism once the transfer is complete.

In return for the concession the DeMars administration has announced they will not send diplomats to Washington, Paris or the United Nations seeking to gain international recognition until independence negotiations are resolved.

19 May 2005. CNN.com, Atlanta. Internet News Brief:

TALKS BREAK DOWN. DEMARS WALKS OUT OVER MONTREAL. Negotiations for the peaceful conversion to Quebec statehood break down as both sides hit a roadblock over who will govern the metropolis of Montreal. Located in the far southwestern region of Quebec, Montreal is just miles from both the Canadian capital of Ottawa, Ontario and the New York State border with the United States. The west side of the city is mostly Anglophone, pro-Canadian while the eastern half of the city is made up of Francophones who voted overwhelmingly for secession back in February.

At issue was a proposal by Canadian Prime Minister Peter Wilson that the western island of Montreal be annexed into the Ontario province thus saving the Anglophone population and businesses from Quebec rule. Quebec negotiators, acting on behalf of Premier Jacques DeMars, opposed Wilson's proposal and walked out of the negotiations in protest.

21 June 2005. Washington Post, Washington, D.C. Newspaper Article.

QUEBEC DEFENSE FORCE FORMED. STATE TO STATE RELATIONS ANNOUNCED. In a highly charged speech opening with the line, "We will never let Montreal be controlled by the English aristocrats," Quebec Premier Jacques DeMars announced the official formation of the Quebec Defense Force (QDF) yesterday. In addition, DeMars called for "state to state" relations between Canada and Quebec.

Amid stalled secession talks, DeMars called on all able-bodied Quebec men and women to join the QDF to defend Quebec against the inevitable aggression brought on by Canada in hindering the new nation from governing their rightful territory. He added that, "All Quebecers must prepare and arm themselves for possible defense of their country." DeMars urged the desertion of Quebec-born military personnel now serving in various branches of the Canadian Forces.

To the dismay of National Defense officials, one highly controversial Canadian Army officer has already taken that step. Retired Lieutenant Michel LaPointe announced his allegiance to the Quebec Defense Force, taking a sworn oath from the premier in a surprise ceremony at the Citadelle, the QDF's new headquarters. LaPointe vowed to serve and protect sovereign Quebec territory by all means necessary. He was appointed to full colonel by DeMars, a ranking he said was denied by National Defence officials earlier in his career.

As one of Canada's most decorated combat veterans, the now Colonel LaPointe brings a high degree of legitimacy to the formation of the Quebec Defense Force. He served in the Persian Gulf War during Operation Desert Storm and in Somalia during Operation Deliverance, both under 2 Commando of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. However, his role in the Somalia Affair brought controversy on what was once thought a shining career. He was found guilty of negligence as a company commander after the murder investigation of a Somalian teen at the hands of Canadian Airborne soldiers. He was demoted in rank from lieutenant colonel to first lieutenant. The Canadian Airborne Regiment was soon disbanded as a result of this investigation.

LaPointe's last assignment before retiring was at Canadian Forces Base Valcartier just north of Quebec City where controversy followed him once again. CFB Valcartier was closed in 2003 by Parliament in an ongoing effort to lower military spending and to shift the burden of defense to NATO allies, most notably the United States. LaPointe's role was overseeing the equipment during the transfer. Most military vehicles, equipment, and air squadrons were consolidated into existing units of the two remaining bases in Quebec – that of CFB Montreal and CFB Bagotville in the northern part of the province – while other equipment was put in mothballs, sold, or transferred to western Canadian bases. LaPointe came under fire for the alleged disappearance of some military property. No evidence was found against him but he was forced out of the military all together with a dishonorable discharge. The case is still being investigated.

A native of Quebec, LaPointe has been characterized as an aggressive commander demanding complete loyalty from his soldiers. He was considered a legend in combat and gathered a large following of ex-Airborne soldiers during the province's campaign for secession. This stunning announcement is sure to bring in more recruits to the QDF in upcoming months.

Western reaction to the formation of the QDF was characterized as hostile. "This announcement is clearly a message of defiance," said U.S. Secretary of State Mitch Waters, after hearing of the news. "DeMars is not interested in peaceful negotiations in order to quell this situation, he is simply bent on bringing the good natured people of Quebec into a violent all or nothing conflict. We've seen this time and again with these ultranationalist despots."

The Canadian reaction was described as furious. Prime Minister Peter

Wilson, an ardent opponent of Quebec independence, warned that Canada would attack Quebec to prevent any steps toward full independence. The hawk Wilson questioned how the QDF planned to defend itself when the Canadian Army rolls right over them and takes back its land. The threats came after Quebec Premier Jacques DeMars trashed the long-standing “one Canadian union” policy and called for “state-to-state” relations between the rival governments in Quebec City and Ottawa.

Prime Minister Wilson, in one of his many ongoing threats, declared the paramilitary defense force illegal. He says it is “nothing more than an offshoot of the FLQ terrorist group that Jacques DeMars was once a part of in his earlier criminal years.” Wilson issued the Quebec premier an ultimatum to disband the QDF and return to the negotiating table immediately or face possible military action.

Wilson stated, “Let me remind everyone, including Mr. DeMars, that his province cannot unilaterally claim independence without consent from the federal government of Canada. If he does not disband the QDF we cannot even consider the consent issue. We were making good progress on most issues until he twisted the facts in my Montreal proposal. Now all I can say is that it’s in his hands if he wants a conflict or if he wants peace.”

2 July 2005. CBC Special Report, Live Televised Broadcast:

“Good morning. I’m Andrew Ashland. Thank you for rejoining us from the break. It’s all but official now. Any hope of diplomacy in resolving Quebec’s secession from Canada has virtually broken down since the establishment of the QDF or Quebec Defense Force two weeks ago. For those of you just tuning in, a joint morning press conference is under way at the White House with U.S. President Butch Abernathy, Canadian Prime Minister Peter Wilson, and NATO Secretary-General Hans VonKannel. They are about to take the podium for a Q and A session.”

The Canadian Broadcast Corporation’s news anchor looked down at his notes while a map of Quebec appeared on the screen over his shoulder. “We have already heard from the U.S. press spokesman who announced the Canadian government has officially requested military assistance from its NATO partners, in particular the United States, if the break-away province of Quebec does not disband the QDF and return to diplomacy by an imposed October 1st deadline. NATO chief VonKannel backed the validity of the request citing NATO Treaty, Article 4, where such assistance is allowed if the territorial integrity of an independent NATO member country is

threatened.”

Video recordings of NATO airplanes, warships, tanks, and troops now appeared where the map was as the news anchor continued his recap.

“Furthermore, if needed, the U.S.-Canadian alliance said they would pursue using a firm response to make Quebec comply. All this, of course, is subject to vote by the nineteen member nations of NATO, where it is expected to pass easily based on NATO’s ‘separable but not separate’ security policy pertaining to North American operations. Okay, we now go live to Prime Minister Wilson answering the first question.”

A close-up of the tall, well built, very distinguished looking leader of Canada appeared on the television screen. With both hands gripping the sides of the press room podium Peter Wilson responded to an inaudible question from the rear of the room. “Canada’s existence has clearly been threatened by a self-declared, illegal vote and a self-declared takeover of Canadian federal territory, not to mention the formation of a rebel force, this QDF. The breakup of the Canadian union is at stake. This is the same situation the United States government faced when the Confederate States of America declared their secession in the early 1860s. No different. Canada cannot and will not allow a breakup of its federation under these terms, period.

“Not only is there a security interest at risk but there is a vital humanitarian interest in jeopardy as well.” He scanned his audience. “If you will remember, in the February secession vote several separate Indian nations inside the province of Quebec voted themselves to stay within the Canadian federation. Their leaders came to me personally and expressed their concerns for protection from the self-imposed Quebec independence bid. How can we have a separate aboriginal tribe saying they want to stay with Canada when this DeMars government claims the tribe’s territory as Quebec property?” he asked raising his eyebrows. “You can’t have it both ways, that is the answer. The social, economic, and political consequences are too great. In fact, North American stability is at stake here. Therefore assistance and force by all means is justified by NATO.”

Wilson continued in his semi-speech. “Diplomacy is mainly moot at this point. There is only one non-negotiable demand and that is for Quebec to disband the QDF and come back to the table so we might find a remedy we can all live with. We’ve had enough of this childish behavior. Stand down your soldiers DeMars!” He finished and stepped aside as President Abernathy approached the microphone.

President Butch Abernathy, the handsome former CEO of a major

software manufacturer, folded his hands on the podium and gazed into the cameras. In a clear, strong voice he explained his administration's position on the developing crisis.

"I want to state for the record that the United States has also been threatened territorially. We have uncovered information that Quebec Premier Jacques DeMars intends to cut off the St. Lawrence Seaway to international trade since the river is within Quebec's territorial boundaries. This is clearly an act of aggression under international waterway laws and I personally will not let this happen." His angry posture was perfectly delivered after hours of practice.

Butch Abernathy was in the first year of his Presidency after winning a close victory against a fellow billionaire in an election dubbed "The Cash Cow Race." The unprecedented success of Abernathy's software company in the struggling economic atmosphere during the early years of the new millenium, along with his good looks and compassionate charisma, gave him a basis to lead America into better economic conditions. Conservative critics tried to derail his election by bringing up his lack of foreign policy experience and disdain for the military in light of the ongoing War on Terrorism started in the previous administration. With this first crisis of his Democratic administration he now set out to show those critics how tough he could be. His pro-military stance also served the purpose of getting a jump in his approval rating in order to gain momentum to pass an enormous spending package through the Republican-controlled Congress.

"And if that is not enough, our sources say Jacques DeMars intends to nationalize all foreign property and put it under his own control. American assets, businesses, and property inside Quebec quite possibly could be seized and U.S. citizens put at risk. America will not tolerate this. The free market will not tolerate this. DeMars has clearly subverted his authority. That's why he formed the QDF, for control. That's their mission, pure and simple. It's not to defend. It's to confiscate. This is not the way of democracy and freedom that the Quebec citizenry expected. This borders on a dictatorship. This is a clear and present threat to both Canada and the United States' national security and really of the North American continent. If we let this province break the rules then what is to stop the other Canadian provinces from doing the same?"

"Yes, yes," shouted a well-known reporter from Toronto standing up to be noticed. "Since both the Canadian and U.S. armies have committed large amounts of combat troops and equipment to the ongoing peacekeeping and

nation building roles in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans, as well as the global hunt for terrorists coupled with the fact that Canadian Forces have already been cut to all time lows, then that brings us to the question of who will be taking the lead role for NATO in this new escalating crisis?"

The NATO secretary-general moved forward to answer the question. "This is a joint NATO partnership request for the survival of North America. Before anything even happens, all nineteen NATO member countries will have to vote on this request. If it is approved and some kind of application of military force is deemed appropriate, then NATO will have to vote once again on the activation of those forces and the rules of engagement under which they operate. In essence, under NATO terms there has to be a clear and defined mission and authorization given to that mission by all members."

"Right, right," said Prime Minister Wilson stepping up to the microphone again, "I want to field that question as well. Let me emphasize that we have two Canadian Forces Bases right inside the Quebec province still posing a formidable presence. These forces will bear the brunt of the responsibility of ousting this paramilitary force if it comes down to it. We are simply asking the U.S. for support in our contingency plans. And I emphasize the word support. That is what President Abernathy has agreed to, and that is what we hope the rest of NATO will agree to when they vote."

"If I may follow up," continued the reporter amid the shouting of other correspondents' questions, "the Canadian National Defense has only 20,000 active personnel spread throughout the entire country. We have only seventy main battle tanks that are thirty years old. We have only sixty operational aircraft in the Air Force, no combat helicopters, and no heavy-lift helicopters. So, how do you seriously expect us to believe those two understaffed bases can bear the brunt of a major military conflict, I ask you?"

Prime Minister Wilson's face turned red. He had been told by his briefing staff that a question concerning the abysmal state of military power in the Canadian Forces would come up, but not on such embarrassingly specific terms as this reporter just confronted him with. "Well Kip, don't worry, it won't be as you described a major military conflict," said Wilson in a jovial voice trying to recover from the initial shock of the question. "Although we might be on the light side we can still deploy our forces at a moment's notice." Wilson then snapped his fingers to emphasize his statement. Several reporters jumped up to seize the inept response.

"But sir, it sounds like you're going to have to rely on the United States to fight most of your internal battle with Quebec if it comes to that," said a

persistent female reporter from the province of British Columbia. “In essence, Canada really is a military protectorate of America, isn’t it?”

Wilson simply ignored the question.

An American reporter stood up and directed a question at Abernathy. “How much support are you willing to give at this point, Mr. President? What kind of U.S. forces are you talking about since most active and reserve units are still on missions crisscrossing the globe?”

Abernathy approached the stand and calmly stated, “The support that myself, the Secretary of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have agreed to will be strictly limited to elements of the 10th Mountain Division based in upstate New York, close to the Quebec border. The 10th Mountain is a highly mobile, very experienced light infantry force that the Canadian Army is very familiar with. They have conducted joint training maneuvers together for the last twenty years or so and have operated together side by side in places like Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

“Currently the 1st Brigade of the 10th is in rotation in Iraq conducting peacekeeping missions. That still leaves the entire 2nd Brigade at Fort Drum, NY to provide the necessary troops. This is the same brigade that successfully fought against the terrorist Taliban regime in Afghanistan a few years back. That is why I have chosen the 10th to be more than adequate in fulfilling any NATO missions and repelling any serious threat posed by the QDF, which is nothing more than a militia force armed with shotguns and hunting rifles if nothing at all. As Prime Minister Wilson has already said, this will be a low intensity matter that the 10th can certainly handle. This is the proposal I have given to Secretary-General VonKannel and what we hope will be approved by all NATO member countries.”

“If I may follow up,” continued the reporter, “so what you are saying is that the U.S. is committed up front to the deployment of ground troops if necessary?”

“That is what I’m saying, yes. And I hope Mr. DeMars is listening,” said the President in a strongly worded but prepared answer.

“Sir? Sir?” asked another American reporter. “Do you think France will fall in line with the NATO vote given their clear public support for Quebec or as some would call it, New France?”

Abernathy glared at the reporter for trying to lead him into an issue of resentment that still burned deeply in most Americans’ minds and diplomatically countered, “France is our friend and a NATO partner. They have consistently voted for the best and I’m sure will do the same in this case

too.”

“But sir, they voted against U.S. interests leading up to the Iraq War in 2003,” rebutted the reporter.

“No. No. They never voted against anything. They had disagreements but never voted against us. In fact they supported U.N. action in the Gulf War of 91 and...”

“But after we liberated Iraq in 2003 there was...”

“Gentlemen. Gentlemen,” interrupted a loud female reporter from Quebec City.

“There was clear evidence that France provided illegal weapons to Saddam Hussein’s regime which directly contradicted U.N. resolutions and...” continued the American reporter.

“Gentlemen, what about the obvious conflict here?” asked the Quebec reporter overtaking her American counterpart. “When back in 1999 in the sovereign nation of Yugoslavia NATO defended the break-away province of Kosovo in an all out air war but now turns its back on Quebec, a break-away province in the same exact situation, why the double standard Mr. Wilson and Mr. Abernathy? Why isn’t NATO *defending* the good people of Quebec instead of all this warmonger talk? Your countries set the precedent years ago — why are you now changing your tune? Please explain.”

Wilson and Abernathy looked at one another with blank stares. They were caught off guard by the probing question but at the same time happy to dodge the French issue. Again, their staff hadn’t planned for this zinger. Now the two leaders had to quickly devise their own clever responses in order to deflect her question. Fortunately NATO Chief VonKessel stepped in and bailed out the befuddled politicians.

“If you recall back in 1999 Kosovar Albanians were being massacred by their own government of Yugoslavia. We had a humanitarian duty to defend those people and that is why NATO went in. No other global organization was willing to do the job. That was the precedence. We did it to stabilize Europe from the ongoing dictatorial rule of Milosovic who had caused all the ethnic hatred in that region even until this day. In the case here of Quebec’s so-called secession, a NATO member country, Canada, has its national security threatened by a rebel force from within her own borders. Canada isn’t the aggressor here. The break-away province is the aggressor and Canada has a right to defend herself to keep her union intact. Just as America had a right to defend its territory from terrorists by calling on NATO for help after September 11, 2001, Canada is simply asking for assistance under the

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very organization that she belongs to as well. There are no obvious conflicts here whatsoever. And I believe that is all the questions we will be taking today. Thank you very much and good day.”

The live feed suddenly switched back to the CBC news anchor telling his viewing audience they were taking a commercial break.

5 July 2005. USA Radio News:

NATO has approved Canada’s request for military assistance by the United States under the “separable but not separate” North American security policy. Eighteen member countries voted in line while France, of course, voted no, citing a cultural conflict. NATO also added a condemnation of Quebec Premier DeMars’s hostile actions and his failure to continue diplomacy in finding a peaceful resolution.

CHAPTER 2 – FIRST ALERT

21 July 2005. Maison de Royale Site. Old Quebec City:

Colonel Michel LaPointe sat comfortably on the edge of his bed in a second floor room of an old bed and breakfast overlooking the Parc de Gouverneurs in downtown Old Quebec City. In his hands was the pro-secessionist newspaper, *Voice du Quebecois*, while his Mac G6 laptop booted up on the windowsill. He had been living in the B&B the last few weeks while his permanent living spaces at the Quebec Defense Force headquarters in the Citadelle were being renovated. He had just finished reading another article about himself concerning his leadership position in the growing QDF and noted with a frown that the author failed to depict his battlefield exploits as he had requested. Instead he thought she focused too much on his investigation during the Somalia inquiry years ago. He decided he would have to place a “friendly” call to the newspaper to correct the reporting once and for all.

LaPointe tossed the newspaper on the floor and reached for his coffee mug while glancing at the computer screen. It had been two days since he received the first encrypted e-mail message from Paris informing him that the QDF special delivery was under way. He decided a status update was in order just in case something had changed. The job was too important to let wait and since the Premier arranged the deal himself LaPointe had to keep that relentless micro-manager abreast of every development. Sipping his coffee he watched as a series of system extension icons loaded up across the screen. A couple more minutes and his computer boot-up would be finished allowing him to link up to his e-mail service for the update.

He set his coffee mug down and happened to look up through his bedroom window across the tree-filled square, past the monument of Generals Wolfe and Montcalm, toward the world-rekknowned Quebec icon, the Chateau Frontenac. The turreted towers of this prestigious centerpiece in the old city were lit up against an early morning, mellow blue sky. LaPointe lost himself in the hotel’s quiet, rich glow. He stroked his thick, gray handlebar moustache and pondered the hotel’s history.

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The Frontenac, built in the likes of a French castle, was his favorite architectural symbol of Quebec's heritage. It had accommodated prime ministers, princes, and queens since 1893 and still dominated old Quebec City. In fact, the old section of the city is still surrounded by ancient stone walls as once part of early defensive fortifications. LaPointe loved his hometown with a passion. He loved its old colonial layout, its narrow cobblestone streets and alleyways, and most of all its romantic personality. It was as if two worlds existed with just a crumbling stone wall separating them. One world being constantly influenced by the biggest exporter of the western, throw-away culture of greed, the United States, and the other world held in control by true Quebeckers like himself. Yes, Old Quebec certainly captured the true nature of New France, one that dated back to 1603 and its first French settler, Samuel de Champlain. But to preserve the heritage held within these walls is what sovereignty was all about, LaPointe thought. Not to be influenced or dominated anymore by the English aristocrats of Ottawa and Washington. Not to be bought off or prostituted by western money.

His anger boiled just thinking about how Canada and the U.S. have backstabbed Quebec in keeping her in their realm of control. At the rate Ottawa was cutting back its own armed forces, they were basically giving Canada away to U.S. interests anyway. Quebec had always been on the U.S. imperialist list. They tried twice to invade this country, once during their Revolutionary War and again during the War of 1812. Both times we fought them back. Now, their army has been *invited* to come back by Ottawa, into Quebec territory no less!

LaPointe nodded to himself and reached for his coffee. The true reason of U.S. involvement in suppressing our independence lay not in its own national security — nothing was threatened territorially — but instead in Quebec's expanding market for American goods and the untapped resources of its geography. To lose this market segment would be unacceptable to the holders of wealth in Wall Street and those they influence in Washington. The U.S. and Canada could hide behind all the national security bullshit they wanted to but when it came down to it, money always motivated them and always would. Both the Canadian and U.S. economies were waning and needed all the stimulus they could muster. Economic stimulus equaled retention of political power and Quebec was just a cog in their wheels. He sipped his coffee and checked his computer. Almost there.

LaPointe stroked his mustache again. The U.S. and Canada were also quite aware that their bastard NATO member France has more influence on

Quebec than they. In fact there has already been certain elements within the French government that have communicated to Ottawa and Washington, in subtle diplomatic gestures, that they too covet Quebec's economic riches. These French reactionaries, most of whom reside in the intelligence agency, DGSE and the French Army have had close ties to DeMars as he rose through the political ranks. France has realized an opportunity to rekindle the strength of New France once again while benefiting herself, not only for the obvious cultural reasons but again also for trade and market opportunities. Besides, a little payback was surely in order against the U.S. because the French were still reeling from America's last president, George W. Bush, who embarrassed the hell out of them to the world when he exposed their secret military and oil dealings with the now defunct regime in Iraq. Yep, LaPointe thought, natural resources. It was the basis for the Iraq war a couple of years ago and would be for this conflict too. This was a fight for Quebec's untapped potential. It had always been. That's how this nation was founded and that is the core of our fight.

France had wanted Quebec back in their sphere of influence since the days when Britain took it from them after that dreadful battle on the Plains of Abraham. LaPointe's gaze deliberately shifted to the monument of Generals Wolfe and Montcalm in the square before the Frontenac. The monument was a tribute to both the victor and the vanquished of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

The famous battle, lasting only twenty minutes, sealed the fate of New France in North America. For more than 150 years Quebec City was the guardian of the French colony but in 1759 under British General James Wolfe an assault was made on the west of the city, on the Plains of Abraham. Both Louis Montcalm, the French general, and his adversary, General Wolfe, were killed in the battle. The British forces won in the end but it wasn't until a year later, with fresh reinforcements, that they marched on Montreal and defeated the last of the French forces. France finally ceded Canada to Great Britain in the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Now, in 2005, it was time to reincarnate New France for good. He drew a breath to calm himself.

The familiar Macintosh tone signaled it had finished its start-up phase. LaPointe quickly dragged his trackball mouse to an icon and opened his e-mail service. He watched as the high-speed, wireless, digital link connection with an orbiting satellite brought him on-line with the rest of the electronic world. It still amazed him what today's computers were capable of. He had been given the machine personally by DeMars who had received it with the latest top-security software developed by the French military. It provided instant

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communication without the risk of a security breach. He was promised not even the Canadian Security Intelligence Service nor the U.S. National Security Agency could crack the codes.

He smiled with satisfaction at his and Jacques DeMars' use of computer technology back in 2002 when they masterminded the theft of ten Canadian Army tanks from CFB Valcartier. The grin grew widely across his face as he thought of that hacker kid that DeMars brought in from the Netherlands. What was his name, Brunele or something? The kid was a boy genius. During the height of America's War on Terrorism little did anyone notice when Brunele infiltrated National Defence Headquarters main computer system and simply changed a few purchase, inventory and delivery sheets. Hell, everyone was focused on all the anthrax scares at that particular time. The tanks went poof and were lost in the paper shuffle. The next step was simply bringing in some natural Quebec-born, ex-Canadian Airborne Regiment members to drive flatbed tractor-trailers, with the tanks on them, right off the base in the dead of night. No one suspected a thing. It was all routine as far as the base knew. Not one tank was noticed since they were all covered with tarps and pine boughs as they drove up to a secret wilderness camp in Northern Quebec. In fact, one of the locals thought they were logging trucks. The Canadians, out of embarrassment, haven't even gone public yet with what was stolen, even after three years. LaPointe's beloved, fully-armed, American-made, M1A2 Abrams heavy battle tanks and an assortment of small arms weaponry and ammunition have been safely hidden away ever since, readying for the right day to use them. That day would come all too soon, he nodded.

A new e-mail message had indeed arrived. He double-clicked the icon and read it. His eyebrows lifted with a positive response. The cargo was en route, confirmed. It would be a couple of weeks until the French freighter made contact, but now with real support from the mother country Quebec's true sovereignty was coming to fruition. Ottawa and Washington will wish they never had provoked the Quebec Defense Force once they see heavy battle tanks in Montreal and a surprise weapon to take on their air supremacy.

He dumped the e-mail message in his system trashcan and shut the computer down. It was time to see DeMars and prepare for the Montreal infiltration. He looked out the window a last time. One day he too would join the heroic figures that shaped the destiny of this nation, one day his statue might stand in the square as testament to his service for his country. Yes, the honor, the duty, and the glory to fight for one's own country against foreign

influence, that's why I'm doing it personally, he reminded himself. To defend what others have died for.

7 August 2005. 10th Mtn. Division. 2nd Brigade Headquarters. Briefing Room, Fort Drum, NY:

With a serious scowl added to his taut face, Colonel Paul Petrovich, more commonly referred to by his troops as "Petrol" for his instant combustible temper, stepped up behind an overused briefing-room podium to start his mission overview. His veteran brigade intelligence officer Captain Maureen Almond, an attractive dirty blonde, gave her commander a nod, referring to the readiness of his upcoming electronic slide presentation.

Petrovich's clenched jawline mimicked his inward concern. For a few months now he and his staff had been closely following the negotiations in the Quebec secession crisis just over the New York border from Fort Drum. He had not liked the rush by the Quebec citizenry in accepting their premier, Jacques DeMars, as if he were their long lost savior freeing them from the bonds of so-called Canadian slavery. Although DeMars had finally galvanized Quebecers to secede from Canada after years and years of failure, the vehicle he used was based on a blatant ultranationalist hate policy against western governments and English-speaking peoples. Petrovich felt a powder keg was about to erupt with the terrorist-turned-politician DeMars being the one to light the fuse. What troubled him the most was that the announcement he was about to make put American troops, his troops of the U.S. Army's famed 2nd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, right on top of that keg. It would be nothing new for them since all of their combat experience in Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom but it still rattled his nerves to go into a hostile urban situation. Urban warfare was the worst scenario of them all.

The short, wedged-shaped Petrovich, sporting the common high-and-tight military haircut, picked up a cordless remote control mouse, clicked a button towards a Dell computer station off to his side and activated the slide show presentation. Turning to the large viewing screen over his shoulder, he made sure the first overhead was displayed before facing the audience. The screen showed the white and blue Quebec provincial flag.

"Sergeant, please dim the lights," whispered the colonel to an aide.

The overhead lighting was adjusted so the large group of officers making up three battalions of the brigade could see the stage clearly. A small spotlight lit the colonel and the podium. Second Lieutenant Mike D'Arata, 1st Platoon Leader of Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, or the

“Golden Dragons,” shifted nervously in his metal chair. He swung a forest camouflaged pant leg up onto his thigh and positioned his notepad across his lap. In the process, his shiny black combat boot accidentally clanged off the chair back of the officer seated directly in front of him. The bald-headed, famed Best Ranger Competition champion and brass-balled combat veteran, Bravo Company Commander Captain Thomas John “T.J.” Karr, turned his head so his square jaw rested on his Ranger shoulder tab and gave the young D’Arata a disturbed glance.

“Sorry sir,” muttered D’Arata trying hard to avoid his boss’s gaze. The cunning, thirty-one-year-old officer, who sowed his combat oats in Afghanistan, merely grunted in return.

With a touch of impatience in his deep voice Colonel Petrovich quickly got down to business as he spoke into the podium’s microphone. “Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. As all of you know by now NATO has officially approved the assistance request by Canada. What may come as a surprise is that the Commander-in-Chief already gave us a mission to perform. I just got out of a meeting with the division commander Major General Jennings and he’s decided that one battalion of the 2nd Brigade will be given the opportunity to perform what’s being called a public relations and peacekeeping mission with the Canadian Army.” Whispers and a shifting of bodies marked the officers’ initial reaction.

“Since our sister brigade, the 1st, is pulling duty in Iraq, we of the 2nd are considered the sledgehammer President Abernathy has called for. Forces Command or FORSCOM down in Atlanta has authorized us to deploy one battalion-sized Task Force to Montreal in order to conduct peacekeeping responsibilities with the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment. The 3rd is a highly trained urban assault force just as we are. They are based at Canadian Forces Base Montreal. Our immediate goals will include continued training in urban combat, communications with our Canadian counterparts, and the establishment of a forward base for any future exercises that might be needed in the Montreal theatre of operations.”

Petrovich’s gray, beetle-brows drew together. “Make no bones about it. We are going in as a show of force on Quebec soil. They can call it peacekeeping or training or holding the Canucks’s hands but this is basically a last ditch effort by President Abernathy to re-commence negotiations with the DeMars government. It’s all PR and will be closely reported by U.S. and Canadian media. However, we will treat this as a live deployment under combat conditions. We will be going in with all our equipment, including

Delta Company. FORSCOM has even activated us to use the new Rapid Reaction Company of light armored vehicles too to really get the point across.” Nervous excitement now rippled through the briefing room. “They will be arriving by the end of the month from Fort Stewart, Georgia with full assets.”

D’Arata perked up too. The Delta Company of the battalion was designated as the heavy weapons section that manned the anti-tank weaponry, heavy machine guns, automatic grenade launchers, and mortars. And the RRC’s LAV IIIs were the Army’s new light tank replacing the older, heavy M1 Abrams main battle tank. Upon hearing of these companies involvement D’Arata even noticed Captain Karr sitting bolt upright and quite wide-eyed. This was a serious situation we’re getting into, he realized, and not just another false alarm. Wow, shit my brew up for me, he thought excitedly.

Quiet conversation was traded between the officers. The colonel cleared his throat to recapture their attention albeit to no avail. He paused for effect but then in an overpowering voice he clearly reasserted himself. “Delta and the RRC are coming just in case the Quebec Defense Force doesn’t play by the rules!” The officers quieted down. “I will announce which one of you three battalions will perform this mission at the end of my brief. Until then my intention is to give all officers of the 2nd Brigade a sense of the state of mind of our potential adversaries and a bit of their history should things get bad down the road, so listen up now.”

Turning to Captain Almond with an acknowledging nod the colonel went on. “The intelligence staff has prepared this very informative multimedia briefing with lots of slides, articles and maps that will be handed out afterward. Many thanks in advance to Captain Almond and her staff for a job well done.”

He turned back to the officers seated in front of him and scanned the crowd. “But I want to re-emphasize that this is confidential intel for your eyes and ears only. Anyone repeating this information to unauthorized personnel will be held accountable with severe penalties. I need go no further.”

Petrovich pointed his remote to the computer. The screen switched, displaying a map of Quebec. “I want to begin with a brief demographic and geographic overview of the working theatre. Umm, here is the province of Quebec. It is Canada’s largest province and second most populous. It’s about the size of France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom combined! This land is huge, people.

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Quebec Regional Map

“There’s, umm, half a million square miles of untouched nature out there, bigger than even Alaska, but three quarters of this area is empty and only two percent of the province is inhabited. It is quite a country. I’ve done some fishing way up in some of the remote wilderness areas north of Quebec City and believe me there ain’t nothing out there for hundreds of miles, except grizzly, moose, and big-ass blackflies.”

Several chuckles broke from the front.

“I’ve also been up in the mountain range, called the Laurentides, and really it’s just an extension of the Adirondacks that you’re all familiar with. It’s totally covered in rocky, rugged wooded terrain just like upstate New York. But it’s nothing compared to the crap terrain we had to climb through in Central Asia,” referring to the 10th’s deployment to Uzbekistan in 2001 to fight terrorists operating out of Afghanistan as a result of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

The colonel advanced to another screen depicting population centers. “As you can see by the chart here, about ninety percent of the population, or approximately seven million people, are French-speaking. They call themselves Francophones.” He then advanced to another screen showing a

map of Quebec and shaded red areas symbolizing population density.

“About half this population is in the greater Montreal area alone, as shown here. The other half of the population lives in the lush urban valley along the St. Lawrence Lowlands, this corridor here,” he said tracing a route along the St. Lawrence River.

“From Montreal, through the industrial port of Trois Rivieres and all the way up to Quebec City, right here, it’s about a 170-mile stretch. You can see most of the major highway systems and infrastructure run along this river valley. Quebec City is the capital of the province and is where the government of Jacques DeMars resides. It’s a fucking hate-filled rat’s nest up there. Pure, ultranationalist Quebeckers control the city. A place I hope we can avoid at all costs.”

Petrovich grabbed for a glass of water off to the side and took a swig. “Now I want to go into the origins of this Quebec secession a little, you know, how it all got started.” With a click of the mouse a newspaper article appeared on screen showing protesters carrying a placard reading ‘FLQ = LIBERATE QUEBEC.’

The colonel donned his reading glasses from his breast pocket and read from his notes. “In the late 1970s the most frightening period of Quebec’s political history began. The ultra-right wing group called Le Front de Liberation du Quebec or the FLQ emerged to initiate a series of events that have been etched upon the minds of Canadian and Quebec citizens alike. The FLQ immediately promoted their cause of Quebec provincial freedom by launching a campaign of terrorism against English-speaking and pro-Canadian federation supporters. Mailbox bombs exploded and violence entered the streets of Montreal.” Another click of the mouse and now and image of a bloodied Montreal citizen was displayed. Her mailbox was blown off its post.

Petrovich pushed his glasses back up his nose and continued reading. “The whole of Quebec’s society had been shaken down to its very foundation. But the terror campaign now entered a much more heinous phase. Two armed men kidnapped Britain’s Trade Commissioner, James Cross. This abduction started what became known as the October Crisis of 1970.

“Shortly after the Cross kidnapping, Quebec Labor Minister Pierre Laporte, in front of his own home, was kidnapped as well. This time a band of armed men joined in the abduction. In response, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau ordered the Canadian Army to protect public buildings and government officials of Ottawa and Quebec. Then, on October 16, Trudeau

proclaimed The War Measures Act which closed Quebec's borders and suspended the civil rights of the people of Quebec. The police and army were given power to search every home in Quebec to find Laporte and Cross."

Lieutenant D'Arata leaned to the soldier next him. "God, I never even knew this happened."

"Yeah, me either," said the recent West Point graduate and fellow 2nd Lt. Wes Shore, the 2nd Platoon Leader of Bravo Company, in a deep Georgia drawl.

"That's because both of you were still cum stains on your ugly parents' sheets," hissed their captain, turning around. "Now knock it off!"

Mike D'Arata thought Captain Karr must have eyes in the back of his bull-shaped head – nothing ever gets by him. In the two years since being posted at Drum, Captain Karr had grilled the green lieutenant into a fine, confident platoon leader that his troops highly respected and looked-up to. If it wasn't for T.J. and his unabashed, man-on-man, field-smart approach to problem-solving in combat, D'Arata would still be sucking up to his platoon sergeant Larry Warren in leading his young men.

The colonel looked up at the chatter in the audience and raised his voice a little louder. "Just two days later Pierre Laporte's body was found near the airport." Petrovich switched the screen to a dead body inside a car trunk. "A police unit located the body stuffed inside the trunk of a car. Cause of death – strangulation. And get this, they did it with a very sentimental religious medallion that he wore every day," said Petrovich shaking his head in disgust.

"Fearing the same for James Cross, the police aggressively intensified their search, jailing many innocent people in the process, but it would take them into December before they finally located Cross. The FLQ had him hidden inside a house in Montreal. A negotiation took place and ultimately Cross was released unharmed. In return, asylum was given to several FLQ members. They were immediately flown to Cuba.

"All of the FLQ didn't get off that easy though. After a quick trial of Laporte's murder, two FLQ members were sentenced to life in prison. A number of co-conspirators were also sentenced to lighter terms, one of which you'll recognize immediately." The colonel advanced to the next screen.

A youthful picture of the current premier of Quebec filled the screen. "A young Jacques DeMars was sent west to a British Columbia labor detention center for his role in the kidnappings. He was brutally raped, beaten, and tortured by inmates on several occasions. His physical and mental rehabilitation ended after three years as he was given parole. He spent most

of his time after that between Quebec and France in various colleges and universities, earning degrees in philosophy, politics, and military history. How do you like that? He then went on to a career in Quebec politics and rose up the ranks of the provincial government. He was a behind-the-scenes player in the October 1995 sovereignty referendum. Remember that vote?"

"Not me," whispered Lt. Shore to Lt. D'Arata.

D'Arata nodded in agreement thinking to himself of what he was doing way back in 1995. He had just gotten out of community college up in Seattle with a two-year business degree and had worked in a corporate office for a short stint as a marketing assistant. He quickly became bored and decided that he couldn't see himself in front of a computer screen for the rest of his life coming up with bullshit product sales reports to enhance the CEO's bottom line. So after a five day, soul-searching, backpacking excursion in the Olympic Mountain Range he decided to pursue his childhood dream of becoming a professional soldier. A competitive sports leader all his life and an avid reader of military history, D'Arata sought the ultimate essence of becoming a man, that of bravery under fire and leading men in combat. He held this as his highest virtue and to experience this in battle was the truest test. He needed the challenge and the excitement. He wanted the adrenaline rush and true life and death decision making that only a battlefield could provide. What was it he told the recruiter? "I'm tired of being a spectator in life. I want to be a player. I want to be out front and quite frankly I'm bored with the civilian rat race of materialism."

After basic training D'Arata was assigned to a two-man anti-tank missile team out at Fort Lewis with the 5th Infantry and he was anything but bored. The Army had just implemented the new Javelin system and D'Arata was a quick read. He excelled so much, learning and advancing in rank, that he thought he might even take a shot at being an officer. Hell, they were hurting for young college-educated men to fill their dwindling ranks anyway. He decided to apply for Officer Candidate School as the next step in his military career.

With a college degree on his resume he was immediately accepted. After breezing through OCS and graduating near the top of his class, 2nd Lieutenant D'Arata was reassigned to the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) stationed at Fort Drum in upstate New York. That was what, almost four years ago, he thought. Just about due for promotion too. Wow, had time flown by up here in the Great White North.

D'Arata's first deployment with the 10th was in the summer of 2001 when

the Kosovo crisis was winding down. His new regiment, the 2-14th, was sent to the border of Montenegro and Yugoslavia for security matters in case hostilities spilled over. His first mission was to secure a radio tower on the border to prevent the Serbian government from broadcasting anti-NATO messages to the people they were trying to protect. He never faced any combat although there were a few run-ins with Serbian snipers. A year later his unit was rotated back to Drum as another army unit took over.

He was particularly upset at missing out in the combat experience hunting the terrorists in Afghanistan during late 2001 to 2002. Stationed in the Balkans most of the time, his unit merely skipped from one hate-filled, eastern European enclave to the next as a police force, while his sister units of the 10th were engaged in live combat in Afghanistan. Their mission was dubbed Operation Enduring Freedom and was the result of the murdering of thousands of innocent Americans by terrorists supported by the government of Afghanistan. Many of the soldiers in the 10th fortunate enough to get called up for that operation had one hell of an adventurous time in D'Arata's opinion.

Petrol's voice jarred D'Arata back to the briefing. "That was an extremely close call for Canada. In that first real serious bid for freedom the 'No' side or pro-westerners won and stayed with Canada by a narrow margin. At the time, Quebec Premier Jacques Parizeau blamed the 'ethnic English vote' and vowed revenge.

"If you'll notice in this next photo, our Jacques DeMars is standing behind Jacques Parizeau. DeMars acted as a personal security consultant and confidant, a key player in the events."

"Yeah, that was a real close vote back then. Looks like they made up for it last February, huh Mikey?" asked Lt. Shore to Lt. D'Arata.

The colonel glanced up towards the talkative new lieutenant in the brigade, Wes Shore, but went on a little louder. "I want to break off on a tangent here because I think it is very important. So listen up. Umm, published results indicated that more than ninety-five percent of aboriginal peoples who participated in the 1995 referendum voted 'No.' The most recent referendum back in February of this year revealed the same statistics again. The aboriginal tribes of Quebec voted to stay within the Canadian federation once more." The colonel then paused and caught the young, buff Georgia boy trying to whisper to another officer.

"For those of you out there that don't know what aboriginal peoples are our, esteemed Georgia Bulldog, fresh out of the Point, will explain. Ass up

son!”

A terrified, red-faced Shore shot up out of his chair and stood at attention. He stammered in his thick accent, “Ah, yes sir, ah, ab-original-like peoples are ah, peoples from the likes of...” and then Shore had a flash of humor he decided to try, “...they are like people from the backwoods of Alabama, sir!”

The colonel laughed out loud with the entire room joining in. Shore looked relieved and eased his shoulders down with a big grin across his face. What the hell was an aboriginal, he thought to himself.

Still laughing, the colonel said, “Huah Bulldog! So, that’s what West Point is teaching you little shits these days, huh? Please resume the ass-down position son. Major Tununda, stand up and tell the Bulldog what an aboriginal person is.”

The muscular, broad shouldered executive officer of the 2-14th stood up slowly and scratched his light brown, hawk-like nose, still reeling from Bulldog’s joke. Major Robert Tununda, a member of the Seneca Indian tribe from western New York, ran his hand across his dark buzzcut and paused before answering. He looked to Shore and gave him a wink. Bulldog knew exactly what an aboriginal person was now.

Tununda had proven to be one of the toughest, most ruthless combat officers in the division. While on duty supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in Central Asia he gained the raw, hard-nosed combat experience that every officer could ever hope for in their career. As a company commander then, Tununda participated in the daunting rescue of U.S. and British Special Forces in an enemy prisoner revolt at a fortress in Northern Afghanistan. Eight hundred Taliban fighters overpowered their guards, killed a CIA operative and stormed the fort armory seizing weapons. They fought a three-day battle against Northern Alliance troops coordinated by a dozen U.S. and British troops calling in airstrikes. When Tununda’s 10th Mountain unit was called in with their armored Humvees to assault the Taliban positions, a stray U.S. Air Force bomb missed its mark and landed almost on top of the U.S. spotters who called in the strike. Thirty Northern Alliance troops were killed and fifty wounded. Five U.S. Special Force soldiers were injured too. Tununda’s team instantly went from an assault force to a rescue force. They raced into the fort under heavy enemy fire with their seven Humvees and evacuated the wounded troops.

A day later with the enemy reduced to just a handful of Taliban fighters Tununda found himself leading an assault team down into the basement of the fort. His hand-to-hand killing of two Taliban soldiers holed up inside gave

him legendary status. It was even whispered throughout the unit that his Seneca Indian warrior bloodline got the better of him and that he allegedly scalped the two Taliban fighters while they were still alive. Although no one had proven the story true, it seemed one of those combat legends that grew in exaggeration over the years.

“An aboriginal is a native of the land before the white settlers took control. In Quebec’s case, the native aboriginal are Indians such as the Cree, the Mi’gmaq, or the Inuit tribes of northern Quebec. They, in essence, are separate nations themselves within the province, sir,” replied Tununda.

“Thank you, Major. You may be seated. Precisely. In last February’s secessionist vote these Indian nations voted to stay with Canada if Quebec voted ‘YES.’ Well the ‘YES’ side won and that’s why we’re in a crisis here today. Anyway, one of the main reasons we are going in — that you all should be aware of — is that if separate nations of Indians want continued alliance with Canada but Quebec in turn claims them as their own territory, then we have problem.

“Let me read this here.” Petrovich adjusted his reading glasses once again. “Umm, the Cree people of Quebec argue that any announced annexation of their rightful lands to sovereign Quebec will not take place without their permission; furthermore that if Quebec establishes a right to secede from Canada, the Cree have the right to stay within the Canadian federation. If Quebec declares independence, this would be a violation of the fundamental principles of their own human rights and democracy. If actual secession were to happen, the Cree argue they would seek security through the Canadian courts in protecting their own territorial boundaries.” The colonel looked up.

“In fact that is exactly what they did. I want you to keep this in mind. Quebec cannot unilaterally nationalize an entire region and claim it as their own. If it comes down to combat remember this, one of the reasons we’ll be there is to fight for the freedom of free peoples. To fight against oppression and to fight against totalitarianism. Don’t ever forget that! It was the same reason we went into Central Asia and also why we still have a presence in the Balkans.” A shuffling in the audience could be heard as many of the officers shifted nervously in their chairs.

Petrovich clicked his mouse and the letters ‘QDF’ now appeared on screen. “This is the newly formed Quebec Defense Force, the government’s paramilitary arm. This is the enemy. And this,” the screen switched back to Jacques DeMars as he made an obscene gesture to Canadian Prime Minister Peter Wilson, “is the face of the enemy.

“DeMars has a lot of deeply hidden rage behind those eyes. Rage, I suspect, brought on by his jail time experiences and all that Marxist garbage he learned in school. This deranged despot is not afraid to exhibit his emotions either, as you can see here. This man is very intelligent, highly educated, cunning, full of deception, very future orientated and most of all he is completely loyal to Quebec’s interests. He has committed his whole life to secession. Which is why he won election and why his party, the Parti Quebecois, back him in every way.

“This guy is very slick, I want each and every one of you to be aware of that. We don’t know what he is up to. DeMars would never go out on a limb like this in forming the QDF unless he was well prepared. Never underestimate this QDF. The official public perception is that the QDF is a bunch of shotgun-toting citizens loyal to DeMars but I want you guys to treat them as the most serious threat you’ve ever come across. Remember, DeMars may be a little older now but he knows how to kill.

“Captain Almond is telling me that desertions of Quebec-born soldiers in the Canadian Army is steadily rising but the Canadian government doesn’t want that to get out, for obvious reasons of course. The Canadian National Defense is very unstable at this time. They have very little honor left after their liberal Parliament has whittled their force down to nothing. Their readiness is questionable and their public perception sucks. That’s why we were called in. What does that mean for us? Well, we aren’t just dealing with yahoos in the QDF, we’re dealing with trained soldiers who are fighting for their own country’s independence. You might have even trained with some of these guys in the past. They will be bent on freedom at any cost.

“Take the first QDF officer to join, Colonel Michel LaPointe. I know of him. He’s a very disgruntled combat veteran. He is apparently calling the shots with the QDF and is a close advisor to Jacques DeMars. We know that he had a distinguished career with combat experience up until the Somalia incident when that teenager was beaten and killed on his watch. After that he went downhill and held some desk jobs before resigning. He was investigated for the disappearance of some equipment. I don’t know all the facts of the case ’cause it’s still ongoing but it basically forced him out of the army with a dishonorable discharge. He’s a ruthless revolutionary because he’s now fighting for independence. They all are. This means they will go to any length to accomplish their goals. The QDF most likely can be compared to those Taliban fuckers we wiped out. They’ll be more of an unconventional army. Expect guerrilla ambushes, booby traps, snipers, and everything from a force

that won't engage us directly on the battlefield.

"If it comes down to a shooting war men, we'll probably be in a Military Operation in Urban Terrain, or MOUT, situation. All you guys have to worry about is doing your job just as efficiently as you have always been trained and we'll all be successful and come home in one piece. Hopefully though, everything will be and should be resolved by diplomacy if the suits in D.C. get their shit together," the colonel said with disgust.

Petrol moved on through his briefing and threw up an overhead of a CNN news reporter. He turned to his audience. "The official reason for this Canadian assistance request that you all should express to any reporters out there is namely the free operation of the St. Lawrence Seaway, which lies in Quebec territory. That, my friends, is reason enough to go to war with this totalitarian regime. Again, they're gonna nationalize the fucking province and basically rob everyone and every business and every country that has an asset in Quebec, let alone shut down an entire international water trade route. That's one of America's life-blood lines!" The colonel was getting hot and red in the face.

"I think Petrol's gonna combust," whispered Shore to D'Arata, who had to literally bite his lip or he would burst out laughing. This time even Captain Karr, overhearing Shore's comment, snorted a light chuckle.

"I'm now going to overview this so-called PR mission with the Canucks and then I'll announce which battalion will be assigned as the Quick Reaction Force. Again, this mission serves as a saber rattling mission – purely for intimidation to see if DeMars will bend in his negotiating skills and come back to the peace table so we all can avoid bloodshed." The colonel paused for the weight of what he just said to sink in. The room was silent as every professional soldier had hundreds of thoughts racing through his head.

"First on the agenda, the unit we send to Montreal will have some classroom orientation and intel briefings with the 3rd Royal Canadian Regiment's liaison officer here at Drum. This will take place at the end of this month. Actual deployment of the QRF will occur next month on Sunday the 15th in the early morning hours. This deployment will be a ground operation, I repeat, a ground operation. As I've said before we will be moving the battalion by convoy with a fully armed escort package of Humvees and LAV IIIs.

"Our destination is Canadian Forces Base Montreal. The route we take will be along Highway 15 as soon as we cross the New York-Quebec border up near Plattsburgh. We will rendezvous at the old Air Force Base in

Plattsburgh before crossing. It's only 60 kilometers to the Montreal from there. The route will be patrolled by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The CINC himself picked this route for the highest visibility possible. Once we make it to CFB Montreal everyone will be confined to the base for obvious security matters. That is a direct order unless I give special permission otherwise. This will be a top-notch exercise. I will not tolerate fuck ups!" Petrovich scanned the officers and their expressions.

"According to FORSCOM, the QRF will remain at CFB Montreal for an indefinite period of time depending on developments in the political arena. Negotiations with Quebec should start up shortly after once our presence is known. At least that's what the suits are all hoping.

"Yes, I know what you're all thinking – into the hornet's nest we go. Don't worry, we'll be fully armed for our own defense. Besides, there will be more than enough assets around for protection in case there's an incident. Montreal is pro-western, mostly English speaking anyway so we're on friendly grounds."

Petrovich took another long drink of water and said, "I'm now going to announce what unit of the 2nd Brigade has been given the opportunity to perform this function." He took off his reading glasses.

Lt. D'Arata closed his eyes and bowed his head. Everyone held their collective breath. The room went completely silent. Hearts pounded even harder now. This was the real deal, D'Arata thought. We are going in to provoke DeMars into a fight, pure and simple.

"The honor of being the 2nd Brigade Task Force into Quebec goes to the Golden Dragons," announced the colonel staring at his subordinate, the large-framed Lieutenant Colonel Doug Gutzenheimer, Golden Dragon's battalion commander.

Chatter immediately took over the briefing room. Some officers were elated, some disappointed, some were quite bitter. A few hoo-yaahs went out. The colonel quelled their reactions quickly in his booming voice. "The two other battalions will continue to be on high alert pending further developments."

Lt. D'Arata opened his eyes and looked up at Captain Karr, one of three company commanders of the Golden Dragons. Karr had leaned forward in his chair, craning his thick neck and whispering something in his boss Lt. Colonel Gutzenheimer's ear. Karr's habitual hand-on-bald-head rub was working full throttle as he spoke, a sure sign even the famed Best Ranger Competition champion was nervous. For Captain Karr to be worried about

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the mission was not a good sign for he was one of the most looked-up-to leaders in the battalion. Just making it out of Mogadishu, Somalia back in '93 with a shrapnel wound from an RPG could attest to that.

D'Arata looked over to Lt. Shore who was staring up at the ceiling exhaling a long breath of air. It would be Bulldog's very first assignment out of college. D'Arata then turned to his left and glanced at 3rd Platoon Leader, Lt. Mickey Torrence, another young mustang like himself. Torrence, of African-American descent, was smiling, obviously quite excited to go and prove himself too.

D'Arata was pumped up himself, yet terribly afraid at the same time. A feeling in the back of his mind left him unsure that everything was as it should be. He knew he was being used by politicians in the wrong way but it was also a chance to put all his training to the test in an urban battlefield. This was, after all, what he had been hoping for all along. This was considered the big game his elite commando battalion had been slated for.

Captain Karr spun around with a serious look on his face and addressed his three platoon leaders. "We meet in my office after the briefing."

Colonel Petrovich interrupted the loud chatter. In his commanding voice he said, "That's the conclusion of my segment. We've got a job to do and we will succeed. Thank you. Brigade operations Captain O'Neil will now brief the remainder of the mission in full detail. Good luck Golden Dragons. You are the Right of the Line!"

CHAPTER 3 – IMPLEMENTATION

10 August 2005. Beauport, Quebec:

In Quebec City's northern industrial section lay the sprawling deep port facilities of Beauport. The main complex of cranes, warehouses, and railroad yards was extremely quiet on this hot summer night as the port was empty of any large freighters. However, at one of the secluded end docks a small fishing boat approached signaling it was ready to dock. With the help of several figures that seemed to emerge from the shadows, the boat tied up but kept its engines idling.

This particular fishing vessel had made an early morning rendezvous in the Atlantic Ocean at the end of the St. Lawrence River with a fast freighter from France where she took on several crates and some human cargo. Now safely in port, the clandestine fishing boat crew was in the process of unloading their precious cargo while a few dozen, plain-clothed Quebec Defense Force soldiers patrolled the docks.

A forklift rolled over from a warehouse and stopped at the edge of the dock near the boat. The crew immediately loaded the wooden crates onto the forks while the human cargo simply stepped off and proceeded inside the warehouse.

Within minutes the fishing boat moved out from the docking facility and headed back out in the river channel. Quebec Defense Force Colonel Michel LaPointe smiled wryly underneath his thick mustache. The transfer of goods was a quick success. The ex-Canadian Army officer watched from a small office window that fronted the warehouse knowing full well what a surprise this shipment would be to the Canadians and Americans who planned on sabotaging his newly founded country's independence.

Yes, all was going our way, LaPointe thought, as he turned around to face the row of men assembled behind him in the office. He caught one of them, a young man with long blonde hair, stifling a yawn. There were four of them total and had arrived with the fishing vessel as part of the shipment. Duffel bags lay at their feet stuffed with personal items, clothing, and side arms. Each man was dressed in fishermen outfits for their disguise as they

journeyed down the river. They stood at attention awaiting their new commander's orders. Without saying a word LaPointe narrowed his eyes on a stocky man standing slightly forward of the other three. He held several papers bound by clips.

LaPointe walked over to him with heavy, heel-clicking footsteps and stood in the man's face with his hands on hips. "Report yourself," LaPointe ordered in thick French-Canadian.

"Sergeant Major Renée Bourdage, Special Contractor, and my team, reporting for duty for the Quebec Defense Force. Here is our paperwork outlining our experience, sir." Bourdage's homeland French was much more refined and classical as opposed to Quebec's twangier version.

LaPointe took the papers in hand without even glancing at them. He didn't need to. The DGSE agent had e-mailed him advanced copies to peruse. Folding his hands behind his back, LaPointe was rest assured they were the best French mercenaries money could buy, or should he say "Special Contractors," as Bourdage had put it. LaPointe nodded and looked down the row.

He inspected each of the Frenchmen, checking their demeanor for any signs of weakness. He knew each of their names, backgrounds and special skills especially in the area of air defense. He was like a chieftain sizing up his warriors before the fight. Not one of the mercenaries met LaPointe's gaze, they just stared straight ahead in complete control. To look their new commander in the eye would promote challenge and would be disrespectful to an officer, especially one being secretly assisted by their mother country France.

LaPointe was pleased with their physical appearance although they seemed a bit tired from the trip. They looked strong and in shape just like the commandos in his old, disbanded unit of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. Yes, these men were some mean motherfuckers who took no shit from anybody. It showed in their eyes, killer eyes.

LaPointe stroked his moustache and sat down at his desk. Now he read their combat resumes out of courtesy if nothing else. Each man's military background was quite extensive with all members of the group seeing "Special Contractual" duty in the world's most recent hotspots such as the Balkans, Middle East, and Africa. One of them had actually contracted out as a security advisor to a South American drug lord. LaPointe was very impressed. They had shot down many airplanes and helicopters. These men were adventure seekers in the game of combat and had become mercenaries

for various personal or political motives, not to mention excellent financial rewards. He was especially impressed with Sergeant Major Bourdage's resume.

"Sergeant Major Bourdage, I see when you were employed with the French Army back in 1991 you were a tank gunner with the French 6th Infantry in the Persian Gulf War," LaPointe questioned from his chair, "you fought alongside the American 82nd Airborne Division, correct?"

"Yes Colonel, that is correct. Our company in particular destroyed over fifty Iraqi tanks and we buried thousands of their infantry in their own trenches," grunted Bourdage with satisfaction.

"Last conventional war of the century. It was a great experience," LaPointe stated.

"Sure was, Colonel. Sure was. I understand you yourself were quite a force to reckon with in that war, sir."

"I had my moments, Sergeant Major. I had my moments," said LaPointe flashing back to Desert Storm where he also 'busted' Iraqi tanks. His heroics as a young tank captain with 2 Commando of the CAR won him several medals of valor and courageousness only to be shot down years later during the Somalia Inquiry. The patriotic injustice he endured from that event still caused him immense animosity against the Canadian government. But that was behind him. He now had a real country to fight for – Quebec.

"That was the desert though and we had lots of room to maneuver and air superiority to pound the piss out of those sand niggers. If we end up fighting the Canadian or U.S. Army, which it looks like we might, it will be in an urban terrain such as Montreal and we won't have any air assets. They will have the advantage. The urban setting will have many more obstacles and defilades to deal with as well as the civilian factor. But it will also provide many advantages for a small but lethal force in which you will play an extensive part."

"I understand, Colonel. All of my men have been in this type of concrete terrain before. In our last contract assignment fighting with the Serbian Army against the KLA, we experienced a theatre ops very similar to Quebec," assured Bourdage.

"Yes, I noticed that here in your resume. It's interesting though. Why would the French government contract you out to fight for Milosevic when NATO's official position was to crush the Serbs and knock em out of Kosovo?"

"Well Colonel, it was all very fucked up in the Balkans to say the least.

Your enemies are your friends one day and back stab you the next. In that particular assignment, in early '99, we were basically there to ensure that a French-owned ore mine wasn't lost to the Kosovo Albanians. It was purely an economic favor for a minerals trader from Paris who knew some higher ups in the French government. You see that mine was also owned by some Milosevic-controlled banks and they were doing business with the French trader even though there was an economic ban imposed by the UN."

"That's interesting," said LaPointe shaking his head. Business must go on, he thought to himself, even in the face of wholesale massacre.

"We did see a lot of action against the KLA though," continued the braggart Bourdage. "The ugly little Albanian bastards were tough fucking nuggets but our superior firepower with the Serb Army cleansed them out of the area. It all worked out nice because that part of the Kosovo province was later manned by French troops under NATO and we never allowed the Albanians back in."

LaPointe nodded keeping his thoughts to himself. This guy was a ruthless son-of-a-bitch. I'm glad he's on my side. There was one other question LaPointe wanted to ask this mercenary leader. It was listed on his resume under "achievements."

"What's the story behind the Stealth fighter you claimed to have shot down over Yugoslavia?" he asked.

Bourdage smiled. A gold upper tooth was revealed in a flash. "Hah, that was awesome! The most fun I ever had. We were finishing up our contract with the Serbs when NATO started bombing. I got word that the French Army wanted to test out a new shoulder-launched missile system designed especially for stealth-type fighters, in particular the American F-117. I couldn't pass up the opportunity. It was a little one-sided though. A DGSE agent supplied me with the bombing run of the Stealth fighter and all I had to do was wait till he showed up. He was right on time. The missile worked like a charm. He showed up on display and everything. Locked onto the Yankee and launched the missile. Seconds later a nice yellow burst in the sky rewarded me. Fucking American never knew what hit him."

"Nice, nice!" said LaPointe smiling back. "With the same units in those crates we ought to have no problem fighting off an air threat."

"Right, and we've got upgraded systems too. The Iraqi Army used these models successfully against both helicopters and jet fighters when the Americans invaded under their regime change bullshit. The Americans claimed accidental or mechanical failure of their aircraft but in actuality they

were shoulder-launched missile strikes from these units. They even tagged a British troop transport chopper with major loss of life. So, don't worry one bit. Our air guard for this mission is going to be superb."

"Perfect," said LaPointe standing up. "Well, I like your confidence and the moral distance you can put between getting the job done you're hired for and the bigger political picture, a sign of a true professional soldier. Seems you've accomplished all your goals in every assignment and I like that a lot because you will be in full command of our air defense, Bourdage."

"Excellent sir, excellent. You will not be disappointed," said Bourdage smiling with a glimmer.

"Basically gentlemen, we have the firepower of ten M1A2 main battle tanks as far as an offensive asset goes," began LaPointe looking over to the others. Bourdage looked surprised.

"Wow, I've seen an Abrams in action. You simply don't fuck with them," said Bourdage. "How did you come to be in possession of such firepower?"

"We acquired them through, shall I say, a 'special arrangement' with the Canadian Army. They were some of the first discontinued tanks of the United States Army that Canada purchased for peacekeeping missions and I was in charge of them during my stint at one of the Canadian Forces bases. Let's put it this way, National Defence won't even admit that they're gone."

"Where are they?" asked Bourdage.

"You'll soon find out," explained LaPointe, stepping around to the front of the desk to address the men. "We've kept them maintained over the last three years and have loyal crews to fight them. We have only fired them on rare occasions to keep the systems accurate. This is the force your two missile units will be defending. This is the surprise left hook that the enemy won't expect.

"You see, I know, as well as the leadership of Quebec knows, that we will never win an all-out conventional war with NATO — that was never our intention. Yes, the QDF has a few thousand militiamen with small arms weaponry but they are spread out over several cities and are more a symbolic gesture than a real organized fighting force. We even know of federalist infiltrators among the new recruits of whom we've been feeding misinformation. You see we've been playing their legal, diplomatic game of negotiation for quite some time now but we needed a little punch to our words. That's why we decided to activate our aces-in-the-hole, the tanks. We will show them, when the day is right, that we are serious about maintaining our territorial rights. We purchased you and your equipment to help us in this

matter. We're not here to sever the head of the beast but rather to break its jaw. You see we Quebecers know how to deal with the Anglophones. They know that although they might knock us down they can always expect us to come back fighting until we get what is rightfully ours. We Quebecers never give up, ever!" said LaPointe clenching his teeth, his jaw pulsating.

"When the world sees the destruction we can rain down against those who oppose our quest to freedom they will respect and support us and expose the hypocrisy of the so-called democratic superpowers. They will see us stand up to the true oppressors in this world, those who oppress with their money. We will be the military force that will allow our leadership to beat the beast politically. Do you now understand our strategy? Do you now know what's expected of you?"

"We do Colonel LaPointe," answered Bourdage for his team. He had been through this scenario with many regimes. "We will provide the escort in air defense to get you to your objective."

"Precisely, Sergeant Major. But we've got a hell of a lot of work ahead of us. You need to assimilate with our tank teams and work on convoy and defense strategies," continued LaPointe. "You men are my eyes in the sky. We've paid a lot of hard cash for you and for the 'units' sitting in there. I expect each one of you to live up to your salary during the duration of your contractual agreement. Who knows? You just might like it here in Quebec, France's new younger sister," the colonel smiled. "You might even want to extend your stay once we finally break the chains from Canada. There will be many lucrative opportunities for you." LaPointe paused and walked the line of men.

"Well, I'm quite impressed," he said standing erect with his hands on his hips again. "You look to be an exceptional group of men indeed. You certainly have all the qualifications. My compliments go to your employers, whoever they are," he chuckled. The mercenaries smiled and relaxed a bit. LaPointe thought DeMars would be quite pleased now that the whole shipment was finally in country. He could hardly wait to pick up the phone to inform him.

"Now gentlemen, if you will, your first assignment is to get some rest because tomorrow is a big day and we have very little time. You will report to QDF Headquarters at the Citadelle at 1000 for an orientation meeting. Premier Jacques DeMars and the ruling council will be present. We will then go over our plans for the operation and would welcome your input. Following that we head up to north country to meet the tank crews. Now, I've got a phone

call to make. Sleep tight, men. Dismissed.”

1 September 2005. AP Network News Radio News Brief:

“A spokesman for the DeMars administration made two stunning announcements this morning that raises the stakes in the ongoing Quebec crisis. In a blow to NATO resolve and the Canadian-U.S. military partnership, NATO member France officially recognized Quebec as sovereign nation under U.N. charters and has asked that it be considered for membership in the security organization. On top of that announcement came one from Quebec itself. The provincial police of Quebec have endorsed the legitimacy of the Quebec secessionist vote. These two key supporters, one on a world power and one a law enforcement organization, have given Premier Jacques DeMars renewed vigor in establishing Quebec as a free sovereign nation.

“The announcements come just two weeks before the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division convoy is due to arrive in Montreal for its scheduled training with the Canadian Army. This brings the crisis to a dangerous new level of confrontation if DeMars does not disband the military wing, the Quebec Defense Force, by the imposed October 1st deadline as demanded by Canadian Prime Minister Wilson. Wilson has stated on several occasions that he will resort to force if Quebec does not comply.

“Now that a major world power has recognized Quebec as a separate nation, serious political cracks have arisen within both NATO and the United Nations. It appears that DeMars now has some leverage if and when he returns to the negotiating table after months of stalled talks.”

12 September 2005. *Montreal Gazette*, Montreal. Newspaper Brief:

HACKER ARRESTED! LINKS TO DEMARS. The Canadian cyber task force investigating the disappearance of undisclosed military property from CFB Valcartier back in 2002 has announced a major arrest in the case. All indications suggest a direct link to the Premier of Quebec, Jacques DeMars and the head of his QDF, Colonel Michel LaPointe.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police spokesman, Major Ray McNamara, announced today that the joint task force made up of the RCMP, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the FBI have arrested a twenty-five-year-old native of the Netherlands after a raid Tuesday on his luxury condo here in Montreal.

Claude te Brunele, an ex-employee of the International Research Institute

for Computer Science based out of Amsterdam, Netherlands, was nabbed along with all the computer equipment he used in a series of financial cyber crimes, one of which linked him directly to the Valcartier incident.

McNamara elaborated. "We have uncovered indisputable evidence that this encryption expert is the person who made the illegal change order in the National Defence mainframe at CFB Valcartier which resulted in the theft of millions of dollars of military equipment. We made this direct linkage actually from another infiltration case we were investigating concerning several financial institutions here in Canada as well as the United States."

Asked how they tracked the suspect down McNamara answered, "During his recent break-ins within the banking industry, he operated various encryption peripherals, which were used to hide his identity during the illegal sessions. However, maybe due to his naivete or maybe due to him wanting to challenge us he left behind a hidden electronic signature. These signatures or computer fingerprints as they're sometimes called are recorded in the session logs of the systems where he had gained illegal access. When the victimized bank's session logs were compared, the similarities between the illegal sessions produced a public key. When we possessed the public key as well as the encrypted signature, we had enough information to determine the private key. After countless hours of computations on our new Cray 2000-16 supercomputer systems as well as our 200 number-crunching peripheral computers, we produced his private key. With the private and public key we were able to decrypt the signature and identify the devices that were used in the attack. Luck was then on our side when we traced device serial numbers and the address records of worldwide domain authorities to arrive at our suspect. Monitoring took place and we nailed our man just before he was scheduled to leave the country. But the linkage in the case with the missing military equipment and Quebec Premiere Jacques DeMars came as we identified e-mail correspondence dating back to 2002 with DeMars and the now QDF Colonel Michel LaPointe, who headed up the motor pool at CFB Valcartier in that time period. The old e-mails, which were deleted but not wiped free from Brunele's computer, outlined certain aspects of the theft only the culprits would know. And that's really all I wish to say about that aspect of the case right now."

McNamara also delved into the background of Claude te Brunele. It turns out Mr. Brunele was a young member of the scientific team at the International Research Institute for Computer Science who cracked the Internet security RSA-155 code back in 1999. He later was fired for unethical

behavior.

RSA codes are used to protect data transmissions over the Internet such as credit card numbers, stock trades, and private e-mails. The RSA-155 code was specifically designed for use by financial institutions in daily transactions. This is the code that the Institute had deciphered and Brunele was thought to have stolen to conduct his illegal activities.

Asked if further arrests can be expected, McNamara replied, "I cannot go there at this time."

13 September 2005. National Assembly Building. Quebec City:

"They'll break him and he'll sing like a bird! We're fucked. Absolutely fucked! I warned you to knock the kid off once the Valcartier job was done. Now look what he's done. He'll implicate all of us and give Ottawa a reason to attack militarily. We'll all be fugitives!"

A sweeping downward hand motion followed by a loud smack against the table echoed through the room, causing the whining government official to jump in his seat.

"That's enough out of you, Jean-Paul! You've certainly been reaping Brunele's rewards lately with your flare for fine classic automobiles now haven't you? You would have none of it if not for him," seethed Jacques DeMars, the Premier of Quebec, from across the mahogany conference table. He stared coldly at the aide who was throwing the temper tantrum and raised his hand, balling it up in a fist. "If I hear any more talk of this government being indicted I'll personally rip your tongue out myself. Is that clear? They can't prove a thing. They are bluffing on the e-mail crap. The operation three years ago was set up to insulate us from any involvement. Brunele dealt with a DGSE 'handler' in Montreal who directed him every step of the way. It's French intelligence who should be worrying, not us. There is no direct link to us. We've been through this a thousand times. Get it through your thick skull. All the shit you're watching on television is just propoganda and words put into his mouth to try and rattle us — which in your case it has."

The aide sunk in his chair and dropped his head.

"There is no need to worry," DeMars said scanning his inner circle of six men seated around the table before resting his eyes on Colonel Michel LaPointe. "I have made sure each and every one of you has a secure account that cannot be traced. You all have enough money to last a lifetime, so quit your bitching. Besides, they have no clue where the tanks are hidden and without direct evidence there's no linkage. And by the time the tanks make

their reappearance, it will be too late.” LaPointe nodded reassuringly. “We will have made our point.”

The short DeMars, dressed in an immaculate black tailored suit, stood up and rested both of his wiry hands on the table, leaning forward. His glistening gold pinky ring with the letters ‘FLQ’ inscribed on it clicked against the varnished mahogany wood surface. “Listen to me. Here’s how we’re going to handle this minor inconvenience. If any word of our linkage comes up in either the banking infiltration or the tank acquisitions we counterattack them in the media and state that Brunele was tortured into making a confession against his will. We say they fabricated the evidence in light of recent political events and lack of credible evidence. We say he acted alone as a disgruntled individual for his own selfish materialistic needs and sense of power just as the papers reported. We deny all involvement and turn the tables to make the focus on the Canadians. I want an avalanche of misinformation of the racist FBI-sponsored torture tactics they used against this Danish citizen in order to get their confession to use against our legitimate legal fight for freedom. I want a smear campaign against Wilson, Abernathy, and the feds. Make it like they were setting us up. Turn Brunele’s fuck-up into a positive for ourselves and you will see how it galvanizes the people to join us even more in our fight. Put out fake poll numbers to back us up too. Everyone see where I’m coming from? They are trying to distract us. In the meantime, if our ‘operatives’ in Montreal have the opportunity to take Brunele out, they have the go-ahead from me,” finished the premier in a cold voice.

The elite Quebec ruling council all nodded their heads in stunned agreement. DeMars was not one to be crossed, ever. And the nonchalant “kill” order he issued just confirmed it. Also, if he was confident that playing the spin tactic in the media would work then they should feel comfortable. After all, he was the master of spin during the entire secessionist referendum campaign that led to the successful vote. Yes, denial and a twisting of the facts was the way to go. DeMars was right again.

Sitting back down, DeMars made a notation in his notebook while stroking his smooth jaw. He then looked back up through black piercing eyes and turned to the leader of his paramilitary wing. “Next on the agenda, Colonel LaPointe. Colonel, please give me a situation report. Is your armor ready to move out? We are only two days away from the American 10th Mountain arrival. Are we ready to initiate the final phase of our plans to rid these ‘guests’ from our soil?”

Colonel LaPointe, dressed in full camouflaged battle fatigues, pressed and starched perfectly and adorned with QDF unit patches, stood up from the end of the table and walked towards a small easel displaying a map of Quebec. He donned a light blue beret cocked at an angle over his short-cropped gray hair. A QDF emblem in gold marked the front of the beret. Picking up a thin wooden pointer LaPointe turned and addressed DeMars's question.

"Yes sir, we are prepared. We have trained hard and are ready to roll from the base camp at the predetermined time. My crews are top notch and led by highly loyal, hand-picked, experienced men. To review, I have worked with key components of the provincial police and they have assured me once we make it to the Autoroute it will be secure all the way to Trois Rivieres for the crossing over the Laviolette Bridge, here." LaPointe tapped the wooden stick on the small industrial city that lay halfway between Quebec City and Montreal.

"Once we cross the St. Lawrence we will refuel and make our final thrust to CFB Montreal in the early morning hours, at which time the American convoy will already be inside the compound. Intelligence sources say they are planning to arrive about 0800 hours. And their Colonel Petrovich is a stickler for doing things by the book. With the coinciding diversionary tactics of fake bomb threats at several pro-Canadian institutions, then knocking out the power grid and of inciting a riot outside CFB Montreal's gate, my force will travel relatively unnoticed along the south bank of the St. Lawrence towards Montreal and completely take the base by surprise. We will then surround it, lay siege, and demand surrender," finished the satisfied colonel circling the small army base on the map with his pointer. He stroked his moustache with thoughts of redemption for the humiliating investigation into his conduct in Somalia. "If they do not surrender immediately, as they are not expected to do, we will then move in and take the hostages. And if they try to attack us by air then we have the defenses to take care of that. We won't shoot first unless provoked."

"Excellent Michel, excellent. This will work. I can feel it in my old bones," said the premier. His facial expression suddenly turned sour though. "I'm still a little bit worried though when our force hits the Autoroute. This is a crucial point where they might be detected and word sent to the Canadians in Montreal. Assure us once more of the precautions you have taken."

"Yes sir. Per the plan, we have disguised the vehicles with highly visible Canadian Army markings to throw off any enemy intelligence agents that

might have us under surveillance. That's the first precaution. Secondly, because we are moving in the early morning hours under complete darkness when most residents will be sound asleep and traffic down to a bare minimum, our chances of detection are virtually nonexistent. That coincides with the fact that our force is small and highly mobile, also making detection tougher. Thirdly," explained LaPointe holding up three fingers, "a communications power outage will occur in Montreal prior to our departure making any warning of detection quite difficult. And finally, air detection.

"If the Canadian Air Force gets too close for our comfort, we are prepared to defend ourselves with our highly superior air defense systems. Let me remind you gentlemen that the shoulder-launched missile systems we purchased were the same ones sold to the Yugoslav Army and used in the only recorded shootdown of an American F-117 Stealth fighter-bomber. And, the man who shot it down will be manning one of those units. If the Canadian or U.S. Air Force puts anything against us they're in for a rude awakening. Does that answer your question sir?"

"Yes Colonel LaPointe, it does. Very good. Well gentlemen, pending any more last minute surprises from the Anglophones," started DeMars in summing up the long afternoon meeting, "it looks as though we are on the final road to making history. I can feel vindication in the air. Yes, this is going to happen," he smiled. "Our lifelong dream of being an independent nation is just around the corner."

CHAPTER 4 – INSERTION

0220 hrs, 15 September 2005. Airplane Maintenance Hangar, Former Plattsburgh Air Force Base, Plattsburgh, NY:

Lieutenants Mike D’Arata, Wes Shore, and Mickey Torrence, the platoon leaders of Bravo Company, sat watching as Captain T.J. Karr, their immediate commander, closed his eyes and rubbed his hand across his shiny, completely bald scalp. This was Karr’s trademark sign that something was wrong. Why the entire battalion had been told to stage its troops in an old airfield hangar at this time in the early morning was anyone’s guess. Stopping at the former Air Force base, now an industrial state empowerment zone, was supposed to be the final rendezvous-point before crossing the border into Quebec and proceeding up Interstate 87 on the final leg to Montreal. But to dismount and assemble all the troops as well as their gear in an old beat-up maintenance facility next to low-income housing units was not part of the plan. Now engaged in an endless wait, the young lieutenants could only assume Colonel Petrovich was up to some uncanny tactic. He was widely known for stunts just as this to keep the troops alert and on edge, only this was taking the opposite effect as most of them were now sleeping. D’Arata brushed it off knowing there was no sense worrying about something not in his control and buried his head back in the thin book he had picked up on Quebec’s demographics. Getting comfortable with his back against his backpack he flipped to a bookmark and immediately began reading the interesting history of the province.

The book, entitled “New France,” was a quick synopsis of the province of Quebec and its people. D’Arata wanted to learn more on the background of the whole crisis before actually going into the potentially hostile territory. With his basic knowledge of the French language and crude speaking skills he felt he needed every advantage he could get when dealing with the Quebecker citizenry. It might prove to help resolve a conflict in the end. The particular passage he was reading was a summary on Quebec’s historical roots.

He learned the St. Lawrence region was first explored in 1534 by Jacques

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Cartier and then in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain who built a trading post on the site of Quebec City. Champlain established the first permanent colony in the area. Trois-Rivieres was founded in 1632 and then Montreal a year later. Beyond Montreal, towards the Lake Ontario region, the Iroquois Indian Nation blocked any further settlement. This inevitably led to bloody conflicts between French explorers, traders, and missionaries who came to the continent seeking a wider market for their goods and services. D'Arata looked up from his book and searched for Major Tununda. He knew he was a member of the Iroquois Nation and might ask him about its history but Tununda was nowhere to be found.

New France, as it was named then, soon became a royal French colony with a growing population of settlers from the homeland. The long French and Indian War of 1754-1763 was then waged in which the French allied with Indian tribes of the north to battle the British colonialists and their Iroquois Indian allies south of Lake Ontario. New France was lost and eventually came under complete British rule. To pacify the French inhabitants the British passed the Quebec Act in 1774 allowing the area to retain its French language and culture.

After the loss by Britain in the American Revolution, many British Loyalists came to Quebec, ultimately settling in Upper Canada or the present day province of Ontario. Lower Canada, or Quebec, was separated and ruled by British aristocracy. French Canadian resentment grew against the British, leading to an unsuccessful revolt in 1837. Although Upper and Lower Canada were reunited in 1841, they joined the Canadian federal union as separate provinces in 1867. Since then Quebeckers have sought to maintain their cultural heritage and language under a constant onslaught of English influence leading up to the present day crisis. D'Arata gave a muted gasp in learning that the resentment between French Canadians and regular Canadians had gone back so many years. Wow, he said to himself, no wonder this place is about to boil over.

Distracted, he looked up at a group of soldiers in front of him. Captain Karr was in a close huddle with his fellow company commanders and the higher-echelon officers of the battalion command staff. They stood at the front of the hangar behind the closed bay doors that led outside to the tarmac. He now saw Major Tununda looking the troops over. He never saw a more serious expression from the Iroquois warrior. Something was definitely up.

The rest of the battalion troops faced the bay doors in staggered columns with gear and weapons stowed in piles according to platoon breakdown. Most

infantrymen were using their backpacks as headrests or backrests as D'Arata was now doing. Many were catching up on some much-needed sleep. Leading the impromptu officers meeting at the front, next to Major Tununda, was the battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Doug Gutzenheimer, a tough, "no-holds barred," forty-year-old graduate of West Point, who had just entered the hangar calling his company commanders together.

The dominating, barrel-chested Gutzenheimer had quite an impressive combat resume. He had served with the 82nd Airborne Division right out of West Point as a 2nd Lieutenant and immediately parachuted into Grenada in 1983. Operation Urgent Fury was Gutzenheimer's "baptism by fire." It came quick as his platoon experienced fierce fighting against the Cubans. The harsh reality of combat brought his first casualties too. He lost two soldiers in his platoon.

His rise up the ranks saw him command a company shortly after, while also earning a master's degree from the University of South Carolina. In 1989 he again entered combat during Operation Just Cause in Panama, again with the 82nd. He parachuted in with the 4th Battalion, 325th Parachute Infantry Regiment and took on the Panama Defense Forces Cavalry squadron at Panama Viejo. Stiff resistance followed as his units stormed the Marriott Caesar Park Hotel and freed fourteen Americans being held hostage. Gutzenheimer's actions during this assault earned him several medals of courage as well as a Purple Heart from an errant bullet that blew a chunk out of his leg.

Still serving with the 82nd when he was again called upon for overseas duty, Captain Gutzenheimer at the time served as a staff officer with a headquarters company and helped in the slaughter of the Iraqi military machine during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

After the short ground war in the Persian Gulf, more medals, and another promotion, Major Gutzenheimer transferred to the 101st Airborne Division. There he served as battalion executive officer while earning his second master's degree from the University of Kentucky. He was off again to participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 during the most brilliant military campaign ever waged in the history of warfare. And then, just this year his mentor, Colonel Paul Petrovich, recruited Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer to command the 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment of the 10th Mountain Division.

Although he was widely regarded as an aggressive, highly accomplished ground commander that led right from the front, he was new to these troops

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and had to once again earn his younger junior officers' confidence. There was much honor and history riding behind every action he made as the 2-14th Golden Dragon's battalion commander.

The 14th Infantry Regiment took its roots at Fort Turnbell, Connecticut in 1861 during the Civil War and participated in every major campaign in Virginia. At war's end during the final review of the Army of the Potomac, the regiment asked their commander General Meade where they should be positioned. Meade replied, "The Fourteenth has always been to the front of the battle and deserved the place of honor... TAKE THE RIGHT OF THE LINE." This became the regiment's motto.

The 14th fought Indian battles in Arizona, Montana, and Wyoming then went to war with Spain in 1898 where they saw action in Guam and the Philippines.

When called to rescue embassy personnel in Peking, China as Chinese nationals revolted, the 14th led the way over the walls of the capital. When the Chinese surrendered, the 14th earned the nickname the "Golden Dragons."

The regiment fought in World War II and saw action on the Siegfried Line, the Rhine River, and the offensive across Germany and Austria. The regiment continued fighting during the Korean War when they were transferred to the 25th Infantry Division out of Hawaii.

During the Vietnam War the 2nd Battalion of the 14th fought with the 25th through the Tet offensive, the battle of Tay Ninh, and into Cambodia before being deactivated in 1972.

The 2-14th was reactivated in 1985 as the first light infantry battalion of the newly formed 10th Mountain Division. In 1988 the 2-14th was permanently stationed out of Fort Drum, New York with the 10th.

Throughout the 1990s the 2-14th was one of the busiest regiments in the U.S. Army, seeing plenty of combat action. They participated in various operations out of Cuba, Florida, Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans. But most importantly they gained invaluable unit cohesion during Operation Enduring Freedom and the hunt for the terrorists that attacked America. The 2-14th had many successful firefights in Afghanistan during their deployment. Although they missed major deployments during Operation Enduring Freedom several of the officers did participate in other units. Now as the 600 soldiers of the famed battalion sat cramped in an airfield hangar they could only speculate as to what their country's civilian leaders had in mind for them next.

Lieutenant Mike D'Arata saw Gutzenheimer staring at him. That's all he

needed to get his ass in motion. D'Arata stood up and immediately stowed his book. At five-feet, nine-inches tall and weighing a solid mass of 180 pounds, D'Arata looked like a bull dressed in full woodland Battle Dress Uniform or BDU. His Kevlar "flak jacket" bulked up his chest while his strong forearms stretched down to adjust his gear, still avoiding Gutzy's gaze. D'Arata could tell by body language that something wasn't right with his superior officer. Not only was Captain Karr upset earlier but he could also tell that the battalion commander was pissed off as well. He now figured something negative was about to happen to their ground convoy to CFB Montreal.

Needing some answers, D'Arata looked around and waved his fellow Bravo Company junior officers over. Shore and Torrence were also in the dark and could provide nothing new as to what was causing the delay. The three decided to then have a chat with their counterparts in Alpha Company to get their feel on situation. The mission had already been set back almost two hours now and the bulk of the Mountaineers had fallen fast asleep.

D'Arata strolled up to a tall, lean lieutenant and shook his head. "Hey Billy, something ain't right. Look at them over there. Gutzy's looking to kill somebody and look at T.J., his head is turning red. God knows what the hell we're doing here."

"Yeah, I know Mike," said 2nd Lt. Billy Gordon of Alpha's second platoon as he yawned to stay awake. "We should have been loaded up on the trucks by now and on our freaking way. At this rate we'll never make it to Montreal on schedule. Petrol is gonna have our ass."

Bravo's third platoon leader Mickey Torrence interrupted. He had his arms folded across his chest. His huge dark black hands were balled into fists. "Man, this shit is not good. I got a bad feeling in my gut. I bet we're scrubbed, man. We're going to abort. I know it. No glory."

"Uh oh," said Lt. Tom Tucker, of Alpha's third platoon. "Charlie Company leaders are going over there now. Looks like it's our turn. Gutzy wants us too, come on guys." All six officers walked quickly to their commander's summons at the front of the hangar.

D'Arata noticed a headquarters staffer plugging in a small portable speaker into a mechanic's overhead extension cord. The NCO turned on a microphone and a low hissing came from the box. There was going to be an announcement.

"Check. Check," voiced the NCO testing the volume. Some of the sleeping soldiers stirred from the loud noise.

Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer spoke sternly to the cocky armor

commander of the Rapid Reaction Company from Georgia, Captain Westfall, who wasn't moving fast enough for him. The captain, with face flushed an embarrassed red, in turn barked his frustration to an unsuspecting, older command sergeant major, "Get the rest of the troops over here right now! Get everyone off their asses and in close and tight. The colonel is going to brief the Task Force right here, right now damnit! Now move!"

Immediate chatter took over the hangar as the loud voice of the command sergeant major and the subsequent shouts of lower sergeants jostled the sleepy infantrymen awake. It took less than a minute before all the troops were roused from their napping to tightly pack the center of the air hangar for the announcement.

Gutzenheimer stepped up onto a crate provided by the NCO and looked down at his men. The NCO handed the microphone to his battalion commander. Gutzenheimer stood still as his combat troops crowded in front of him. Finally he raised his hands and motioned everyone to go down on one knee as a few more stragglers squeezed in. Every soldier of the 600-man combat battalion knelt. The hangar became respectfully quiet while the hum of the speaker provided the only background noise.

Taking his clear wire rim glasses off and tucking them into his BDU breast pocket, Gutzenheimer rubbed his weary eyes before looking down to address his men. His wide six-foot, four-inch, 235-pound frame rose as he took a breath to break the news. Panning his head, topped with a strip of close-cropped brown hair, he spoke in a crisp clear voice that echoed off the metal walls.

"The ground mission to Montreal has been aborted!"

Clear disappointment marked the Mountaineers' reaction. Gutzenheimer didn't give it time to sink in. "It's not over though. We've got another mission." The makeshift speaker squealed. "Can you guys hear me back there?"

"Yes sir," shouted several troopers far in the back of the hangar.

"All right men. We've got another mission. We're going deep into Quebec on what's being called Operation Joint Suppression." The troops looked at each other confused as to what brought about the escalation. Chatter broke out.

Gutzenheimer cut to the point. "Men, the shit has basically hit the fan! Colonel Petrovich and I just got out of a conference call with Fort Drum's base command staff, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Secretary of Defense, and The Man, Commander in Chief Abernathy. We have been told

that the Quebec Defense Force has commenced military activities in Montreal earlier this morning and the President and Prime Minister of Canada want immediate action taken to stop them. The QDF already knocked out the power grid and phone communications in the greater Montreal area. They have apparently placed bombs in several Canadian agencies, and they also captured a couple Royal Canadian Mounted Police stations. We understand from sources that Canadian Forces Base Montreal will be marched on this morning by a large crowd of protesters, possibly armed. The march is supposed to coincide with our arrival. That's why our mission was aborted. CFB Montreal and the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment is on full battle alert and have implemented emergency urban contingency plans for this type of civil unrest. It appears these attacks are all very well coordinated by the Quebec government." A shuffling took over the hangar. Tensions were rising. Mouths fell open.

"Listen up now. What matters the most," he said poking the air with his finger, "is that Quebec fired the first shots and threatened the national security of a NATO member country."

Several officers in the front nodded their heads in agreement.

"Prime Minister Wilson has already imposed Canada's War Measures Act declaring the Quebec province under martial law. He already gave his troops the attack order. The Canadian Army is mobilizing as I speak." The hangar was silent. The men hung on every word their veteran commander uttered.

"They've got a combined armored and infantry assault force made up of old M1A1 Abrams and M60 tanks, Cougar APCs, and some Bisons. They will advance towards Montreal on two fronts, one from Ottawa and one coming up from Kingston.

"Once the Canadian columns get near Montreal — now listen up because here's a big part of the plan — they will merge and bypass the city and advance up Autoroute number forty to Quebec City. CFB Montreal and the RCMP feel they can handle the thugs in Montreal on their own. Therefore, NATO has been advised to take the fight to the doorstep of Premier DeMars and lay siege to his capital city. This will be a Canadian heavy mechanized assault supplemented with infantry. Our mission, as the joint partner, is to spearhead this column to Quebec City. We have our orders directly from President Abernathy himself. Apparently, and I'm not too pleased about this, the CINC is calling most of the shots here. Be advised right now this is a hasty mission. Not very well planned out. This is the kind of shit that gets us in

trouble but we also have our orders.” His voice tapered off. Silence followed, hearts raced, and no one moved.

Gutzenheimer stood with a hand firmly on his hip and scanned the young warriors surrounding him. It was a powerful moment for the Golden Dragons, a moment that would change many of these combat soldiers’ lives forever.

“Gentlemen, we will be inserted into the city of Trois Rivieres which is about an hour and a half northeast of Montreal. It’s another hour or so to Quebec City from there. The reason we’re going to this city is to secure the bridges there so the Canadian columns can advance on Quebec City and end this crisis immediately. We need to end this crisis IMMEDIATELY! That is the word from the top.

“So far the Commander in Chief and the Joint Chiefs have authorized only one battalion of infantry to conduct this combat mission. They want the minimum force necessary to do the job, and we are it. However, the 4-31st and the 2-87th back at Drum have been put on alert should we need additional support in the upcoming days.

“This will be a MOUT situation. Some of you call it the concrete jungle. And it will be. And you have trained for it. And you are the best. The reason we’re in this hangar should be obvious. We’re going to be making an air assault. Our 10th Aviation Division will be providing airlift and cavalry recon. But we are going to be doing things a bit different. Listen up, especially Delta Company.” The portable speaker suddenly made another loud squealing sound. The NCO quickly fixed it.

“Right now our Black Hawks are being equipped with long range fuel tanks for sustained operations. We’ve also had to call in some additional air reserve units to supplement the lift. They will only transport Alpha, Bravo and Charlie Company personnel in at first. The initial assault target is the small regional airport at Trois Rivieres. Once we take down the airport, Captain Westfall’s Rapid Reaction Company and his Light Armored Vehicle-IIIs will follow up on C-17 Globemasters and C-130s. These two types of planes are the only ones that can land on the small runway at the target airport. Once the RRC’s transports have cleared the runway then Delta Company, their Humvees and the rest of our equipment will close the landing on additional Air Force transports. We will then and only then conduct our secondary objectives.”

Several hands shot up to ask questions. The Delta Company commander was especially agitated, as he would be last in. Gutzy ignored everyone.

“I know you all have questions. Let me explain why we we’re bringing the

heavy weapons section in on C-17s instead of with Black Hawks.” He looked at Delta’s captain. “It’s because of the time factor. It’ll take too much time for the Humvees to be sling loaded by Black Hawk or even Chinooks because of the drag in speed from the extra weight. Christ, it’ll be noon before they get there and that’s not acceptable. It’s that simple.

“The solution is to do it by air transport. By the time Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie assault the target airport by Blackhawk, the RRC will be loaded and airborne from here, make the quick trip to the target, and land with the LAVs. Once the transports unload and clear the runway then Delta will be right behind them. Everyone understand? Good. We’ve practiced similar scenarios like this before, now’s the time to make it happen.

“What’s been delaying us up this whole time is getting the right amount of aircraft up here to Plattsburgh. Fortunately, the Air Force got direct orders to expedite the situation. The transport planes are already en route and will arrive once our Black Hawks and the Cavalry’s Kiowas are clear of the airfield.”

One of Gutzenheimer’s headquarters staffers touched the colonel’s elbow and handed him a piece of paper. The colonel reached for his glasses, put them on, and reviewed the paper. It was an enlarged photocopy of a 1:50,000-scale map of the city of Trois Rivieres with several circles drawn in. Gutzenheimer quietly asked a question of the assistant then turned back to his troops.

“Once we all get into Trois Rivieres and land all of our assets, we will hit the secondary objectives by armed convoy. Commander’s intent will be the following. There are three objectives in about a four-mile radius. Listen up and take notes.” Several officers including Karr and D’Arata took out notepads and pens.

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC



Trois Rivières Regional Map

Produced under licence from Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, with permission of Natural Resources Canada.

“Number one,” he emphasized slowly, “the Golden Dragons have to take the airport as I’ve already stated. Number two,” he said glancing at the map in hand, “the Route 55 Laviolette Bridge spanning the St. Lawrence River. And number three the Autoroute 40 Radisson Bridge spanning the St. Maurice River. That’s an airport and two main bridges. Basically men, our assignment is to take over the major transportation corridors of this city and await linkage with the Canadian mechanized assault force. This mission is right up our alley, boys. This is why the President called on us as the 911 force. So let’s live up to the Golden Dragon tradition and put on a good show.

“My staff is preparing rough sketches of the first target, the airport facilities, so you know where to go in assaulting this initial objective. We’re also getting each platoon leader a copy of this topo map here,” he said holding up his photocopy.

“I want all company commanders in close communication with my staff as we fly up there. My call sign is Dragon Six and I’ll be airborne watching the op in the Command and Control bird with Colonel Petrovich. His call sign is Pluto Six.

“It’s going to be a dawn assault. We’re scheduled to touchdown in about three hours from now. It’s quarter to three right now so we’re already hurting

for time. It's going to be close. One thing that is not working for us is the weather. There's a low ceiling out there with showers expected along the St. Lawrence valley.

"Enemy resistance is said to be none at this point. We have civilian contacts on the ground and they say this is supposed to be an unopposed or permissive entry. There are no reports of any QDF activity in this city. It should go pretty smooth but don't hold your breath. Also, the only people supposed to be up in the air are U.S. or Canadian aircraft. Quebec is declared a no-fly zone. Anything else, even civilian aircraft, is subject to attack."

"Man, another permissive entry mission. We'll never see live combat," said Mickey Torrence in a barely audible voice to his counterparts. D'Arata merely stared ahead at Gutzenheimer. Wes Shore's gaze was elsewhere too.

Suddenly the side door entrance to the hangar burst open and a Royal Canadian Regiment liaison officer entered the hangar, interrupting Gutzenheimer's briefing. Right behind him was 2nd Brigade Commander Colonel Paul Petrovich and several more aides. The Canadian officer held up a paper from across the hangar notifying Gutzenheimer of its importance. Gutzenheimer nodded in acknowledgement.

"Okay, everybody stay at ease. Colonel Petrovich is going to say a few words then we're on our way. Colonel, good timing," Gutzenheimer said loudly through his microphone. "I just finished my briefing. It's all yours. Guys, clear a path for the colonel."

"No, no. Stay where you are," barked the superior Petrovich. "Colonel, I want you to read this announcement to the men and sum up your briefing. We gotta go."

"All right sir, send it on over."

The Canadian officer handed the paper to a kneeling infantryman and he handed it to the man in front of him and so on in a chain. The paper quickly made it to Gutzenheimer. He immediately pushed his glasses up his nose and read it silently. Nodding his head, he cleared his throat to read the contents out loud.

"Everybody, this statement I'm about to read is an advanced copy. The real thing will be released later this morning. Here it is. From NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium dated 15 September 2005. For immediate press release. In an emergency session, NATO's North Atlantic Council voted unanimously in authorizing Secretary-General Hans VonKannel use of deadly force against all rebellious elements occupying the Canadian province of Quebec. This special council act allows VonKannel to give the go ahead

to joint U.S.-Canadian theatre commanders without having to go through the prolonged process of seeking approval from the capitals of all 19 member nations of the alliance. The military operation is being labeled as Operation Joint Suppression.” Gutzenheimer paused and looked up at his men.

“And as of an hour ago VonKannel gave us the green light. No more fun and games. It’s the real fucking deal!”

“All right now,” he bellowed, his voice getting louder. “Golden Dragons, the shooting war has begun!” He paused to let his words echo throughout the hangar. He looked a few of his men directly in the eye. Mike D’Arata was one of them. “And all of us here in this hangar will be the first Americans to go into battle. Are you warriors ready?” he asked loudly, squealing the speaker again.

The Mountaineers of the 2-14th, feeling very confident in their new commander, let out an affirmative “YES SIR!”

“You are warriors now,” he said in a lower serious tone. “The warrior is the second half that makes a man whole. From the time you step out this door here,” he pointed behind him, “you will leave that first half—the half full of emotion, compassion, love, and mercy—at home. You will leave that half behind with your wives and girlfriends and you will become the warrior the 10th Mountain has made you into, the warrior that our proud nation and the man next to you depends on.”

The men sat silent, listening. The young ones fidgeted.

“The warrior only knows hardship, discipline, slaughter, and no quarter. The warrior looks at the enemy not as another human being but as an obstacle to overcome and fulfill his objective. The warrior knows how to kill without remorse. You will become the Golden Dragon warrior once you step out this door.

“Now, I didn’t fucking hear you the first time. Are you warriors ready?”

Another louder “YES SIR!” reverberated through the hangar. Colonel Petrovich even joined in from the back.

Gutzenheimer then held a fist up showing his troops the side where the index finger and thumb meet to form a wrinkled hole. He wiggled his thumb and boomed with humorous relief. “Are your assholes PUCKERING?”

One last, very loud “YES SIR!” rolled from every man’s smiling mouth. Petrovich had a wide grin as well. The troops were now pumped with adrenaline, feeling strong and feeling invincible.

“All right then, ‘cause my asshole is puckering too so let’s get it on!” finished their commander. He turned to his senior NCO. “Command Sergeant

Major, let's load em up, we're moving out!" The lieutenant colonel then took a deep breath and turned off the microphone as the troops sprung to their feet.

0310 hrs, Former Plattsburgh Air Force Base:

Lieutenant Mike D'Arata jumped out of his idling Sikorsky UH-60L Black Hawk when he saw Captain Karr running up. Karr, native of Buffalo, NY and undeniably the hardest-working, physically-fit officer of the 10th Mountain, was decked out in full combat gear. Night vision goggles were attached to his helmet, field glasses were slung around his neck, his face was painted almost black except for the whites of his eyes, a full rucksack bulged on his back and an M16-A2 was harnessed over his flak jacket. In his hands was a photocopied sketch of the airport objective attached to a clipboard. The captain laid the rough map on the metal floor of the Black Hawk and leaned inside with D'Arata to discuss their part of the mission.

The Black Hawk's crew chief, manning one of two side door M240G machine guns, applied a boot to the corner of the map so it wouldn't blow away in the wash of the idling helicopter rotor blades. A 10th Mountain soldier kindly held a red-filtered flashlight over the hasty meeting so the two officers could see what they were looking at.

D'Arata looked down at the pencil sketch. It was incredibly basic. It showed two runways side by side surrounded by gray area labeled as "woods." The main runway running northeast was labeled "paved" while the shorter parallel one was labeled "grass." Based on what he could decipher from the drawing, there was only one access road leading into the airport from the highway. At the end of the road where the runway stopped were several blackened rectangles depicting the airport facilities. One was labeled "terminal" and the others "maintenance."

"The best technology in the world and this is all we got?" shouted D'Arata, pointing to the map.

Captain Karr was fully aware of what his platoon leader was thinking and held a hand up to calm the young mustang down.

"I know, Mike. I know. They don't have jack shit on the airport, just a road atlas that some pencil-pusher traced from," shouted Karr over the drone of the Black Hawk. "But we don't have any time. This will have to do."

He pointed to the map. "Bravo Company is first in! We will approach from the southwest and hit the main terminal. I want your platoon and Shore's platoon to surround the terminal and cover this access road while Mickey sweeps the inside. Right here!" he jabbed forcefully on the drawing. "Got it?"

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC

“What side of the terminal should I take?”

“Thanks,” apologized the captain for not being more specific. He took a pen out of his breast pocket and drew an “X” on the west side of the terminal, labeling it with a numeral one. “You take the west, Bulldog will cover the east, okay?”

“Yes sir!” nodded D’Arata.

Captain Karr moved his finger and pointed to another area adjacent to the main terminal. “Alpha Company will be hitting the maintenance area and this warehouse, here. Charlie will secure the fuel tanks and cover our south flank. Any questions?”

“No sir!” shouted D’Arata.

“Tell your squad leaders what’s going on!” Karr gave the map to his lieutenant and ran off to Lieutenant Shore’s Black Hawk for the same brief.

D’Arata jumped back into his Black Hawk, designated as call sign Ice-33, and leaned over to his Radio Telephone Operator Specialist Kenny Fletcher, a lanky nineteen year-old from Tulsa, Oklahoma. “Fletch, inform First Sergeant Warren that we’re gonna hit the outside of the main terminal on the west side and then cover an access road to our north. He’s going in first; we’ll be right behind him. Have him pass it down to the squad and fire team leaders.”

While Specialist Fletcher radioed the message to Lightning-22, the Black Hawk containing the other half of 1st Platoon headed by the twenty-year veteran Larry Warren, D’Arata passed word down to one of his squad leaders, Staff Sergeant Matt Mikowski. “M&M”, as he was called, in turn gave word to another squad leader and in turn to each fire team leader. All the men of 1st Platoon now knew their immediate mission, albeit in rough draft. They just had to wait for the go-ahead code word before they could lift off and actually get en route to the objective.

For the next few minutes silence and intense boredom took over D’Arata’s Ice-33 Black Hawk. Each man was nervous and couldn’t keep his mind off of the anticipated combat to come. For most this is what their entire lives were all about. Combat was what they trained for and what they relished. Whatever horror could potentially come, that was the risk they all took for the sake of personal and professional growth, for the mental and physical challenge that conflict brought, for the sake of becoming an infantry commando for the United States Army. For the few others this came as a shock for they joined up for the sign-up bonus and college tuition guaranteed after a two or four-year stint. Combat was just a remote possibility in their

estimation.

With a full load of combat gear strapped to their web harnesses, tight flak jackets underneath a cold weather coat, weapons between their legs, and no elbowroom to stretch out, few men could move, let alone speak to one another. They waited for the pilot's announcement and thought about what was expected of them in the next few hours before dawn.

Two minutes later the lift-off announcement came.

"*Blizzard. Fucking Blizzard. We're on our way,*" the pilot reported rather simply over the aircraft's intercom. This was the code word everyone was waiting for. The mission was a "go."

Lieutenant D'Arata and his RTO, Specialist Fletcher, looked at one another under their Kevlar "fritz" helmets and gave each other a clenched fist "good luck" high sign. It had been their ritual since D'Arata brought the teenager on board as his personal communications assistant several months ago.

Some of the other soldiers merely grunted, others shuffled in their strapped-in, uncomfortable seats while two gung-ho Mountaineers, the M240G machine gun team, slowly chanted, "Bliz-zard, Bliz-zard."

D'Arata watched out the side door as one of the Kiowa Warrior light attack choppers from the 3-17th Cavalry Squadron took off to provide the lead security. The mission was hot and his heart was racing.

0440 hrs, Ice-33, Across the Quebec Border Southeast of Montreal:

"Yes, yes sir Bravo Six, roger that!" acknowledged Specialist Fletcher to Captain Karr over the receiver of his Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System or SINCGARS.

Stuttering and excited, Fletcher leaned forward and shouted the information to Lt. D'Arata who was looking out the side door window of the Black Hawk. "Sir! Sir! Captain Karr just said our ground intel spotted a column of MBTs headed south on Autoroute 40 from Quebec City!"

"Say again, say again!" shouted a surprised D'Arata who had only caught part of it. He looked across the aisle to find Fletcher, as it was almost pitch black inside the Black Hawk. All interior and exterior lighting was extinguished. A mere speck of light from the moon shone through the windows.

"Main battle tanks headed toward Trois Rivieres sir! They're about sixty miles away making good speed," shouted Fletcher.

"You said ground intel reported it? Wait, wait. From where? Who?" asked

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC

D'Arata shaking his head. "It's got to be bad. The QDF doesn't have any tanks!"

"No, no sir. Captain Almond confirmed it. She knows the intel guy personally. He's from the American Consulate in Quebec City. The contact confirms main battle tanks. MBTs. He even authenticated! It's all on the command net."

D'Arata was hit again. Damn, this was for real. "Holy shit! Did T.J. give any new orders?" he asked, now shocked as to the developing situation.

Fletcher held up a finger to tell D'Arata to hold on as he listened to another radio transmission over the command net. "Wait one. Captain Almond is back on. Umm, umm, ah, she confirms the contact said ten, that's one-zero, main battle tanks but he can't identify the make. He says they have Canadian symbols. Red and white CA logos."

D'Arata looked perplexed, not sure what to do or think. Canadian tanks coming from Quebec City? It didn't make sense.

Fletcher paused to listen again then caught his lieutenant's bewildered look. "I am not shitting you, sir!"

Ice-33's pilot came on the aircraft's inside intercom to make an announcement. "*Forty minutes out! Forty minutes out!*"

Forty minutes away, shit! Shit! "Let me have it," said D'Arata to Specialist Fletcher, as he groped for the receiver of the SINCGARS. "Company command net, now!"

D'Arata was flabbergasted. Tanks! Shit. Maybe it's part of the operation? Hope to hell the RRC is already airborne if it's not.

D'Arata radioed his company commander in a higher than usual voice. "Bravo Six, Bravo Six this is Bravo One Six, come in."

"*Bravo One Six this is Bravo Six. Calm down and go ahead with your message,*" Captain Karr sternly replied from his Black Hawk about an eighth of a mile back in the air convoy.

"Bravo Six, any change in orders for the heavy iron headed our way?"

"*Negative Mike. No change at this time. Just found out myself. Proceed as planned. I've been informed the Canadian Air Force has got a set of Hornets on the way to check 'em out right now. We think they are friendlies but have to confirm. Also the RRC will be airborne in about a half-hour. ETA to objective one hour. We will re-evaluate the situation once we're on the ground.*"

"Roger Bravo Six," finished D'Arata, completely taken aback as to the events now unfolding. This is getting out of hand. This whole thing was

originally supposed to be a fucking public relations ploy and now we're on a live combat mission. He was relieved though that the tank column was at least going to be checked out by air. And the Rapid Reaction Company was just the back-up they needed. Thank God the brass above him included them with the mission, thought D'Arata.

"Sir, what's up?" asked squad leader SSG Mikowski rather nervously. He and one of the platoon's M-240G medium machine gunners, Specialist Bernie Blakefield, had been listening to D'Arata's conversation and saw their lieutenant visibly shaken.

"M&M, we've got Canadian marked tanks forty miles north of our target. They're not supposed to be there as far as I know. The Canadian Air Force is sending aircraft to check 'em out. No change in plans. We still attack the target airport."

M&M nodded his head in numbed astonishment. He told his team leaders seated next to him and word spread quickly throughout Ice-33. Several heads turned in exasperation.

D'Arata was back on the radio, this time over the platoon net. "One Four this is One Six. Come in."

"*One Six this is One Four, go ahead,*" replied First Sergeant Larry Warren aboard Lightning-22.

"Did you hear the news?"

"*Affirmative Six. Looks like we're in for a real rat foxtrot if those tanks aren't CA.*"

D'Arata smiled at Warren's polite radio transmission referring to the upcoming assault possibly turning into a "rat fuck," a term coined during the Vietnam War meaning a mission doomed from the beginning.

"I copy that, One Four. Yeah it's an affirmative all right. We got spies on the ground relaying the info. Says they are Canadian tanks so cross your fingers. The CAF are supposed to confirm but at least the RRC will be coming soon."

"*Roger, Six. So much for a permissive entry, eh?*"

"Yeah, I hear that. See ya on the ground in a few, out," signed off D'Arata with a deep exhale.

The next half-hour passed quickly by inside the droning Black Hawk as every man envisioned what was to come in this foreign city, especially with a possibly hostile tank force bearing down on them.

Ice-33's pilot then made his last announcement on the aircraft's intercom. His voice reflected excitement this time. "*Mountaineers, we've got a big,*

bad White-Out! White-Out! Attack will proceed. Ten minutes out. Recon reports LZ is not hot. Repeat. LZ is not hot. Go get 'em Dragons!"

The troops seemed to all shift at once including D'Arata as a bead of sweat formed on his forehead. Okay, okay, here we go, he thought to himself. Good, good, no action down there. At least not yet. I think I covered everything. Platoon knows their objective. Squad leaders know where they're going. Fire team leaders are key too. Okay, this is it. Murphy, don't fuck with me now. Please Murphy, just give us two hours for our own tanks to get here.

D'Arata looked over to his men and shouted, "Check gear! Lock and load! Safety's on!" The young men rustled in the seats and bumped bodies in their final preparations. Some seat straps came undone as the anxious ones couldn't wait to break free. Individual and crew-served weapons clicked as rounds were chambered and safety mechanisms double-checked. Gear was adjusted, body armor tightened, and Kevlar helmets straightened as the men prepared for touch down.

Ice-33's crew chief on the side door turned and shouted as loud as he could while holding up five gloved fingers to Lieutenant D'Arata. "Five minutes out! Five minutes out!"

Oh man, oh man. D'Arata's stomach fluttered and he suddenly had the uneasy urge to take a long piss. Disappointed in himself that he always gets this nervous before a mission he turned his attention back to the crew chief. The big man grabbed hold of the Black Hawk's side door, unlatched it and slid it open. The M240G medium machine gunner on the other side door did the same. Both doors came open at the same time, blasting the passengers with the outside elements.

A rush of cold air and some light drizzle blew into the aircraft along with the loud chest-pounding beat of the rotors and engines. D'Arata had to close his eyes momentarily as the wind and moisture caught him off guard. He blinked them open, regained his vision, and peered outside.

It was still quite dark as Ice-33 dipped down below the shallow broken clouds, lights could be seen everywhere. He watched as headlights slowly made their way down unseen roads. Off in the distance there was a much denser area of lighting exactly where the Black Hawk was headed. Must be Trois Rivieres, he thought.

The dark but reflective St. Lawrence River now came into view as they banked northeast and closer to their objective. The Black Hawk descended even closer to the ground now, about two hundred feet high. There's the Lavolette Bridge spanning the river. Man, that's a long fucking bridge,

D'Arata thought. White headlights and red taillights could be seen crossing the bridge in both directions. Damn, civilians are out and about already. Not good.

“One minute! One minute!” shouted the crew chief.

D'Arata nodded his head in acknowledgement. This is it baby! He looked again out the door. Something unusual caught his eye. It was blocking out parts of the city below. There seemed to be three big white clouds just sitting over the waterfront area in the small downtown section. The clouds grew wide as they rose. What was it? Upon closer inspection, as the Black Hawk dipped lower, he realized the white clouds were in fact steam clouds rising from the three major paper plants that anchored this small industrial port. At the closest plant, illuminated just north of the Laviolette Bridge, he could make out smoke stacks with their blinking aircraft warning lights, large round storage tanks, railroad cars holding logs, a near empty parking lot, and several large piles of what looked like wood chips.

Before he knew it though, they had crossed the river and buzzed across a long expanse of farm fields. Next came the four-lane Autoroute 40 landmark which they bisected perpendicular. Then the Black Hawk dipped even lower over a dense pocket of forest. The chopper was so low D'Arata thought the wheels were hitting the tops of the trees. A hard bank to the right and they skimmed right down the middle of Trois Rivieres Regional Airport's long 6000-foot paved runway. The parallel 3000-foot grass runway soon appeared on their left. Some lights and buildings came into view as the runway ended at a small arch shaped building labeled the “terminal” on his drawing. That's the objective? Damn, it's no bigger than a McDonald's fast food restaurant.

Just before they were to land, though, Ice-33 pulled up sharply and accelerated back up into the air, catching everyone by surprise. D'Arata, readying to be the first one to hit the ground, had to grab hold of the crew chief to save himself from falling out as the Black Hawk ascended from the runway.

“What the hell is going on?” he shouted, joining in with several obscene remarks inside Ice-33.

“*Sorry about that guys,*” announced the pilot over the intercom. “*New orders from Pluto Six. We're headed to the Route 40 Bridge. ETA in two minutes.*”

“What the fuck?” angrily snorted D'Arata. “Get me Karr right now!” he ordered to his RTO.

As he waited for Fletcher to raise the company commander on the net,

D'Arata viewed the airport below as several Black Hawks touched down and began the assault. The scene was surreal as combat soldiers ran across the grass and pavement and struck the small buildings with deadly surprise. He watched as Black Hawk after Black Hawk spilled out its occupants before taking off again. D'Arata was pissed and couldn't understand why he wasn't down there with his commando counterparts.

"Sir, Bravo Six!" shouted Fletcher handing the handset to D'Arata.

"What the hell is going on, T.J.?" barked D'Arata to his company commander as Ice-33 swung into an orbit over the airport.

"One Six, you will maintain proper radio procedure. Do you understand?" demanded Captain Karr, angrily reprimanding his young lieutenant over the company net.

"Yes, sir. I copy sir," said D'Arata, complying with his captain's order.

"Here's the sitrep. We are stepping up the timetable for all objectives. Pluto Six has ordered Bravo Company to take and defend the Radisson Bridge over the St. Maurice River. That will be our new Battle Position. We have been diverted because we cannot communicate with those tanks on Route 40 and we don't know if they are friendly yet. Confirm, over?"

"Roger Six. Where are we going to land? What do you want me to do?"

"The LZ is just west of the target bridge in a grassy field near the river bank. The pilot already knows. It's on the south bank. My bird is first in, then your platoon, then Shore and Torrence will follow. Just spread your men out in a perimeter around the LZ and meet me for a quick brief after everyone touches down. Gotta go, out."

Ice-33 fell in behind several Black Hawks orbiting over the airport and proceeded toward its new target in the downtown area. Lights flashed by. D'Arata could make out the roofs of houses and buildings. The city was packed tight it looked like. Long rows of apartments, homes, and commercial buildings all jammed together down narrow streets. The large plumes of white steam from the paper plants were now off to his immediate right. The wide St. Lawrence River lay beyond in the mist.

A minute later Ice-33 touched down in a large residential yard bordered by the steep wooded river bank of the St. Maurice. A large, suburban house stood two hundred feet away to the right. Soldiers from Karr's headquarters platoon had already seized it. D'Arata and Specialist Fletcher jumped out first. They immediately kneeled down next to the side door to let the squads come out next. Fletcher raised his M16A2 and scanned the area while his platoon leader rallied his men out of the chopper. Fletcher noticed, not fifty

feet away, Lightning-22 releasing the other half of the platoon. The two Black Hawks were way too close, he thought. First Sergeant Warren was already running ahead of his men looking extremely angry and confused. Warren's Black Hawk transport then lifted off and banked away into the darkness. Fletcher shook with relief.

“Go! Go! Go!” shouted D'Arata smacking each man on the buttocks as they exited Ice-33. Two more to go, he counted. It was the Javelin crew, Battaglia and Fogerty. Each man had his hands full with the antitank missile equipment. Stumbling out of Ice-33 these last two nearly tripped from their added weight. D'Arata caught Fogerty as he fumbled with two Javelin missile tube assemblies. He knew exactly what the kid was going through, as he was once a Javelin assistant himself. He pointed the two to the edges of the landing zone and the rest of the platoon.

Ice-33 then lifted off and disappeared in the cloudy early morning skies once the crew chief gave the “all clear.” It would be heading back to Fort Drum to start ferrying more troops and equipment back to Trois Rivières.

D'Arata and RTO Fletcher ran to the perimeter next and met with FSG Warren from Lightning-22. All men were accounted for and merged into a cohesive fighting unit with superb effectiveness. D'Arata hand-signaled their men closer toward the riverbank and the cover of the treeline, which dropped steeply a hundred feet down into the river. In the next few minutes he watched as Wes Shore's 2nd Platoon Black Hawks touched down next and extracted his soldiers. Mickey Torrence's 3rd Platoon soon followed in the same manner. Bravo Company was now spread out in a wide perimeter around the LZ. Some troops had even taken cover across the street among some houses.

Up above their position orbited a squad of Army OH-58D Kiowa Warrior light attack-scout choppers. D'Arata looked up upon hearing one of the Kiowas buzz by. A cold morning breeze and light rain blew across his painted cammo face as he followed the shadow across the dark gray sky. They were the infantry's eyes and security. Higher above the Kiowas but just below the cloud cover circled several UH-60Q Black Hawks for medevac and rescue of any battalion assets. Among them was the Command and Control or C2 Black Hawk containing Colonel Petrovich, Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer, and elements of their command staff.

D'Arata waited for a few more moments with his RTO and FSG Warren behind a row of naked, gray trees, to make sure everyone was set. He watched as soldiers from the headquarters platoon scrambled about shouting orders from the house they captured. Captain Karr's voice barked the loudest. His

men had obviously just cleared the residence for his command post but Karr didn't really seem to have things in control though. D'Arata became somewhat worried.

"Sergeant, stay with the platoon and troop the line. Keep them calm. I've got to figure out what's going on then I'll meet you back here, alright?"

"Gotcha Lieutenant. This is complete FUBAR," stated Warren as he turned and shouted for a squad leader.

D'Arata looked around to adjust to the surroundings before making his way to the CP. The sky brightened a bit allowing him a glimpse at the area of operations. The St. Maurice River was to their north at their backs and shimmered under the early morning grayness. The Autoroute 40 Bridge was to his east. It was illuminated brightly under tall city street lamps. The four-laner was deserted. Good, he thought, no traffic.

Just beyond the Autoroute Bridge, a parallel railroad trestle ran across the river. It was barely visible in the mist. D'Arata scanned down river further east but could not see anything. Fog had started to rise from it. In fact, light fog seemed to surround them from everywhere. Great, now we've got a visibility factor to deal with, he thought.

Sweat rolled from his forehead as he finally got up and ran over to Captain Karr's captured house. Several of the command staff in the front doorway motioned him inside.

Fellow platoon leaders Shore and Torrence soon joined D'Arata. They made their way into the kitchen where they met with Captain Karr and the company operations officer, 1st Lieutenant Zak Powell. The house was pitch black except for filtered flashlights. No regular lighting was visible even though there was still electricity. A soldier turned down some blinds. Another drew the drapes to make it even darker. An older couple, obviously the owners of the house, stared wide-eyed as they sat quietly on their couch with a Headquarter's section infantryman guarding them. Lieutenant Powell flicked his flashlight on as Karr wasted no time in going over the hasty plans. There was a detailed photocopy of the city map spread out on the table, along with several duplicates for the platoon leaders.

"Here are your new maps. Okay, here we are," he pointed to the map where Autoroute 40 crossed the St. Maurice River just west of the downtown district. "We are out on our own right now, at least five miles from the airport and the rest of the battalion. Petrol ain't taking any chances with those tanks coming down the highway here. We just got word from Canadian National Defence that those tanks are not Canadian so he was very prudent in his

decision. They are unauthorized and unknown and possibly a deception. The Canucks say they are pretty sure those tanks are apparently the same ones that disappeared a few years back when the QDF Colonel LaPointe was in charge of them at a Quebec Army base. They never found them and have been searching ever since. It was that lost equipment they were investigating him for. Remember in Petrol's briefing? So we're assuming they are the enemy and it's our job to stop them. I think they're about ten miles away and about to be ID'd by the 'hornet' flight. Bottom line is we've got very little time to take this bridge and prepare a defense in case it is the enemy." Karr looked up at each of his young platoon leaders' camouflaged, painted faces to emphasize his next statement.

"The other thing is those tanks are M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks and the only thing that can stop one is another Abrams or a Javelin missile if we're lucky."

D'Arata was about to faint. They were the front line against ten Abrams tanks. The same ones that kicked Saddam Hussein's ass! They might as well start running now, he thought shaking his head. Thank God at least they had Captain Karr.

Thomas John Karr was one of the smartest combat leaders D'Arata had ever met. Karr had mentored the young lieutenant not only as an older brother figure but also as an authority on field combat operations and physical fitness. He showed D'Arata what the troops expected of him, what their mindsets were in combat and most of all how to lead them when the chips were down. He instilled in D'Arata that loyalty, fellowship and the willingness to protect each of the men in his platoon and not to let them down were the most important attributes a line officer could have. And who better to teach it than a man who earned a Purple Heart. D'Arata drew from Karr's own combat exploits in many beer-filled talks down at their unofficial company watering hole, the Pewter Mug back in Watertown.

D'Arata had learned that Karr had participated in the rescue convoy of the surrounded Rangers and Delta Force soldiers in Mogadishu, Somalia back in 1993 while a fresh second lieutenant with the 10th. That was Karr's first live combat mission, of which was just as hastily planned as this one was turning into. The intense firefight, of which Karr's rescue convoy took a beating, showed him the sheer tenacity of the surrounded men of the 3/75th Task Force Ranger. Their loyalty to each other and coolness under fire had such an impact on him that he immediately applied to Ranger School after the battle. He felt he needed all the combat experience he could get. And he was one of

the lucky ones, just getting a shrapnel wound in his leg. Eighteen guys never made it back.

He not only made himself into a Ranger but also won the 1996 Best Ranger Competition with another soldier from the 10th two years after that. In the competition he and his team member struggled through 60 continuous hours of military events in an effort to prove themselves the most highly-skilled Rangers in the U.S. Armed Forces. The 10th Mountain Division elevated him to near-God status with promotion to Captain following soon after.

“Now, here’s what we’ve got for anti-armor. We’ve got six Javelins—two for each platoon—and a shitload of AT-4 rockets. That’s fucking it! We didn’t bring any mines or anything else. Delta Company has all that shit and they’re not even airborne yet I hear. But the RRC is on the way and should be landing at the airport soon. When they get here Gutzy said we’ll get the LAV-III’s first for reinforcement. Okay?”

The three platoon leaders nodded in worried agreement. D’Arata couldn’t get it out of his head. Ten tanks against a company of ill-equipped foot soldiers with only six Javelins to their name against the best fighting tanks in the world? It’s all happening too fast.

“If the LAVs get here in time we have a fighting chance. Even though their armor is lighter they still have the same main gun of an Abrams. They got a 120 mm cannon and they can maneuver a lot better with eight wheels. Now here’s how I want you guys spread out in the engagement area. This will be your assigned BP. D’Arata, take your platoon across the bridge and cover the northwest side adjacent to the highway and this shopping plaza. Shore, you take your boys across the bridge too and cover the northeast side here near this rail bridge. You boys use any cover that’s available. Break into buildings if you have to. Get guys on roofs for elevated positions. Remember, anything goes. It’s your balls or theirs.

“Mickey, you’re going to protect our asses and be a rear guard. Take your men down the highway near this railroad split and set up facing south. Scratch that, set up a 360-degree defense,” he said looking at Torrence. “And keep an eye out for the police station that’s marked on the map down there. I want you to stop the flow of traffic headed in our BP. Okay?”

“How am I supposed to block traffic? We don’t have anything to do it with,” asked Torrence.

“Improvise, find something,” urged Lieutenant Powell.

“Right, stop civilian vehicles and park them sideways. We learned that in

MOUT training,” stated D’Arata.

“That’s right!” said Powell. “Do what you have to do. Put something in the road. I don’t care what it is. We just have to stop civilian traffic from crossing this bridge. We need to keep the engagement area clear of civilians, understand?”

“Yes sir,” said each leader.

“Okay then, any more questions?” asked Karr.

“Ah, sir, what about rules of engagement? I mean what if some civvies give us shit. Can we detain them?” asked the nervous Torrence, the African-American from Los Angeles, California.

“Mickey, we are in combat right now!” said Karr standing up. “This is the real deal. We are under the War Measures Act with Canada and under NATO command. Use everything you have ever been trained with. If you see a civilian with a weapon pointing at you then you can take him out. If not, well, use your instinct. That goes for all three of you. You are the front fucking line. If someone gives you shit and is threatening the mission then by all means detain them and if you cannot then use deadly force to complete your mission. This isn’t a peacekeeping mission anymore. This is a combat mission and all that matters is to take and defend that bridge. Got it?”

“Yes sir!”

“Okay then, let’s do it! Go!”

The three young lieutenants scrambled out the front door into the early morning fog and drizzle.

CHAPTER 5 – SINGLE SHIP

0540 hrs, CF-18 Hornet Flight, North of Trois Rivières:

Captain Claude Levesque, of the Canadian Air Force's 3 Wing, 425th Tactical Fighter Squadron eased the stick of his CF-18 Hornet slightly forward. Within seconds the fighter screamed downward out of the clouds to a level of 1000 feet. The Quebec-born fighter pilot, who voted against secession, jammed the stick to the left and banked hard to align himself with the fog shrouded Autoroute 40, the multi-lane highway system the "target tanks" were apparently using this morning.

Levesque's wingman, Lieutenant Donald Casper, mirrored every move his captain made. As Levesque banked again and then cut back on speed, so followed Lieutenant Casper. The pair of CF-18s, called PainKiller flight, had been scrambled out of CFB Bagotville in northern Quebec after an emergency call from National Defence headquarters. They quickly made it to the intercept area with their powerful twin F404 turbofan engines just as the American 10th Mountain air convoy was heading in for its final leg to Trois Rivières. Speed was essential in the intercept and PainKiller had made it just in time.

"PainKiller Five One to Pluto Six, over," radioed Capt. Levesque over the American frequency that was providing direct liaison intel on the location of the column.

In a crackly, static-filled voice Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer answered to the commander of PainKiller flight. *"This is Pluto Six command element Dragon Six. Go ahead."*

"PainKiller Five One to Dragon Six, we have a visual on route four-zero in the Deschambault area, over."

"Dragon Six to PainKiller Five One, copy. The targets should be northeast of your position. Remember we need a confirmation on the column only. Do not fire unless fired upon," radioed Gutzenheimer who had been given the orders from Colonel Petrovich who in turn received them directly from the joint NATO commander and head of the 10th Mountain Division, Major General Bill Jennings back at Fort Drum.

“Yeah, copy that,” said Captain Levesque. He thought this was going to get hairy. All official indications said the tanks were not Canadian even though they had CA markings. They weren’t even certain if they were attached to the QDF or not. So basically all I’m here to do is identify the make of the tank and get the hell out.

“PainKiller Five Two to PainKiller Five One, spot tanks at one o’clock. Looks like a convoy with civilian vehicles in between,” radioed wingman Casper.

“Copy that Five Two. Stay tight now. Let’s spook ‘em out and see what they’re up to.”

“Roger.”

0545 hrs, Lead QDF M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank, Autoroute 40:

Quebec Defense Force Colonel Michel LaPointe of his newly formed tank assault force couldn’t believe his MBTs had advanced so far down Autoroute 40 out of Quebec City without even being molested once. His large green tanks had been transported by flatbed tractor trailer haulers from their secret wilderness camp to just north of Quebec City. From there they noisily rolled onto the Autoroute 40 just over an hour ago. Not one shot was fired at them, one barricade put up to block their advance, nor were there any reports of surveillance against the force. Not even any flybys from the Canadian Air Force had appeared. Granted, most of the civilian population was still sleeping and most of the provincial police force was in the QDF’s realm of influence, but he thought for sure he’d be engaged in combat by now either by the Canadian military or their law enforcement arm, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Surely, word must have gotten out to someone on their side now, nearly five hours after the commencement of action in Montreal. Well, so be it, LaPointe shrugged, luck would be with Quebec this morning and he’d take every piece he could get. Maybe his longshot plan would work after all.

Deception was now the key against NATO. And apparently it was working perfectly. They were on their way to their first objective, that being the crossing of the St. Lawrence River at Trois Rivieres. LaPointe’s force was made up of ten, older M1A2 Abrams main battle tanks, two air defense teams riding in civilian pick-up trucks, two fuel trucks and two cargo-troop trucks carrying a platoon of QDF infantrymen. The infantry platoon was armed with hunting rifles, shotguns and a few automatic machine guns which were stolen along with the tanks from CFB Valcartier a couple of years ago. All the units

had magnetic Canadian Army logos stuck on their panels for easy identification. Underneath the magnets was the real identifying logo of the Quebec Defense Force. It was the same crest as the provincial flag of a white cross against a blue background. In each corner of the cross was the fleur-de-lis symbol also in white. This logo would be exposed once they neared Montreal. The ploy had worked well so far in that a civilian motorist with Quebec provincial license plates drove by the column with his middle finger jutting out his window. LaPointe had to laugh.

Gloating with self-satisfaction all morning because he was the one who mastered the plan even though it had its risks, LaPointe couldn't help but feel things were going his way for the moment.

Everyone in Quebec had known the U.S. 10th Mountain Division was sending an armed convoy into CFB Montreal on this very morning. All they had to do was tune into CNN for the exact date, time, and units involved. But it was LaPointe who pushed DeMars's hot button early on when he suggested this would be the first foreign unit on Quebec soil and that they should be repelled at once to show their resolve for independence. They had saved their stolen tanks for a day exactly like this LaPointe told his premiere.

LaPointe called on DeMars to attack Canada first in response to the planned blatant insertion of U.S. troops into Montreal. If it's provocation NATO wanted then that's what they would get. The QDF would call NATO's bluff, though, and attack the main Canadian base in Montreal with tanks, infantry, and a rioting crowd on the same morning the Americans were to arrive. He argued that even if they were wiped out with him sacrificing his life, there would be a political victory in the defeat. This would show NATO and the rest of the world that Quebec was serious about defending its own people and keeping Montreal in its rightful territory. The West would call for peace negotiations and settle immediately.

Today's operation would seek to exploit NATO's deepest fears—waging an urban guerrilla war, wrought with high casualties—something completely revolting to the western alliance and their liberal media outlets. They had just gone through two major military campaigns in their Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom and as far as LaPointe was concerned, would definitely not be willing to go at it again with another conflict. Negative American public opinion polls of ground troops in Montreal had even strengthened that point.

The Quebec leadership's intention was to win the only possible way they could against NATO, and that was to turn Canadian and U.S. public opinion

against their own government's aggressive stance against Quebec. With France acting as the kink in NATO's armor, LaPointe knew his assault had to be fast and gruesome to win results. He knew that with the little resources they had, they could not sustain a long and drawn out engagement. The QDF would rely on the shock factor to achieve its goals, then enter back into negotiations to gain political advantage.

NATO's actions were so predictable. They were sending in a tiny U.S. contingency as a simple warning of larger things to come. They always advertised first. Without clear, swift action now the Quebecers would only give NATO time to build up its forces until the QDF had no chance whatsoever to repel them from Montreal. That build-up could cost Quebec's freedom.

DeMars and the ruling council bought the plan and stressed to all QDF officers that Montreal would stay in the province at all costs. He gave a direct order to Colonel LaPointe that the city be defended down to the last QDF tank. There was a firm base of support for the Parti Quebecois and a fierce loyalty to the French culture in Montreal and they would not be let down.

Along with the surprise tank attack there would also be the guerrilla-type, high publicity attacks in western Montreal too. These would act as diversions and tie up key government police forces while the QDF armor advanced on the city.

Suddenly LaPointe's personal wireless telephone rang in his breast pocket, snapping him back to the immediate situation. He pulled it out, opened it and shoved it up underneath his commander's helmet. It was a call from QDF headquarters inside the Citadelle. Premier DeMars was on the other end after a fax-type digital encryption ensured voice security.

"Hello Colonel, everything going smooth?"

"Ah, yes sir. No incidents to report at this time, sir," answered LaPointe as he watched a small car speed past his tank.

"Good, good. What is your ETA to the bridge crossing?" asked DeMars.

"Ah, we are about twenty minutes out, making good speed."

"Excellent, I have good news to report. Our guerrilla cells in Montreal have already been quite successful. Power is still out and the protesters are gathering outside the army base. They will continue to keep up the harassment once the Americans enter. The Canadians are in disarray with all the bomb threats too. And we have captured several main RCMP offices."

"Very good, sir. The Yankees have not gotten there yet?"

"No reports so far. I think we scared them off to be honest, and they're

rethinking their strategy. That is why it is crucial we get there as soon as possible and destroy what we can, even if they don't arrive. We have a short window of opportunity so we must take advantage of the American delay."

"Well, once they do arrive in Montreal we'll hit em on all sides, with everything we got."

"We will Michel, we will. I'll talk to you soon. Let me know as soon as you get into the Trois Rivieres and cross the St. Lawrence, understand?"

"Yes sir, good day, sir." He pressed the off button on his phone and tucked it back in his pocket. Yes, we've already scared them off! The plan is working.

It was an excellent plan, LaPointe reassured himself. To punch Prime Minister Wilson and President Abernathy right in the gut and knock the air out of them with this pre-emptive strike, hell, it must be shocking them at the moment. How dare they even think to send in the 10th Mountain to Montreal to try and provoke us back to the negotiation table. We will negotiate on our own terms! We are a free Quebec nation now! We will not be dictated to.

While LaPointe was caught up in his egotistical self-reward, he never noticed the two specks that broke from the dark gray clouds miles away at that very moment. His binoculars were around his neck as he gripped the commander's turret outside his tank and took in a deep, cold, breath of fresh morning air. Dawn was breaking, the fog forming pretty thick and he was just miles from Trois Rivieres. Yes, the QDF had definitely caught the other side with their pants down around their ankles, he thought, itching his long moustache. And it was because of my aggressive intuition and experience. The two planes had now caught the column on their long-range television monitors.

Ah yes, LaPointe nodded, now he couldn't wait to move his tanks across the mighty St. Lawrence River and move on to his final leg in Montreal. Canada and the U.S. would have to oust our force with its infantry. That's the only way. And to do this in an urban setting with civilians everywhere will take a high casualty toll. They'll back down. They won't risk the body bag images of their boys on television and the public outrage that will follow.

The American president won't risk it either. Look at what happened in Somalia. Eighteen Rangers killed and their wimpy, lying, redneck of a president, that Clinton fellow, pulled the plug to save his own political ass. Bush was very strong and nobody screwed with him at the time. Even DeMars knew that. But the new President Abernathy is no different than any other self-serving politician. He won't risk the political fallout once we start

stacking bodies. He's got no foreign policy experience and he surrounded himself with left overs from the Clinton era administration. Fuck America. Fuck Canada. They want a fight? They'll get one.

The two supersonic jets caught up to the convoy and screamed directly over Colonel LaPointe's position scaring the living daylights out of him. He literally jumped out of his turret in fright as the loud thunder from the fighter's engines ripped through the morning air.

LaPointe reached for his turret-mounted 12.7 mm Browning M2 machine gun, flicked the safety off, charged it, and grabbed a hold of the handles to swing it around. Too late. The aircraft had already bypassed his position and disappeared up the highway. All he could see were two bright orange balls speeding away. His hands were shaking and his heart raced. He forced himself to take a deep breath. My God, where did they come from?

He shouted in his headset to his battalion of tanks stretched out along the highway. "Advisory to all units, all units, this is Grizzly One. Enemy aircraft overhead! If they come back you have my permission to engage with machine guns and shoulder-launched missiles at will. Increase all vehicles to maximum speed."

Toggleing the intercom Colonel LaPointe spoke to his driver and told him to speed up. "Get up next to that truck and use him as cover! These guys are fast." He couldn't believe it. A nervous wave shook through his body. This is it, he thought. Combat once again. It's been a long time coming.

LaPointe swiveled the turret of his dark green tank 180-degrees so it faced backward. The driver increased speed to about 40 mph. LaPointe stood tall out of his commander's cupola, which was on the right side of the turret roof, and pointed his machine gun to the sky. The loader, in the hatch to the left of him was already manning his own roof-mounted 7.62 mm M240G machine gun. Filled with excitement, the four-man crew of Grizzly One prepared for combat.

"Grizzly One, this is Eagle One. We see them! Coming six o'clock fast. Will engage with missiles!" radioed Sergeant Major Renee Bourdage, in a black Chevy pick-up truck taking up the rear of the column.

LaPointe spoke clearly and coolly into his mike. "Okay Eagle One. All units engage fighters at six o'clock position. I want the sky filled with lead. Missile crews get ready to launch."

0547 hrs, PainKiller Flight:

Captain Levesque radioed back to Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer up in the C2 Black Hawk orbiting over Trois Rivieres. “PainKiller Five One to Pluto Six, we have visual confirmation on ten tanks, two fuel trucks, and several more vehicles in column formation. They are travelling at about 40 mph southbound, copy?”

“*Copy PainKiller Five One. Can you identify what make the tanks are?*” asked Gutzy in crackling transmission.

“Negative on first pass. We’re making another run for ID now, wait one.”

“*Roger.*”

“Ah, looks like...ah, not sure but...,” said Levesque fading out.

“*They’re M1 Abrams!*” radioed Lieutenant Casper to his commander as he screamed down the highway ready to overtake the last tank in the column.

“*PainKiller flight, come again on the ID,*” questioned Gutzy.

Levesque radioed, “Pluto Six, we confirm they are M1 Abrams, over.”

“*Ground fire! Ground fire! Break right! Break right!*” shouted Casper over the radio.

“Roger!” acknowledged Levesque as he jammed his stick to the right and banked hard over the middle of the tank column. As his flight path changed he swung his head back to the left and looked through the bubble canopy. A flurry of machine gun tracer rounds followed his aircraft. The beehive had been disturbed.

“We have been fired on. Heavy tracer fire!” announced Levesque. Suddenly his red launch indicator light went off with a simultaneous loud beeping. He rechecked his instruments and warned his wingman. “Missile launch! Missile launch! One-eight-zero.”

Both PainKiller pilots frantically looked behind them to ensure there were no actual launches in flight. The enemy could have just locked on to their CF-18s to scare them away.

Casper proved that wrong when he chimed in, “Missile in the air! Missile in the air! Five o’clock!”

Levesque broke to the left while Casper went right. As Levesque conducted his maneuver he looked back again for the missile and saw it split between the two aircraft and fly away as a near miss. Just as he turned back to his front view Heads-Up-Display or HUD and jammed the stick in another direction, his CF-18 Hornet was impacted by an unseen second missile.

Lieutenant Casper hadn’t seen the first missile split their flight but caught the full view of his commander’s Hornet blowing up. He couldn’t believe

what he was witnessing. It happened as if in slow motion. The small missile dove into his captain's left wing and exploded. The wing was immediately engulfed in flame, forcing the aircraft to roll over. Casper focused on the cockpit area to see an ejection but saw nothing but a fireball. Suddenly his launch indicator light went off again and he turned back to his own instruments.

"PainKiller Five One has just been hit! I say again PainKiller Five One has just been hit," radioed Casper as he conducted a series of high-gravity S curves to outmaneuver the missile threat. He was breathing heavily now and was terrified at what he had just observed. There was no time to think, though. He could be next. He had to get out of there, now.

Casper increased his throttle speed, pushing himself back into his seat, and high-tailed it out of the area. Before entering the clouds he gave one last glance back to PainKiller Five One. A puff of black smoke and fire had already marked the site where the plane went down. Casper disappeared north.

"PainKiller Five Two to base, proceeding home, single ship," he radioed to his base in Bagotville.

"PainKiller Five Two, confirm single ship."

"Ah, sorry, that's affirmative, better launch search and rescue. I marked the location of the crash site," he said in a dejected voice, realizing his close friend was probably dead already.

"PainKiller Five Two, launching SAR right now," assured the air traffic controller back at the airfield in northern Quebec. *"Did you see a chute? Did he eject?"*

"Not sure sir. He might have. I didn't see a chute. He was hit by a missile!"

A minute went by, then the radio spoke again. It was the American infantry brigade commander. *"Five Two, this is Pluto Six, are you positive those were Abrams?"*

"Affirmative, affirmative. Don't know where the fucking missile came from though."

"Sorry about the loss Five Two, hang in there. We're sending our own Black Hawk SAR. We'll get there quicker," finished Colonel Petrovich.

0548 hrs, PainKiller Five One:

It felt like a large truck slammed into him from the rear and then detonated, thought Captain Levesque. His Hornet rolled to the right upon impact and then simply broke up, his helmet smashing against the bubble canopy. The

instrument panel then disintegrated and flames blew past his head around his mask. He could feel his leg burning. That's when he reached for the ejection handle and pulled it as fast as he could.

In a sudden rush through the smoke and flame his seat rocketed from the burning aircraft and shot through the air. Unfortunately he was heading parallel to the horizon and falling fast to the ground. He had a glimpse out of his blackened helmet and caught sight of several farm fields. Realizing he would hit the ground any second, he didn't wait for the ejection seat to automatically deploy the parachute; instead he manually deployed it himself.

As the parachute caught air and jarred him backwards the ejection seat broke free and his survival pack dropped below him. The parachute deployed quickly enough to slow the descent but not enough to let Levesque prepare for impact. Within a split second he struck a wooden farm fence with both burned legs, flipped, and landed hard on his back, knocking the wind out of him.

He clenched his eyes shut and gasped for air, struggling to get more oxygen into his lungs, but his body seemed paralyzed. He suddenly felt cold and thought he was lapsing into shock. Fearing the worst he reached for his survival radio in his pant pocket and flicked the homing beacon on so any approaching SAR could easily find him. He was overcome with fright. He couldn't control himself, couldn't maintain his breathing. His heart raced making up for the lack of oxygen, making him dizzy. His vision then narrowed and he thought he heard the sound of a tractor as a small piece of aircraft debris floated down across his line of sight and landed next to him. It was one of the last things he remembered before blacking out.

0550 hrs, QDF Grizzly One:

Colonel LaPointe raised a fist in the air and slapped hands with his loader. He gave an enthusiastic assessment to his gunner and driver below inside the tank once the other jet had disappeared. "We splashed the dirty bastard! We got him with a missile! The other plane took off. We did it!" Little did they know that a fellow countryman, albeit against their cause, was just shot down and lay near death in a farmer's field.

Grabbing the controls, LaPointe swung his tank turret to face forward again while his loader continued to scan the skies for any more threats. Although LaPointe had a wide grin pasted across his face, intense fear was bottled up inside. The other plane could strike back any moment. The enemy knew where they were now. They were exposed and vulnerable.

He spoke into his helmet mike to address his convoy. "Grizzly One to all

units. Excellent job team, excellent. We scored our first air kill but expect more visitors to come any minute. Continue security measures and fire on all aircraft that enter our airspace. Proceed to our objective at full speed, out.”

An older, dented 1998 white Dodge Ram Quad Cab pick-up truck sped forward and drove side by side with LaPointe’s big green command tank. There were two such pick-ups used as the mobile air defense team for the column. In the back of the Dodge sat two men dressed in woodland camouflage military uniforms holding the French-made shoulder-launched, air-to-air missile unit. They were smiling in glory at their kill. Several more infantrymen hung out of the windows of the cab and pointed their personal weapons to the sky. They all laughed.

LaPointe gave the men a thumbs-up and a big smile back. He radioed the pick-up truck once he saw what team it was.

“Grizzly One to Eagle Two, was that your shootdown?”

“*Yes sir!*” replied the blonde haired mercenary into his static filled hand-held radio from the back of the pick-up.

“Did you see a parachute?”

“*No sir, too foggy. Too dark.*” The French mercenary looked over at LaPointe standing tall in his lead tank and shrugged his shoulders. “*Didn’t see a chute. It just blew up,*” he radioed.

“Okay, okay,” said LaPointe thinking. “How many missiles do you have left?”

“*We have ten missiles left, sir.*”

“How many missiles do we have left altogether? I saw three launched.”

“*Ah, twenty-five total sir.*”

“Good, good. I have a special mission for you. I want you to get to Trois Rivieres as fast as you can. Establish a clear observation site near the Laviolette Bridge and shoot down any military aircraft you see, understand?”

“*Yes sir, thank you sir. We copy.*”

The driver of the Dodge floored the pedal and the truck leapt forward down Autoroute 40, just six miles from the city.

0557 hrs, QDF Eagle Two, Near Radisson Bridge:

Eagle Two’s pick-up truck skidded to a halt when the driver saw bright red taillights ahead in the light fog. There were a half dozen vehicles lined up bumper to bumper. The anti-aircraft missile team figured they had come up on an accident or some other mishap. They could clearly see the row of tall, illuminated light poles over the Route 40 bridge up ahead and wondered at

how they could get by the traffic. All they had to do was cross this short highway bridge and they would be in the city, not three miles from the Laviolette Bridge and the main crossing.

Frustrated at the delay, the driver pulled into the emergency lane along the left shoulder median wall and started inching forward, bypassing several cars. The team simply could not wait. They had to get to their destination no matter what. As the Dodge snuck past the backed-up cars, a chest-thumping beat filled the air. It was a helicopter over their position.

The front seat QDF militiaman recognized the aircraft immediately as military. He then observed the large black stenciled lettering on the side of the low flying scout chopper as it skimmed directly over them in the fog. "American Army choppers! American Army choppers!" he shouted. "That's no accident up ahead, it's the enemy!"

The Dodge came to an abrupt stop. Several of the infantrymen jumped out while the two-man mercenary missile team remained in the back preparing their missile unit for a launch. Two more choppers soon followed the first.

The front seat militiaman identified the make of the choppers and immediately radioed his commander to the incoming threat. "*Grizzly One, are you there? American Kiowa attack choppers moving up the highway. We are engaging right now!*"

Before he could finish his radio transmission the shoulder-launched missile unit drowned out all sound as a missile rocketed off the back of the truck. The deadly dart of light pierced the fog belt and arched into the sky toward the last of the choppers making its way up the Autoroute.

Same Time, 2-14th Battalion, Bravo Company, BP Radisson:

"*Bravo Six to Bravo One Six, gimme a sit rep.*" It was Captain Karr calling.

Lieutenant D'Arata snatched the SINCGARS receiver off of Fletcher's shoulder harness, keyed the receiver, and replied instantly. "Bravo One Six to Bravo Six. We are in position. I have detained several vehicles and their occupants and created a block on southbound traffic trying to cross the bridge. The block is about a football field away so we have clear fields of fire in front of the bridge. My OP on the Wal-Mart roof reports no sign of the enemy tanks, over."

"*Roger, good job, out.*"

"*Bravo Two Six to Bravo Six, come in,*" radioed Lieutenant Wes Shore to Captain Karr.

“Go ahead Bulldog.”

“We are ditto on the northeast. Nothing moving but a few exiting vehicles. The Kiowas just bypassed my position.”

“Okay Bulldog. Bravo Six to Bravo Three Six. Did you copy the last?”

“Bravo Three Six affirmative,” said Mickey Torrence from his position covering the south flank of the company on the city side of the bridge. He was breathing heavily after his platoon had sprinted to their positions a quarter mile down Autoroute 40 into the downtown. His men now hugged the concrete barrier walls of a raised highway overpass. They could look down into the fog-shrouded city and see the silhouettes of several downtown buildings against the shoreline of the wide St. Lawrence River. The rest of the dimly lit neighborhoods were barely visible under the expanding white canopy of fog.

“Bravo Three Six. You see any movement your way?”

“Negative. Visibility is getting bad though, even with NODs. I do have traffic blocked northbound to the bridge. Five civilians detained. Do have one friendly casualty to report, a sprained ankle, over.”

“Okay Mickey, get him taped up and taken care of, out.”

Back on the north side of the Radisson, D’Arata spoke to his First Sergeant kneeling next to him. FSG Warren had his M16A2 rifle pointing up the highway at the backed-up traffic forming north of their sector.

“Sergeant Warren, all company platoons are clear so far. Everything’s cool.”

Warren heard his young lieutenant and simply grunted in agreement. He appreciated that the kid kept him informed of the company situation. He felt D’Arata really did look up to him, as well he should, after all Warren was his father’s age and had seen plenty of combat. His two Purple Hearts, numerous medals, and endless rambling war stories could attest to that. He was widely respected throughout the company and when he spoke all ears perked up. He was a common-sense type of man who always seemed to be right.

Viewing through an AN/PVS-7B Night Optical Device strapped around his Kevlar helmet, Warren fixed his eyes on a large pick-up truck bypassing the traffic along the inner emergency shoulder. His night vision goggles, more commonly referred to as “seven-bravos” by the infantrymen who wore them, provided illumination of any source of heat by showing up as bright green in the field of view. Larger sources of heat could reach illumination levels of white. The pick-up he was following suddenly stopped. Unfortunately a bright white now flashed in Warren’s eyes, temporarily

blinding him.

“Damn! Something just went off! I can’t see a thing!”

D’Arata looked up just in time as a shrieking missile rose from the line of vehicles in the fog ahead. “There goes a fucking missile. It’s headed for the Kiowas!”

“Mike, use your binocs and pinpoint the origin point,” said Warren calmly in a deep, confident voice as he blinked to get his vision back.

D’Arata raised the powerful binoculars that were hanging from his neck and slowly scanned the stopped traffic from the launched missile trail. He stopped and focused the glasses on a puff of smoke, ignoring where the missile would be headed. It was his job to find and dispose of the culprits who fired it.

“Right there! Gotcha!” exclaimed D’Arata as he watched a moment longer. “Straight down the road on the inside shoulder next to the median wall. A white pick-up truck. You got vision back?”

“Yeah,” Warren said, squinting toward the area through his goggles. “His lights are off. Damn fog. Ah, umm, yeah, yeah, I got ‘em. Looks like infantry. Yep, they’re armed and have a shoulder-launched missile unit in the back of that truck.”

“Sergeant, take ‘em out,” ordered D’Arata who was ready for action. “Hit em with the 240,” referring to one of the platoon’s two M240G medium machine guns. “I’ll get Speedy on ‘em with his sniper rifle too. Take those sons of bitches out now Sergeant!”

“No problem LT,” said Warren, flipping up his NODs. He immediately ran off to the right flanking M240G crew and could be heard shouting for Blakefield’s team. Two soldiers jumped up.

D’Arata turned to his RTO, snatched the receiver again, flicked a switch to the platoon net and radioed one of his squad leaders on the far perimeter. He called for the platoon sniper Corporal Gonzales to follow Sergeant Warren and the 240 crew and engage the enemy patrol. Without waiting for a reply D’Arata switched frequencies back to the company net and radioed for his commander.

“One Six to Six! We have a missile launch against the Kiowas. Am engaging!”

Same Time, 3-17th Cavalry Squadron, Bravo Troop (Blackjack), Radisson Bridge:

As they passed over Autoroute 40’s Radisson Bridge, held by a company

of 10th Mountain groundpounders, B Troop commander Captain Tommy Giancursio motioned his pilot to descend closer to the highway for a better reconnaissance position. He was searching for good defilade to hide their Kiowa Warrior aircraft behind to begin the scouting of the Abrams tank column which lay somewhere up ahead. Giancursio's gunship, along with his wingman's aircraft at his four o'clock, and an additional two OH-58D scouts, were apparently just a few miles from the supposed location of the QDF tank column that took down the CAF Hornet minutes earlier. Pluto Six had directed the four birds in for a search and destroy engagement to slow the enemy column down before they reached the bridge and their troops defending it. Tommy felt the situation was going to get bad. The M1A2 Abrams was the heaviest tank in the world and had the thickest armor to boot. These were the same tanks used in the first Persian Gulf War and then during the final regime change in Iraq. He had never even heard of one being destroyed by an attack chopper in combat either.

The dreadful news that the QDF actually shot down a CF-18 Hornet spread quickly throughout the aviators' nets. Giancursio had heard the bastards had disguised themselves as a Canadian Army unit. He could only hope the fellow pilot ejected safely. In fact, a 10th SAR Black Hawk had already been dispatched to the site of the crash to see if the fighter pilot was even alive. That particular flight was now due north of Blackjack's position near a small farming town. In the meantime, Giancursio and his men were sent to pay the QDF tanks a deadly visit in retaliation.

Giancursio's raiding party, from the 3-17th Cavalry Squadron of the 10th Aviation Brigade, weaved their way into position over highway signs, trees, utility lines, and small commercial structures while keeping a keen eye out for the lead elements who were now somewhere in the vicinity. They noticed a dozen civilian vehicles in the southbound lanes adding to a growing traffic backup at the bridge. Several civilians were mulling about their cars. The northbound lanes were all clear. The traffic jam would be good though, thought Giancursio. It would work to Blackjack's advantage and block the tank column from crossing the bridge, making them vulnerable to attack. As long as they were out in the open they could be hit. Now, if only those damn civilians would abandon their vehicles and get the hell out of there they might not get hurt.

Those poor people don't even know the firepower that's about to roll upon them. In fact, thought Giancursio, most civvies probably haven't even heard the news that Prime Minister Wilson had imposed the War Measures Act or

that the Canadian Army was on the move. Or even that the Americans had landed in Trois Rivières. And it's all because their own QDF started everything by cutting the power in Montreal. And then they go and shoot down a Canadian fighter. Hell, most Quebeckers were probably hitting their snooze buttons.

"Where are those tanks?" said the pilot, Chief Warrant Officer Morgan Hoyt, thinking out loud as he slid the Kiowa over a copse of trees, preparing to take it lower.

"Morg, I've got nothing so far," said Giancursio in his deep bass voice while monitoring the imagery generated from their mast-mounted sight (MMS).

The MMS was the Kiowa's most highly distinguishable feature, enabling the two-man crew to detect and lock onto targets from miles away. Mounted on the top of the rotor hub and stabilized to compensate for the extreme vibrations given off from the four rotor blades, the MMS gave Giancursio real time imagery by a television camera, a laser-range finder, and a thermal imager all encased in a bubble-like, three-eyed head. The integrated fire control and display systems allowed both Giancursio and Hoyt to locate, lock-on, and engage targets in just about any weather pattern thrown at them. Whether at night, in the fog, in a sand storm, or even in heavy smoke, the Kiowa held a deadly advantage in seeking its prey.

Now searching for that elusive prey through his small television monitor mounted in the dash of the tight cockpit, Giancursio focused on a lone vehicle coming down the Autoroute still miles away in the fog. His pilot, Hoyt, seated on his right, maintained a steady flight path using the HUD, or heads-up-display, positioned in the cockpit window. Both men also scanned a series of panel meters for figures, speeds, directions, and weapons choices. They had been through this drill before but never in a densely populated urban setting covered in fog such as they now found themselves in. It certainly would prove to be the biggest challenge of their careers, if not their lives.

Tommy Giancursio, a true Midwestern boy by birth and spirit, was born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1961. He joined the army at twenty-years-old at the urging of his father and two years later was flying Cobra gunships in Grenada. He saw action later in Panama, leading a helicopter assault on Rio Hato Air Force Base during Operation Just Cause, and also during Operation Desert Storm. During his time in Iraq, he switched to the lighter Kiowa Warrior attack/scout aircraft, as the Cobras were being phased out of service. He logged more than 700 combat hours, received five air medals, and

contributed much to the destruction on the famed Highway of Death outside Kuwait City. He flew briefly in Operation Enduring Freedom in Uzbekistan but no exploits to speak of. Now softer around the belly with a little age, but still as in-your-face as ever, he thought this operation just might be his last before his wife and children finally coaxed him into trying a career as a civilian pilot.

As Giancursio keyed his mike to caution his Troop against the impending attack, his jaw tightened when the missile launch indicator started beeping. An explosion went off far to his right. Too late! A flash of light lit the skies.

The radio barked back immediately. *“We’re hit! We’re hit! Blackjack Two-Six is hit. Blackjack Two-Six is hit,”* frantically radioed the pilot of the stricken aircraft.

Blackjack Two-Six was Giancursio’s own wingman, a few hundred yards back to his right. Chief Warrant Officers Buddy Olson and Frank Yatteau were the men flying it. Giancursio and Hoyt both looked in the direction of Blackjack Two-Six. They saw the aircraft, a dark shadow spurting bright yellow flames against the gray sky, spinning around and dropping quickly. A line of smoke spewed from the engine bay as the pilot tried to wrestle it under control. It did not look good.

Giancursio made the radio announcement that would stick with everyone who heard it for years to come. *“KIOWA GOING DOWN! KIOWA GOING DOWN!”*

At the last instant Two-Six’s pilot looked like he might have gotten his bird under control. He seemed to be trying for an emergency landing on a flat commercial roof, but suddenly he lost the aircraft once more and dove it cockpit first into the roof with a burst of flames.

Hysterical radio chatter followed and jammed all communications. Stunned as to what had just happened, Giancursio momentarily froze in indecision. He didn’t know what exactly hit his wingman nor where it came from. Soon another radio message came in, overpowering the rest.

“Missile, missile! Six o’clock,” said a screaming pilot. *“Break course, break course!”*

CWO Hoyt’s instincts took over and he dove their Kiowa straight for the ground, noticing a brightly lit but empty plaza parking lot surrounded by several trees and storefronts. Giancursio punched chaff and flares at the same time, hoping to create some kind of diversion for the incoming missile lurking behind.

“Hold on Cap, I’m taking her down,” said the pilot.

“Shit, watch the power lines. Shit Morg!”

Their Kiowa narrowly missed a utility pole strung with high voltage power lines and popped into the parking lot, hitting the pavement harder than normal. One of the decoy flares attracted the incoming missile just before they landed. The missile detonated over the trees as it came in contact with its newly acquired heat source. The concussion and noise of the explosion threw the Kiowa forward, gouging out skid marks along the asphalt but otherwise letting the aircraft escape unscathed. Branches and debris rained down on the parking lot. Giancursio and Hoyt sat pale-faced.

0559 hrs, Bravo Company, BP Radisson:

The M240G crew, with Specialist Bernie Blakefield behind the gun and Private First Class Tad Stevens feeding him the “belt,” began laying rounds on the white pick-up truck. Blakefield made sure his cyclic rate of fire was set on “sustained” so he was only firing 100 rounds per minute as opposed to his other setting of “rapid fire.” The ammunition was tracer so the gunner could follow his shooting path and adjust more accurately. It would be long-range fire in short bursts in order to hit the target as accurately as possible.

To Blakefield’s side lay Corporal Louis “Speedy” Gonzales. He was settled in a kneeling position behind a fire hydrant with his Army issued sniper rifle leveled at the pick-up truck. The QDF “target” that was in the foggy crosshairs of Gonzales’s high-powered illumination scope was a young man with long messy blonde hair dressed in black and gray camouflage. The “target” had just let loose his second missile from the back of the pick-up and stood up to track its course.

Gonzales pulled the trigger and made his mark. The target’s blonde hair turned to a splash of dark, thick mush and the man fell forward on top of his partner in back of the truck.

Shocked at seeing his friend’s head literally explode in front of him in a gush of brain matter, the other QDF soldier jumped out of the truck and fled.

“That’s a confirmed kill. Nice shot, Speedy,” said First Sergeant Larry Warren, viewing the hit with his night vision goggles. “Your first?” he morbidly asked. But Blakefield’s machine gun opened up before the sniper could reply.

Gonzales still peered through his sniper scope, ready to fire again. He followed the fleeing militiaman as he ran across the highway screaming amid tracer rounds from Blakefield’s weapon. He was just about to make it over the median wall when several of Wes Shore’s 2nd Platoon soldiers riddled him

with long range M16 and M249 SAW bursts.

“Damn! He was mine,” said Gonzales, disappointed.

Blakefield swung his M240 back to the pick-up and finished it off in nice controlled bursts. He blew the front windshield apart first, tearing up two occupants inside. The remaining QDF soldiers had already hit the ground and crawled away behind the line of cars. Several civilians climbed out of their vehicles as well trying to escape from the firefight. It took a trained eye and disciplined trigger finger not to gun them down too.

“Blakefield, cover 1st Squad. Adjust fire. Adjust fire. Provide cover. Provide cover fire. First Squad, move forward and get those two that got away,” shouted Warren. Eight soldiers rose from their fighting positions and sprinted toward the smoking truck and screaming civilians. The heavy platoon machine gun opened up once again in case any enemy decided to shoot back while their 1st squad moved in.

“One-Four to One-Six. Am sending 1st Squad in to mop up the enemy patrol, over,” said Warren over his personal squad radio.

“*Copy One-Four. Will advise 2nd Platoon and the Kiowas,*” said platoon leader D’Arata.

“Roger,” acknowledged Warren.

Warren switched frequencies to the company net and heard Wes Shore communicating with the Captain. “*I can see the crash site from here. We need to get some guys over there, now! I can send a...*”

“*Stand fast Bulldog. Just stand fast! There could be more infantry out there. Wait one,*” ordered Karr.

Warren then heard D’Arata break in. “*One-Six to Six, I am sending in a squad to clean up the missile patrol on the Autoroute, over.*” Thank God he informed them, Warren thought. The kid was on the ball.

“*Copy One-Six. Will relay that info to the birds,*” replied Karr.

Same Time, B Troop, Over Radisson:

“*BJ Seven here, have a fix on the missile launch. It’s in a pick-up truck. Will engage with rockets and 50 cal,*” radioed the gunner/observer from Blackjack Seven. His aircraft had pulled a 180-degree turn facing the St. Maurice River and locked onto a white pick-up truck near the center median wall.

“**DO-NOT-ENGAGE,**” ordered Giancursio. “*We’ve got friendlies down there. The infantry is already engaging the missile site and there’s too many civilians in those cars.*”

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC

“Okay. Okay. I copy. Breaking off,” radioed Blackjack Seven, narrowly missing a friendly fire incident. If not for the quick communications from the ground troops to the choppers, several Bravo Company soldiers and civilians were sure to have been killed within seconds.

“Blackjack Six, Blackjack Six, are you damaged?” radioed Blackjack One-Six’s pilot CWO Tim Nelson.

“Negative, we’re okay. Clear the air. Blackjack Six to Blackjack Two-Six, do you read?” No answer came back. *“Blackjack Six to Blackjack Two-Six, Olson come in, over,”* radioed Giancursio again. Again he received blank air. *“Anybody see where Buddy went down?”* he radioed as his Kiowa idled slowly in the parking lot. Both occupants were still trying to catch their breaths.

“This is Blackjack Seven. I am over the crash site right now. It’s east of the highway near some railroad tracks on top of a warehouse. The cockpit is halfway in the roof. The engine is on fire. I can’t see Olson and Yatteau. I’m taking her in.”

“Six to Seven, I’m right behind you for back-up. One-Six, what is your status?”

“Yeah Tommy, I’m over the enemy missile patrol helping our boys down there with a couple enemy troops that got away. Hold on, they have been captured. Repeat. Our soldiers are giving me the thumbs up. They got two EPWs. Looks like the pick-up truck is destroyed too. We’re heading to the crash site now to help out in the rescue operation, over.”

Giancursio motioned Hoyt with a thumbs-up sign to take the Kiowa up from the parking lot as he keyed the microphone. Hoyt banked the aircraft south toward the Radisson Bridge, not 1000 yards away. *“No, no, One-Six, I want you to maintain position around the bridge entrance. Those tanks have got to be around here somewhere. We gotta hold them up before they hit that bridge.”*

“Copy Six.”

“Blackjack Six to Pluto Six, come in,” radioed Giancursio to the command and control chopper.

“This is Pluto Six-Six Alpha, go ahead,” answered Petrovich’s RTO in the command Black Hawk.

“Pluto Six-Six Alpha, we’ve got a Kiowa down, a Kiowa down! Request SAR at Radisson Bridge.”

“Okay, okay, we already know. This is Dragon Six,” said Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer, taking over the transmission. *“We heard your earlier*

traffic. A rescue Black Hawk and two more Kiowas from your Troop are approaching. I'm keeping the last two over at the airport."

"Roger Dragon Six."

"Any sign of the tanks?"

"No sir, not yet," replied Giancursio.

0608 hrs, QDF Grizzly One:

Several minutes had passed since Eagle Two made their last transmission to Colonel LaPointe. They claimed to have shot down one of the American choppers near the Route 40 bridge but were now under attack from enemy infantry. LaPointe's mind was in overdrive with questions. American choppers? We shot one down? Did Eagle Two say Kiowas? Were those American infantry troops at the bridge? Where was Eagle Two's position? Was he in the city? Should I send my infantry platoon to attack the bridge and reinforce the missile team? He needed to find out. He tried contact once more.

"Eagle Two come in, this is Grizzly One." He listened to a stream of static. "Eagle Two are you there? Talk to me."

Nothing. Better do something. Better do something now. Must assume the Americans have the bridge. It might be an ambush they ran into. Have to continue my mission on the secondary route and avoid the Americans at all costs. I must protect my tanks and troops and get into this urban area for better protection. I cannot stop now. How the hell did they even get here? How did they find out about us?

The colonel radioed his convoy. "Grizzly One to all Grizzly units. We are under air attack from American choppers. Everyone follow my lead off the highway at Exit 205 into Cap-de-la-Madeleine. We will cross the St. Maurice on Route 138 and enter the city on that bridge. Air guard, be on high alert."

LaPointe's quick thinking and pre-planning would prove to save his column a sure delay at the Radisson Bridge. He exited off Autoroute 40, turned south, and headed toward the river. This was his only other way of crossing the St. Maurice, entering the city of Trois Rivières, and then crossing the St. Lawrence River to complete his first objective.

Within several minutes all 1st Armored units made it safely off the Autoroute, traveled down a heavily wooded rural road and then passed into a mixed industrial, commercial, and residential area called Cap-de-la-Madeleine approaching the old narrow Duplessis Bridge on Route 138. His column rumbled down early morning fog-filled, deserted streets, obscuring any view from the Americans in the air.

LaPointe ordered his driver to speed up then keyed his mike. “All units, this is Grizzly One. Once inside the city we will proceed to the Laviolette and cross the St. Lawrence, out.”

0618 hrs, C2 Black Hawk, Over Airport:

“*Dragon Six, still no sign of them,*” radioed Captain Tommy Giancursio through hissing static.

“Okay, Blackjack Six, I copy. How’s the rescue coming?” asked Lieutenant Colonel Doug Gutzenheimer.

“*Shitty! But your pounders sent up a squad and are helping out. I got word they have to go inside the building to get access to the cockpit. The engine’s still smoking. No word on how my crew is doing, over.*”

Sitting next to his junior battalion commander in the electronics packed command Black Hawk was the red-faced Colonel Paul “Petrol” Petrovich. Since the announcement of the Kiowa downing he had been living up to his nickname quite well. He snatched the SINGARS receiver out of Gutzenheimer’s hand and made a transmission to Giancursio. “This is Pluto Six, do you need more security down there to cover the crash site?” he asked angrily.

“*Negative Pluto Six. The 60Q Black Hawk just showed up. We’ve got enough assets. I don’t want to overdo it.*”

“Okay Blackjack. Continue recon for that armor—find them! Out.”

Petrol flipped the SINGARS receiver over to a now miffed Gutzenheimer. “I was going to ask him that next dammit! Give me a chance to coordinate this, Paul.”

Petrol ignored him, taking some notes.

The C2 pilot came on the intercom. “Command, be advised the airport is secure, the airport *is* secure.”

“Okay, take her down,” Petrovich said back to the pilot, keying his headset intercom. As the aircraft banked for the start of its descent Petrovich sat back, perplexed. Where had those damn renegade tanks gone? He looked at a map of the city and reviewed the last actions of where the Kiowa Blackjack Two-Six went down in relation to the CF-18 shoot down. They had to be somewhere along the Autoroute, but where? Had they taken to the countryside west and into the woods or have they split east towards the St. Lawrence?

This unexpected threat of heavy tank armor against his infantrymen had shaken the colonel ever since learning of it halfway in on their initial flight to

Trois Rivieres. He had acted prudently in attacking the objectives directly but it cost him dearly with a downed chopper and possibly two KIAs. Now the enemy tanks were knocking at the 10th's door ready to burst in. Things were not looking pretty and he was pissed. This whole mission could fail in a matter of minutes.

The C2 Black Hawk had the main runway at Trois Rivieres Regional Airport in its sights for an approach.

Gutzenheimer spoke to his boss again, who seemed to be daydreaming. "Colonel, we've got big problems brewing! We got a Canadian Hornet shot down and now they just blasted one of our Kiowas out of the sky. All by a phantom tank force with anti-aircraft missiles. And they just disappeared? We need an ETA on the RRC and Delta Company. How are we going to..." Before he could finish, the Black Hawk touched down on the runway with a teeth-rattling jolt.

Colonel Petrovich seized the pause and shouted back to Gutzenheimer as they unbuckled their seat restraints. "Hold on there," he barked. "Slow the hell down. I know the damn situation, Doug. First off, the Rapid Reaction Company..." He turned to the 2-14th's XO seated in the next row with a SINCGARS up to his ear. "Major, what is the RRC's ETA?" he demanded.

Major Robert Tununda replied, "Ten minutes out in the Globemasters. As soon as they touch down they're ours."

"And Delta Company? Captain Almond! Delta's ETA? Update now," shouted Petrovich to the only female U.S. soldier on the mission.

"We've got two C-17s and three C-130s airborne. They just crossed the New York-Quebec border. ETA about thirty minutes sir," she replied.

"Okay," said Gutzy in a calmer voice.

"I'm going to deploy the RRC to the front line as soon as they land. They're first in. All we can do right now is wait," said Petrovich, trying to quell his temper. His face was shiny from sweat.

"Okay. In the meantime we've got to set up the TOC and get ground ops ready," insisted Gutzenheimer.

"Fine, let's go!"

Gutzenheimer and Petrovich jumped out of their idling Black Hawk and ran for the main terminal. Four soldiers provided security and jogged along with the commanders. RTOs, air combat controllers and the rest of the staff followed out of the Black Hawk with their various communications equipment, heavy backpacks and weapons.

Running for the cover of the small one-story terminal office, Petrovich

watched as the young commandos of his brigade swarmed all around him in the early morning light. They seemed to be everywhere, preparing defensive positions as well as making a working forward base ready to receive the large Air Force transports due to arrive any moment. Petrovich glanced down the runway hoping the C-17 Globemaster IIIs could land on such a small strip. He had been assured they could, that's what they were designed to do in a scenario just as this. Guess we'll find out the hard way once again, he thought as he stepped into the terminal.

0617 hrs, QDF Grizzly One:

LaPointe's wireless phone beeped. Jesus, not now! He had to answer it, as only one person could be on the other end. He snatched it up and hit the "talk" button. A jumbled, digital modem-type sound filled his ear, ensuring audio encryption.

"Yes?"

"Colonel, I'm watching a live news report saying the American infantry is making a helicopter assault on Trois Rivieres. They have captured the Laviolette Bridge. What is happening?" asked a remarkably distraught Jacques DeMars.

"The Laviolette! Christ! I didn't even know. You tell *me* what's going on. You obviously have more information than I do," replied LaPointe, quite stressed out already. "We are about to cross the St. Maurice River right now and enter the city. I had to divert the tanks to a secondary route."

"You did? Why was I not informed?"

"Because we are in combat, Mr. DeMars! We are being attacked from the air," retorted LaPointe, annoyed at this untimely distraction. He had to focus on the potential threat ahead of him, not give reports of his every move. His tank moved out onto the first section of the Duplessis Bridge taking up both southbound lanes of the old structure. A terrifying thought then entered his head, what if this old bridge can't hold the weight of his 67-ton American-made main battle tank?

"What else have you not told me, Colonel LaPointe?" asked DeMars testily.

LaPointe did not answer right away. He was still shocked that his tank might collapse the old cement bridge at any point. "Ah, please repeat."

"What else have you not told me?" asked DeMars again.

"Well, let's see, Mr. Premier," said LaPointe breathing easier as his tank still had solid footing. "So far we shot down a fighter jet near Deschambault

and an American chopper not minutes ago. Both with our missiles! How about that, eh?" LaPointe's loader, in the hatch next to him, looked over at his commander with a grin.

"*You did? That's excellent!*" DeMars said, more conciliatory.

"Yes we did. And I'm expecting more at any moment. Do you have anything to add? Do you have any intelligence to relay to me? How much infantry landed here?" shouted LaPointe as his tank rumbled across the width of Saint-Christophe Island and onto the second section of the bridge approaching old Trois Rivières. "Seems like I've been left out of the loop too, eh?"

"*Hold on. Hold on,*" said DeMars as he spoke to one of his advisors in the background.

LaPointe could hear a volatile conversation on the other end of the phone. Within seconds DeMars was back on.

"*Colonel, we cannot attack Montreal at this time,*" he said.

"Well, obviously not, now that I cannot even cross the Laviolette Bridge!" replied LaPointe.

"*Not only that but the Canadian Army just entered north Montreal with a mechanized tank and infantry force. They are shutting the city down. It's on FOX News right now. Our plans are blown. We have been sabotaged.*"

LaPointe was silent on the other end. Sabotaged? Feeling like the wind had been knocked out of him, he stood stupefied in his commander's cupola as his tank slowly crossed the main channel of the St. Maurice River. He instinctively looked to his right upriver towards the Radisson Autoroute 40 Bridge where the Americans were, apparently, but he could see nothing around the fog shrouded bend in the river. Who leaked the plan? I'll personally kill the bastard, he thought.

"*Colonel. Colonel. Are you there?*" asked DeMars.

"Yes, I'm here."

"*Where are you right now? I have a map in front of me.*"

Great, the politician getting involved in combat. I do not need this, thought LaPointe. He sighed, "I am crossing the river right now on Pont Duplessis 138 at the three rivers' mouth."

"*Okay, get your tanks into the city area and hide. It looks like our plan was leaked somehow. Make sure you hold the 138 bridge so we can send reinforcements and link up with you. That's when we will attack the Americans. Our fight is not over. Trois Rivières will be our new showdown instead of Montreal. Do you understand?*" said DeMars.

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC

“Yes, yes. I understand. But what reinforcements? We have very little manpower.”

“I am mustering all the troops and volunteers I can find in Quebec City. We’ll get there as soon as we can. I’m also going to activate our cells in Trois Rivieres to help out too. Call me back when your units are in place. Good luck.” DeMars hung up.

LaPointe turned the phone off and slammed it inside his commander’s cupola. Think. Think. He looked ahead along the city bank to his left and saw a large steam cloud rising from the fog. Two smoke stacks jutted upward. A mountain of wet wood chips sat in the foreground. The silhouette of a large, long factory then came into view. It was one of the city’s mainstay industries. Yes, I know where to go now, he thought, looking down at his city map for its exact street location.

LaPointe keyed his helmet intercom. “Driver, maintain course until you come upon some railroad tracks. Make an immediate left on the tracks and follow them to the pulp and paper factory.”

“Roger.”

The large lead tank kicked into higher gear as it rumbled off the bridge and entered Trois Rivieres. A city police car, already alerted to the presence of a Canadian Army convoy entering the city, was parked with lights flashing on the opposite lane. The officer, loyal to the Quebec cause but unaware this convoy was actually QDF, saw what was coming his way and just stared, wide-eyed. His city was being invaded and he was powerless. To his dismay several more of the Canadian-marked tanks followed the first. One tank came precariously close to clipping the front quarter panel of his car. He backed up in submission, giving them plenty of room. He noticed in his rear view mirror that the first tank had made a sharp turn on the railroad tracks behind him. That would take them right into the TRIPAP pulp and paper plant complex. Why are they going there? he asked himself. As more of the supposed enemy followed, he could do nothing but radio in a report to headquarters. To his relief, he would soon find out who this enemy really was.

LaPointe keyed his microphone for an announcement. “Grizzly One to all units, new orders follow. Once you cross the bridge, turn left onto the first railroad tracks you see. Rendezvous at the TRIPAP paper plant and seek defensive positions. All units acknowledge.”

“Grizzly Two, clear!” radioed the second tank in line.

“Three clear,” sounded the next and so on. The confirmation of orders followed with each of the tanks, the remaining missile team, the fuel trucks,

and infantry platoon acknowledging in succession.

LaPointe came back on with more orders. "Eagle One, Eagle One, dismount at the end of the bridge where the cop car is and provide air guard. Do you understand?"

"*Eagle One understands,*" replied Sergeant Major Bourdage, head of the remaining missile crew still crossing the river.

"Grizzly Ten and Troop One. I want your unit and half of the infantry to stay with Eagle One for bridge security. Ten will be in command. We have reinforcements coming in on this route. Keep it open at all costs. And inform that cop back there who we are too. We don't want to spook the local law enforcement into a situation."

"*I understand your transmission, Grizzly One. What reinforcements?*" radioed Bourdage.

"Not now Bourdage, just do as I say."

As LaPointe's M1A2 tanks rumbled down the old, narrow city Route 138 before turning left at the tracks, many lights flickered on in the tightly packed two-to three-story row houses along the street. Drapes were drawn as curious occupants peered out of their windows at the early morning Canadian Army intrusion into their quiet neighborhood. Several calls to the emergency services phone number were placed.

Moving down the rails with one tank track crunching up railroad ties and the other churning up rocks and weeds, Grizzly One entered the industrial complex. The rails then split in three directions as they wrapped around the main factory. Several flatbed cars filled high with long, wet pine tree trunks sat off of one rail split. LaPointe continued straight on, passing a small school and city park on his right. He was now parallel to a city street, Hertel Street to be exact, he noted on his map. The backs of row houses filled his entire right all the way down to the St. Lawrence River. The industrial factory filled up the whole left side of the corridor, taking up six city blocks.

LaPointe glanced into the sky above the plant. Thick white steam tumbled out of its exhaust stacks and several vents. The plant worked at all hours, even Sundays. There would be people here. He ordered his driver off the tracks and into the main parking lot on the northeast end of the plant. The virtually deserted lot held a handful of cars and trucks marking a skeleton crew of workers this early morning. He parked the tank between a large cylindrical storage tank and the huge pile of wood chips near the river bank. He looked at his surroundings and radioed his convoy for positioning instructions.

His luck was running out and all pretense of self-confidence was soon

fading. The reality of an enemy already in his objective area boggled his mind. They weren't supposed to be here! It's not supposed to happen like this. LaPointe's hands shook uncontrollably. His loader, seated next to him, a close friend and fellow veteran from the disbanded Canadian Airborne Regiment, asked him if everything was all right. The colonel said nothing. He was too perplexed at the unexpected situation.

0630 hrs, 2-14th HQ TOC, Airport:

"Another Kiowa going down! We got another Kiowa going down! FUCKING SHIT!" said a frantic, static-filled voice over one of the large Tactical Operations Center field radios.

Colonel Petrovich, in close huddle with his brigade intelligence officer Captain Almond, battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer, battalion executive officer Major Tununda and several other staff officers and NCOs, held a hand up to silence his crew. They listened intently to the alarming radio call echoing throughout the terminal control room.

A familiar voice came on the airwaves. It was Captain Tommy Giancursio, air commander of B Troop's Kiowas. *"We lost Blackjack One-Four! Confirmed! Son-of-a-bitch. Blackjack One-Four is splashed. She's broken in half and crashed into the river. She is sinking. One-Four is sinking, over!"*

More static and several simultaneous transmissions jammed the radio. A weak message got through. *"Missile! Another missile airborne!"*

"Oh Jesus, Two-Three, move it!" someone screamed.

"Hey!" blurted another pilot. *"Missile hit the flare, missile hit the flare."*

It was hard to decipher what exactly was being said.

"Blackjack Six to caller, what is your position, over?" radioed Giancursio as Hoyt hovered over the St. Maurice River where One-Four had sunk in a pool of smoke, oil, and debris.

"Blackjack Six, this is Blackjack One-Three. We are over the one-three-eight bridge. Engaging! Triple A! Triple A! SHIT! Taking rounds!"

"We need search and rescue out here!"

"This is Blackjack Six, both SAR Black Hawks are currently in operation. There are none left," said Giancursio trying desperately to manage the chaotic battlefield scene.

"Doesn't matter, they're dead," said an anonymous pilot.

More traffic clogged the radio communications as several Kiowas were still either attacking or were being attacked by the enemy. No clear message

could get through.

“Lots of fog out here. I’ve got movement on the tracks.”

“Get into that steam cloud over the factory for cover. Take cover!” said Giancursio.

“Spot several tanks inside the city heading south towards that big factory, over,” said another static filled voice.

“Roger, roger! Tank column spotted. I got ‘em on the tracks. We found them Six, over.”

“Damn, I’m hit. Small arms fire. Pulling out. Pulling out.”

“Six acknowledges. We found the tanks. They are on the tracks, over.”

“What tracks?”

While the rest of the TOC staff stood frozen in disbelief at yet another shoot down from B Troop, the XO of the Golden Dragons, Major Robert Tununda, nudged Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer and pointed to the Route 138 bridge on a map spread out in front of them. A tourist map they found in the lobby with cartoon renderings of city buildings lay on top. It provided a good indication of key landmarks in relation to their accurate topographic map.

“That column snuck in right under our noses. Right here,” whispered Tununda. He tapped the small 138 bridge on the map as it crossed several islands in the three rivers’ mouth.

Gutzenheimer looked over to Tununda’s location while keeping a keen ear open for the continued radio communications.

“You got smoke from your tail. Get outta there. Extract over the St. Lawrence for safety.”

Tununda leaned closer to the map and continued. “They downed Blackjack Two-Six up here,” he said pointing to the north side of the Autoroute 40 bridge, “and now Blackjack One-Four here at the Route 138 bridge. Those tanks must have gotten off the main highway way back here somewhere and went through this Cap-de-la-Madeleine neighborhood.”

Captain Maureen Almond moved next to Tununda and listened in. She angrily added, “No wonder we couldn’t find them. Why the hell didn’t General Jennings listen to me and make that bridge one of our objectives? We would have had people there right now. I told him it was just as important! Now look at the crap we’re in.” Her usual calm, disciplined professionalism had crumbled after listening to the second Kiowa shoot down and ensuing firefight.

Petrovich turned to his subordinates after hearing the latest radio chatter.

“They’re knocking us down with fucking missiles! Christ, we don’t even have enough rescue hawks available.” He sounded desperate.

“Spot one tank and some ground troops on city side of one-three-eight bridge. Engaging with Hydras,” screamed an excited Kiowa pilot over the radio.

Major Tununda now got caught up in the fray. “Ground troops too? Son of a bitch!”

“Fucking bastards. This is turning into a motherfucking clusterfuck!” added Gutzenheimer.

The radio shrieked again. *“Got the missile crew on the roof there. Score one for us!”* said a pilot.

“GOOD! Got that SOB!” spat Petrovich.

“YES,” hissed Almond.

“Triple A from the tank. Pull up! Pull up!” a voice broke through the radio.

“This is Blackjack Six to all B Troop pilots. Abort the battle and stand off at long range now. We are too close for their missiles. Might be more hiding.”

“I don’t blame him,” said Major Tununda. “We already lost two birds and two more damaged.”

“Yeah, good call, Giancursio. Back those birds off,” agreed the colonel out loud to no one in particular.

The engagement continued on though. *“One-Three get outta there! Extract now! Return to airport, you’re smoking!”* ordered Giancursio.

“I copy. Wilco,” acknowledged the exasperated pilot in Blackjack One-Three.

“Taking hits! Taking hits!” said another Kiowa pilot as loud pinging could be heard in the background of his transmission.

“Everyone out? Everyone make it?” asked a voice.

“Roger, roger! Watch your six.”

“I copy. On my way. Hurah, took down some of their ground troops.”

“Shit! Watch the power lines! Pull up!”

“Okay, all clear. Getting out, roger.”

The TOC team were simply stunned as they listening to the encounter. The room fell silent as each person tried to figure out what the hell had just happened and what they could do to respond to the enemy. They were so focused on problem-solving no one in the command circle even noticed the low rumble outside the terminal window and the loud reversal of four huge

engines.

Petrovich and Gutzenheimer suddenly lost themselves in similar thoughts at the same exact moment. Both men couldn't help but think back to the Somalia incident in 1993 where a team of Rangers and Delta Force members on a prisoner grab mission ended up being surrounded by an armed militia after a pair of their Black Hawks were shot down. Although neither commander had participated in the battle both had studied that operation in depth from a command point of view. They read all the books, watched in horror at the classified videotape of the firefight and listened to the radio transmissions of the distraught combatants. They even watched the movie that was made over the whole affair, *Black Hawk Down* countless times. It was a mission out of control once those Black Hawks crashed in Mogadishu. It turned into an armored rescue operation involving a Quick Reaction Force from the 10th Mountain before the Rangers could be bailed out. The battle claimed eighteen soldiers, one being from the 10th Mountain. Scores more were wounded including Bravo Company Commander Captain Karr, a green lieutenant at the time. The weak American President soon pulled all the troops out. Petrovich and Gutzenheimer, although not knowing what the other was thinking, both felt Somalia's ugly presence in their little room this morning. They had two Kiowas go down and a Canadian Air Force jet. Panic reared its ugly head in both commanders' thoughts.

A staff NCO broke the tension. "Colonel, the first Globemaster with the Rapid Reaction Company just landed, look out the window!" he smiled, pointing behind them.

Several of the officers scrambled for the window and watched as the first mammoth Air Force C-17A Globemaster III Heavy Transport taxied to the end of the runway just in front of the small terminal. The windows now shook violently as the "Moose" turned and came to a complete stop facing back down the short runway. The pilot had expertly aligned his air beast for a quick take off once it unloaded its cargo.

The rear-loading ramp of the "Moose" lowered and rested against the ground, revealing one of the Rapid Reaction Company's Light Armored Vehicles or LAV-III's. Inside the large cargo bay the loadmaster was pulling aside the chains and shoring that had been used to secure the eight-wheeled vehicle topped with a 120 mm cannon. He gave a thumbs-up to tank commander Captain Tad Westfall and the armor went rolling. It accelerated off the rear-loading ramp fully armed, topped off with fuel, and ready for combat action. A puff of gray smoke followed as it increased speed and

headed for the perimeter.

“Damn, that’s one good sight!” said Gutzenheimer.

“I didn’t even hear them land,” said Tununda.

“Me either. Looks like she just made the runway too. Thank God,” said Petrovich, his mind still on Somalia where all requests for heavy armor in that operation were denied from the inept presidential administration. “Corporal,” said Petrovich to an RTO, “get me a sit rep and damage report from Blackjack Troop ASAP.”

“Yes sir.”

“Boy, that LAV looks beautiful!” added Almond as another vehicle rolled off the ramp.

A sense of relief filled the room and several officers and NCOs actually smiled.

“I’m glad someone had enough brains to send the RRC,” said the unit’s command sergeant major. “Now, we can even the fucking playing field.”

This comment by the top NCO brought the group back to the seriousness of the situation. Several turned away from the windows as the C-17’s ramp went up so it could take off and make room for the next incoming flight.

“Major, did we get all of the RRC’s assets airborne?” asked Petrovich.

Major Tununda had been in brief contact with the RRC up in the C2 Black Hawk since their deployment. “As far as I know, yes. The Rapid Reaction Company has eight LAVs and two Hummers equipped with TOW and MK-19 automatic grenade launchers.”

“Ah, Colonel Petrovich, Major Tununda, ah, I hate giving you this news sir, but...” It was the air combat controller speaking. He had just entered the room after vectoring the C-17’s pilot in for the landing. “There is only one more Globemaster coming in. They aborted the rest.”

“What? What the hell are you talking about? Who aborted what?” asked Gutzenheimer, shaking his head in disbelief. This can’t be happening, he thought. It just can’t be. He looked at Tununda and Petrovich. His jaw had dropped open.

“Captain Westfall told me his whole force was airborne. Up to five C-17s!” said Tununda quite embarrassed and angered.

The air controller shrugged. “They said they only sent two aircraft total. I just found out the rest turned back on presidential orders. Got me why the CINC did it. We’re getting less than half of the total company. We might get four tanks if we’re lucky. Depends on what’s in that next C-17.”

“Son of a bitch!” shouted Petrovich. “The *President* called them back?”

“Holy shit, no one ever relayed this information to us. We were counting on them. We need that armor against ten tanks,” quietly said Captain Almond shaking with nervousness.

“For what it’s worth, sirs, ma’am. They did say that Delta Company is still en route,” said the air combat controller.

Petrovich stood still in disbelieving deep rage. He then blew his lid. “Fucking no-spine Abernathy! Dirty back-stabbing, politically-correct, piece of shit! I wonder what popularity poll he used to make *this* decision!” Petrol’s face was awash in emotion. He shook his head and took a deep breath to cool down. “No one told us about the goddamn tanks the QDF had in their back pocket in the first place and now our own CINC screws us while trying to fight them. Why in the hell is the President making tactical military decisions in the heat of battle? Can anyone explain this to me? ANYONE?” he shouted. “What in the world is he thinking in pulling out the rug from underneath our soldiers on the front lines? The soldiers *he* put here in the first place because of *his* hasty, muscle-flexing plan.”

Petrol was in utter disgust. Everyone else was agreeably silent. He drew a deep breath again but then vehemently continued on. “Is he afraid too much armor equals too much killing? What does he expect? This is our job. We kill the enemy that kills us. Has he read the lessons learned from Vietnam, Somalia, from Iraq? You just don’t do this anymore to American soldiers. I am fucking outraged!” Spittle flew from the colonel’s mouth.

“Sir, calm down sir,” said Almond in a soothing voice.

“He’s put us in a world of shit. But alright, alright, we’ll just have to deal with what we get and adjust. We’ll have to make do,” he said, trying to reassure everybody. “We have certain things to our advantage. We are not giving up on the account of an absolute idiot in our own White House! This wouldn’t be the first time.”

He looked at Almond. “Is the Orders Group all here? Let’s get everyone in this room.”

“Yep, everyone’s accounted for, sir,” she replied quietly.

“Okay people, listen up. First,” Petrovich said looking at an RTO. “Corporal, I want you to personally contact the RRC commander Captain Westfall. Tell him to assemble his armor on the access road and to wait for a quick briefing with, ah, with Major Tununda. Do it now—go!”

As the communications assistant ran into the other room, Petrovich turned to Gutzenheimer and Tununda. “Doug, Robert, I want the RRC to double time it to Bravo Company and the Radisson Bridge. Bravo is out on a limb

with four miles of city between them. That's our weakest line and our first defense. Those QDF tanks and infantry that just got in might want Bravo's bridge just as much as we do."

The lieutenant colonel and his major both nodded their heads.

Petrovich went on. "Once the LAVs get there have Captain Karr spread out to establish a bridgehead on both sides of the river. Have him send an OP east to the 138 Duplessis Bridge to establish contact with the enemy. Got it?"

"Yes, but they also need to keep an eye out on the Autoroute still. I'm worried there's more QDF coming. I got a funny feeling this isn't it," said Gutzenheimer.

"Right, they need to cover the Autoroute corridor too. That's a given."

"Already done," said Major Tununda. "Captain Karr already took that initiative. He's got two platoons out there performing security and observation of the highway north of the bridge. Last sit rep said all Bravo troops had excellent defensive positions."

"Good. I want it known that the objective of the RRC and Bravo Company is to defend that bridge at all costs. At all costs! Any questions so far?" the colonel asked.

"None? Good. Alright, Robert you go right now. Get that RRC on the move once that second plane lands."

Major Tununda grabbed his M16A2 rifle, called for a security escort, and ran off.

"Good luck Major," shouted his boss Gutzenheimer.

Petrovich rambled on. "Okay, air support is out of the question considering what just happened. Blackjack Six made the right call by pulling everyone out. That second Kiowa has sunk. We have to assume, based on his last report, that we lost both crewmen. We can't even start a recovery because we don't have any more SAR Black Hawks available and the area's too hot. We cannot accept any more shootdowns. We don't know how many more missiles they have or where they're located. This mission has to be done on the ground. We have a true OPFOR to deal with now right at our doorstep. This is now going to be a light-heavy ground operation in suppressing the enemy. Let's get back to basics. Remember our MOUT training."

"The way I see it is we need to cut off all access to the downtown area and contain those forces that snuck in," chimed Gutzenheimer.

"Right. Exactly. Good thinking," said Petrovich. "Once we have them boxed in we can close the noose and pick 'em off one by one with small fire teams of Javelins and AT-4s, anything. We have to act fast. We can't wait for

Delta Company to arrive. We can't spare another minute. Doug, give me a quick sit rep," he asked, looking down at the city map.



Trois Rivieres Regional Map and initial Battle Positions for 10th Mountain forces.

Gutzenheimer spoke up. "We have Charlie Company covering the Lavolette Bridge cutting off the south part of the city. They also have a platoon at the 40 and 55 highway junction cutting off the west part of town. Bravo Company is at the Radisson Bridge cutting off the northeast. And the St. Lawrence cuts off the east..."

"But," said a concerned Petrovich looking at the map, "the QDF still have access with the 138 Duplessis Bridge here. Right where they knocked us down." He pointed to the marked location of the latest Kiowa crash.

"I know. I know, Paul. And they've got tanks and troops manning that bridge. You heard the radio dispatch. It looks like their only way in and out of the downtown. I think we should destroy it from the air to cut off all access. Maybe we can call in the CAF from Bagotville again to do the job. I'm sure those boys want to get back into the battle after their initial loss. It's going to have to be a precision run to nail that small of a bridge. But, we have to get authorization from the top before taking out this civilian target." Gutzenheimer paused and thought for a moment. "I remember in the planning meeting that Ottawa was concerned about the two large paper plants on each

side of that bridge collecting any collateral damage during the operation. I think that's why they turned us down in the first place in making that a mission objective."

"Yes, I remembered that too," said Almond in disgust. "Apparently, they own some stock in those companies. Don't want their damn investment affected. I told them it was the wrong decision."

"Yeah, I bet our esteemed CINC has something invested in them too," sourly added Petrovich. "We're gonna run outta time if we have to dick around with authorization from the Pentagon or that ass in the White House. Let's get General Jennings on the line and I'll personally relay what we want. He'll take care of us." Another aide ran off to the radio room with the assignment.

"Sir, in the meantime I feel strongly that we need to push the QDF into that kill box ASAP. I suggest taking two platoons from Charlie Company at the Laviolette, since there's no threat down there, and drive them north into the city until they establish contact," urged Gutzenheimer.

"Alright Doug, I agree. Make it happen and coordinate it with Bravo Company so there are no friendly fire incidents."

A loud thumping could be heard outside as three damaged Kiowas, still smoking from the battle over the St. Maurice, landed on the tarmac outside the terminal. The officers of the TOC looked outside at the noise. Several soldiers with fire extinguishers ran to the aircraft as the crews shut the birds down and bailed out. They were visibly upset. One crewman limped away and fell to the ground wounded.

"Ah Colonel, I believe we have another problem," interrupted Captain Almond as she was just handed a piece of paper by a staff assistant. "Just got a fresh intel report saying our contact in QC has observed many deuce and a half Army trucks full of QDF infantry coming down the Autoroute from Quebec City. ETA to Trois Rivieres forty-five minutes to an hour."

Petrovich looked at Gutzenheimer. Gutzy was looking down, silently shaking his head. Petrovich felt the same way too. He simply leaned both hands against the map table, dropped his head, and went into deep thought again about what steps to take next. This whole operation was turning out to be one of the biggest combat nightmares of his life and he wasn't sure how long he or his troops could sustain the mishaps that seemed to be around every corner. It truly was turning into another Somalia. God help them to get out of this one.

"Sir, sorry to interrupt," said Almond again. Yet another report was just

handed to her. “Charlie Company reports they just detained a news crew broadcasting live near the Laviolette Bridge but there are still several others out there filming.”

“Great, just fucking great! Now the whole fucking world knows we’re here! Kiss surprise goodbye,” said Gutzenheimer waving his hand in frustration.

“I think we’re the ones who’ve been surprised,” said Petrol.

“Ah sir, one more report, I’m really sorry,” she persisted. “The first Kiowa crash site of Blackjack Two-Six is having difficulty. The cockpit is suspended inside the roof and they can’t seem to get up to it. The SAR crew is working on it, though, and the fire is out.”

“Okay, anything more for Christsake?”

“No sir.”

“Get outta here. Everyone dismissed. Doug, stay here. Everyone else dismissed!”

CHAPTER 6 – SNIPER

0645 hrs, Village of Point-du-Lac:

The ringing phone jarred him out of bed. Who the hell could this be, thought young Etienne Nicolet. “Hello?” he answered in a raspy, hung-over voice after a long night of beer drinking.

“*Etienne!*” It was QDF group leader Franco.

“Yes!” Etienne replied, sitting up straight in bed and becoming very sober.

“*Get up immediately, go to the airport, and shoot at the Americans that landed there,*” ordered the man on the other end.

Etienne shook his head, still drowsy and not quite understanding what Franco was saying. “What? Go to the airport? Americans? Eh?”

“*Etienne, listen to me very carefully. American infantry landed at the airport and in other parts of Trois Rivieres. They captured the Laviolette Bridge. It’s on the news. Your job is to go to the airport and disrupt their operations. Conduct a sniper attack. Shoot and move. Okay Etienne? This is what you joined the QDF for. This is what you do the best. Think of them as deer. Like you’re shooting deer. And don’t let them see you. Be a hunter. Quebec is depending on you. Understand?*”

“I will do it, Franco. I’m on my way,” said the eighteen-year-old. He hung up the phone. Excitement and a sense of adventure rushed through his alcohol-filled veins. Finally, something important to do that helps my new nation. He quickly ran to the bathroom, emptied his bladder, and unlocked the equipment closet to grab his gear.

Within minutes Etienne had donned his gray and black, bark patterned, one-piece camouflage hunting outfit, tied up his black leather combat boots, making sure to tuck the trousers into the tops, and proceeded to slip on a black urban bulletproof assault vest. The vest he particularly liked as it had lots of ammunition storage pockets, currently stuffed with full metal jackets of 5.56 mm ammunition for his rifle.

Clipping the vest on he thought how fortunate he was to be chosen as the top marksman in the small cell of the Trois Rivieres branch of the QDF.

Franco had given him an unlimited budget to outfit himself as a would-be sniper. They provided him with the best military and police equipment available on the market. All he had to do was connect to the Internet and order online from an American equipment distributor, and the order was shipped directly within five business days. Etienne ordered sniper videos and books to hone his skills. He ordered knives, watches, gloves, headgear, GPS receivers, binoculars, scopes, and many other gadgets he thought necessary or even just cool. Looking into the mirror he slipped a pair of heavy-duty Steiner binoculars around his neck. He had so much fun outfitting himself and now was the time to try it all out. He felt important. He felt he was becoming a man. His time had come.

Next he strapped on a heavy-duty police web belt that held a number of accessories such as a small flashlight, a hand radio to contact cell leader Franco, handcuffs, mace, and also his sidearm, a 16-shot 9 mm Beretta 92 pistol. Badass! You are one mean badass, he thought, admiring himself in the mirror.

After putting on a pair of black leather/spandex fingerless shooting gloves he pulled a black balaclava over his shaved head and tucked it into the collar of his cammo outfit. He then reached for his shooting glasses and slipped them on, making sure to wrap the curved rubber ends around his ears underneath the balaclava.

Now he reached for his main weapon, one that Franco personally supplied. Clipped to the side of the closet was a beautiful, black matte finish, semi-automatic Colt AR-15 sniping rifle. It had a powerful 4x21 mm Elite IR riflescope mounted on top. He unclipped it and cradled it in front of his chest. He unfolded the bipod attached to the barrel and locked it into place to make sure it worked properly. It did. Great. He clipped it back in place. One more look in the mirror and he decided he was ready. He turned and exited his beat-up, rented trailer and stepped outside into a field of fog. A four-wheel Honda All Terrain Vehicle sat waiting for him in a side shed.

Securing the sniper rifle to the back of his ATV, he started it up and drove up the road leading out of the small, river farming town. The airport was just a few miles north. He knew exactly where to go, after all, these were his stomping grounds.

Once outside in the cold morning drizzle and thickening fog he couldn't help but notice an incredibly large aircraft that had just taken off from the airport. It was heading from right to left extremely low across his path. My god, it's huge, he thought. He had never seen anything like it before. It

seemed to hover in the mist-filled air. He was amazed that something so large could fly at all. It gained speed, then simply disappeared into the low clouds. Must be the Americans. His heart pounded.

As his ATV passed over the main highway, Autoroute 40, he noticed a provincial police car speeding towards Trois Rivieres with lights and sirens wailing. Things were happening, this was exciting. Etienne kicked up some mud then turned right and took a dead-end dirt road leading to the airport property. He quickly realized the fog was setting in pretty thick. He wasn't sure if this would help him or hurt him. He decided that, like hunting deer, it would probably give him cover and the ability to move closer to his prey.

At the end of the road directly south of the airport Etienne took an old muddy snowmobile trail into the surrounding woods and slowed down to see better in the fog. Suddenly, another large aircraft flew right on top of him. The roar was deafening as the plane dipped down for a landing at the beginning of the runway. Etienne wasn't sure what to think only that as he approached his sense of excitement grew even more intense. He was going to make his mark this morning and impress the hell out of Franco and the others.

After a few more bends in the trail he decided he was close enough for action so he shut down and hid his ATV in the woods. From there he set out on foot southeast of the main runway.

Etienne spent the next several minutes creeping from tree to tree until he positioned himself at the edge of the treeline near the middle of the runway. He could barely make out the huge American Air Force transport plane as it towered over the trees and low fog belt. Lying flat on the wet ground Etienne blended in perfectly with the fallen leaves and naked trees. He crawled with slow, deliberate movements and took position next to a rotted log amid prickly underbrush. He leveled his Colt AR-15 and retracted the bipod legs to stabilize a good shooting position. Setting the butt down on the wet ground, he reached for his field glasses.

Raising the powerful Steiner binoculars slowly to his eyes for a first peek, he realized just how close he had ventured. Maybe a little too close, he thought. He panned the field glasses left and right to check for security guards and saw some soldiers on the far side of the runway only. They were running all over the place, in and out of the buildings and waving their arms directing each other. He also noticed what looked like those new light tanks the Americans had introduced in their army, what were they, LAVs or something? Yep, sure were. He remembered them from Franco's pictures. Several soldiers were even getting inside of one of the LAV's rear ramps. My

God, an entire army! Etienne looked back to the large Air Force plane, trying to decide what he should do. There were so many targets to choose from.

As he watched, the transport suddenly increased its four engines to a loud droning roar. He noticed one of those LAV tanks rolling off its rear-loading ramp. The wheeled tank trailed grey smoke behind it and bounded down the deck. The rear ramp started rising. It looked like the plane might be preparing to take off. Maybe he should go after the plane's engines or something. He had to wreak the most havoc against these invaders of his country. That's what Franco would want. Yes, the plane, that's probably where his first shot should be. And the noise from the aircraft might even drown out the sound of the muzzle blast when he fired.

Etienne cracked the knuckles of his gloved hands and snuggled the butt of the AR-15 rifle into his shoulder. He reminded himself, three shots and out. Just like the American Marine video said, then I'll move into the woods and get into another position.

He eased the riflescope up to his shooting glasses and focused on the aircraft. Everything was extremely up close and personal with the power of his scope. He moved the crosshairs to the high cockpit of the plane, now having the pilot in target. Should I shoot him? Maybe they have bulletproof glass. Better not, I might waste the shot. He decided that was too risky.

He moved the crosshairs to the large engines. Yes, there's my target! If I take out the engines I might stop it from flying, he thought wishfully. That would really piss them off.

He went through the basics. Firm hand-shake grip on the stock. Butt firm and tucked into the shoulder. Three-inch eye relief from the scope. No shadows on the outer edges of the crosshairs. Stare at the crosshairs. Target in the middle of the large engine. Pick position. Slow steady pressure on the trigger, just the tip of my finger. Pause in my breathing. That's it!

Etienne eased the trigger back and fired. The barrel cracked loudly. Immediately, he followed through after the kickback and looked down the scope again for his second and third shots. The rifle cracks echoed louder than expected. He saw a small spark hit inside the engine.

"Nothing," he mumbled. Caught up in the moment and forgetting to extricate himself from his firing position he aimed for the engine again. Another burst of rounds hit its mark. This time a puff of smoke blew out the back of the engine. It made a harsh grinding whine as metal clashed. It was instantly disabled. Etienne smiled. He laid down a steady burst of six more rounds to really finish it off. His reward was immediate.

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC

Several of his rounds had burst through the engine, ricocheting upwards through the leading edge slats on the main wing and into the fuel lines. The JP-8 fuel mixture ruptured in the line and seeped out of the wing, spilling directly on the hot engine below. With one more round acting as the ignition source striking against the inside of the engine, the fuel ignited, sending a chemical reaction lateral through the wing. The wing lifted and erupted into an incredible bright orange fireball of hot fuel and metallic debris. In that same instant a huge concussive blast wave flattened everyone and everything in its path. Etienne closed his eyes from the brightness as the shock wave rushed over him. The final split-second element was the deafening noise of the explosion. It blew out his eardrums. He dropped his rifle and covered his ears. My god, he thought, what have I done?

Opening his eyes to the destruction he looked up through his shooting glasses and watched the fireball rise into a small mushroom cloud of gushing crimson flames and black rolling balls of oily smoke. The huge aircraft shuddered from the dismemberment of its wing and virtually flopped over on its side. The severed wing shattered into thousands of flaming pieces. Fuel poured out of the wing and caused a slew of secondary explosions rivaling the first in power. The jolting rumble of the explosions thundered through Etienne's chest, sucking out the oxygen he needed to breathe. He gagged then laughed with fear.

Flaming parts and shattered metal sheeting flew everywhere. Etienne buried his head into the ground as a piece of burning metal tumbled his way. It clipped the tree to the side of him with a thump and smashed into the ground. He half-cried, half-laughed again. The adrenaline high was just too overwhelming. Jesus, what have I done? Once more he looked up at the devastation he created with just several bursts from his rifle.

Bodies had been tossed across the tarmac. One person was on fire and was running away frantically, waving his arms. The victim soon dropped to the ground and went motionless. Debris continued to rain down all around. Pieces fell through the trees and smashed against the asphalt runway. Black smoke billowed from the stricken aircraft as sixty-foot vertical tongues of flame licked skyward.

The tank that had rolled off the rear ramp narrowly escaped the main destruction. The four-man crew inside had already buttoned up their hatches, as was procedure when entering a hot battle zone. The tank had gotten far enough away from the exploding aircraft to only suffer cosmetic damage to its rear deck. The whole back half was now a blackened smudge of the nice

green camouflage paint job it used to have.

Etienne had experienced enough. He rose to his feet and grabbed his rifle. Turning his back to the destruction he took a step over a log. That's when the fuselage and the remaining wing of the mighty aircraft succumbed to the fire, sending another explosive wave of hot liquid jet fuel into the woods east of the runway. The blast knocked Etienne flat on the ground. A surge of intense heat rolled over his body, singing his uniform. The branches above him vaporized. Treetops burned and fell to the wet ground. Etienne cried out in pain and writhed in the smoking, burning underbrush. His balaclava was on fire so he tore it off and flung it aside. His scalp was burned. His glasses flew off too. Scrambling away back into the thick woods he ran hard for fifty feet, tripped, and collapsed in exhaustion.

Realizing he was not severely injured except for slight burns on the back of his head, he lay there looking up in the sky as a wry smile pasted his face. He knew now he had certainly exceeded everyone's expectations. Why, he might even be considered a hero of Quebec for his actions. He laughed again, this time because he was thoroughly proud of himself.

Even though the thought of going back for more sniping crossed his mind, he decided the airport would be too much of a risk to lay down additional fire. He had better just quit and go back to the ATV to call Franco and tell him what he had accomplished.

Etienne stood up, satisfied, looked once more at the black mushroom cloud rising over the trees, and started walking away. His head snapped back as the first burst of 5.56 mm SAW rounds caught him high in the back of the neck, right above the bulletproof vest. The rounds tore right through his skull with clean straight holes. The next burst from the 10th Mountaineer's M249 Squad Automatic Weapon ripped up and down the length of Etienne's backside. Several rounds slammed into the bulletproof vest but Etienne was already dead and falling to the ground. The American sentry poured fifty more SAW rounds into the sniper as payback.

0717 hrs, 2-14th TOC:

After a heated, private one-on-one debate of what actions to take next while the last Globemaster offloaded its cargo, commanders Petrovich and Gutzenheimers' heads snapped up upon hearing an unusual sound outside. It sounded like a grinding of metal coming from the transport plane. Before either man could comment, the windows of the office shattered inward from a concussive wave, showering the two with glass. An incredible chest-

pounding rumble followed an instant later.

Gutzenheimer was spun around against a filing cabinet and crumpled to the floor, his wind knocked out of him. Petrovich was tossed backwards, banging his head against a wall amid a flurry of sharp glass shards. He yelled in agony, also dropping to the floor and bleeding heavily. The last thing the colonel remembered before blacking out was that he had started hyperventilating.

It wasn't until several minutes later that Petrovich regained consciousness. An ashen-faced Gutzenheimer was screaming over him, "Paul, Paul, wake up!" A breathing mask had already been placed over the colonel's nose and mouth while oxygen from a portable tank flowed into his lungs. The brigade medic, kneeling next to his downed commander, was applying dressings to Petrovich's forehead and neck. The medic's hands shook uncontrollably as he ripped off a piece of tape.

"He's coming around. Good job Doc, you're doing real good. Keep it up. Keep it up," said Gutzy to the medic. "Paul, can you hear me?"

"Yeah, I'm here," moaned Petrovich, in muffled, barely audible voice. "I'm back. Oh my God, my head hurts." He tried getting up but Gutzy kept him down with a firm hand to his shoulder.

"Hold on there, just stay put. Just breathe easy there. Doc is cleaning you up a bit. You got some nasty gashes on your face."

Petrovich lay still, breathing slowly through the mask while trying to figure out where he was and what happened. "Must have gotten the wind knocked out of me. What happened? My head hurts. Where are my glasses?" he asked.

"We lost the Globemaster. It blew up," said Gutzenheimer calmly. He had donned his Kevlar helmet and had his sidearm drawn. "We don't know what happened. It just blew up. A lot of our people are killed and wounded out there. The runway is blocked. I already shut down the airport. Nothing can land now. Delta Company can't come in. There's fire and wreckage all over the place outside." A tear or sweat dropped from the lieutenant colonel's eye, hitting his commander on the cheek.

"Oh God," cried Petrovich, his face draining completely of all color. "Oh God." He closed his eyes and held back the remorse and pain at the announcement of the loss.

"Paul, I'm going to take temporary command while Doc checks you out further. You got a big lump on the head and you lost a good amount of blood. You don't look good. I think you're getting into minor shock. Do you

understand me?" asked Gutzenheimer out loud.

"Yeah," said Petrol in a low muffled voice from behind the mask. He shut his eyes.

Gutzenheimer stood up and called to several more medics and his command sergeant major. Waving his pistol around, he pointed to what needed to be done. "Okay, guys listen up, we need to set up an aid station and treat the wounded. Then get 'em loaded up on any free Black Hawk you can get. Send them to Ottawa ASAP. Find some fire fighting equipment. We gotta put that fire out or contain it or something. Get some water or foam on it!"

For the next fifteen minutes Gutzenheimer and his sergeant major ran around trying to get things organized. It was pure chaos. While helping a wounded soldier stumble into the terminal, his RTO handed him a satellite communications phone receiver. "Sir, it's Drum calling. It's the general," he whispered.

Wiping his sweat-soaked face with the back of his BDU sleeve, the lieutenant colonel put the phone up under his Kevlar helmet. "Dragon Six command element here. Go ahead," said Gutzy, trying to catch his breath.

The transmission was surprisingly clear as Major General Bill Jennings spoke from Fort Drum. *"Doug, that you? I just saw a live feed from FOX News. I see a lot of smoke and fire from a distant shot of the airport. Good God what just happened? Where's Petrovich? Give me a sit rep right now."*

"General, Colonel Petrovich is out of commission right now. Got his head banged up and some bad cuts on his face from the explosion. He'll make it though. Just needs some time to be checked out thoroughly. I've taken temporary command till he comes around. There are people dead up here at this airport, sir, at least five we counted so far, some more missing. I'm trying to get a head count. We also got about ten guys wounded really bad off. They will be evacuated with our remaining Black Hawks to Ottawa ASAP. We don't know if the Globemaster crew got out. They are assumed dead too."

"Ah Christ, it was a Globemaster? You lost a fucking Globemaster? How did it happen goddammit?"

"A sniper we think. We took down a shooter trying to get away I just found out. We're canvassing the woods for more enemy. But it's fucked, sir. The situation is completely fucked beyond all recognition. We've got a major disaster going on up here and very little resources. The runway is blocked. Delta Company cannot land, and I just found out more enemy is coming down the Autoroute from Quebec City. Bottom line is we need REINFORCEMENTS right now! Where the hell are the Canadians?"

“All right, okay. They’re coming. Help is coming. I got word that the Canadian mech force is about an hour away. I’ll start an emergency Black Hawk deployment from Drum right now with more medics, supplies and reinforcements from the 2-87th. And I’ll try to get some Canadian Coast Guard choppers to you too.”

“Roger sir, roger,” said Gutzenheimer, wiping a blood-stained hand across his forehead. “Did I mention we lost two Kiowas too?”

Silence followed.

“General, you there?”

“My God, yes.” Jennings paused again. “How? How did they go down?”

“Missiles, from those tanks. They hit our Cavalry from behind before we could find them.”

“Jesus Christ! Alright, I know it’s bad from where you’re at but we need to talk mission now. You need to put those losses behind you. You still have an enemy out there to deal with. What deployments have you made so far?”

“We only got four LAVs from the RRC that are on the ground. They are already en route to the Radisson objective. Why did the rest of the company get pulled? What happened? Why did Abernathy cut them off? We could really be using them now,” asked a testy Gutzenheimer. “I guess it doesn’t even matter does it? They couldn’t have landed anyways.”

“I had no control. SecDef backed him, that weak bastard. I’m sorry about it Doug, and I’ll do everything I can on my end to get you something.”

“Roger, sir. You did hear about the latest intel of QDF reinforcements, right?”

“Copy,” confirmed the general. *“Looks like DeMars is going all out on this drive. Sounds like he’s sending everything he’s got to Trois Rivieres. They must have gotten wind of the Canadian advance on Montreal and decided to counterattack, except we got in their way.”*

“Our contact in the capital says that new QDF convoy is loaded with infantry. The vehicles are old Army deuce-and-a-halves. And I think this tank force we got boxed in here must be a lead element who just so happened to show up when we arrived. I think someone tipped them off we were coming,” replied Gutzenheimer.

“I don’t know,” countered Jennings. *“It might be coincidence. They couldn’t have known we changed plans at the very last minute to come to Trois Rivieres. Hell, we were just about to roll off to CFB Montreal when we got word of the terrorist attacks there. I bet they were headed to Montreal to take on the Canadians and we just happened to cut them off. Now I don’t know*

if that's good or bad luck."

"Yeah, I think you're right," conceded Gutzenheimer. "But we can do something about it if we bomb this Route 138 bridge from the air," he said kneeling down on the floor of the TOC office, hunched over the crumpled city topo map. He placed his reading glasses on, which immediately steamed up due to his body heat.

"No, no," said Jennings. "*Ottawa turned down to bombing that bridge, said there'd be too much collateral damage to civilians. We'll have to readjust our strategy on that one, over.*"

"Damn! Fuck Ottawa! We're fighting their fucking war and we're getting our asses kicked in," replied Gutzenheimer, jamming his useless glasses in his breast pocket.

"I know, but that still doesn't leave our hands tied if you know what I mean, Doug. Our boys come first. The President screwed us on the RRC so you do what you got to do as the acting field commander to take down that bridge. Understand? I'll take the heat on this end. My career is finished anyways after this shit. At least I can give the 10th a victory. Remember, those LAVs have the same cannon as an Abrams. One 120 mm shell can pose a fair amount of destruction against a fixed target. If you know what I mean."

Before Gutzy could thank the general, the battalion intelligence officer, Captain Maureen Almond, entered the room, her sidearm drawn. Although appearing quite disheveled she struggled to maintain an air of professionalism despite the confusion all around. She even saluted. "Sir, I'm sorry to interrupt. Got a level-one priority report from Bravo Company and a report from the SAR Black Hawk on the CAF Hornet shootdown. Should I come back?" She adjusted her Kevlar helmet, holstered her weapon and waited for an answer.

"No, hold on," said Gutzenheimer looking up. Bravo Company was the front line. It had to be important. And the Canadian CF-18 Hornet rescue, wow, he had forgotten all about that. That's what started everything.

"General, wait one, please. I'm going to put you on hold for just a minute, over."

"Roger Doug."

Gutzenheimer rose to his feet, picked up the map, and placed it on the table. "Go ahead with the SAR report first," he said wearily. He looked out the shattered window towards the flaming carcass of the three-hundred million dollar Air Force transport and shook his head as the attractive intelligence officer spoke.

“Yes sir. SAR reports they found the pilot’s parachute and survival radio turned on but no body. He must have been captured or is currently trying to evade capture. They’re headed back and will assist with the wounded evac. End report.”

Gutzenheimer shook his head. “Go on with Bravo’s report.”

Almond continued. “Bravo Company sit rep on the initial engagement with QDF missile patrol reports four enemy dead, two enemy prisoners of war, and the confiscation of their weapons, maps, radios, a shoulder-launched missile unit, and several missiles. Bravo Six reports missile unit appears to be French-made. End report.”

“What? French-made?” Gutzenheimer shouted. “French shoulder-launched missiles?” He shook his head in disgust. “I wonder what else those French pieces of shit supplied to DeMars? They’re supposed to be our NATO ally and they jammed us in the ass again!”

“It never ends,” said a distinct voice. “The back-stabbing never ends.” It was Major Tununda returning from triage. Gutzenheimer and Almond turned around.

Tununda had been wounded. A quarter-sized chunk was blown out of his bulky forearm from a piece of burning metal during the explosion. A tattered white field dressing stained with blood was wrapped tightly around it. More blood covered his BDUs.

“You alright?” asked Gutzy.

“Oh, I’m fine. But some of those boys out there are burned beyond recognition,” he said angrily, his nose flaring. He too had listened to Almond’s report and was thinking to himself how this region of Canada had been fought over by the French for centuries, ever since the white man first stepped foot on the continent and screwed everything up. And his people of the Seneca tribe were some of the first warriors to take them on. In fact, it was in 1687 that the French Marquis Denonville, from his headquarters in Montreal, decided to invade the Seneca Indian lands in western New York just so he could take over the fur trade market from the British and the shorter water routes to Western trading posts. All to extend New France’s “sphere of influence.” It was an event that changed the course of Seneca Indian history and shaped Robert Tununda’s own destiny to this day forward.

Denonville had an armada of 1,500 Frenchmen, plus 500 Indian allies in 200 bateaux and canoes set out to Lake Ontario’s Irondequoit Bay, the gateway to the Seneca empire, now near modern-day Rochester, New York. Another 1,000 Indians allied with France came from the other direction and

the two forces met on a certain day. They established a beachhead then pushed into the interior of Seneca Indian country to lay waste to the people and the villages. A Seneca scout who watched the force land spread the alarm to his tribe. That warrior scout, named Red Knife, was a long distant ancestor of Robert Tununda. Red Knife quickly rallied a band of Seneca and ambushed a Denonville patrol in a bloody fight south of the Bay. Ultimately the French won the day and devastated the Seneca villages and crops dotting the countryside. Several Red Knife family members were killed in the clashes.

The Seneca enacted their revenge the next year and repaid the Marquis with a visit of their own in French Canada, burning and ravaging several French settlements not too far from Trois Rivieres. Red Knife was said to have scalped over a dozen French settlers himself. These historic events proved to draw the Iroquois Nation, particularly the Seneca tribe, to ally with the British in the French and Indian War and later in the American Revolution. On the losing end with the British, the Seneca were forced to relinquish their great empire and sent to live on reservations for the remainder of their existence. Robert Tununda himself grew up on one of those reservations in the Alleghany region of western New York. He vowed early on to continue the great warrior line of Red Knife though and joined the U.S. Army as a combat infantryman at the age of seventeen.

“No wonder the French government didn’t vote for NATO participation with Canada,” Tununda said. “They’ve been in bed with DeMars the whole time. It’s obvious now.”

“Hell, France was the first nation to recognize Quebec in the United Nations,” added Almond.

Chatter filled the room as two more staffers stepped into the room.

“Dirty French bastards!” cursed Tununda out loud. “How did they get those weapons into Quebec?”

“Smuggled probably. Question is how many more do they have?” followed Almond. “And I wouldn’t doubt it if the French Army even sent some of their notorious ‘advisors’ to help the QDF out. They’ve been doing it all over the world.”

“Well, look what it’s led to,” said Gutzenheimer, still stunned by the report. “Dead Hornets, dead Kiowas, dead Globemasters, and dead soldiers! Our soldiers!”

“The captain’s right. Those quite possibly could be French troops for all we know,” said Tununda, ready for a fight, ready for centuries of payback.

“If they are then all the better, in my opinion,” said Gutzy. “They need to be taken down. Send a message to the French government’s selective memory for all the sacrifices this country has made for them.”

A young, savvy computer communications specialist interjected. “I think I know how they might have gotten those missile units. Remember that computer hacker the Canadians nailed a couple of days ago for breaking in some banks?” he asked.

The officers stopped and turned to the smooth-faced kid with a blossoming peach-fuzz moustache stretched under his nose. He looked no more than a fifteen-year-old in fatigues. They looked perplexed at the young soldier.

“Sirs, ma’am,” the specialist straightened up, thinking he had broken some etiquette rule of enlisted men speaking out of turn to their supervising officer. “I apologize for speaking out of line. Won’t happen again.”

“No, no, no, it’s okay Jansen,” said Gutzenheimer looking at the specialist’s nametag. “Go on. Tell me more. What about this hacker? How do you know?”

“I remember that report,” said Tununda with a mean frown. “Didn’t they try linking the hacker to DeMars and the QDF Colonel LaPointe?”

“Yes Major, you’re right,” answered the specialist. “But the only evidence they had was really weak, just some e-mails around the time of an equipment theft a few years ago at CFB Valcartier.”

“Well, that missing equipment turned out to be the same goddamn tanks that are sitting at our doorstep,” said Almond testily. “What’s your point?”

“My point is, from what I’ve heard, they don’t have anything concrete linking the QDF to the most recent financial break-ins and the French missiles just might be the bigger break they’re looking for.”

“Topping stolen tanks!” asked a now annoyed Tununda.

“You see, I belong to a group of Internet security buffs. I’m a computer geek really and we monitor hackers’ chat rooms and in one of them the buzz was that this hacker actually bragged of his reputation and mentioned an operation he did for the French secret service, that he was funneling money directly from Canadian and U.S. banks to Quebec who in turn bought weapons from France. This was before he was even close to getting busted! I never thought to tell anyone about it because we thought it was so far-fetched and just playing off the politics going on and besides, we never even heard of this guy before. He was pretty audacious. But his hacker identity at that time is the same identity the papers said. So now it seems like it could be

possible that the QDF is using actual French weapons and all,” he shrugged. “That’s really the point I’m trying to make. That there is a whole criminal aspect to look at.”

“It would make sense,” said Almond, “but it’s all hearsay, Jansen.”

“You know all this financial cloak and dagger speculation is fine and dandy but the fact still remains we’re the underdogs in this battle. They’ve still got the heavier firepower,” interrupted Tununda.

“Yeah, I hear ya Robert, but this battle is also being fought on the political front and in the courts and this is the best damn ammunition we got to get that SOB DeMars and his French cronies once this battle ends,” said Gutzy. He turned Almond. “For what it’s worth, I want you to get this information about the French missile launcher and the possibility of a link with the hacked money relayed back to the FBI and the Mounties right away. Make sure they get it to the top. I’ll inform General Jennings myself. There’s got to be some way with all our fucking technology out there they can track down those purchases and nail these bastards as the criminals they are. It’s gonna be crucial evidence after this battle is over. If they can seize a whole bunch of bank accounts that leads to the French government, it might give us some retribution from what they did out there on the runway. Get on it now!”

“Yes sir,” replied Almond.

“And pass on to Bravo Six good work. Just have him secure all the evidence and EPWs at his command post. He made a major intelligence hit for us.”

“I’ll take care of that, sir,” said Tununda.

“Good,” said Gutzenheimer, picking the satellite receiver back up. “General Jennings, you still there? We have another angle. It’s a longshot but we think the French government might be directly involved in this.” He winked at Jansen as he spoke.

CHAPTER 7 – RADISSON

0735 hrs, Bravo Company Command Post, BP Radisson:

“Captain, the RRC convoy is approaching from the west!” announced 1st Lieutenant Zak Powell.

T.J. Karr walked to the front door and looked out just as four, green-painted, eight-wheeled vehicles of the Rapid Reaction Company rolled down the sloped road behind his residential command post. They stopped just inside the perimeter of Bravo Company headquarters; uphill from the bridge. Karr noticed the last vehicle was burnt black from its turret to its rear deck. Damn, he thought, it must have taken that damage back at the airport explosion. He hadn’t heard much from the TOC since. The only thing he knew was that a large transport went up, Petrol was incapacitated, Gutzy was now in charge, and chaos was the order of the hour. He could see a long plume of black smoke billowing from the airport location several miles away just over the RRC convoy. He just shook his head.

Tad Westfall, the tall, lanky RRC captain, had already disembarked his lead LAV and was walking at a quick pace toward Karr’s CP. He walked alone with no escort. An air of cockiness floated about him. Ah damn, thought Karr, now I got to deal with the new guy from Fort Stewart. He had only shaken hands with him briefly when his unit arrived last month at Drum but never really got a chance to get to know him or work with him in the field. He wondered where the rest of his force and their Humvees were, before turning back inside.

Tadith Neilson Westfall II, Georgia Tech graduate, was in many ways the opposite of the cool, calculating, proactive Captain Karr. Westfall was every bit the tall, handsome, aristocratic-looking officer—he knew it and he took advantage of it. Bred from a gated subdivision in North Atlanta’s wealthy Fulton County, Westfall grew up in the country clubs and golf courses of the cliquish southern white elite. After graduating Tech with an engineering degree on an ROTC program, Westfall entered Armor School and was just finishing up during the latter stages of the Persian Gulf War. By the time the ground war rolled around he was shipped to the theatre and was itching to

prove his superiority over the others in his class.

It would be his first action and he was unashamedly eager for a chance to kill some Iraqis with his big Abrams tank. He craved any combat opportunity to a point of obsession. But his hopes were dashed when he was assigned to a reserve unit where the most he did was clean the sand out of his tank engine. Over ten years later with many more hot operations passing him over due to his brash attitude, including action in Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom, he turned to his political weight to make something happen. With his daddy pulling some strings, the ambitious Westfall landed a position on the 911 emergency armor force called the Rapid Reaction Company, out of Fort Stewart, Georgia. He had finally positioned himself for some real action when the next hotspot broke out in the world. He had little interest in the big picture of any situation, only a burning desire to destroy something and kill those who weren't of his superior, American, white, elitist thinking he was so shaped into.

When the call came for armor support for a 10th Mountain commando unit going into Quebec, the only thing he could think of was pure self-grandeur. The prospect of a good fight to brag about was all Quebec meant to him and of course he would be calling all the shots as the commander.

"Attention," announced Powell, saluting the approaching captain through the doorway. All Bravo headquarters staffers saluted as well. Westfall ignored the salutations, took off his commander's CVC helmet, and walked right in. What a prick, thought Powell.

"Where's Karr?"

"Over here."

Without even acknowledging his fellow Captain, Westfall said, "Show me your positions and where the enemy tanks are situated."

"How is it back at the airport Captain Westfall? How's the colonel? I heard he went down hard," Karr asked as he turned to the situation map taped to the kitchen table. Westfall merely grunted a "Don't know" in return.

Boy, this guy's a live one, thought Karr, grabbing a grease pencil out of a cup. He leaned over his battle map pointing the pencil to the Radisson Bridge and the railroad trestle a few hundred yards down river to the east.

"Okay, well here's the outlay. Per Colonel Petrovich's last orders, we are using these two bridges as the center for our defense..."

"Captain," interrupted Westfall leaning over into the Bravo company commander's face, "Listen to me. I asked where the enemy is, not what the colonel told you to do. I've already been briefed on that by some fucking

redskin major back at that unsecured airport,” he loudly chided with a slur. “I’m here to wipe the enemy tanks out. That’s what we came here for. The armor is here, son. It’s time to stop dicking around and start blasting some Quebeckers. You game?”

The command post went silent as Captain Karr pondered how to react to this son of bitch. He giped Petrovich, racially insulted Major Tununda, had an impatient attitude, and was demeaning in front of his staff, thought Karr, now boiling inside. This was neither the time nor place for a testosterone match. He had enough to worry about. Should he bite his lip, snipe back at this blatant provocation, or simply pop the fucker in the jaw. He decided to play it cool but establish firm control.

Karr stood up slowly, unstrapped his Kevlar helmet and placed the head gear gently on the map revealing his shaved muscular head now pulsating with hot blood. With a fierce, vein-popping stare Karr looked up at Westfall directly in his eyes. Despite Westfall’s dominating presence, Karr didn’t flinch. It was Westfall who blinked first, not used to such a challenge from a shorter person.

Captain Karr spoke slowly. “First of all, I’m not your fucking son, *Captain* Westfall and secondly since you’re a newbie to the 10th, that Native American you so racially tagged has a real name. It’s Major Robert Tununda. He is a Seneca Indian from the Iroquois Nation, one of the best soldiers in this battalion. When in my presence,” he said pointing a finger in Westfall’s face, “I demand you address him with the respect a senior officer deserves. And I warn you, you had better not let your remarks get back to him—Iroquois have a nasty reputation for white, pretty-boy scalps, if you know what I mean!”

Westfall’s lip curled. He had heard the Tununda scalping rumors. He tried to respond but Karr cut him off by speaking faster and louder.

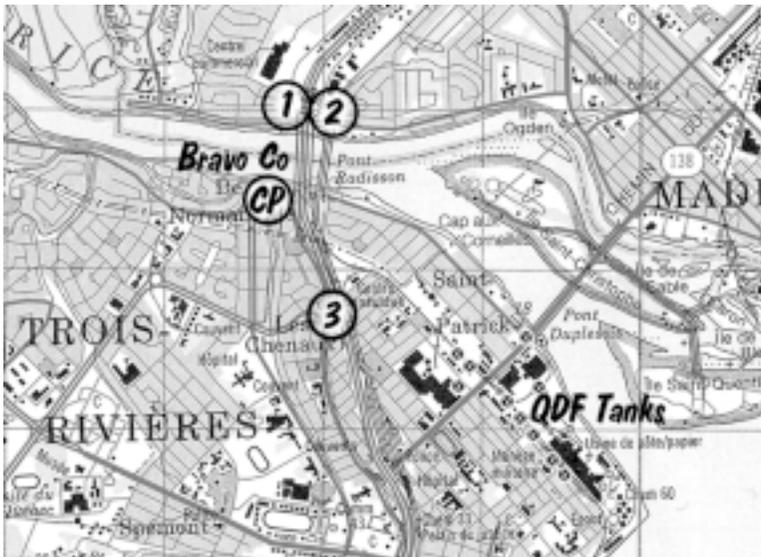
“Now, my name is Captain Thomas Karr. I’m pleased to make your acquaintance and gladly welcome you to *my* command post and *my* bridge,” he said sarcastically, stressing the ownership of his turf. “If you’d like, I’ll show you exactly where the enemy is and how we can work *together* on the same team in knocking these fuckers into the Saint Lawrence River. Now, would you like to hear my brief or would you like verbally joust a little bit further, because I can go all day long, buddy? The only problem is there’s Americans dying out there and stopping that from happening is my *first* priority!”

Westfall stood over the shorter Karr with bitterness written on his face, however he knew the fellow captain’s sly courteous approach in front of his

command staff offered a way both commanders might save face without too much of the confrontation going further. Okay, he'd let him slide this time, but he wouldn't forget about it. He'd get the short son-of-a-bitch back one way or another he decided.

"Captain Karr, glad to meet you," Westfall smirked holding out his hand. "Now, that we've both sniffed out each other's assholes nice and clean, let's get my armor deployed. Whaddya say pal?"

Karr laughed confidently and shook Westfall's hand. A shared sigh of relief whistled through the house as several of the Headquarter staffers chuckled along.



Battle Positions for Bravo Company and QDF tank force.

With grease pencil in hand, Karr circled the industrial complex south of the Route 138 bridge. He was all business now. "We think they're right in here but it's not confirmed. The second bird we lost went down right in the river here and our Kiowas engaged their missile team and one of their tanks at the end of this bridge. That's where they saw them last. Right in this paper plant area. And we know they didn't recross that bridge."

"Yeah, but what makes you think they're just sitting there? Maybe they've moved further south into the downtown."

"Well, we've got that end covered with two platoons from Charlie

Company who moved up from the Laviolette Bridge. They're patrolling this area here and still have not made contact with the enemy. That was over twenty minutes ago and they moved in pretty deep. We've got OPs out there everywhere and there's been no movement at all. The QDF know we're definitely in control and have him boxed into a corner. I think he's buying time to figure out his strategy."

"A cornered cat always kills," said Westfall. "It's going to be tough to lodge him outta those narrow streets."

"I don't know if you heard, but we bagged some EPWs and captured their maps. We learned their objective was to cross the Laviolette Bridge. Their plans are clearly FUBAR now. I bet he knows this and is trying to figure a way out."

"Could be. Where are your observation posts?"

"I've got four OP teams out there. 1st Platoon OP is in this shopping plaza. They're covering the Autoroute on the far bank and have a clear view northeast up the highway before it bends out of sight.

"2nd Platoon OP is here holed up in the top floor of one of these houses on the river's edge east of the railroad bridge. He's scoping out the 138 bridge. No one has crossed back on that bridge since we had that air battle and lost the second Kiowa."

"And your other platoon? Where are they at?"

"Third Platoon is on the Autoroute south of the bridge near this railroad split. The highway is elevated here and provides a good overlook right down into the city. Third Platoon's got an OP on top of this community center building near these tracks, right here," he said pointing to a black rectangle on the topo map with a label next to it that read "Centre Communautaire."

"And my Headquarters OP has the highest elevation overlooking the city. He's across the street on top of that hill there hiding in the tree line."

The two captains looked through the front windows at the rise overlooking the Autoroute 40 bridge. The hill was lined with patches of thin leafless trees adjacent to an upscale residential neighborhood. The RRC column was parked on the downward slope of the Boulevard Des Chenaux, turrets scanning for targets. The long plume of black smoke from the airport jutted across the sky in the background.

"Good, looks like you've got observation for 360 degrees. Now, where's your anti-tank teams set up?" asked Westfall.

"I've got four Javelins on the north side of the bridge and two at the rail split with 3rd Platoon. Six total. They're entirely inadequate for the threat

posed, especially since our Delta Company can't land. Delta had all the heavier anti-armor weapons, the TOW Hummers, even the battalion mortars. I've got to admit, I'm really glad you guys made it here in time."

"Thanks, but I got fucked on my end too. I only have half the RRC. Fucking CINC called back our other planes. Abernathy said we were sending too much. What you see out there is it, man, four LAVs, one being a troop carrier. Anyway, I'm here."

"Right," Karr said softly. He couldn't believe it. The CINC pulled their reinforcements? He blinked a few times. What the hell was too much against ten M1A2 Abrams tanks? The shit seemed to get deeper and deeper, he thought.

"Alright, your dispersement looks good. Here's what I think we should do based on your BP," said Westfall as he leaned closer to the map. "We've got the downtown almost surrounded. Now, the only opening for the QDF seems to be this Route 138 bridge down river. I was told by that, ah, Major Tununda, that a request to blow it by an airstrike has been denied. But I just got word on the way over here from the acting commander, Gutzy-something-or-other, that I'm authorized to take it out by simply blasting it with tank rounds. This portion of the bridge, here," he said referring to a length connecting the city bank to a small wooded island in one of the three river's mouth. "I understand it's concrete-made and pretty old too. Should crumble pretty easily with a few good hits of HEAT," he said standing up, satisfied. "Once a good amount of it is destroyed," Westfall continued, "that will seal their tanks in the city and keep their reinforcements out."

"Ah, excuse me but what reinforcements?" asked a surprised Karr, looking up at the tall tank commander.

"Seems you've been really left in the dark. This is just one hell hole of an operation. Well, they've got another convoy coming down the highway from Quebec City. I hear it's a bunch of trucks loaded with infantry. No one told you?"

"No, man! How much time do we have?" asked Karr angrily swiping his hand across his bald head. He had known his RTOs were having trouble with radio communications to the airport since the explosion but couldn't fathom that he had been left on his own without being informed about enemy reinforcements. What in the hell was going to happen next?

"About a half hour. But hold your horses. The Canadian Air Force is attacking them right now to slow them up. We've also got some New York State Air National Guard F-16s scrambling from Syracuse as well as some F-

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18s coming from Maine's Air National Guard. My hope is those QDF reinforcements won't even make it here at all. Still, we've got to keep up our end of the bargain and blow up part of that bridge so they can't use it."

Karr exhibited complete desperation on his face as the arrogant tank commander spoke to him. Reinforcements? Shit! Was the TOC ever going to let him know? What were they doing?

Westfall went on trying to embarrass Karr, sensing he knew more of the operation than this infantry captain. "You see, one of the Canadian mechanized forces has already bypassed Montreal and is now headed directly for Trois Rivieres. We've got to hold this bridge until they get here and cross it. Their ETA is less than an hour."

"Listen wise-ass, I know my objective. All I'm concerned about is their tanks. And reinforcements now. That's the immediate threat. We are out here on our own, dammit! We can't even get reinforced ourselves!"

Westfall was unabashedly obvious in his selfishness. "I'm here as reinforcement! Now, here's what I propose. I'm going to cross your bridge with two LAVs to bolster your defense on that side. I'm going to personally take down the 138 bridge and cover your side of the bank from that far side. With me so far?" Karr ignored him. "My remaining LAVs and dismounts will take up a defense along the highway between your 3rd Platoon and the Radisson Bridge. We'll just set up a firing line on the highway and wait till the QDF tanks come to us. We'll have an elevation advantage at least. If they move, we blast them with everything we've got. If they don't move that gives the Canadians time to get here with more support."

"Okay," said T.J., pressed to make a decision. What more could they do? They didn't have enough assets to go on the attack, the TOC was in disarray, their lines were stretched thin in a hostile environment, air support was nonexistent, and he still didn't have a clear fix on where the QDF tanks were exactly. Captain Karr nodded his head. "Fine, let's do it!"

"Alright, I'll start firing the first rounds in," said Westfall glancing at his watch, "ah, at 0750."

"Got it," said Karr. "Oh, what's your call sign?"

"Piercer Six," said Westfall donning his CVC and strapping it in place. He then turned and ran back to his tank.

Karr swiveled around after watching the prick leave and immediately jumped into action. "RTO, get the platoon leaders on the net, pronto!"

0750 hrs, TRIPAP Pulp and Paper Plant:

LaPointe heard a sharp muffled blast in the distance followed by a closer crashing explosion. What was that? Shit!

“Grizzly Ten to Grizzly One! Grizzly Ten to Grizzly One!”

“Go ahead,” said LaPointe keying his helmet radio.

“They just hit the bridge! Sounded like tank fire. Don’t know where he is. What should I do? Over.”

“Hold your position, Ten. Let the infantry spotters find him,” replied LaPointe.

“Copy Grizzly One. Could sure use some more help up here, especially if that was a tank. I’m the only one defending this bridge with just twelve foot-soldiers. I think they know where I am. We found some of the Eagle One team on the roof. They’re all dead and Bourdage is missing. The American helicopters destroyed the missile unit too,” said the nervous tank leader of Grizzly Ten. Another tank blast went off and could be heard exploding in the background noise of his radio.

LaPointe heard the explosion pretty clear himself from his position at the paper factory just down from the bridge. Missile team gone. Bourdage, the mercenary, missing. This is not good. He thought the tank commander seemed to be rattled too. “Okay, just hold your position. I’m going to send Grizzly Nine in to help you out.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the relieved tanker.

“Grizzly Nine, move to Ten’s position for backup.”

“Copy that. On my way.” A tank parked in a side street next to one of the fuel trucks revved its engines and moved out.

Damn, they’ve got a tank up there, thought LaPointe. I thought there was just infantry. How did they get here? Shit, shit! I can’t just sit here and take this. I have to act. I’ve got tanks of my own, the best in the world. Maybe I should attack their bridge. I know that’s where they are. But, those damned choppers. I know they’re out there watching us. They’ll strike me from the top with their anti-tank missiles, right where we are weakest. And I’ve got no more air defense!

LaPointe’s long range radio squealed amid the hiss of severe static interference. *“QDF Base to Grizzly One. Acknowledge.”* It was headquarters calling from the Citadelle back in Quebec City.

“Go ahead Base,” said LaPointe.

“Grizzly One...Reinforcements...attacked by NATO aircraft on Autoroute. They...scattered. Will not, I repeat, will not be linking up with

you...on your own."

"I copy Base. I'm on my own."

"Base out."

Before he could even react to the incredible news of the enemy air attack on their support forces LaPointe was jarred in his commander's seat when yet another explosion ripped through the morning air. His loader, also standing in the hatch next to his, flinched as well. This one seemed louder, more of a crumbling sound when it hit. His unit radio chirped.

"Colonel, this is Grizzly Ten. They seem to be focusing on this end of the bridge for some reason. They just took out one of the columns over here. Hold on. We pegged him. He's shooting from somewhere up behind the railroad bridge on the far bank, over," sounded Ten's tank commander, more in control.

Another high explosive tank round whistled in with a crunch. LaPointe could hear the shriek and loud blast as it struck concrete and pavement once again.

"Grizzly One, did you copy my last message?" asked Grizzly Ten.

"Roger Ten."

Yet another tank round boomed in, echoing through the city. They're going to take out my bridge, LaPointe thought. Damn them! The infantry reinforcements no longer exist and we are being shut in. According to the last observation report, they have foot soldiers closing in on my south flank and the Radisson and Autoroute on my west are also occupied. My back is up against the wall with rivers on my other two flanks. I'm trapped. How did it happen so fast?

"Are there any of our infantry on the other side of the river?"

Ten replied, *"No. I've got twelve guys sitting here around my tank with their thumbs up their asses. You never gave us explicit orders to send anyone over. Let me engage that tank. I don't think he knows where I am yet."*

"Negative! Stay put! It could be an ambush to draw us out. Here's what I want. Send all the soldiers to the other side and have them await further orders, out."

The tank fire lasted five more long minutes. Not one of the QDF infantrymen could make it to the other side of the bridge. None of them dared to run the deadly gauntlet. LaPointe's radio blared again in his headset. *"Mother of God! They blew off ..."* A loud roar blocked out Ten's transmission.

"Say again, Ten. Say again."

“They blew the bridge! The end of it just fell into the river,” said the tanker in an excited voice. *“Our bridge is gone and none of our soldiers made it to the other side. What do you want me to do now?”*

“No one made it over? What the hell are you doing? Just hold your position. Don’t give anything away. Cover yourself. I am going to re-evaluate the situation and make a decision as to what to do. Inform me if that tank moves. OUT!” LaPointe reached for his wireless phone to contact the premier. He needed guidance now.

LaPointe dialed his superior but received a recorded message that the call was unable to be sent. He tried several more times and then gave up, slamming the phone down with a curse. Must be interference.

LaPointe then tried contacting the Citadelle headquarters with his field radio but was again hindered by interference. He kept getting static. He then asked if any of his units could contact Quebec City, but none were able. LaPointe concluded his radio transmissions were being jammed. Yes, the Americans were definitely closing in. They probably have digital communications jammed in all of Quebec now.

Still intent on getting through to Quebec City, LaPointe turned to his loader and explained he was going into the paper plant to try and make contact with the Citadelle. He jumped down from the turret, hit the rear deck and climbed down from the tank. He ran inside an employee entrance near a shipping dock. A wide-eyed plant employee, noticing the QDF symbol on the tanker’s uniform and a bit confused at whether the tanks out in the parking lot were Canadian or Quebec, nonetheless let him in and asked how he could help. LaPointe asked for a regular telephone so the employee directed him to the shipping office. Within seconds LaPointe had contacted Premier DeMars, informing him of the situation of his forces being surrounded, the bridge blown, the air defense mercenaries gone and his tanks on their own now facing enemy armor. A conference call ensued with the Citadelle for the latest intelligence reports on the enemy and a heated discussion followed on what to do next.

While the colonel spoke on the phone the plant employee turned on a small television in the office and flicked through several channels to catch the latest news. Military vehicles filled the television screen as a female reporter stood by a highway road sign talking to the viewing audience. The news report caught LaPointe’s eye, particularly the road sign.

It was an Autoroute 40 marker in its distinctive blue and red provincial coloring. Below it read the direction of “EST” or east, and military vehicles

were passing by it in that direction.

“Hey, turn up the sound,” LaPointe ordered the employee. The young man did as he was told.

They both watched the screen as the camera zoomed in on a military flatbed tractor trailer hauling an Abrams tank with Canadian Army markings. It passed behind the reporter as she spoke in her native French language. A caption read underneath her picture, “Marie Moran reporting live from Berthierville.”

That was all LaPointe needed to see before losing what little patience he had left.

“Jesus!” he screamed into the phone. “The Canadians are in Berthierville with tanks! That’s only sixty kilometers away! What the hell are you people doing? Why didn’t you tell me? Goddammit! I will not go down like this! You have no idea what is going on here. I am trapped. Surrounded like a dog. I have been set up! I will kill whoever is responsible for this when I get out. No one will trap me and my men!” He slammed the phone down, jamming his finger in the process. “Son of a bitch!” he exclaimed in pain.

He ran outside to his idling Abrams and immediately called a meeting to figure out how he could implement a hasty escape. His men had very little time to save themselves. They had to act fast. One of the first things they did was to take off the Canadian Army logo magnets. This time they would show their true colors and fight as the defenders of Quebec.

0806 hrs, Bravo Company CP:

Nearly ten minutes had elapsed and the city was fully awake since the beginning of Westfall’s loud tank barrage and the earlier deafening explosion of the C-17 at the airport. By now most residents had heard the news of the military operations underway in their neighborhoods. Some curiosity seekers even ventured outdoors with their video tape recorders, cameras, and binoculars to get a glimpse of the American infantry troops, their tanks, and their choppers. They even walked up to the large Quebec Defense Force tanks occupying the area around TRIPAP and praised the soldiers for defending their city.

The Trois Rivières city police department finally stirred from their inaction, too. Although they plainly made themselves visible to the Americans they, by no means, confronted them. With the Americans possessing much greater firepower, one small act of defiance could result in complete destruction of their small force. Instead, the police department

stuck to their headquarters near the main railroad yard adjacent to the Autoroute and provided routine observation reports back to their defenders near the paper plant.

Captain T.J. Karr watched nervously as several civilians in his Normanville area neighborhood poked their heads from drawn window curtains or looked from behind corners of their houses. Some bold youngsters even gathered at an intersection with arms folded across their chests shouting obscenities to the Americans. Karr did not like the feel of the situation and was concerned that local QDF loyalists might cause a disturbance, or even worse, attack his troops guerilla-style like the irregulars did in Baghdad during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The city was coming alive and with that came new distractions that he had to anticipate. He certainly did not need a civil situation to draw him away from his duties defending the bridge.

Foot patrols from Charlie Company had been sent deeper into the downtown area but still no contact with the enemy was made. One Charlie patrol had the length of Route 138 covered from the Autoroute all the way down to the smoking, crumbled Duplessis Bridge. But the enemy armor did not stir. There was quite a bit of civilian movement, though, as people became aware they were caught in the middle of a battle zone. Some were trying to escape the city.

Bravo Company radio chatter was down to a minimum. Even the LAV-III's with the RRC could not spot the enemy tanks, despite all their clever gadgetry. The fog was not an issue with the armor as their thermal imaging saw right through it. Instead, what hindered visibility was the urban landscape of tightly packed buildings of all sizes, trees, utility poles, wiring, vehicles, and signage that gave an unclear sign of where the threat was exactly. Everyone knew the general area the QDF tanks were located, but without helicopter reconnaissance from above it was quite difficult to see down every street or around every corner.

Karr shook his head. It was eerily quiet, too quiet. Something was about to happen. He could feel it in his gut. The QDF reinforcements would be arriving soon. This rattled his nerves even more, almost to the point of breaking. He thought of his wife and three year-old boy back at home in Watertown, NY. He hoped to see their smiling faces very soon if only he could get himself and his company through this in one piece.

It was just a matter of thirty seconds more before all hell broke loose.

"*Charlie Six to Bravo Six,*" radioed the smooth-talking Charlie Company Commander near the police station.

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Karr turned and grabbed the hand mike from his RTO. Addressing his close friend and fellow captain he acknowledged, “Go ahead Ray.”

“T.J. be advised we just spotted multiple tanks and infantry moving northwest towards your location, over,” said Captain Raymond Ruggerio. He had personally led two of his platoons deep into the downtown of Trois Rivieres all the way from the Laviolette Bridge where his CP and reserve platoon were still stationed.

“Roger Charlie Six. What street are they on? I need a landmark or reference point, over,” asked Karr, hunched over his plastic-protected topo photocopy with grease pencil in hand. His eyelid twitched. His nerves were fried.

“Wait one.” Ten vital seconds ticked by as the bold captain of the foot patrols had to cross reference his visual information against his own topo photocopy. All officers of the battalion had the same map to work from. *“Bravo Six, they crossed the street down near the Route 138 bridge, the Pont Duplessis on your map. They’re headed through the Saint Patrick neighborhood along the river road. There’s no street name on my map, over.”*

“I copy,” said Karr, wishing he had a map that showed precise coordinates instead. There just wasn’t any time in the hasty planning session.

“T.J., my scouts see additional tanks headed northwest on the tracks. Repeat, MBTs on the tracks coming in your direction from that factory, over!” continued Captain Ruggerio.

“Okay, I copy!” Karr replied. “Can you engage them from where you are, over?”

“Negative, we’re gonna have to move in closer. I’ll keep you informed when we make contact, out.”

Karr shouted out loud so all his headquarters staff and RTOs could hear throughout the occupied house. “Relay to the RRC multiple MBTs heading north to our BP up the river road and train tracks. Have them fire at will.”

Karr turned to his personal RTO and handed him the SINCGARS handset. “Spec, try to contact the TOC with the same report now. See if they can raise us some air support.”

“Wilco sir,” replied the twenty-year-old radio operator.

As the young RTO keyed his handset to make contact with Battalion Headquarters, Karr attached his battle map to a clipboard and ran outside to the rear of the house for a view down river. He and his troops were about to engage in the fiercest combat they would ever experience.

“Come on, come on,” he whispered looking down towards the Autoroute. Damn, the visual range was shit. He could hardly make out anything. He lifted his field glasses for a closer look again. “Someone make contact with those tanks before they get too close.”

“Captain, Bravo Three reports infantry moving up near his position. Requests permission to engage,” shouted another RTO from inside the house.

“Absolutely for Christsake! Engage now!” Karr ordered forcefully.

“Right!” said the specialist, turning to relay the orders over his squawking radio.

“Can’t reach the TOC! Can’t get through. Must be interference,” announced Karr’s personal RTO stepping to his side.

Karr’s level of intensity ratcheted up a major notch. Can’t reach the TOC? This is messed up. He took a breath before replying. “Okay, check your antenna and keep trying. We’ve got to get some air support. Just keep trying. Change positions or something. Run across the fucking street to higher ground. But make contact with the TOC.”

A loud 120 mm tank cannon boomed from across the river. Karr flinched. That’s Westfall’s LAV again. Everyone in Karr’s small headquarters section perked up and looked across the river to a concentric ring of fog that rippled out horizontally from Westfall’s hidden position under the railroad bridge. A loud, spark-filled fireball erupted down the road just east of the same railroad bridge on the near side. Debris was flung into the air and landed in the river. Suddenly, heavy machine gun and small arms fire opened up as well from across the river. Elements of Shore’s 2nd Platoon were joining in. Red tracer rounds ripped through the mist tearing up a tree line along the river bank where Westfall’s round had impacted. Excellent, thought Karr. Hit him hard! Show no mercy!

“Captain, Piercer Six reports he just knocked out an enemy Abrams tank along the river road at the break in the tree line there,” pointed Lieutenant Zak Powell running up with his own SINGARS radio on his back.

“Yes!” replied Karr clenching a fist. He marked the location on his map. He then looked up and watched as a plume of black oily smoke lifted over the fog, signifying the first Quebec Defense Force tank kill. That was too close. Damn, they made it up here way too fast. Shit, there’s a gap in my line. My God, it’s right in front of me! How could I miss it?

“Sir, Bravo Three reports heavy sniper fire from the rail split. Two WIAs. They are returning fire,” reported Powell matter-of-factly.

“Tell him to get ready for tanks coming north up his tracks. Use the

Javelins. Did we advise the armor assigned to that sector?"

"Yes sir, they have been notified and are moving up the ramp. You can see them now," said Powell, squinting down at the misty Autoroute.

The enemy was hitting Karr's company simultaneously on his south flank, near 3rd Platoon's position, and also on the east flank in an undefended gap near the entrance to the railroad trestle, he realized. I need more defense over here. How did I miss that damn gap? He turned to his personal RTO and snatched the SINCGARS receiver from the soldier's hand.

In the distance off to his right, Karr heard the distinct rapid fire pounding from a .50 calibre machine gun. It must be from a LAV. A smattering of small arms and exploding grenades then joined in too. That's coming from down near Torrence's platoon, he thought, craning his neck to get a better view. He could see nothing though, the fog was way too thick. A double burst of cannon fire followed by crashing explosions reverberated through the BP. This time Karr saw a wall of red tracers zipping through the fog, marking his men's positions. Good, let 'em have it Mickey, he thought, keying the SINCGARS receiver.

"Bravo Six to Bravo One-Six. Acknowledge!"

"*Bravo One-Six here. Go ahead,*" replied a cool Lt. D'Arata.

"Mike, displace your entire platoon across the bridge right now. Put your Javelin teams up front. We've got those tanks attacking us on two flanks over here. Set up near the railroad bridge entrance on this side. Move it!"

"*Jesus, roger! Out.*"

"Bravo Six to Bravo Two-Six."

"*Go ahead,*" said 2nd Lt. Wes Shore.

"Two, I'm sending 1st Platoon over to my side. You are to spread your men out and cover the bridge with your armor over there. It's all yours, Bulldog. Do good!"

"*I heard and will comply, sir,*" said the Georgia native in his thick southern drawl.

First and 2nd Platoons snapped to action. D'Arata's soldiers jumped from their positions upon hearing word they were moving out and started running across the four lane Radisson Bridge in fire team groups. Half of Shore's platoon took over D'Arata's old positions while his other half continued to fire with Westfall's Light Armored Vehicle against the river road. The remaining LAV on that side still provided security up the Autoroute as the two platoons adjusted their positions.

The situation was getting shitty all over. There were multiple

engagements in all sectors of Bravo Company's Battle Position. Torrence's 3rd Platoon found themselves engaged in a heated firefight with a dozen or so QDF infantry holed up in some buildings. The two LAVs assigned to 3rd Platoon's sector laid a pounding attack against them with both its 120 mm cannon and .50 cal machine gun, but couldn't get pinpoint accuracy because the enemy infantry kept moving about.

Back at the CP Karr found it difficult to keep up with the radio traffic. He furiously scribbled notes and symbols while carefully trying to listen to the details. The reports were flowing in at an alarming rate as every officer and RTO seemed to collectively jam the net, especially from 3rd Platoon. Torrence's boys were getting the most action at the moment. He hoped the untested platoon leader could handle it on his own. He had to, or they might be flanked.

Karr felt like he would be the one snapping instead. He wanted into the fight bad. He wanted to run down from his CP with a Javelin anti-tank missile on his shoulder and face the enemy head-on but he forced himself to remain focused. That was tunnel-vision thinking. In this literal fog of battle the company needed a quarterback and he was the man responsible for the job. Karr took a breath and pulled himself together. He suddenly felt a keen awareness of every physical and mental sensation in his body. It was somewhat calming and took him into a higher realm of leadership. His intense shifting of emotion marked the line between disintegration and victory. His men depended on him to keep his cool and to disseminate the battle information coming in. It was up to him at the moment since the TOC was down. He decided not to fail them. Karr breathed deep again and raised his field glasses to watch D'Arata's platoon take their new positions.

"Captain!" shouted his RTO. "Three-Six is dead! Torrence is dead. Sergeant Mamoto has taken command of 3rd Platoon. Reports they are under heavy fire and requests a Charlie patrol to sweep the enemy from the rear.

"Aw God, not Mickey. They killed Mickey? Aw, God," Karr paused and lowered his field glasses. It felt like someone kicked him in the chest. His heart raced and he became dizzy. It took everything in him not to burst out in tears. Moments ago he had just felt his self-confidence guiding him and he decided not to lose it. Matter of factly, he decided to file Mickey's death away for future remorse. Too many other lives depended on him not losing it.

"Sir, what do you want me to say to Mamoto?"

"Tell him to hang in there and we'll get Charlie to attack from behind," Karr replied in a cracked voice.

0820 hrs, 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, BP Radisson:

After informing his squad leaders to tell the men to grab as much ammunition as possible and to leave their rucksacks behind, 2nd Lt. Mike D'Arata ran his men back across the Radisson Bridge. He fanned his platoon out at the top of the raised railroad trestle embankment near the river's edge. The embankment, lined with sharp rocks alongside rusted tracks, gave the platoon a good elevated position to look southeast into the engagement area. The Boulevard des Chenaux snaked east to west underneath the embankment. There was a lot of shouting amid the mad scramble. One of the loudest voices was of the veteran First Sergeant Larry Warren keeping the men in line.

D'Arata couldn't thank Warren enough but he was still angry at his company commander Karr. They had a dug-in position on the other side of the bridge and now T.J. wanted them to establish a hasty defense against tanks. It was fucking ludicrous in his opinion. There was just no time. D'Arata's head spun with thoughts of failure.

"Dammit Karr!" he growled as he whipped out his city topo map to pinpoint his position. "What the fuck did you put me in? Unfuckingbelievable! This is so fucking unorganized!" he vented out loud, unable to control himself.

RTO Fletcher looked to his lieutenant in confusion wondering whom he was talking to. "What?"

D'Arata ignored him and peered at the wet map. He then crawled up through some light brush to the tracks to get a better view of the engagement area. Looks like I'm wedged in between a residential area in front of me, the Autoroute behind me, and these tracks here that apparently connect with another set leading all the way down into the city. He raised his binoculars and looked down the embankment into the city. There was a neighborhood directly in front of him. Roofs, backs of houses, fenced yards, naked trees, no movement. He scanned right, following the set of tracks. Wisps of fog blew past his field of vision. When it cleared he observed that the tracks curved into a flat industrial storage area behind the houses where they were met by another set of tracks. This rail-split area, on his far right flank, was barely lit up by decrepit old street lamps. It revealed a multitude of cover possibilities ranging from stacks of railroad ties, bundles of metal piping, large rolls of cable wiring, utility sheds, and two vacant box cars sitting off the tracks. He noticed that a squad of his soldiers had already gained some of those positions

to cover that flank.

D'Arata squinted further past the split and saw elements of Mickey Torrence's platoon up on the Autoroute. Looks like they were overlooking the other side of this area with a Javelin crew. That's about as far as he could see. He turned all the way around to check out his other side.

On his immediate left, along the river's edge parallel to the boulevard, was a copse of leafless trees at the base of the black steel railroad trestle, then a clearing, then another stand of trees. The burning enemy tank that our RRC LAV had hit was about 200 yards away down the boulevard. The break in the treeline had obviously given him a clear flanking shot from across the river. A raging tongue of flame snaked out of the busted beast as it lay partially in someone's front lawn, emitting banging secondary explosions of its on-board ammunition.

A figure suddenly ran past the burning tank. He was armed and dressed in dark camouflage. Infantry! D'Arata's heart skipped a beat and he gripped his rifle. He caught his breath and looked for his platoon sergeant to issue an order. A battering opened up from across the river and the soldier was systematically gunned down by several long-range bursts of heavy machine gun tracer rounds. D'Arata followed the tracers back to the source. It had come from the RRC tank directly on the other side of the river underneath the railroad bridge. He was in a clear ambush position and laying good lead. Great, thought D'Arata, keep it up. More enemy infantry suddenly appeared.

"Sergeant Warren, we've got a squad of infantry coming up the street behind that dead tank!" shouted D'Arata to his platoon sergeant stationed up on the railroad bridge. "FIRE AT WILL! FIRE AT WILL!"

Warren echoed D'Arata's orders and the platoon's left flank opened up with a rising crescendo of small arms fire into the clearing. The hammering was incredible as the soldiers let loose with everything they had. The distinct popping of M16s, the rapid-fire bursts of SAWs and the low mowing sound of the M240 machine gun made such a chest-pounding, violent racket that the half dozen or so QDF paramilitary soldiers sneaking up the street along the treeline were instantly stunned. Most went down in the wet grass, never to move again. One soldier managed to crawl away with minor wounds while another mentally broke down right there and started screaming. He was soon shot through the face.

Fletcher pointed behind him and shouted as loud as he could over the noise of small arms fire. "Sir, sir, Bravo Six reports 3rd Platoon's OP has a tank moving on his side of the tracks over there."

As if to confirm the radio report someone on the far right flank shouted, “Tank approaching,” over the rattle of gun fire. “Tank approaching! On the tracks! On the tracks!” D’Arata and Specialist Fletcher looked at each other then over to their right.

Shouting was Specialist Will Coyle, the Javelin gunner covering the fork in the tracks that led into the city. He was already kneeling, straddling the rails with a Javelin antitank weapon mounted on his shoulder. A missile assembly was attached to the launch unit and ready to fire.

“Willy, take cover first,” shouted his assistant who was in the prone position off behind a rusted dumpster.

Coyle ignored him. He was just about to launch the missile when the approaching dark green enemy tank opened up on the lone soldier with its 12.7 mm turret-mounted machine gun. Coyle had no time to react as high velocity bullets riddled his exposed body. He shook violently in a dance of death as rounds penetrated right through his body armor and Kevlar helmet, kicking up dirt and stones behind him. Blood spurted everywhere. Coyle’s arm separated from his shoulder in a spray of bright red. He shuddered again as his helmet tumbled off what was left of his mushy face, and then he simply fell backwards, his body completely shredded. The Javelin fired straight up out of the tube with a loud crack as its initial engine kicked in. It then veered out of control and sailed towards the Autoroute near 3rd Platoon’s position exploding into a concrete column that the highway sat on.

“Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!” shouted D’Arata from afar. He was already crawling back down the embankment to take cover near a pile of discarded rail ties.

“Take cover!” shouted a squad leader. “Everyone take cover! Tank on the tracks!”

“Coyle’s down!” screamed the Javelin assistant, still glued to the ground.

“Coyle’s dead! Get up and hit that tank back,” shouted First Sergeant Warren as he stood up from behind a metal utility box and fired his pump-action M203 grenade launcher. He had run over from the railroad bridge upon hearing of the tank approaching. In quick succession, he fired, loaded, and fired again two 40 mm shells. The rounds spun slowly in the air, arching down toward the tank. They exploded just short of the target, peppering the tank with hot shrapnel.

The QDF tank commander, who had been exposed while manning his machine gun, immediately buttoned up his hatch with a gash across his cheek from a piece of Warren’s grenades. The M1A2 tank’s main 120 mm gun then

went into action with a thundering boom against 1st Platoon's right flank. The impact of the HEAT round hit twenty yards to D'Arata's right just at the base of the Autoroute overpass. A searing blast of fire, smoke, rock, and splintered railroad ties sprayed outward along the top of the embankment, engulfing two screaming 10th Mountaineers. A whizzing piece of shrapnel bounced off D'Arata's helmet, knocking his head into the ground. Fletcher had already burrowed his own face in the dirt.

D'Arata sprung back up, pissed, and shook his head to clear it from the jolt. He looked over to where the round hit but saw nothing but black smoke. Immediately several more high explosive (HE) and smoke grenades were launched in return against the tank. Plumes of the white covering smoke blew from the impacts along with a direct grenade hit on the tank's frontal armor. The HE had no effect. The platoon was creating a good screen from the advancing tank, but it just wasn't enough to suppress it.

"Medic! Medic! Carter's down!"

The shout came from inside the smoke where the tank round struck. A soldier was kneeling over another.

A rocket launched from the platoon. Someone was responding with their AT-4 antitank weapon. A white trail of smoke and sparks lit off from near the base of the Autoroute. Their aim was off target, though, as the rocket struck a utility line tower behind the slowly advancing battle tank. The smoke trail from the small disposable rocket drew a rapid succession of co-axial machine gun bursts from the raging beast.

The tank was incredibly intimidating. It struck fear into the young men, scattering some in panic, freezing others. One nineteen-year-old soldier, an Asian-American named Kim Woo, defecated in his pants. Some of the soldiers reacted differently though, not budging an inch. In the midst of the engagement, as smoke filled the flank, Specialist Mike Danson and his ammo bearer PFC Jeff Shurhoff exposed themselves to the approaching armor by opening up with their M240G heavy machine gun from behind a large storage roll of cabling. Their bravery was intense. The tank kept on coming, brushing off the pesky noise against its shell. The green beast seemed unstoppable. Rallied by the machine gun team's courageousness, a slew of small arms, propelled grenades, and more AT-4 rockets joined in retaliation. The tank was getting battered but it was still just surface damage. Not even the 84mm HEAT rocket of the AT-4 could penetrate the thick armor of the Abrams. It only slowed it down for a few seconds.

The tank then recovered and continued blazing away with its machine gun

FLASHPOINT QUEBEC

and main cannon, now only 100 yards away and in plain view of the whole platoon. The Mountaineers simply could not beat the heavy armor. It wasn't until a direct rear grill hit from an approaching RRC Light Armored Vehicle, up on the Autoroute between 3rd Platoon and 1st Platoon's position, that the enemy tank really became damaged.

The LAV's own 120 mm cannon nailed the tank with a HEAT round. White sparks, deck parts, and fire blew from its back section. The LAV commander, sensing a kill, continued a relentless plaster job smacking the tank's hull with another quickly loaded HEAT round.

The QDF tank was still alive at the moment though, gasping for life. Its turret swung around, searching for the source of the attack. But the LAV beat him with one more burst of HEAT blowing the enemy commander and loader's hatches right off the top of the turret deck. The commander, gunner, and loader roasted from the intense shower of liquid fire that rained inside. The driver was uninjured but urinated all over himself in fright. Now the tank finally stopped and was put out of commission.

The driver, crazed beyond all belief, sensed his only chance to escape. He lifted his hatch and jumped out, making it three steps before being gunned down by the 3rd Platoon sergeant manning the observation post on the building overlooking the railroad split.

The LAV commander noticed the escaping driver too and had his gunner re-engage the disabled target wanting to completely finish it off now. He also had his wheeled vehicle stop so his mounted infantry squad could deploy out of the rear. But after another cannon burst hit against the disabled tank, the LAV gunner suddenly let up and shifted his turret to fire as another threat approached up the tracks. He was too slow this time, as a second QDF Abrams counterattacked. The LAV commander's overzealousness would cost him and his crew their lives.

The second QDF tank advanced at full power and hit the exposed LAV, positioned north of Mickey Torrence's Platoon, with a decimating direct frontal penetration from its main gun. An incredible explosion of white hot sparks ripped apart the LAV's small turret, instantly killing the four-man crew and five-man infantry squad inside. An immediate secondary explosion followed the initial blast as the on-board ammunition caught and lit off.

The Light Armored Vehicle disintegrated in large rolling balls of orange flame. Thick black smoke poured out of the carcass. The five-man infantry team, which was in the process of lowering the rear ramp to dismount, never stood a chance. Several body parts lay about. A decapitated head with helmet

still attached to a painted face rolled off the raised highway and smacked against the soft ground below next to a 1st Platoon soldier. It turned out to be the same young man who had soiled his BDUs moments earlier. Lance Corporal Woo simply passed out.

The second QDF tank, however, soon met its own end when the other RRC LAV in 1st Platoon's sector moved into firing position and fired a SABOT armor-piercing round against the Abrams's front slope. Within a fraction of a second a thin jet stream of white flame and molten metal burst through the inside of the tank in a laser shot of pure energy. The SABOT actually traveled through the tank's fuel tank, exited out of the bottom, and blew a crater in the ground below. The QDF tank stopped, shook, then exploded. The ear-shattering explosion severed the tank in half. The turret, with the tank commander's bloody torso hanging out, flew sideways against a building. Windows shattered and walls crumbled as the turret landed to a fiery rest upside down inside a hardware store. Flames immediately broke out in the structure. An automatic fire alarm blasted its horn and a sprinkler system kicked in.

0827 hrs, RRC Command LAV, Under Railroad Bridge:

"Target infantry, HEAT round," ordered Captain Tad Westfall into his helmet microphone.

"Where?" asked the gunner Sergeant Roland Smith looking through his gunner's sight. "I only see civilians coming out of that house there. There's no more infantry, sir. We knocked 'em down."

"Up!" shouted the loader, announcing he had just loaded the high explosive shell.

"Fuck the civvies, they're helping the enemy! Waste 'em now!" ordered Westfall.

"But they're unarmed. I repeat—I see no infantry, sir."

"You can't take an order, I'll do it myself!" shouted Westfall, grasping the handgrip controlling the main gun, taking it over from the gunner. He depressed the firing mechanism with curse, allowing the tank cannon to roar once again. God, I love that sound, he thought with disturbing intimacy.

Westfall followed the shot through his commander's independent thermal viewer or CITV, and announced after the intense white explosion, "K-I-A! Chalk up another squad of infantry for us! Next time you follow my orders Smithy or I'll jack you myself."

Smith was completely shocked and disgusted at what his relentless

commander just did. He felt nauseous. Through his gunner's sight he viewed two young children and a woman blown apart. Not an enemy infantryman was in sight. He was going to throw up. His young niece and nephew's faces flashed across his mind. It could have been them, he thought, closing his watery eyes.

In the six months since serving the bastard Westfall, Smith had watched the man grow into more of an asshole every day, but now he'd crossed over the line. He deliberately killed innocent people and then had the audacity to brag about it. At that moment, swallowing down bile, Smith decided he would report Westfall to his superiors. The crime was too great. He clearly murdered with intent, knowing full well they were unarmed civilians. This was against all rules of engagement. This was not the acts of a professional American soldier. This was the act of a cold-blooded killer.

Smith was about to speak up and reveal his intentions when a round struck near their tank with a loud slamming explosion. The jolt pressed the crew against their seats. The LAV actually moved backwards a bit from the concussion.

"Damn, we're targeted," said Westfall feeling the heat wave of the blast pass over the top of his partially opened hatch. "I can't fucking believe it. Let's get that bitch!"

"Roger," gunner Smith replied, getting back in action, now fearing for his life.

"Shoot any target you identify. Load SABOT," ordered Westfall.

"Identified tank! On the way!" shouted gunner Smith, firing the main cannon.

The heavy 120 mm cannon recoiled from the blast. Westfall braced himself from the jolt then looked through his CITV to locate the detonation on the enemy tank. Smith had found his target well. He'd let him off the hook for questioning his choice of targets.

The enemy Abrams was partially hidden behind a row of trees just inside the clearing. The SABOT round slammed into the turret ring and exploded. Flames burst out of the exposed crew area, frying the unfortunate Quebeckers inside.

"Nice work! Nice work!" morbidly replied Westfall. "Teach that tanker to strike us."

"Yeah," replied the gunner sarcastically. "That's what you call a legitimate target!"

"What'd you say? Uh oh, got another one. Tank, tank! SABOT!" Westfall

shouted.

“Up,” replied the loader.

“Identified!” Smith added in unison.

“Fire!”

Yet another QDF tank entered the kill zone but had rounded a corner down a street. The 120 mm SABOT round narrowly missed its mark, striking a parked truck instead. The round passed right through the truck’s side in a neat hole and pierced the trunk of a large tree. The tree disintegrated in huge white splinters and collapsed amid an intense explosion against a nearby home.

“You fucking missed the tank!” yelled Westfall.

“Sir!”

“You fucking hit a tree!”

“Shit happens! Guess it’s collateral,” shouted Smith defiantly through his CVC helmet intercom.

“What!? You’re fucking kidding me, right?”

“Hey, you killed those kids and their mother and you’re worried about a fucking tree? Fuck you, Captain! Fuck you!”

“You little son of a...”

A loud clang, like a sledgehammer against an anvil, smashed against their tank. An enemy HEAT tank round struck it, this time right under the driver’s seat on the inside of the right forward wheels. The resulting explosion lifted the vehicle several feet and slammed it back down. A hole blew through the thin bottom armor. Private Bill Lowden, the driver, screamed in agony, spraying blood up into the crew compartment. Westfall, Smith and the loader, Corporal Steve Grant, were all thrown against the interior from the incredible blast.

“Aaaahhh, I’m hit! I’m hit! I’m hit! Aaaahhh!” screamed Lowden. Wispy acrid smoke crept inside from Lowden’s position.

Westfall’s trouser legs were wet with Lowden’s blood. He had never had another man’s blood on him before. He looked down and gasped at the sight.

“Lowden’s hit!” shouted Smith.

“Oooohhh, Rollie help me,” moaned Lowden in a horrifying voice.

“Stop yelling! Stop yelling!” cried Grant.

“Smoke! We’ve got smoke inside. I think we’re on fire,” said Smith trying to be heard over the driver’s persistent screaming. Suddenly all the electronics went dead. The interior lighting flickered off and the vehicle shut down.

“Sir, what do we do?” yelled Grant.

“Sir? Captain? Captain, are you alright?” asked Grant again, craning his neck over to the commander’s seat. He could see Westfall just sitting there with blood-stained legs and wondered if he was hit as well.

“Captain, you’ve been hit! Captain’s been hit!” decided Grant.

“Hold on, Bill! Hold on!” yelled Smith.

The crew panicked, not knowing how to react. They had never been attacked like this. All discipline broke down. Their leader wasn’t leading and their armor was disabled.

Yet another enemy round came in. It was a SABOT meant to kill the LAV completely. Fortunately for the American crew, the QDF tank gunner was slightly off his mark. The round glanced off a rear quarter panel and slammed into the railroad bridge steel column. The blast shook the tank and jarred the frantic occupants.

“We’ve been hit again! I can’t see a thing!” screamed Westfall amid the choking smoke. “I’m bleeding.”

Lowden now pleaded for someone to help him. Grant and Smith were both trying to maneuver their way over to the stricken driver while Westfall popped his hatch and scrambled out the top of his tank. He had one person he was concerned with, and that man’s name began with Tadith.

“Captain we need your help. Lowden’s bleeding all over,” pleaded Grant. Westfall had already jumped off the rear deck and to the ground below. He had already abandoned his tank without telling his crew.

“Captain, get back here!” shouted a muffled voice from inside the smoking tank.

Westfall backed away staring, as his crew begged for help getting their wounded driver out. The gunner’s hatch opened and Smith popped his head through coughing hoarsely. He looked around and spotted his commander standing there dumbfounded.

“Hey! Hey! Get your ass up here and help us. What’s your fucking problem?” ripped Smith.

Westfall mumbled, turned away, then looked down at his trousers again.

“Move it soldier!” shouted someone from behind the captain. Westfall was shoved aside and fell to the ground as 2nd Lt. Wes Shore leapt up onto the tank deck and scrambled to help the crew inside.

Grant popped the driver’s hatch for fresh air. Black smoke vented out. Flames licked the front of the tank. Smith held his breath and ducked back inside as Shore leaned inside the commander’s cupola. All three men braved the toxic smoke and fumes to pull Lowden’s limp, bloody body out of the

interior. Several more infantrymen, including a medic, climbed onto the tank as well.

“No, no, get off! It’s still a target!” shouted Shore as he struggled to drag the driver’s blood-soaked body off the rear deck.

The soldiers carried Lowden back away underneath the railroad trestle to provide first aid. Grant and Smith, gagging from the inhalation of smoke, wobbled after the group.

Captain Westfall, the cocky commander of the RRC, had watched the whole rescue from afar while sitting on his ass. He looked from his bloody pants to his burning vehicle and back again, numb to what had just happened to his crew.

Someone grabbed his shoulder trying to help him to his knees. “Are you all right?” asked a young black corporal from Bulldog’s platoon.

“Get away from me, nigger boy!” replied Westfall, jumping up to his full height.

“Wha’d you say?” the stunned soldier said looking up at Westfall with wide eyes.

Westfall didn’t have time to reply, as he was punched extremely hard in the mouth with a right fist from Lieutenant Shore. Westfall’s jaw shattered, his CVC helmet flew off, and he fell to the ground yet again, this time knocked out cold. Shore and the racially assaulted corporal dragged the limp body away as the RRC’s command vehicle rapidly became engulfed in flames.

0830 hrs, 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, Railroad Tracks:

D’Arata looked down the tracks beyond Coyle’s shredded body. The white smoke screen had drifted away but was replaced by thicker black smoke and flames. That entire flank was obscured. Someone was crying to his right. A soldier was hunched over another as two more dragged a body away. D’Arata turned his head. Two huge enemy Abrams tanks sat side by side burning on the tracks a few hundred yards down into the rail split. A small building had also caught fire where a severed turret lay inside. The building was starting to become heavily involved in flame. Black-gray smoke spilled out, adding to the ground cloud shrouding their flank. The city fire department had already gotten the call and was dispatching its apparatus. An approaching siren could be heard.

D’Arata looked up to the Autoroute to what was left of the troop-carrying LAV III. Two charred bodies lay mangled on the smoking, burning wreckage.

Another bloody body hung over the concrete barrier wall, its head gone. At the base of the wall below sat the corpse's head next to a downed soldier from his platoon. Someone was trying to help the Mountaineer up. The scene was sickening.

Some of Mickey's soldiers had already run up to the burning wreckage to find survivors but couldn't get close enough because the LAV continued to pop with hot ammunition. D'Arata, however, couldn't believe there would be anyone left based on the sheer destructiveness of the explosions.

Fifty yards from the dead LAV, back up the highway, almost directly behind D'Arata's platoon position, was the other wheeled LAV that had saved 1st Platoon from being overrun. He noticed that the back half of the tank looked like it had been scorched. Unaware of the lucky escape from the Globemaster, D'Arata figured it had been hit in their short engagement.

Two of D'Arata's soldiers suddenly caught his view as they dashed from their positions and dragged Coyle's body and Javelin launcher back down to cover. Another soldier went up and retrieved Coyle's severed arm lying between the rails. The soldier vomited as he ran back to his position.

D'Arata's stomach knotted up too. He turned his head to stifle the wave of nausea that overtook him. My God, my men are killed. I thought I gave the Javelin teams explicit instructions to seek protective cover first. I know I did. But damn, Captain Karr should have never moved us over here. We had no time to prepare a defense, we still don't. An explosion went off down the boulevard, taking his mind off his self-doubting. Two more enemy tank hulls burned alongside several dead enemy infantrymen and what looked like several civilians mixed in. Another explosion blew out of one of the hulls. A residential property had caught fire as well as a small truck in the driveway. Again, black plumes of smoke and yellow shafts of flames filled the scene. Christ, thought D'Arata, four fucking main battle tanks destroyed in five minutes!

D'Arata scanned left now, back across the railroad trestle to the other side of the river. The RRC's command tank finished the battlefield destruction. It too had been disabled. Flames shot out of its open hatches. D'Arata stared, hoping the crew had gotten out alive. They fought well, saving his platoon from an annihilating enveloping attack from the enemy.

The resulting mayhem had happened so fast that D'Arata was temporarily frozen in indecision during this brief lull in the fighting. He continued staring across the river, his mind taking a break. Fortunately his gruff veteran platoon sergeant appeared.

“Mike, Mike,” huffed First Sergeant Warren, slamming into the rocks next to D’Arata and RTO Fletcher. “Coyle took it first. He’s KIA. They just got his body down, what’s left of it. His Javelin is wrecked. And, Rizzo’s dead too! A tank round split him in two, not much left there. So that’s two KIA.”

“Jesus!” said D’Arata shaking his head. Two dead. It’s so final. That’s it. Rizzo was right out of high school. Private Gino Rizzo, called “Stallion” by the platoon, had just finished his basic training and was one of the newly assigned guys. He was a handsome young man, had lots of girlfriends. Now he was dead. No, he was cut in half. How am I going to explain this to his family? D’Arata felt numb. He stared at the ground with glassy eyes.

Warren continued. “We’ve also got two severely wounded. Private Carter was hit with shrapnel in the legs and SAW Gunner Gammon took some rounds in the gut. They’re both bleeding bad, Lieutenant. We’ve got to get them evacuated ASAP. I mean now, or we might lose them. Medic Walworth is doing the best he can but needs help. Also, Kim Woo is a mental break. He’s useless.” Warren waited for an answer, sweating profusely.

D’Arata still stared down.

Warren nudged him. “Mike! Hey! You’ve got to blow it off. Snap out of it. There’s work to be done. Put the feelings away for another day. Understand?”

“Okay, okay! I heard everything. Okay,” said D’Arata shaking his head. “Have two or three guys evac the wounded back up to the company command post and then...”

“Sir?” It was RTO Specialist Kenny Fletcher looking at him with wide eyes as he held the radio receiver to his ear.

“Yes?”

“I just found out Bravo Three-Six is dead.”

It was like being slammed in the head with a baseball bat. “Jesus no!” D’Arata shouted. His close friend Mickey Torrence gone? There’s no way. D’Arata looked to Sergeant Warren with blank eyes. Warren simply stared back with no emotion.

“Sir! Second Squad Leader Tuttle reports his fire team sees, ah, another tank, ah, coming directly ahead up one of the side streets, sir,” interrupted RTO Kenny Fletcher.

D’Arata forced himself to forget about Mickey. He would mourn him later or he would join him now if he didn’t take action. He grabbed his binoculars and stomach-crawled up the defilade for a better view. He scanned for 2nd

Squad's four-man fire team that had gone down the other side. They were at the forward edge of the battle area and were sneaking around some houses lining a narrow road parallel to the railroad corridor. Sergeant Warren was right by D'Arata's side. RTO Fletcher stayed back.

"I can't see them, Larry. Where are they?"

"There, at your one o'clock, behind that parked car. Right on the corner. See 'em? See Speedy bobbing up and down?"

"Yeah! Got em. Good, they've got the other Javelin with them—excellent. Get all available AT-4s up here front and center to back them up. Get a 240 team up here too. We've got to pack the center for that tank," ordered D'Arata, his heart pounding.

Warren scrambled off, shouting the new orders. Several men jumped up and ran for the centerline around their platoon leader.

D'Arata turned back to his RTO. "Fletcher, contact Captain Karr and inform him of a new tank threat coming through the neighborhood below us. We need to get that LAV back over here ASAP. He's too far back," said D'Arata as one of his soldiers opened up with his M16 on an unknown target.

"Who fired? What have you got?" asked D'Arata.

"Nothing. Saw something move. It was a dog," said a private.

"Discipline, men. Keep fire discipline," said D'Arata. He slid back down to his radio telephone operator and grabbed the receiver once Fletcher finished with his communique to the CP.

D'Arata switched frequencies to the platoon net. "Bravo One-Six to One-Two, sit rep!" he shouted.

"*Bravo One, Battaglia's about to hit him with the Javelin. He's coming in range now. Get ready,*" said Staff Sergeant Eric Tuttle over his hand radio.

"You shoot and scoot! Shoot and scoot, understand Sergeant?" advised D'Arata, knowing full well that Squad Leader Tuttle, the brash, acne-faced kid from Arkansas, sometimes thumbed his nose at orders and let his Rambo tunnel vision take over.

"Wilco, out." Tuttle turned to the Javelin gunner. "Jake, fucking LT wants a shoot and scoot, okay?"

"Yep."

Specialist Jake Battaglia, kneeling next to a parked Honda Civic, balanced his two-piece, fifty pound Javelin "smart" weapons system on his shoulder. He pressed his eyes against the gunner's eyepiece display on the compact Command Launch Unit (CLU) that was held in front of his chest and took aim down the street. The other half of the system, the Launch Tube

Assembly (LTA), which houses the 5-inch diameter infrared-seeking missile, sat on his right shoulder. His assistant, the big kid PFC Andy Fogerty, had already attached the missile.

Battaglia chose the direct-attack engagement option as opposed to the top-attack option because of the overhanging tree branches down the street. This would enable him to launch the missile straight on against the armor rather than arching the missile for a top-down turret attack.

Fogerty checked behind Battaglia to make sure everyone would be clear from the backblast. "Clear," he shouted, raising his M249 SAW into firing position.

"Clear," echoed the last member of the fire team, Private "Speedy" Gonzales the platoon sniper, as he also took aim down the street from the back of the Civic.

Sergeant Tuttle then smacked Battaglia on the top of the helmet and plugged his ears. "Do it Jake!"

Specialist Battaglia's heart raced as he partially exposed himself to the large, dark green, M1A2 main battle tank not one hundred yards away. This would be the first time the twenty-year-old had ever fired a weapon, let alone the Javelin missile, in a live combat situation. With the target designated and acquired in the sight, Battaglia had nothing more to do than depress the fire control. As his trigger finger twitched, he noticed the tank commander's hatch open on the top of the turret. The helmeted commander had hold of his turret-mounted machine gun and was pointing it in Battaglia's direction. Does he see me? Oh man, here it goes. Off the missile launched. A backblast blew out the back of the LTA, shattering the windows of the Civic. The missile's main engine kicked in and shrieked at high speed down the middle of the street with a white-gray plume of smoke trailing behind it.

As soon as the Javelin missile left the launch tube, Battaglia turned and ran for the corner of the house, to the other three waiting soldiers. He hit the wall between Sergeant Tuttle and Private Fogerty. Battaglia exhaled loudly while waiting for the impact of his warhead. Tuttle looked around the corner.

The most important feature of the Javelin, that of being able to "fire-and-forget" the target, allowed the shooter to scramble away while the missile was still in flight. The missile simply guided itself to impact. Nothing happened at first. Then, just as Battaglia thought it was a miss, an incredible blast erupted from down the street. Sergeant Tuttle flung back against the wall and covered his face beneath his Kevlar helmet. The tank took a direct hit on its sloped turret. The lethal, advanced two-tandem warhead of the missile

slammed right between the 120 mm main gun and the coaxial machine gun. The resulting explosion blew a hole into the turret with an incredible penetrating blast that shattered the entire turret from the inside out. The tank commander lost both legs at the thighs, his torso flying twelve feet straight up in the air. A huge concussion traveled down the street, smashing windows and triggering car alarms. Glass shattered from a window above the four soldiers against the wall sending small shards down on their helmets.

Tuttle peered back around the corner for another glance. The turret of the tank was obscured in a ball of flame and smoke. Its main cannon was twisted like a pretzel. Debris crashed all around the street. Several trees were toppled over, branches scattered everywhere.

“Fuck, Jake! Direct fucking hit! Hurah! You blasted the mother,” said Sergeant Tuttle out loud.

Battaglia exchanged high fives with Fogerty and Gonzales. They all looked down the street now at their kill.

“Shit. Hold on! A crewman’s still alive. I can’t believe it! He’s bailing out. Come on guys. Let’s take him,” ordered Tuttle, running back to the windowless parked car.

“But the lieutenant said fire and leave,” exclaimed Battaglia.

“Fuck LT. Let’s pop the bastard.”

Tuttle raised his M16A2 with an M203 grenade launcher mounted under the barrel and took aim at the tank. He had a 40 mm high explosive shell already loaded so he simply pulled the trigger. As the shell tumbled through the air the enemy crew member jumped out of the driver’s hatch and limped for cover.

He hadn’t made it five feet when Tuttle’s grenade hit. The explosion blew the driver off his feet and slammed him down on the pavement. His body crumpled and rolled over. He screamed in pain.

Gonzales, already in position, targeted the wounded man in his rifle scope hairs but held back after watching him squirm in agony. He decided not to shoot him. Instead he aimed at the open driver’s hatch to see if anyone else would pop out. Nothing else moved from the tank. The wounded driver was the only one alive, for the moment.

Thunder tore through Gonzales’ right ear. He snapped his head back and yelled in pained surprise. Fogerty’s M249 SAW had opened up not two feet away from Gonzales’ face. The loud rapid fire of the Squad Automatic Weapon’s ball ammunition pounded Gonzales’ hearing to oblivion. The rounds tore through the wounded man on the street. Pockets of flesh and olive

drab clothing ripped off with squirts of bright red as twenty quick rounds struck the man. Most went right through his body and ricocheted off the pavement.

“Aaaarggg! What the hell? I can’t hear a thing!” yelled Gonzales over the hammering of Fogerty’s SAW.

“Cease fire Fogerty, you got him,” yelled Tuttle. “Cease fire.”

The SAW stopped and Gonzales cursed at the SAW gunner. “What the fuck is wrong with you man? I can’t hear anything. My ears are ringing. Don’t you ever fucking shoot that thing so close to me again or I’ll fucking skull cap you! Jesus fucking A, man.”

“Fuck off Speedy! You want some of me?” challenged Fogerty, pulling his smoking SAW off the roof of the car while staring at the sniper.

“The fucking guy was wounded. Why the hell did you shoot him, huh?” asked Gonzales loudly.

“Shut up both of you right now,” yelled Battaglia from the corner of the house. He was discarding the spent missile tube and attaching a fresh Javelin to his CLU. “Fogerty, get over here and help me.”

The loud squawk of Tuttle’s squad radio silenced the men. “*One-Two this is Bravo One. I told you to shoot and scoot, over.*”

“Damn, it’s the Lieutenant,” said Tuttle to his fire team as he raised the radio to respond.

Just as he keyed the receiver, the car they were hiding behind seemed to explode in a flurry of ripping metal and plastic. The radio shattered in Tuttle’s hand. Something large hit it. Bullets were ripping through the car. They were taking hits, big heavy caliber hits. A round grazed Gonzales’ helmet, creating a dent. He flew backward, landing on his butt.

The Javelin assistant Fogerty went down next as a large round passed right through his flak jacket armor and blew a softball-sized hole out of his back. He too fell backwards, landing next to the stunned Gonzales. The SAW bounced off the car as Fogerty’s lifeless body hit the grass in a splash of blood and crushed bone.

Gonzales turned his head when he felt the spray of something splash across his face. He stared directly into Fogerty’s bloody, gaping mouth. Rounds cracked all around them. My God, Gonzales thought before losing it, he was just talking to him. The sniper screamed wildly in terror, still staring inside Fogerty’s red frothing throat.

Tuttle hit the ground next with a grazing shot across his vest. He was stunned but unhurt. He crawled towards the house. Battaglia darted out,

snatched up the screaming Gonzales by his straps and dragged him back to cover. The parked car disintegrated behind them as more rounds tore through it. Grass, glass, car parts, and dirt zipped and cracked all around them. A few rounds started coming through the house wall above their heads.

“He’s got us targeted! Get the fuck outta here,” screamed Tuttle, getting to his feet.

Battaglia slapped the screaming Gonzales across the face. “Shut up! Shut up Speedy. We gotta go.”

Gonzales shook his head, blinked his eyes, grasped his rifle, and took off running towards the back yard. Tuttle urged him along. Battaglia grabbed the Javelin and followed. They left Fogerty. They couldn’t get to him. It was obvious he was toast.

The three soldiers dove and took cover behind a storage shed just as the garage took a direct tank round. They all felt the concussion and heat from the loud impact, but were saved by the small tin shed that crumbled around them.

The explosion blew apart the garage and what was left of the pockmarked, smoking Civic. Another tank had apparently advanced up the street unbeknownst to the quarreling fire team. They got up once more on Tuttle’s command, brushed off the debris, and fled back up to the platoon as another fire team in the squad provided overwatch.

Their platoon leader, Mike D’Arata, had watched the whole sequence in horror as another of his men died from an enemy tank. He specifically ordered Tuttle to fire and forget and now the wise-ass kid got a member of his team killed. D’Arata stared the young sergeant down with fury in his eyes as the stricken fire team passed by to take cover. Tuttle dropped behind a railroad tie and sobbed uncontrollably, knowing full well what he had done.

0835 hrs, QDF Grizzly One:

Colonel Michel LaPointe was on the verge of having his own nervous breakdown. In a few short minutes his ten-tank assault force had been cut in half. He was now down to five tanks. The loss was devastating. The forward-most tank, Grizzly Five, was currently pursuing an enemy anti-tank foot patrol in the neighborhood east of the Radisson Bridge. That patrol had just taken out Grizzly Eight according to last reports from Five.

The four tanks in LaPointe’s immediate squad were positioned in a column on the tracks, ready to advance into the thick of battle. LaPointe’s was the lead tank and could barely see Grizzly Six and Seven burning a half a mile up ahead at the split in the tracks. Black smoke and flames smothered his

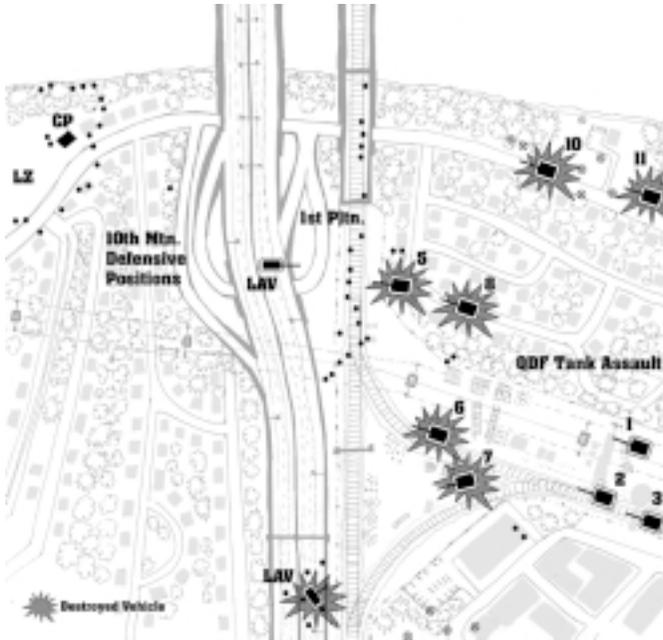
view, and the fog certainly didn't help matters either.

In order to break out of Trois Rivieres and make it back over the St. Maurice River before the Canadians showed up, LaPointe had decided to simultaneously advance his forces on two axis. The right axis was along the river on the Boulevard des Chenaux, the left straight up the railroad tracks to attack across the trestle. His infantry platoon, down to twenty men at last count, was already split in two groups ready to support both attacks. His scouts had pinpointed two American platoons in well-defended positions right in the path of both advances and warned their colonel of the threat. LaPointe brushed off the warning, citing that infantry were no match for heavy tanks.

However, when a message came that Grizzly Nine and Ten were ambushed by the same American tank that took out their bridge, along with most of their infantry support, LaPointe considered he may have made the wrong decision in a dual axis advance. Grizzly Eight then confirmed they killed an American Light Armored Vehicle on the far side of the river and things turned around. Grizzly Eight then took to the residential neighborhood for cover, still advancing towards the Radisson. Grizzly Five followed behind. But that's where Eight was knocked out and where Five now pursued. LaPointe's hopes were shattered in a matter of minutes. His French mercenaries and Quebecker crews were getting slaughtered.

Now it was LaPointe's turn to run the gauntlet. The thought of surrender fleetingly crossed his mind, but he shut it out. His tank crews had sacrificed too much to stop now. His men had showed him incredible determination in following his orders, however flawed they may be. As their leader he would follow suit and live up to his word. He really had no choice as the Canadian mechanized advance weighed even heavier on his mind.

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Close-up map of Radisson Bridge battle just before LaPointe's breakout attempt.

LaPointe and his three tanks would advance right up the tracks amid the heavy black smoke of the two burning hulks ahead. They would punch through this time and roll right into the American positions and create shock and havoc. There were no more second thoughts.

"Driver, listen to me carefully. I want you to advance up the tracks at full speed right into the smoke. Once we pass Six and Seven, follow the tracks to the right. I want you to get us across the train bridge at all costs unless I tell you different. Understand?"

"Yes, I do sir," said the tank driver.

"Good, move out." The green beast jumped forward.

"Grizzly One to Grizzly Two, Three, and Four. Follow my lead. Stay on the tracks and fire at will. We are crossing the St. Maurice."

0840 hrs, 1st Platoon:

"Here she comes. FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!" shouted Lieutenant D'Arata to his platoon.

A wall of rockets, grenades, and bullets slammed into the enemy tank that

rumbled around the corner of the burning house. The QDF Abrams rolled over the already demolished car, flattening it into the ground. Fogerty's body also took a track, turning it into a bloody mess. The foolish enemy tank commander was riding hatches open, manning his turret mounted machine gun. He never stood a chance as the American barrage punched big holes in his abdomen with tumbling rounds and hot shrapnel. A direct hit by an AT-4 slammed into a track, slowing it down.

The tank managed to get off one high, wild blast from its main cannon that landed miles away before being stopped cold as explosion after explosion pummeled the tank into submission. The final death knell came as the RRC LAV assigned to 1st Platoon's sector struck the tank with a SABOT round. A large white explosion killed it clean.

First Platoon cheered. They were starting to get the hang of tank killing. D'Arata immediately keyed the SINCGARS handset, congratulating the LAV commander while looking back to him up on the Autoroute. The commander, just getting D'Arata's message, opened his hatch and raised a thumbs-up sign to the platoon leader down in front of him.

D'Arata then switched frequencies and called his Captain. "Bravo One-Six to Bravo Six."

"Go ahead One."

"Yeah, scratch another heavy. That's the fourth in our sector alone, over," said D'Arata happily.

"Nice work, Mike. Nice work indeed," replied a somewhat relieved Captain Karr. *"With the two on the river road, that's a total of six confirmed tank kills. We know there's at least four more out there. Bulldog's Javelin gunners are on their way to your position to bolster the defense, over."*

"Roger T.J., roger that. Thanks. What is ETA of the Canadian reinforcements?"

"Good news—they are on the outskirts of town just a few miles away. I heard they're sending some help to the airport but their tanks and APCs are headed right for our bridge. We'll get relief in a matter of minutes. We just got to hold on for those last four tanks, over."

"Bravo Six, that is definitely good news," said D'Arata, sensing a shift in the battle and feeling rather confident after the first wave of tank attacks had been successfully fought off. "Ah, Bravo Six, I think we should go in though and find them first. I want to send my Javelin squad back in the neighborhood to seek them out, over."

"Go for it Bravo One. Take the battle to them. Use Bulldog's Javelin

teams to take their place in line, out.”

“Okay T.J., out.” D’Arata turned and shouted to his second squad, “Tuttle, Battaglia, Allen, and Gonzales. Get the Javelin ready. Gammon, you’re going too.”

“Gammon’s wounded sir,” said 1st Squad SAW gunner Corporal Leroy Buchanan, a big black man from Chicago. “Second Squad don’t have no more SAW gunners left. I can take his place, sir.”

“Fine Buchanan, go,” said D’Arata cursing himself at forgetting about the wounded Dave Gammon. “Tuttle, get down there and hit another fucking tank. Make it up, man! Robinson,” continued D’Arata to second squad’s other team leader, “you provide covering fire and back them up. Go, go, go!”

D’Arata now turned to his platoon sergeant Larry Warren as the assigned soldiers scrambled down the embankment back into the neighborhood below. “Warren, get both M240 teams ready. I want them in action as soon as we see a tank. We’re also getting 2nd Platoon’s Javelin gunners. Here they come now across the bridge. I want one team set up on the river road and one set up covering the rail split.”

“You got it, sir,” smiled Warren. The kid was taking charge. He was primed and on fire, thought the veteran sergeant. We might just make it now.

Warren shouted for his heavy machine gun teams. “Blakefield! Danson! Follow me.”

0845 hrs, B Troop:

Blackjack Six and his new wingman Blackjack Seven flew a wide berth along the St. Lawrence River south of Trois Rivieres, just ten feet above the water. They suddenly swung north and headed directly for the downtown. It was still somewhat foggy, but the long plumes of black smoke and raging fires in the distance clearly marked the location of the engagement area around the Radisson Bridge.

B Troop Commander Captain Tommy Giancursio and his pilot CWO Morgan Hoyt, were ready to rejoin the fight after having to abort the initial air-ground battle over the St. Maurice River earlier in the morning. For the last hour and a half the six remaining Kiowas had been providing air security over the airport and the Laviolette Bridge. They had stayed clear of the downtown area and the hidden missile threat from the enemy tank force.

But Giancursio had had enough lollygagging around. He wanted revenge, pure and simple. He watched the C-17s land and the RRC join the battle and thought his B Troop was just being wasted away. He wanted to re-engage the

QDF and show them some of his tricks from the air.

Giancursio had landed his Kiowa and had a face to face lobby with Colonel Petrovich to let him back into action. He had won the decision. However, just as the remaining Kiowas refueled and had taken off to scout and attack the enemy, the airport exploded in a mushroom cloud of fire. A Globemaster had gone up.

Since then two Kiowas from B Troop had been reassigned to escort the Black Hawks with the most severely wounded soldiers to Ottawa. That left the Troop with just four of the original eight choppers providing air security and recon for the hundreds of ground soldiers below now wedged in the city.

After hearing of the start of the tank battle around the Radisson Bridge from a frantic RTO in Bravo Company's CP and a brief radio discussion with acting field commander Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer, Giancursio and his wingman were finally dispatched to seek and destroy the QDF tank force in the city. The other two Blackjack choppers would proceed up the Autoroute to engage the supposed QDF reinforcements.

Now clearly focused on his mission, Blackjack Six proceeded in to make contact with the French bastards that killed and wounded his fellow fliers.

"Oh yeah Morg. I got one on the tracks, near the paper plant. Spot one tank facing away. I can nail him from behind with a Hellfire," said Giancursio looking at his hi-res TV camera display via the MMS pod on top of the Kiowa. "The time has come."

"Roger, roger. I'll come to a hover."

With a switch of frequencies Giancursio radioed his wingman. "Blackjack Seven, Blackjack Seven, hold position and recon. We are engaging a target near the paper plant, over."

"Copy Six."

Both Kiowas came to a hover in the middle of the St. Lawrence River about fifty feet in the air. Swirls of fog and mist shrouded their exact location. They were invisible to anyone from the shore.

"I've got laser designation of the target. Ready to fire," said the captain.

"All steady," said Hoyt.

"Missile away!" screamed Giancursio with a rush of excitement.

With a press of the button on his cyclic handgrip the "smart" laser-guided Hellfire missile's engine ignited. Within an instant the single stage, single thrust, solid propellant motor reached 500 pounds of thrust and launched off the starboard side rail. The Kiowa banked slightly to readjust from the weight change. As the missile sailed in front of the chopper, a plume of white exhaust

suddenly obscured the view from the “All-Glass” cockpit.

“Damn! I lost lock. Rise up Morg. I need to reacquire.”

The Kiowa rose slightly out of the smoke trail and hovered in a new position.

“Got it back,” announced Giancursio, as he set the targeting laser beam back on the rear deck of the QDF tank. Through his TV display he could actually see two tank crewman standing on the turret. One had just entered his hatch.

Another couple of seconds passed and the Hellfire armed itself after about 200 meters from initial launch. Giancursio kept the laser beam pinged to the target and the Hellfire shrieked at 900 miles per hour down the narrow railroad corridor in front of the paper plant.

The anti-tank missile struck the QDF tank directly on the red “death dot” Giancursio had marked on the rear deck. Upon impact its conical shaped-charge, high explosive warhead with a copper liner cone formed a white-hot jet stream that penetrated the tank’s armor. A tremendous explosion tore the tank apart. The turret flew twenty feet straight up like a saucer, crushing the crew. Tongues of flame shot out of its mangled hull from every direction. It was simply incinerated.

Just as Blackjack Six’s Hellfire made impact, another missile was launched by Blackjack Seven.

“*Missile away. Target fuel truck,*” radioed Seven’s pilot.

“Copy,” said Giancursio.

The second Hellfire lived up to its name. A raging fireball and black cloud filled the front of the paper plant when the fuel truck exploded. Chunks of flaming metal smashed into the row houses and apartments directly across the street. Every window in every house within a two-block radius was shattered. Stunned civilians emerged from shattered windows and doors, screaming for their lives. Several were killed in the destruction.

The two Kiowas moved in for more.

0852 hrs, QDF Grizzly One:

“Accelerate. Faster, faster,” urged Colonel Michel LaPointe to his driver as their tank broke through the immense black smoke screen between the burning tanks of Grizzly Six and Seven.

His lead command tank, with all hatches buttoned up, revved with new life and sliced through the smoke, blazing away with its main cannon and coaxial machine gun against the American infantry positions held up ahead

on the Autoroute and railroad trestle. The gunner and loader worked in sync with LaPointe, blasting away at anyone that dared move. Another QDF tank followed behind taking the left flank while the third took up the right flank. The fourth tank was yet to be seen.

BOOM! BOOM BOOM! Loud main gun blasts and rapid fire machine gun bursts reverberated all around the railroad split once again. A half-green, half-black American LAV joined in the action with a devastating counterattacking fire from behind a barrier wall up on the elevated highway. His main cannon was pointed as far down as it could go.

LaPointe thought he scored a direct hit on the LAV with a nice resulting explosion but the round seemed to merely deflect off the its armor. Damn, that was a HEAT round. He cursed and ordered another round loaded, this time the deadlier SABOT. A large explosion crashed off to his left. He looked through his commander's vision blocks as Grizzly Two blew up amid several intense impacts. Both tracks blew off in hot flames. LaPointe shielded his eyes from the brightness and refocused on his target. He didn't have time to think about the consequences. He merely reacted.

"Target on that armor again," shouted the gunner.

"Round up," followed the loader.

"FIRE!" screamed LaPointe. The big gun recoiled, shaking his tank. The turret swung around, tracking the LAV, but suddenly their tank took a hard bounce when the driver slammed into some rail debris.

LaPointe watched the American receive his round right in a wheel just above the barrier wall. It spun the LAV around and lifted it up in the air with the ensuing concussive explosion. Other than three large wheels tearing off, the vehicle was still intact, though. In fact, its turret swung back in his direction, seeking retaliation.

"Hit! We got him," announced the gunner.

"Shooting smoke," screamed LaPointe as he fired off several smoke screen canisters ahead of him. Bullets ricocheted off his tank. It sounded like a heavy downpour of rain. A louder crash then occurred as a SABOT round from the immobile American LAV clipped his deck.

The SABOT actually penetrated his rear deck and blew out the back, narrowly missing the engine compartment. LaPointe spun around, banging his tanker helmet against the sides of his commander's cupola to access the damage. His wireless phone started ringing from somewhere at his feet.

Grizzly One kept on moving down the tracks, undaunted, through the smoke and fire. They were approaching the infantry position on the

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embankment to the railroad bridge. Grizzly Three was off to LaPointe's right rear and just took a direct hit of his own from an infantry anti-tank missile. LaPointe swung all the way around just in time to catch the impact of that hit.

That mortally wounded tank stopped dead in its tracks as if a high powered locomotive had slammed head-on into it. The tank shuddered as a shoulder-launched round, fired from an enemy infantry position near some boxcars, passed through the interior compartment and shot out the other side striking a small boat and trailer being stored on a side street. Shattered flaming fiberglass and twisted metal from the boat sprayed across the street. Grizzly Three's turret suddenly just exploded blowing open all the hatches. The crew deceased instantly.

LaPointe closed his eyes.

"I can see the train bridge. Want me to cross it?" asked the driver over the intercom.

"Yes! Don't stop," shouted LaPointe.

"Target, eleven o'clock. Give me SABOT," said the gunner, breathing hard.

"Up," replied the loader.

"FIRE!" ordered LaPointe to his gunner. He watched through his thermal display as their round completely missed the crippled American vehicle and traveled up into the neighborhood behind. An impact explosion against someone's home resulted. Nice time to miss, thought LaPointe depressingly.

"Smoke!" Yet another canister fired off. LaPointe took control of the coaxial machine gun. He wouldn't let that American get the better of him. Swinging his turret to the left, he rattled off several rapid-fire bursts against the blackened, smoking LAV. But his turret was suddenly thrown off target as his tank banked hard into a rut.

His main gun barrel had slammed into a rail sign with a grinding of metal. The sign severed in half. The turret creaked against its gears to the rear position. The hydraulic controls were damaged. The tank then bounced back up, slamming the crew against the inside roof. Someone screamed. LaPointe thought it was his gunner. Explosions slammed all around. The American LAV had him now. He quivered in fright, knowing what was coming.

Sparks and fire filled his vision blocks upon two indirect hits. He couldn't see a thing. Heat washed over him from yet another explosion. His helmet fell in front of his eyes, then the tank lifted in the air and crashed back down with a huge jolt. Smoke filled the inside and LaPointe grew dizzy. This is it, he thought. I'm dead.

“Bail out,” someone screamed.

He blinked surprisingly to be still alive and slammed open his commander’s hatch. Shrapnel from another explosion ricocheted off, slicing him in the face. LaPointe fell back down in pain and faded out of consciousness.

The last thing he heard before blacking out was his phone ringing at his feet. He couldn’t stop it. He closed his eyes and the ringing faded.

0856 hrs, 1st Platoon:

The victory shouts from 1st Platoon soldiers sounded off amid the hammering of M240s, M249s, M16s, and M203s against the burning black hulls of the latest three QDF tanks which had made the final rush. “Hurrah! Oh yeah! Did you see Battaglia’s hit? Nailed that sucker good, man. Wow, our LAV got him at the same time too.” Several soldiers even stood up, pumping their fists in combat glory while shooting their weapons at the hip.

First Sergeant Warren immediately disciplined them. “Get back down. There’s still one more tank out there somewhere.”

“I need a Medic over here! I need a Medic!” The screaming for help brought several of the younger gung-ho soldiers back to the severity of the situation.

The closest destroyed tank, the one that took Battaglia’s Javelin round in its side as well as a round from the LAV, lay fifty feet away, just about where Will Coyle died earlier. It had almost penetrated their position but succumbed to the onslaught that was thrown in its wake. The dead tank now lay slightly to its side with the front elevated along the defilade. Mike D’Arata’s soldiers raked the exposed under belly of the beast several more times. Rounds sparked off its tracks and frontal armor. The main gun barrel was forced up underneath a steel signal tower. The top of the turret, where a bent mounted machine gun lay twisted off to one side, was lost in heavy smoke. D’Arata did notice one of the hatches was wide open up on top and clanged as several heavier caliber bullets bounced off. He was concerned that the crew, if still alive, could escape just like that driver did who jumped out of a previously disabled tank.

“*CEASE FIRE! CEASE FIRE!* You’re just wasting ammo,” screamed D’Arata at the top of his lungs. The firing whittled off as several squad sergeants and then First Sergeant Warren echoed the order.

A secondary explosion went off in the very first tank that was hit some hundred yards away. Cracks and loud booms like a fireworks display rang

throughout the BP. D'Arata flinched and buried his Kevlar helmet in the ground when some shrapnel shrieked his way.

A burst of heavy machine gun fire slammed into another dead tank near the split in the rails. D'Arata poked his head up behind him to see where the source was. It was their LAV again off to his right rear up on the Autoroute. The commander was firing his .50 caliber machine gun into a QDF tank carcass as if the wreckage posed a threat. His LAV, now completely blackened beyond recognition, had three of its wheels twisted off. It lay partially flung over the crumbled concrete barrier wall separating the highway from the rail yard below. It looked a mess, having taken several direct hits.

"Fletcher, get on the horn and tell the LAV to cease fire. That QDF tank is out of operation. We've got Charlie Company patrols out there still and we don't want cross fire."

A few more bursts from the .50, then RTO Fletcher's radio transmission got through and the battlefield ahead of 1st Platoon lay still from small arms fire. The roar of fire and secondary explosions from the on-board ammunition of the dead QDF tanks continued on, though. A faint ringing could be heard as well.

"Lieutenant! We got a bleeder here, needs evac ASAP," shouted the medic.

D'Arata spun around. Behind him was a makeshift triage area for the wounded. It was set up just under the Autoroute overpass near the boulevard. Several soldiers were laying flat on the ground with bandages wrapped about them as the platoon medic and an assistant worked them over. Off to the side lay two of the dead. One was Coyle's body covered in dark blood. His severed arm lay across his chest. He had no face. The other body was Rizzo. The kid's sickly gray face was frozen in death with mouth wide open and eyes rolled back.

One of the wounded cried out. D'Arata ignored the sound and turned back to eye the busted tank closest to them again. Although the side of it was burning steadily where Battaglia's Javelin hit, D'Arata still seemed worried. The turret, spun in reverse on its back deck with the signal tower hovering over it, troubled the young lieutenant.

"Mikowski, where are you?" shouted D'Arata to his 1st Squad Leader Staff Sergeant Matt Mikowski. "M&M, speak up." D'Arata stood straight up and scanned his platoon.

"Yo, over here sir," said the man from Pennsylvania. He stood up too from

behind a sewage drain, his M16A2/M203 rifle balanced on his hip and helmet angled to the side.

“Get a fire team up here pronto and check out that tank right there,” he pointed. “They rest of you keep an eye out for that last tank and get the wounded back up to the CP. Second Platoon Javelin teams, be on the lookout too.”

A distant explosion suddenly rumbled through the BP. The impact had come from deep in the downtown area. D’Arata perked up, wondering what it was. A rising black, flame-filled cloud emerged from the rooftops amid milky waves of dissipating fog. Suddenly another even louder explosion shuddered through the city. Another black and orange cloud sprung from the streets. Large debris flew through the air. D’Arata continued looking into the city at the incineration. Out of the corner of one eye he spotted two teenage boys squatting down behind a pile of wood near a chain link fence that bordered a resident’s backyard and the edge of the railroad industrial area. Damn civilians are going to get themselves killed, he thought. Another series of secondary explosions catapulted more destruction into the air back in the city.

“Lieutenant! Lieutenant! Don’t worry about that last tank. One of our Kiowa Warriors, Blackjack Six, just blasted the piss out of him down near the paper plant. They also got a fuel truck too,” smiled RTO Specialist Kenny Fletcher holding the SINCGARS handset up to his ear. He had been eavesdropping on the air command net. “That was their score,” he said pointing to the fireballs.

“Where is he? I thought the Kiowas were all back at the airport,” asked D’Arata looking toward the two new rising black columns of smoke. “We’ve got our recon back out here?”

“Right on LT. They’re right there,” said Sergeant Warren, pointing straight into the city.

D’Arata looked east and viewed two Kiowas skimming the rooftops. They were orbiting in a tight path, barely visible from the dense black columns of smoke that emitted from the engagement area below.

“Well, shit, I guess that’s it then,” smiled D’Arata as the two Kiowas buzzed over his position. D’Arata’s white teeth flashed in bright contrast against his sweat and cammo stained face. “That’s all the tanks accounted for. That’s ten of them. Fletcher, contact Captain Karr and inform him of the destruction of three more tanks in our sector plus the Kiowa kills.”

“Wilco.”

“SIR!” It was Staff Sergeant Mikowski shouting from atop the tank turret of the burnt Abrams in front of their position. “We got a live one out here.”

“What?” said D’Arata, starting forward with his rifle low to his side. He could barely make out Mikowski in the black smoke but did see the soldier’s rifle pointing down inside the open commander’s hatch.

“I’ll come with you, Mike,” said Warren.

“No Sergeant, I’ll be fine. Get the wounded evacuated. Medic Walworth needs help. Keep the boys calm. Fletcher, you come with me.”

D’Arata and his RTO ran off at a crouch toward the tank. Mikowski and another soldier, Corporal Leroy Buchanan, were on the turret straddling the commander’s hatch while the other two fire team soldiers, Sergeant Keith Muller and Private Gary Wozinski, provided security around the tank. The ringing he heard earlier was much louder now. It was coming from inside the tank and sounded like a cell phone.

“Lieutenant, it’s their commander, he’s alive. Should I waste him?” Mikowski asked stupidly down to his commander.

“No, you bonehead. Take him prisoner,” interrupted the young Fletcher looking up at the sergeant.

“Is he wounded?” asked D’Arata.

“Looks like it. I don’t know how bad.”

D’Arata climbed up onto the rear deck of the tank, then stepped up to the turret. He peered into the commander’s hatch and was taken aback when two piercing blue eyes glared back at him under a dented tanker’s helmet. The older veteran’s face was expressionless and ghost-white under a mask of black soot and blood. A deep gash zigzagged across his cheek and nose. Blood oozed out onto the man’s dark droopy moustache. A palm-sized phone rang loudly at his feet.

D’Arata looked to the collar of the tank commander’s olive drab uniform and noticed the insignia of a full colonel alongside a Quebec Defense Force patch. Under the blue symbol with a white cross was a nametag that read “LaPointe.” D’Arata recognized the name, but from where? He also checked to see where the man’s hands were, if there was a weapon around. Nothing. The tanker’s hands were folded casually on his lap. He coughed a little. A bloody arm and shoulder were also visible deep inside the turret. Another crew member, thought D’Arata, probably dead.

“Colonel LaPointe, parlez-vous anglais?” D’Arata asked the wounded man in the best French he could muster.

“Oui, yes, I speak English,” answered the pain-filled, defeated voice of

Michel LaPointe.

“Bon. I’m Lieutenant D’Arata of the United States Army, 10th Mountain Division, and you are now my prisoner. We’re going to get you out of there. Your tank is on fire. She might explode any minute.”

The phone rang again.

“Lieutenant,” said LaPointe, looking back at D’Arata, “just leave me here to die with my men.”

“Sorry Colonel. I’m not going to argue with you. Your battle is over. You don’t have any more tanks left and I’m losing my patience,” said D’Arata sternly.

This time LaPointe became angry. “Fuck you, American invader!”

D’Arata raised his eyebrows and stood up to full height. He bellowed out loud while looking down at LaPointe, “Fuck me? Fuck me? Why you dirty son of a bitch!” D’Arata then took his M16 and stuck the barrel in LaPointe’s face, pressing it against his cheek while knocking the colonel’s helmet sideways on his head.

“Who the hell do you think you are prisoner, telling me to fuck off, eh?” D’Arata then pulled the trigger but not before moving the barrel an inch off LaPointe’s face. The M16 fired a single round, burning LaPointe’s cheek. The bullet ricocheted inside the turret and embedded itself in an already dead crewman. LaPointe reared back in renewed pain, screaming for mercy.

“That’s for my men you killed, you piece of shit.” D’Arata then coughed up some snot and spit in the colonel’s face. LaPointe clenched his teeth in fury. It was then that D’Arata remembered where he heard LaPointe’s name. It was in the original mission brief by Colonel Petrovich. He now realized who LaPointe was and how he stood with Jacques DeMars. LaPointe ran the QDF. Damn, this was one big fish they hooked. And he just got a face-full of my spit. A satisfied smile spread across D’Arata’s face. Captain Karr is going to love me! He looked over to his wide-eyed soldiers. They nodded approval, respecting D’Arata’s reaction. They too had no remorse for the QDF colonel.

“Pull his ass out right now and let’s get the hell outta here before this thing blows.” D’Arata jumped off the tank deck to let his men get to work.

RTO Fletcher walked up to his lieutenant’s side, rather excited. D’Arata could tell the kid had good news. The nineteen-year-old was beaming from cheek to cheek.

“Lieutenant, man, you’re not going to believe this!”

“I’ll believe anything now Fletch,” D’Arata snapped back. “Let’s move back first. I don’t want this tank popping off with us next to it. Now, whaddy

got?"

"Okay, well first off, I just got word from the TOC that the QDF reinforcement convoy was fucking wiped out way up the Autoroute. The Blackjack Kiowas just confirmed it too. So they ain't got no more help coming. Also our Charlie Company patrols linked up with Lieutenant Torrence's — sorry, I mean Sergeant Mamoto's — 3rd Platoon and mopped up the rest of that infantry assault over there. They counted eight enemy dead and took two EPWs. And check this out, the Canadians are coming up the road right now as we speak. See 'em?" he pointed happily.

D'Arata raised his field glasses and looked past the smoke and fire of the railroad split, past the destroyed and scorched LAVs, down the Autoroute toward 3rd Platoon's position. A dark green, camouflaged, six-wheeled Cougar Armored Personnel Carrier raced up the highway followed by two eight-wheeled Bison APCs. A large Canadian national flag flew from the back of the lead Cougar. All three were making good speed.

"Yeah! Beauty!" exclaimed D'Arata.

"A fine sight indeed, 'eh Lieutenant?" asked Specialist Jake Battaglia, stepping up to his platoon leader.

D'Arata spun around. "Battaglia! Hey, you son of a gun. That was a fine shot you put on this tank here. Where the hell were you hiding out?" he asked, slapping the Javelin gunner on the back.

"Thank you, sir. Thanks. I was underneath those box cars over there," he pointed. Several 2nd Squad soldiers emerged from the same hiding place and were walking towards them.

"I think it's all over guys. I think we did it," explained D'Arata as more soldiers gathered around him.

"Ahhhh! Non!"

The group of men stopped and looked over to where the shout came from. Mikowski and Wozinski were supporting the EPW tank commander as he tried to walk on his own away from his burning tank.

"Ahhh! Non, non!" LaPointe cried again, falling to the ground. He sat still amid the battlefield debris, bowed his head down, and proceeded to cry. The two Mountaineers let him be. The colonel's shoulders shook as tears rolled from his eyes. His gray hair, matted with blood and sweat, lay askew on his head. More blood dripped from his face. He cried and cried and then looked up toward the group of adversaries watching him.

Through tears he rasped in accented English, "You dirty Yankee bastards! Leave my country!" Then surprisingly he sprang up and tried to run.

Mikowski's rifle butt to the lower back caught him in mid-stride, sending the prisoner sprawling forward on his stomach to eat dirt. All energy left his body. He lay there and moaned like a child. Mikowski put a boot on his back and the barrel of his weapon to LaPointe's head to keep him down.

"Tie him up and get that piece of shit back to the command post," ordered D'Arata to his men. "Move it!"

"Sir." It was Corporal Buchanan. His huge bulking black frame stood over the shorter platoon leader. "The rest of the tank crew is dead. We confiscated some personal weapons, a map, and this phone here. It stopped ringing on its own. That's 'bout it."

D'Arata took the small wireless phone, looked at it, thought about smashing it, but decided against and tucked it into his BDU breast pocket. "Okay, let's go! Everyone back to the rail bridge to your positions! I want a platoon damage report in one minute."

"You got it LT," said squad leader Mikowski. He clutched LaPointe by the collar and pulled the whimpering man to his feet. "Buchanan and Muller, stick with the lieutenant and provide escort back. Everyone else, you heard the man. Let's rock 'n' roll!"

D'Arata looked back up to the Autoroute and stopped. The Canadians were finally here. He took a long deep sigh of relief. He could feel the pent-up energy leaving his body. Sergeant Muller, Corporal Buchanan and Specialist Fletcher stood to his side feeling the same way. The first three Canadian Army APCs were met by two M60 tanks. They had just bypassed the RRC's damaged LAV. D'Arata watched with pride as the rest of the Canadian convoy advanced behind them into Bravo's Battle Position.

A red maple leaf against a white background symbolizing Canada's flag was stamped on every war machine. It was a sight of pure joy for the fighters of 1st Platoon and Bravo Company as the first Canadian vehicle rolled onto the Radisson Bridge. D'Arata could see several soldiers from Shore's 2nd Platoon on the other side, urging the Canadians across. We did it, thought D'Arata with a smile. I'll be damned. We did it!

"Whaddya say guys? Let's get back."

Mike D'Arata put a hand on his RTO's shoulder and took a step forward.

"*SHOOTERS!*" sounded Muller and Buchanan together.

A rifle crack and a shotgun blast rang out simultaneously from afar. They were fired in unison from an old, three-story brick building across the tracks about seventy-five yards behind D'Arata and his men. It was the neighborhood community center that 3rd Platoon's OP was on top of, labeled

“Centre Communautaire” on the map. The air cracked by D’Arata’s head. He flinched and instinctively hit the ground, covering his head from the near miss. RTO Kenny Fletcher, on the other hand, let out a horrendous wail and clutched his knee, crumpling to the ground. Muller and Buchanan also hit the ground in reaction but instantly readied for the counterattack. Buchanan retracted the bipod on his SAW.

Same Time, Saint Patrick Community Center:

“Got the radio guy,” said the grinning French mercenary Renee Bourdage. He pulled his shotgun in from the metal door and meshed with the shadows in the dark recesses of the hallway behind him. His gold tooth flickered in the dark.

“I think I got that officer too,” replied a younger QDF soldier as he pulled a hunting rifle in from the same door and closed it.

“Okay, reload and let’s get the hell out of here,” said Bourdage as he loaded his shotgun with several more deer slug shells from his pockets. He had obtained the weapon from a cooperative resident of the city while trying to get back to his missile unit after the American air attack earlier. Having been literally blown off the building where his unit was stationed, he survived the fall by landing in a garbage pile in an alley. Dazed and deafened from the air strike he lost all sense of direction and wandered aimlessly in the wrong direction. It wasn’t until the tank battle had begun that Bourdage gained his bearings back and linked up with a QDF infantryman to rejoin the fight. He wasn’t even aware that he was missing in action. “We have to take a different way out now. Their scout on the roof will be looking for us.”

Outside Saint Patrick Community Center:

“I see ‘em, I see ‘em! Two shooters,” screamed Buchanan, in the prone position with the butt of his Squad Automatic Weapon tucked tight against his shoulder. He pulled the trigger and the SAW let out a rapid-fire burst of hot rounds against a rear metal fire door that had just slammed shut. Buchanan continued with several more bursts, this time pock-marking the brick wall around the door. Muller joined him with his M203 grenade launcher and plopped a 40 mm round right in front of the door. The jarring explosion merely made a dent after the smoke dissipated.

“Ahh Christ Lieutenant, I’m hit. Ahh Christ, this is not good. Ahh Jesus, it hurts!”

D’Arata crawled over to his radioman and immediately assessed the

wound. His heart sank as he observed a fleshy chunk taken out of the young man's leg. Fletcher's knee was gone. Chips of white bone were flaked around the wound as blood squirted out at a good rate.

"It hurts Lieutenant. It's not good," he kept saying. "Ahh Christ, it's not good."

D'Arata, seeing the wound to be quite serious, opened the first-aid pouch on his web harness and grabbed a field dressing as the shaking, wounded radioman rolled over clutching his bloody leg. He pressed hard with the padding hoping to stop the flow as best he could. He knew he'd better get immediate attention though. "Hang in there buddy, I'm going to call for help okay?"

Bop-Bop-Bop-Bop-Bop-Bop. Muller opened up again with his M16.

"Cease-Fire! Cease-Fire! Whaddya got?"

"Two shooters in that brick building! They're inside!" said Buchanan.

"Okay, okay. Check your fire. We got an OP on the roof there too." Apparently the enemy entered the building unnoticed to the OP team perched above.

"Ahh Jesus sir! Please get me outta here! Oh, man."

D'Arata looked back at Fletcher. It wasn't good. The kid had lost all facial color. He had to act. He grabbed for the SINCGARS receiver on Fletcher's shoulder and made a frantic call for the medic. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed as several of his soldiers were already making their way back to his position. D'Arata then switched frequencies and radioed his company commander of the situation too. "Bravo One-Six to Bravo Six. We took another casualty down here. It's my RTO. I'm sending him back up with a team. He needs immediate attention, over."

The captain radioed D'Arata back and told him to bring up the wounded but for the time being there was no bird available for evac and that the WIAs would just have to hang on.

"Copy Six. But I'm going after the bastards that shot him. There in the same building that 3rd Platoon's OP is on top of."

"I understand."

"Bravo One out."

Saint Patrick Community Center:

The initial American return fire and grenade explosion had knocked Bourdage and the QDF infantryman to the floor as they were reloading their weapons. Both were saved from serious injury from the closed metal door.

Realizing they had now been pinpointed, they got up and ran down the hall to escape. After bursting through a wall of vertically split, heavy plastic sheeting that hung from the ceiling, the two soldiers ran down another short hallway and entered a rear storage area. They could barely make out their surroundings, pausing in the darkness to adjust their eyes as enemy rounds showered the exterior of the building. A single shaft of light from a dirty overhead window lit up one of the corners near an exit sign. The sign illuminated an opening to what looked like a front office. Bourdage motioned for his counterpart to follow. Just as they stepped forward the hallway behind them exploded.

A ball of flame, shrapnel, and building material ripped through the long plastic sheeting, tearing away the framework and melting the sheets instantaneously. The concussion blew both men forward across the smooth concrete floor knocking their weapons from their hands. The younger man screamed in pain as he was struck in both legs with a large chunk of metal. Both also had their eardrums blown out from the shocking blast. Now clear across the room, they lay twisted on the floor.

The stronger Bourdage struggled off the floor and rested on one knee. He looked back towards the blast. Sunlight weaved its way in through heavy whisps of black toxic smoke. Flames grew on both sides of the shattered hallway. Incredibly, he survived unscathed yet again but his ears were ringing and bleeding. He shook his head to clear it but a piercing pain bit through his brain like someone had stuck him with a needle. He howled painfully fighting it off. His immediate concern was his shotgun though. Where had it gone? There, he saw, next to that forklift. Still reeling from the American counterattack, he rose to his full height and balanced under two wavering feet. Blood dripped from his ears onto the shoulder of his uniform. He took a step towards his shotgun but something on the floor moved to his left. It was the other soldier.

“Aahahhhahhhahhah!” screamed the younger man.

Bourdage watched his counterpart’s mouth open but couldn’t hear what he was saying. The rifleman was in obvious pain. He could see he had been hit in the legs. Shuffling over, Bourdage looked closer at the man’s legs then simply vomited, splashing a chunky morning meal across the smooth concrete.

The rifleman’s lower left leg had been torn away at the knee. Blood squirted out and had already spread across the floor. The right leg was bent backwards at the shin with a large splintered bone piercing through his

camouflaged pants. A chunk of flesh hung from the bone. The younger man's eyes were already rolling in the back of his head. He shook all over. Clearly he was on his way out.

Before Bourdage could even wipe the vomit from his mouth the building erupted once again. This time heavy caliber machine gun rounds tore through the huge opening the first blast had created. The rounds cracked all around, penetrating shelving units, cardboard boxes, a shrink wrapping machine, a forklift, a water bottle, and the drywall on the other side of the room. One round struck Bourdage in his combat boot, clipping his big toe. The man fell backwards and yelled an obscenity. More rounds whizzed by him. He jumped up and lunged for his shotgun.

With weapon in hand, acidic saliva caked around his mouth, and a bloody foot, the Frenchman hobbled toward the front exit amid a shower of .50 caliber rounds. He had one thing driving him now – survival.

Outside Saint Patrick Community Center:

“Keep moving! Go! Go! Go!” cried Mike D’Arata. He waved Corporal Buchanan, Sergeant Muller, and now Private Wozinski into the smoky breach created by the LAV blast. The vehicle’s .50 caliber heavy machine gun had just let up to allow the soldiers to infiltrate the brick building. The first man, Wozinski, entered with his M16A2 bursting but was pushed back by flames and smoke. Buchanan and Muller slammed into him. They couldn’t advance any further. Wasting no time, D’Arata ordered the men back out. He took lead and ran for the front corner of the building, seeking another way in.

A minute earlier a team of D’Arata’s men had converged on their downed leader as soon as the initial sniper shots rang out. While two soldiers helped strip the SINGARS radio backpack off of their wounded RTO and haul him back to their lines, Private Gary Wozinski provided additional protection with Buchanan and Muller around their angered lieutenant as D’Arata decided how best to take the building.

Now completely focused and wanting revenge, D’Arata slipped the SINGARS radio backpack over his own shoulders and called in the LAV fire against the suspected enemy position. He immediately rallied his three security personnel as a fire team and told them they were going in to get the bastards. He also had the two soldiers of 3rd Platoon stand fast on the roof to cover the exits from above. Under the suppressive .50 caliber wall of lead, D’Arata’s team ran for the blown out hole in the wall where the metal door

once stood.

D'Arata was now stationed at the front corner of the building, having to abort the initial breach. He waved Muller around to a set of glass doors and told him to take it out with his M203 grenade launcher. Muller couldn't wait. In a split second the young warrior blew away the main entrance with a 40 mm HE round at point blank range. A piece of flying glass zinged back and struck him in the cheek as the loud bang and gray smoke spread outward from the shattered entrance way. Muller didn't even flinch as a trickle of blood ran down his camouflaged cheek.

"Bravo Six, this is Bravo One-Six, just made forcible entry on the front entrance, over."

"Roger Mike, I'm sending a squad from Charlie Company over to cover your exterior," replied Captain Karr from his CP.

"Roger T.J. Be advised the OP is still on the roof providing security."

"Roger, out."

Buchanan's large frame swept past D'Arata as he spoke with the company commander. His SAW was clasped in one hand while his other large black paw clutched a hand grenade. Now it was Buchanan's turn at securing the entry. He pulled the pin and tossed the grenade into the mangled entrance and hunched down to the side, slinging his SAW barrel skyward.

"Fire in the hole!"

"Fire in the hole!" echoed Wozinski.

With a sharp blast, the grenade went off. The fire team moved in led by Wozinski, followed by Buchanan, Muller, and then finally D'Arata. Right through the gray smoke they plunged and into the dark shadows of a cubicle-filled front office. A small fire burned near a computer terminal to the side. A tall indoor plant was knocked over, its dirt-filled pot busted to pieces. Several cubicle walls had fallen to the carpeted floor and glass and debris crunched under the Mountaineers' combat boots as they swept their weapons from side to side searching for any movement. The men spread out along the right wall and searched each cubicle quickly. Shouts of "Clear" were barked out as they advanced deeper into the office area. It was dark, but the light cast from the front entrance opening allowed them enough visibility to move quickly through.

"I got blood here. In the hallway, over here," said Buchanan in a stern voice. He had advanced the deepest into the building and came across a trail of blood that looked like it originated from the rear storage area at the end of a hall. The trail ended behind a closed door of a restroom, where he now

stood. D'Arata and Muller positioned themselves on each side of the restroom door while Wozinski crept down the hall following the blood trail.

"Okay sir, whaddya want to do?" whispered Buchanan with his SAW levelled at the door.

D'Arata whispered in his ear. "Corporal, you stay here and guard the door. I'm going to have Muller cover the front entrance, and me and Woz will check out the back here and follow the blood, got it?"

"Yep."

After sending Sergeant Muller to move back to the front area, D'Arata slithered down the hallway to Private Wozinski. Illuminated by a "Sortie" sign that flickered above him, Wozinski was looking around the corner into the storage area. It was filling up with smoke from a fire against the far wall. The smooth concrete floor was littered with debris. Most of the materials were scattered outward from the collapsed wall. This is where the LAV's round hit and was followed up with his .50 cal., thought D'Arata trying to get his directions pinpointed.

"Woz, whatcha got, anything?"

"No movement back here so far but this blood trail leads to that pile on the floor. I can't make out what it is sir. Might be one of the snipers."

"Let's check it out. I'll cover right side, you left. All right, keep your eyes open now. Go."

D'Arata and the young private slowly walked across the warehouse floor in a crouch. Each man covered an 180 degree field of fire as they followed the blood trail. The trail actually ended near a forklift but they had gotten close enough to the pile to confirm it was a body. It was a soldier dressed in BDU. His helmet lay off to the side. Without saying a word D'Arata checked out the man while Wozinski continued scanning the room for movement.

"Jesus!" D'Arata whispered.

Wozinski looked down at the body. A leg was missing at the knee. It was nowhere to be found. There was a pool of blood around the stump. It had stopped flowing, which obviously meant the heart had stopped pumping. The other man's leg was contorted back at a grotesque angle. Wozinski muffled a cough and looked at the soldier's eyes. They were wide open but all that showed was the whites. His eyes had rolled into the back of his head. Something smelled like vomit.

"Man," exclaimed Wozinski. "He must have..."

A shotgun blast rang out from back down the hall where Buchanan was. The corporal yelled then opened up with his SAW. Both D'Arata and

Wozinski scampered back to help.

Turning the corner D'Arata saw Buchanan spewing an unrelentless amount of rounds from his weapon into an enemy soldier whose body lay slumped halfway out of the restroom door. Meaty chunks of the dead soldier flipped up against the wall. Blood sprayed everywhere. The soldier's shotgun was to his side, with a fine wisp of smoke emitting from the barrel. The high-pitched, rapid-fire emission of the Squad Automatic Weapon echoed with ear-piercing violence throughout the warehouse. Finally Buchanan's SAW clicked empty and spun to a stop. The mushy corpse of an older-looking man in camouflage rolled onto its back as an arm fell off. His blood-filled mouth was wide open, teeth shattered from several SAW rounds. A gold tooth sat on his chin. Through the heavy smoke a blood-stained blue and white QDF patch on his breast pocket marked him as a Quebecker. His name patch said Bourdage.

"Leroy, you alright? Leroy?" asked D'Arata coming up to his side with ears ringing.

"Fucker shot me, LT. Fucker actually shot me. Can you believe it?" Buchanan shouted with a bewildered look on his face. Gray smoke swirled around his helmet.

D'Arata looked at the man, amazed. "Where?"

Sergeant Muller ran up. "Your leg? You're hit in the leg." He pulled out a field dressing from his pouch.

"No man, I'm fine. Shit. He hit my water bottle, look." The corporal's plastic water bottle had been blown to pieces. Just a small flap hanging on his belt was all that was left. Water had splattered all over the wall and down Buchanan's leg. It looked like dark blood stains smeared down his pants.

"Hey Bucky, here's a souvenir for ya," said Wozinski flipping Buchanan a gold tooth he found on the dead man's face.

"Guys stand back. Fire in the hole!" It was D'Arata. He had a grenade in his hand and was getting ready to toss it into the bathroom. He wasn't taking any chances in case anyone else was in there. The men stood off to the side, D'Arata pulled the pin, waited three seconds, and tossed the grenade behind the ajar door. It went off with a loud bang, followed by a crash.

D'Arata was first in, stepping over Buchanan's kill. Smoke filled the bathroom. It was dimly lit by a small window that had been ripped off its hinges near the ceiling. Shattered porcelain from a sink and countertop were spread all over the floor. Water sprayed out of a cracked pipe, wetting the lieutenant's boots. A spider-webbed mirror hung precariously on the wall,

and the small stall with the toilet had collapsed in on itself. It was obvious there was no one else inside the one-toilet bathroom.

“Clear!” shouted D’Arata.

“Hey, we got company! Front entrance!” It was Sergeant Muller shouting now.

“Easy guys, easy. We got a Charlie squad backing us up out there. Might be them,” said D’Arata.

Muller shouted to a figure entering the smashed front entrance to the office, “Freeze! Don’t move or I’ll fire.”

The figure spoke back, “That you, Keith Muller, you little weasel? It’s Johncey from Charlie Company. We’re cool, man.”

“Hey man! All clear!” replied a relieved Sergeant Muller.

“Bring them in, Sergeant. We need to sweep the rest of this building for more enemy and link up with the OP on the roof. I have to radio a sit rep,” said D’Arata in an exhausted weary voice.

“Wilco LT. Come on in Johncey, bring some more boys. We got some clean up to do.”

D’Arata walked out the front door past several wide-eyed soldiers from the Charlie patrol and stepped into the bright light of the morning. He was quite a sight. Uniform dirtied, wet and bloody, face streaked with greasy black paint and grime, Kevlar helmet askew, and smoke trailing behind him, he looked like he just fought a fire. He shielded his eyes with his hand from the glare and walked to the corner of the building where they had first started the breach.

“Bravo One-Six to Bravo Six, come in, over.”

Captain Karr’s voice barked from around the corner near the blown-away metal fire door. “Bravo Six is right over here Mike.”

D’Arata looked over, and there was his smiling company commander. D’Arata smiled back and collapsed in emotional and physical exhaustion against the wall. He slid down to his butt and sat down, M16A2 across his lap. Captain Karr ran up with three other soldiers, including First Sergeant Larry Warren. D’Arata looked up at the men and just shook his head.

“You okay buddy? We heard a lot of racket in there,” asked a concerned Karr, kneeling down next to his young platoon leader. He put a hand on his forearm. FSG Warren also bent down and voiced concern. Captain Ruggerio from Charlie Company took a knee and leaned in too.

“Yeah, I’m good. My men are good.” D’Arata was breathing hard and talking between puffs. “Buchanan lost his water bottle at point-blank but

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yeah, no casualties,” he smiled. “We found one bad guy already dead. Probably from the LAV fire. Corporal Buchanan took down the other guy in the bathroom. Just the two of them so far. Both QDF infantry. Uniforms, patches and all. A squad is in there clearing out the rest of the building.”

“Mike, quit talking. Relax. Catch your breath. You did a bang-up job this morning. It’s all over. It’s all over,” said his captain. “Canadians are taking over the downtown and clearing the streets. Our mission is complete.”

“That’s great, Captain, but what about Fletcher? How’s he doing?” asked D’Arata.

“He’s lost a lot of blood but he should make it all right. He’ll do good,” said his first sergeant. “We stopped them. It’s over.”

Finally, thought D’Arata, closing his eyes. Finally, the battle is over.

CHAPTER 8 – BDA

0940 hrs, 2-14th TOC, Trois Rivières Regional Airport:

“Okay listen up now!” announced Lieutenant Colonel Gutzenheimer to the group of officers all gathered in the terminal break room. “We’ve got ten minutes, then we have to report back to General Jennings with our Battle Damage Assessment. Jennings is then going to relay the information back directly to the Commander-in-Chief. Abernathy is going live with a national announcement scheduled at 11AM, and his aides need all the information they can get before telling the public. Everyone understand?”

“Attention,” announced an NCO.

Colonel Petrovich walked into the room with a bandage wrapped tightly around his head. Captain Almond followed at his heels. Through his broken glasses he had a mean look in his eyes and a demeanor of defiance. The officers and NCOs all saluted their commander. Gutzenheimer saluted and gave him a nod saying all the men were present and briefed.

“I want the BDA clear, concise, and accurate,” angrily said Petrovich with notepad in hand. “I want friendly casualties first, enemy casualties second, starting with Alpha Company. Captain, go ahead.” His wound seemed to have exacerbated his personality.

“Sir, Alpha Company reports four of my men killed in the C-17 explosion. There was an additional KIA, the C-17 loadmaster. We also sustained five wounded along with two airport employees wounded. We took down one enemy killed. We think he was the sniper that caused the explosion.”

“Wait. You’ve got four KIAs, five WIAs for your company, right?”

“Correct sir.”

“And the C-17 lost one KIA and I believe the pilot and co-pilot were wounded, right Doug?” growled the colonel.

“Yes, I believe that is accurate, sir,” said Gutzenheimer.

“All right, next, Bravo Company. Captain Karr. Go ahead,” ordered Petrovich.

“Sir, we had seven killed, twelve wounded.” Karr knew his company sustained the most casualties in the fight, and he bore the brunt of the

responsibility on his sweat-stained, dirty face. His eyes were bloodshot and heavy exhaustion seemed to make his cheeks droop as he looked down at a wet, crumpled notepad with tick marks next to casualty names.

Petrovich knew about the young lieutenant's death from Karr's 3rd Platoon, the Torrence kid. He knew Karr was close to his subordinates. He thought about saying something sympathetic, but moved on. Now was not the time. "What is your damage assessment against the enemy?"

"The best I can figure is that my first and third platoons knocked out four enemy tanks with direct Javelin hits, but it was really the RRC that finished them off. So, I'm claiming four enemy main battle tanks destroyed, fifteen dead crewmen, one EPW, their tank commander Colonel Michel LaPointe. And the original enemy missile patrol, which was in a civilian pick-up truck, four killed there, two EPWs taken. Ah, as far as their infantry we counted twenty enemy killed, six EPWs."

Petrovich looked up from his clipboard. This was the first he had heard of the taking of LaPointe, the popular ultranationalist leader of the QDF. "Nice work, T.J. Nice work. Where is LaPointe?"

"He's actually still back at the Radisson in my CP being patched up. My Lieutenant D'Arata is personally guarding him. He took him."

"Okay, good. Almond," he said, turning to the intelligence officer, "get LaPointe flown back here to the TOC ASAP. We need to interrogate him before the Canadians get at him."

"Yes sir," said the captain, relaying the order to an NCO staffer with a flip of her head.

"So, to sum up Bravo Company you had a total of thirty-six enemy killed and eight taken prisoner?" asked the colonel, looking down at his notes.

"That sounds about right, sir."

The colonel nodded to Captain Karr. He then looked to the captain of the Charlie Company. "Charlie Company next, Ruggerio."

"Sir, Charlie reports two KIA, eight WIA in that firefight near Bravo's 3rd Platoon. All enemy killed and EPWs were included in Captain Karr's report. His boys deserve the credit; we were mainly the eyes. That's all I got."

"Team effort, you did a fantastic job, Captain. You were the force that pressed them in from the south. Very important what you did—don't forget it. You all did a fantastic job." Petrovich nodded to his officers somewhat nervously, then looked back to his notes. The moment was tense. He was objectively converting once-live soldiers with real names and families to cold hard dead numbers. It was always the cruelest duty after a battle, but a

mandatory one.

“Okay, well, Delta Company is next. I understand they have landed safe at CFB Montreal and will be conducting maneuvers with the CA there. All right, that brings us to the Cavalry. Our B Troop took it hard. Captain Giancursio, let me have your report.”

A distraught Giancursio wanted to interject some humanity back into the briefing. He thought the colonel was being too cold-hearted. “Sir, we lost the two Kiowas as you know. The first shutdown killed the pilot, Buddy Olson, and wounded the gunner, Frank Yatteau. The second shutdown we lost both crewmen – my good friend Gregor Fuller and gunner Shane Pressman. Total casualties of three dead, one wounded, sir! We took out one enemy ground-to-air missile patrol at the 138 bridge and an undisclosed number of infantrymen – possibly five to seven in that hit. We also nailed one enemy tank and a fuel truck in return. I suspect there’s a lot of collateral too,” said Giancursio coldly.

“Tom, it’s hard on all of us,” said Petrovich looking at the B Troop commander, knowing full well what he was doing. “You did an incredible job up there. We had no idea the French supplied them with missiles. Christ, that they even had tanks, Abrams tanks. But you surprised them in the end. Your guys shut the door and nailed the coffin. We would have been pretty hard pressed if you hadn’t taken out that last tank, from what I gather,” finished Petrovich, looking down to make several tickmarks on his notepad. “Believe me, Tom, I share in your grief for your losses.” He paused then said, “They’re my losses too.”

Still peering down he went on, “And the Rapid Reaction Company? Without you guys we would have had a lot more men down. What is your BDA, Captain Westfall?”

No one responded. Petrovich looked up for Westfall but didn’t see him.

“Where’s Westfall?” he asked, looking at Gutzenheimer. “I thought you said everyone was here.”

“Ah, sir, the RRC has a command change. I’m First Sergeant Nick Scott, acting commander.” Scott turned to Captain Karr as he spoke, knowing full well that Karr knew how his asshole commander sustained the injury. Scott felt that justice was due as well and was not about to reveal Karr’s young platoon leader as the culprit. “Captain Westfall suffered a broken jaw when he and his crew bailed out of their tank. He was unable to make the meeting and has already been evacuated by a Canadian Coast Guard chopper.”

Petrovich shook his head, “Okay Sergeant Scott, sorry to hear it. Gimme

your BDA.”

Scott nodded quietly. He had been through quite an ordeal this morning. It was his LAV that had barely made it out of the exploding C-17 Globemaster, and then he took a beating up on the highway overpass. His vehicle was essentially out of commission, but he saved a lot of lives. “Sir, I’ll give you my friendly vehicle losses then friendly personnel. We lost the troop carrier LAV, that was Lieutenant Jefferson’s. And we also lost Captain Westfall’s LAV. We had five KIA, five WIA total, sir,” he reported bowing his head.

“Yes, but you handed it to their tank force with really just three of your vehicles engaging, isn’t that right? Give me numbers of their destroyed tanks.”

“Yes sir. Out of the original ten enemy M1s that got in, the RRC took out five. Your Bravo Company here knocked off four and the Kiowas got that last one, sir. It really was a great combined arms effort on everyone’s part.”

“How about a count on the enemy tank crew casualties in those seven tanks you took down?”

“Ah, Captain Karr’s first platoon there took the head count I believe,” said Scott.

“T.J., do you have those figures?” asked Petrovich.

“Yeah, the RRC’s seven kills claimed every crewman except LaPointe. We counted twenty-seven dead and LaPointe as the only EPW from the tanks.”

“Jesus, all this fucking carnage in the last three hours,” exclaimed Petrovich rather tiredly. “Alright, well, that’s it. Let’s wrap this up. Here are the totals.” He paused and started counting his tickmarks while mouthing the numbers. It was very disturbing to watch. Petrovich could feel the cold stares bearing down on him.

He shook his head exasperated. “Christ, we had twenty-two men killed and thirty-three wounded. We lost two Kiowas, one C-17, and two LAVs.” He dared not look up. “That what you came up with Captain Almond?”

“Yes sir.”

Petrovich grunted. “The enemy losses are as follows: seventy-six killed, nine enemy prisoners of war. Ten tanks destroyed, one fuel truck, and one pick-up truck. And there was other collateral damage that we don’t have any numbers on.”

This time he looked up with frustration written on his face. His eyes were welled up with tears. “I just don’t know what to say right now looking at these

figures. It hurts. It really hurts.” Petrovich scanned the group of officers before resting his eyes on Captain Karr. “We took a pounding and lost a lot of men out there, but we also saved a lot more with your courage and bravery under fire. It had to be done. It just had to be done. We had a mission. It was a mission drawn up by our own President and then renigged upon by our own President.” He looked at Lieutenant Colonel Doug Gutzenheimer. “But we were successful in our mission, and that’s all that matters. Every life lost and every man wounded was for the utmost cause in stopping this threat from going any further.”

Petrovich now stared at Captain Tommy Giancursio. “I want to say I am sorry for all our losses, for each and every single man. They sacrificed their lives for a higher cause, a higher cause. Just remember that.” Back to Karr he looked. “I mean, Christ, a tank assault against a company of infantry and only four of our own armor to back us up with very limited air support? I think we performed exceptionally well. Exceptionally! That’s tough what we did out there. Real tough.” He looked down.

“That’s all. I really, ah, well, that’s all. Thank you men. Thank you for a fine job incredibly done. Dismissed.” Petrovich gave his officers a hasty salute and scampered out of the room.

The officers returned the gesture and dispersed. Colonel Petrovich headed for the radio room to contact his superior officer, Major General Jennings, back at Fort Drum.

0955 hrs, Bravo Company CP:

“Lieutenant, we just got word a Black Hawk is en route to pick up the EPW. They’re taking him back to the TOC,” said a private, popping in from outside.

Mike D’Arata simply nodded and turned back toward his prisoner. “Hey LaPointe, I just don’t get it,” he said to the battered man seated in the garage of the occupied residential command post. “You knew we had armor at that bridge down there, didn’t you? Why the hell did you attack us? What the hell were you thinking?” D’Arata stared at him and readjusted his grip on the M16 aimed at the colonel’s midsection. One move from this bastard and he’s done, Mike thought.

The defeated colonel just stared ahead, ignoring the brash young American lieutenant. D’Arata knew he heard his question. The dejected, wounded man’s gray hair was crusted flat with sweat and grime. His face was stained and his moustache was caked with blood and snot. A square white

bandage was taped across his cheek and nose. Maybe I should just shut up. Yeah, right. It was his bastard troops that shot Fletcher, that killed my men, and killed Mickey too. Luckily Fletcher was stabilized and evacuated on a Black Hawk. Naw, I'm going to dog this piece of shit Quebecker some more before I let him off. He was their leader. He called the shots.

Suddenly LaPointe blurted out in broken English and raised his bound wrists in front of him with a finger pointing at D'Arata. "I had to attack you Americans, I had no choice! It was desperate, a desperate move to get across that river. I knew the Canadians were coming and with the other bridge destroyed we had no choice but to advance on the bridge you occupied. I had to save my tanks and my troops and to do this we went on the offensive rather than be cornered like a whipped puppy. It is that simple. The decision was that simple. The outcome is what was unexpected. Me taken prisoner and most of my men slaughtered. Why don't you just pull that trigger now, you smug little shit, and spare me the guilt, eh? Why don't you just go ahead and do it? You missed me before. You're a bad shot! Why not just finish me off now, coward?" He stared at the young platoon leader with desperate rage.

"No, you're gonna have to live with it, LaPointe. Just like I have to live with the loss of life in my platoon. I have no sympathy for you. You gambled and you paid the price," said D'Arata, readjusting his aim with an angry expression on his face.

A ringing in D'Arata's breast pocket startled him. "What the?" It was the wireless phone taken from LaPointe's tank.

LaPointe knew that distinct sound all too well. He watched the American look away lowering his weapon for just an instant while he tried digging the phone out of his pocket. The colonel's instincts took over. He still had fight in him. A hostage plan formed in his mind, if he could pull it off. He looked outside the garage and didn't see the guard out there. The ringing emitted again. Yes, this would be his last act of defiance.

LaPointe jumped up and dove toward D'Arata grabbing the barrel of the M16 with his tied hands and shoved the weapon to the side. The rifle went off with a quick, three-round burst that struck the floor of the garage spraying both soldiers with concrete fragments. D'Arata shouted. LaPointe screamed back at him still clutching the smoking M16 barrel. With a jerk he snatched the M16 from D'Arata's grasp but failed to realize the rifle's strap was still around the lieutenant's shoulder, so D'Arata too fell forward and toppled over the colonel.

As soon as the two soldiers hit the floor LaPointe kicked D'Arata off and

rolled over. The M16 slid away. With a huff, LaPointe stretched for the weapon and managed to get his hands around the grip but D'Arata landed a double-fisted slam to his back and flattened the colonel into the floor knocking the air from his lungs. LaPointe howled in pain and then sucked the air to breathe as he lay sprawled across the concrete. D'Arata now punched LaPointe in the back of his head causing stars to fill the colonel's vision. D'Arata screamed as he broke a finger against LaPointe's skull. The phone in his pocket rang again. Suddenly an M16 rifle butt came crashing down on LaPointe's head in the same spot D'Arata had punched. LaPointe's face smacked into the ground breaking his nose and knocking him senseless. D'Arata looked up. It was the guard from outside. The private had entered the garage as soon as he heard D'Arata's M16 report but hadn't gotten a clear path to assist the lieutenant in suppressing the rebellious prisoner.

D'Arata stood up straddling the downed colonel with curled lips of pure hatred formed on his mouth. Blood had already pooled on the floor around LaPointe's head. D'Arata wasn't finished though. He bent down, grabbed the raggedy man, flipped him over and punched him hard again with his full body weight behind him. He smashed him on the cheek with the bandage, this time shattering LaPointe's cheekbone and reopening the earlier gash. But D'Arata screamed again as yet another of his fingers snapped. The inside door of the garage flew open just as D'Arata drew back for another crack across LaPointe's mushy face. D'Arata's wrist was grabbed before he could throw his punch. He looked up ready to reprimand the private but it was First Lieutenant Powell who had a hold of him. Two more soldiers from the command staff stood behind him with weapons drawn.

"No more!" shouted the senior lieutenant.

D'Arata crumpled from exhaustion and rolled off LaPointe making sure to grab his separated rifle. He sat next to the bloody, moaning prisoner and breathed heavily. The cell phone rang again.

Powell looked around to try and figure out what had happened but before he could ask, the private explained the situation as he saw it.

"Is that what happened, D'Arata?" asked Powell.

With a heavy rasp D'Arata agreed.

"Okay. Fun's over men. Get the EPW secured for transport on the Black Hawk. Mike, get inside and clean yourself up."

"Yes sir," said D'Arata standing up. His breast pocket rang again. It was that damn phone! Powell stared at him.

D'Arata fished the phone out, pressed a button, and bellowed an angry

“Hello?” Digital beeping and some squelching fill his ear. Must be a wrong number fax coming through he thought, with a finger on the “End” button.

“*Bonjour*,” said a voice.

“Bonjour,” replied D’Arata, a bit surprised.

“*Comment t’appelle tu?*” The caller was asking who it was.

D’Arata responded back in French, a little calmer now. “Who is calling? Who are you trying to reach?”

“*I’m trying to reach Colonel LaPointe! Is this one of his crewmen? Where is Michel? I need to speak to him immediately. Put him on.*”

D’Arata was glad he took the accelerated French language course at Fort Drum. He could make out most of what the caller was asking, but struggled for a response. “Tell me who this is and I’ll let you talk to him. He’s seated right next to me.” Lieutenant Powell looked at D’Arata confused.

“*This is the Premier of Quebec! This is Jacques DeMars! Put him on right now. I don’t have time for this. I’ve been calling for the last hour.*”

“Oui, oui, Monsieur DeMars. Monsieur Jacques DeMars. Well, if it isn’t the man who caused this whole mess. This is Lieutenant Mike D’Arata of the United States Army 10th Mountain Division, and I’ve got your Colonel LaPointe tied up here as my prisoner, so you can kiss my fat American ASS!”

“*Pardon?*” said DeMars. “*U.S. Army? LaPointe prisoner?*” The line went silent, and then some shouting could be heard in the background.

Powell also uttered astonishment. “Is that really him?” he asked.

D’Arata’s heart raced. He was speaking to the leader of Quebec. And rather harshly at that. He didn’t know what to say next. “I guess it is.”

Colonel Michel LaPointe cleared his throat and rasped, “It is him. That’s my personal phone.” Powell and D’Arata looked over at the man. His eyes were still closed as he was in terrible pain. Blood ran freely from his flattened nose and his deformed cheek. He bowed his throbbing head as two soldiers tied his arms and feet. “It is him,” he said again. “It is DeMars.”

D’Arata stood over the prisoner. “Why should we believe you?”

LaPointe looked up into D’Arata’s eyes. He spoke loudly now in French so DeMars could hear. Immense pain filled his voice. “Tell the Premier we’re finished, we failed. Tell him to just go back and negotiate a cease-fire. Too many lives have been lost already. Tell him that and maybe we can end this thing.” He bowed his head again in submission.

D’Arata spoke into the phone and cited verbatim what LaPointe had said. The only response from the Premier was a grunt then the phone went dead. D’Arata looked at the colonel and shook his head. He dropped the phone at

his feet and crushed it under his combat boot. The low thumping of a Black Hawk could be heard approaching.

Lieutenant Powell turned to a sergeant standing next to him. “We just had the Premier of Quebec on the damn phone! Can you believe it?” He turned back to Mike and shouted loudly over the beating of the chopper blades outside. “D’Arata, let’s get inside. We better contact Pluto Six and tell him what was said. The rest of you boys load up the EPW for transport.”

1100 hrs, National TV Broadcast:

“Good morning my fellow Americans,” started off President Butch Abernathy in a softer than usual voice as he followed his prewritten teleprompter mounted on the camera he was facing. “Today I want to talk to you about our nation’s military involvement in Quebec. Early this morning while most Americans were sleeping safely in warm beds, the brave soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division were laying their lives on the line for our national security. I gave authorization to deploy an emergency Task Force to the small city of Trois Rivieres, Quebec, just north of Montreal, under NATO Operation Joint Suppression. As has been widely reported, they were originally supposed to go to Montreal for training today. Instead, Jacques DeMars, the Premier of the breakaway Canadian province of Quebec, decided he wanted to start a war. And he did.”

Abernathy scanned ahead for the next sentence and superbly took his queue to become ever increasingly angry. “His paramilitary wing, the Quebec Defense Force, attacked our Canadian brethren in Montreal, killing a number of civilians and soldiers. They bombed buildings, knocked out all communications, and attacked a Canadian Army base. They were in the process of coordinating a large mechanized attack against Montreal from their capital in Quebec City when we gained information of their movements.” He paused and stared into the camera, eyes ablaze, brows furrowed. “I decided we had to act fast to stop this offensive.

“After consulting with Prime Minister Wilson and NATO Chief VonKennel, we realized there was a small window of opportunity to act. We decided to send American troops in for a behind-the-lines air assault mission to cut off the enemy advance.”

Abernathy softened his tone again, speaking slowly. “My fellow citizens, it was a decision I didn’t take lightly but it was a decision that was necessary.” He then perked up with excitement. “Our brave fighting soldiers succeeded in their mission, secured the airport and bridges they were assigned to protect,

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and with the help of our Rapid Reaction Company of Light Armored Vehicles they fought off the QDF attack, all in the last few hours. I commend their excellence and professionalism in getting the job done under the difficult circumstances.

“The Canadian Army has already bypassed our positions in Trois Rivières and have halted their own advance on the outskirts of Quebec City. I just got off the phone with Prime Minister Wilson, and his troops are preparing to lay siege to that city. Let’s pray this rebel uprising ends soon, because too many lives have already been lost to DeMars’s misguided judgement in claiming independence from Canada.

“I will not go into the details of what happened in Trois Rivières right now, as we are still in combat mode, but I want to be frank with you that there was extensive loss of American life and property.”

Abernathy paused with glassy eyes, as his teleprompter instructed him to do. He then looked down in a perfectly choreographed gesture worthy of an acting award and said, “We lost twenty-two men and over thirty-three wounded.”

Looking back up to the camera he went on. “My deepest sympathy goes out to the families of the brave young Americans who gave the ultimate sacrifice or were injured in Quebec. Let me express my thanks and my gratitude. Your country is grateful, and so is the rest of the world. And so is the vast majority of the Canadian people. Thank you, fellow Americans, and God Bless.”

CHAPTER 9 - POST-OP

16 September 2005. Foxnews.com News Web Page:

NATO ULTIMATUM: DISBAND QDF OR FACE BOMBARDMENT. Quebecers given five days to dismantle the rebel militia force. Quebec City, Canada – Canada’s military dropped leaflets around Quebec City Monday, sternly warning residents to demand the DeMars government disband his Quebec Defense Force or face a certain artillery and air bombardment of their historic capital city.

“If you wish to keep the QDF terrorist organization, the city will be destroyed by artillery, aviation, and invasion,” said the leaflet, read on Quebec television. “There will be no more talks until the QDF is disbanded. The countdown has begun.”

The leaflet promised that the old, popular, walled-in section of Quebec City would be demolished first in an attempt to drive a stake through the heart of Jacques DeMars’s military uprising. Old Quebec City, the cultural center of the most beautiful European-style fortress-city on the North American continent, gives Quebec its colonial French image. NATO commanders said their troops had secured all roads leading out of the city, and gave residents inside no chance of winning.

“We will start the bombardment with the Parliament building, then the Chateau Frontenac; all famous architectural institutions the QDF and its supporters have frequented. I can tell you now there will be extensive damage of these French landmarks. There will also be extensive collateral damage to residents’ homes and shops. If the QDF still do not disband, we will invade the city and hunt them down street by street, house by house,” said Canadian Army General Maxwell Vincent. “We will beat them until the last bandit is buried under the ruins of Quebec City. Is this what true French-Canadians want? I would urge them to consider our demands.”

Canadian Prime Minister Wilson holds the militant force responsible for a series of deadly bombings inside Montreal. This prompted him to order NATO forces into Quebec under Operation Joint Suppression. A brutal tank attack against American 10th Mountain troops in Trois Rivieres yesterday

morning opened the operation. Losses were described as heavy.

Fearing a continued high casualty count the Canadian military will first rely on artillery and air attacks in this campaign, leaving its soldiers far outside Quebec City's perimeter.

The emergency crackdown in Montreal and other parts of Quebec has left an unknown number of QDF and civilian casualties—spurring immediate criticism from the international community, namely France, a member of NATO, for the use of excessive force in a purely internal issue within Canada. Canada and the U.S. have rejected the criticism, claiming the offensive is intrinsic to North America's security.

“The aim of our policy is to strengthen Canada,” Prime Minister Wilson said in a national televised address explaining the operation. “We cannot allow a rogue province to unilaterally declare independence and then dictate the terms of its secession from our federation with unchecked violence. As far as our relations with NATO is concerned, the organization has backed us on every action we have taken, with the exception of France, which has acted with dubious motives in this whole affair. For instance, what were French-made shoulder-launched missile units doing in Trois Rivieres and how did they get there? We have even more evidence of France's clandestine activities in support of the QDF, and this will be addressed at the highest levels.”

A high level French Ministry of Defense official dismissed all claims made by the Canadian Prime Minister.

20 September 2005. *Voice Du Quebecois*, Quebec City. Newspaper Brief:

NEGOTIATIONS UNDER WAY. QDF DISBANDED. PRISONERS SWAPPED. Forced back to the negotiating table under the threat of artillery bombardment and invasion of the capital by occupying NATO forces, Premier Jacques DeMars complied with Prime Minister Wilson's demands to disband the controversial Quebec Defense Force as one of the key criteria to continued peace talks. In a conciliatory statement issued today by a DeMars spokesman the Premier stated, “The Quebec Defense Force has been deactivated due to irreparable losses from invading foreign forces. The freedom fighters who so valiantly sacrificed their lives to defend our budding nation will never be forgotten. The mighty NATO war machine has flexed its muscles against a peaceful population that has legitimately voted for independence under Canadian law. We have shown the resolve of all citizens

of Quebec to fight for freedom whenever and wherever, and now we must continue that fight back on the diplomatic front. In the spirit of compromise I have already worked out a demilitarization program with NATO commanders. I have also arranged a prisoner swap with the combatants of the battle at Trois Rivieres five days ago. The violence has ended, let the peace begin.”

Quebec Defense Force Colonel Michel LaPointe, along with several soldiers from his unit, were returned to Quebec City last night in a prisoner exchange for Canadian Air Force Captain Claude Levesque. Levesque and LaPointe fought against each other on September 15th in the early morning battle at Trois Rivieres. Levesque’s jet fighter was shot out of the sky by a shoulder-launched missile from Colonel LaPointe’s air defense units after Levesque’s air patrol attacked the convoy. Levesque was able to eject his plane but sustained serious spinal injuries upon impact. He was picked up by a local farmer and rushed to a hospital where Quebec Provincial Police placed him in custody. He has been under Red Cross supervision ever since, with paralysis from the neck down.

Colonel LaPointe’s forces ended up being ambushed by American troops several hours later as his armored column went head to head with tanks, infantry, and attack choppers of the 10th Mountain Division from Fort Drum, NY. They battled over the Autoroute 40 bridge that crossed the St. Maurice River in Trois Rivieres. By capturing this key bridge, the Americans secured the Canadian Army’s mechanized advance on Quebec City. LaPointe’s forces were dispatched immediately upon hearing word of the American assault at Trois Rivieres and tried desperately to expel the invaders. Additionally, his units shot down two American Kiowa attack helicopters and a C-17 Globemaster heavy transport plane. The destruction of the Globemaster caused much damage and enemy loss of life at the small regional airport.

Although Colonel LaPointe’s tank force destroyed a number of enemy tanks and soldiers, his units suffered a major defeat as they were left on their own when QDF reinforcements failed to arrive in time. That QDF infantry support was decimated by an air attack from Canadian and U.S. Air Force bombers and fighters just outside of Quebec City.

LaPointe was wounded in the combat but is recovering. He comes home a hero of the battle, showing Quebec’s resolve to fight in defense of his new country. A special ceremony is being held in honor of the all the fighters of the Battle of Trois Rivieres during next month’s still scheduled Quebec

Independence Day festivities.

3 October 2005. CNN Live Report. The Citadelle, Quebec City:

“A nation is born,” started the smiling female news reporter. “I’m Cindy Sorel and this morning here at the Citadelle, in front of cheering crowds, President Jacques DeMars was sworn in as the first leader of free Quebec. On a day of renewed celebration filled with much revelry at the successful agreement of the Canada-Quebec Peace Accord, President DeMars expressed hope for the future of his country.”

An image of Prime Minister Wilson and President Abernathy sitting at a conference table with bitter looks on their faces filled the camera screen while the reporter continued to narrate. “Condemned by the international community for the widespread destruction, heavy loss of life, and human abuses, Canada and the United States succumbed to pressure in letting Quebec pursue their independence. In a deal brokered by beleaguered NATO partner France under U.N. supervision, Quebec has been deemed a “UN Peacekeeping Zone” to ensure the North American security arrangement between the U.S. and Canada remains intact. All U.S. and Canadian combat troops have been pulled out of the country as part of the bargain. United Nations peacekeeping troops from Great Britain and Germany have been deployed to keep the peace in volatile areas.”

The screen graphics now switched to a map of Quebec. “But Canada gained the concessions they were looking for too. Under the peace agreement the Native Canadian tribes of Quebec will remain under Canadian protection and the St. Lawrence Seaway will continue to be an international trade route. Quebec will pay approximately thirty percent towards the Canadian national debt and will retain the Canadian dollar for a period of ten years. Also, a key concession for Canada was met in that the western half of Montreal will be annexed into the Ontario province.”

The camera view switched to a live shot of the reporter as she spoke in a cheerful tone. “It seems as though peace has finally worked in North America. We now go live to the majestic Chateau Frontenac where correspondent Armour Monte is speaking with some very happy partiers at the Parti Quebecois celebration ball inside the famous hotel. Armour, to you,” the reporter finished with a grin.

“Thanks Cindy...”

Same Time. Pewter Mug, Watertown, NY:

Captain Thomas John Karr and his two remaining platoon leaders, all dressed in civilian attire, sat side by side on three-legged stools along the long wooden bar at their local watering hole. They were watching the same live CNN report on the Independence Day celebration in Quebec City. Their battalion had been shipped back to Fort Drum a week ago after being relieved by a British Army unit, and this was their first time out together since being reunited with family and friends in Watertown.

“Hold up, did you hear that? Did you hear what the Communist News Network said?” asked Karr.

“Yeah, Quebec’s now under United Nation’s control. How freaking convenient for them,” said D’Arata, looking down into his heavy dark beer, still brooding over the young men in his outfit that sacrificed their lives for what seemed like a lost cause at this point. Mickey Torrence’s death weighed the heaviest on his mind. He still could not believe his fellow lieutenant was dead. It was an emotional flight back to the States and he still felt like letting loose at any moment.

“You would think all the blue suits could have worked this out, you know?” D’Arata remarked in a nasty tone while looking at his taped-up broken fingers on each hand.

“What in God’s name did we go up there for in the first place if Abernathy was going to let the U.N. come in under French guidance? Abernathy sold us out on the battlefield and sold us out diplomatically too,” barked Karr, slamming his beer down on the bar. Foam sprayed across the bar. A young couple at the other end of the bar looked over disturbingly. Karr had already downed three beers and was rather talkative. “Why do we put our lives on the line for these shits running our country? Why? Both sides got everything they wanted in the end it sounds like to me. You’re right, Mike. I mean the politicians could have worked all this crap out on their own instead of using us like a bunch of play toy soldiers to satisfy their whims! And the U.N. back in the picture? What’s up with that crap? Why did the spineless Abernathy give the U.N. an open door on this? Didn’t he learn anything from how they coddled to our enemies just a couple of years ago?”

Wes Shore threw an angry middle finger towards the television set hung over the bar. “They played us man,” he bitched with a drawl. Several patrons listened in silence. “They played us real good. I bet that DeMars dude and France had this planned out all along. I bet DeMars was willing to let Montreal go since the beginning. That’s what started all this, remember? It

was all about Montreal. If you think about it it's a good deal for Quebec. They get rid of the Pro-Canadian side of their city in exchange for an independent country that has its security provided by the U.N. and paid for by U.S. taxpayers. What a fucked up sitrep, man."

"Look at that shit, Bulldog," said D'Arata. "Look at those people celebrating like they won or something. We kicked their asses big time! Wiped out their tank force, bombed the shit outta their reinforcements, surrounded their capital city, even made them disband their army. Man, it's not fair to our men who lost their lives."

"And then we get stabbed in the back by our own spineless leaders," added Karr sucking his beer as images of dead and maimed soldiers from his company filled his head as if generated on queue from D'Arata's previous comment. "I mean, France screwed us too. Again! And they come out as heroes for setting up the arrangement just because they have the U.N. backing them." He stopped and shook his head.

Seconds later he blurted out again. "They provided the fucking missiles that shot down our choppers and that fighter jet. I had the fucking evidence in my hands. You'd think they would have done something about it, about French involvement. Bush did! Hell, what about them stealing Abrams tanks! But no, those politicians jammed us. We did their dirty work for them once again because they are incompetent. Look at that DeMars asshole." He pointed to the television. "There he is, that smiling SOB. Just incredible! He turned a major military defeat into a political victory. Why the hell did we even fight them if our so-called leaders were willing to give in?" he repeated. "Goddamn, we lost a lot of good men out there. I just don't get it. I'll *never* get it!"

"Did you hear that reporter, Captain?" asked Shore, staring at the television. "Abernathy and Wilson's poll numbers actually increased since the deal. They're being hailed as national heroes for choosing peace over war. You got to be shitting me," he said, waving a hand in disgust at the television.

"Peace over war. Gimme a break," said Karr. "Abernathy chose peace over war? Yeah, because the body bags were affecting his liberal support. That's why. What, did he think this whole Joint Suppression crap was going to be, a walk in the park? Damn, we fought main battle tanks with light infantry!"

"I bet he gets the Nobel Peace Prize too," muttered D'Arata. "Hey, Arafat got it once."

The television screen then switched to a shaky amateur video recording

taken during the Battle of Trois Rivieres shortly after the QDF tank assault. This particular segment had been getting a large amount of coverage during the last few weeks of peace negotiations. It was played all over the world and had created a rallying cry within the left-wing, anti-war factions of the American public, resulting in political pressure against Abernathy. An inset photo of two young men was in the lower corner as a narration of the video scrolled in white text along the bottom of the screen.

“Goddammit! Here they go again. How many times do they have to play this thing?” said D’Arata, turning his head away.

Unbeknownst to Bravo Company at the time, two Trois Rivieres brothers, aged thirteen and fourteen, had donned their handheld video camera and followed LaPointe’s tank assault into D’Arata’s BP at the rail split. The scenes they captured were the only live coverage of the actual fight and its aftermath. Not even the handful of local news crews in the city that morning had gotten the up-close dramatic shots that these two boys had taken. The brothers had been interviewed countless times on Quebec television alongside Premier DeMars and others in the Parti Quebecois, explaining their story. The two were complimented for their bravery during a historic moment.

But once the video made it to U.S. and Canadian television networks, the real public manipulation begin. Anti-war elements in the media edited the tape in such a way as to exacerbate the 10th Mountain’s role in causing an inhumane battlefield massacre. The public outrage that followed contributed highly to a plummet in Abernathy and Wilson’s poll numbers as the crisis was continuing.

D’Arata turned his head back to the television set. The bouncing blurred picture started out as the boys ran up the tracks behind three QDF tanks. LaPointe’s command tank was in the lead heading for a column of heavy black smoke ahead. Further up near the out-of-focus Autoroute 40 overpass where the Americans were stationed, a large fire raged. An unknown type of military vehicle was burning fiercely up on the highway structure. D’Arata knew it was their LAV troop carrier, the one that saved his platoon’s life but subsequently lost its own as that damn second tank infiltrated his and Torrence’s positions.

“Here’s our two courageous youngsters as they ran next to the Quebec tanks and into the American onslaught,” said the narrator of the video.

The QDF tanks quickly outpaced the boys’ vantage point and had emitted several canisters of smoke screen. They plunged into the thick wall of smoke

where the railroad tracks split left and right. Several bright explosions and crisscrossing tracer rounds ripped through the smoky scene as the camera came back into focus. The boys' cries in French could be heard over the firefight as they hugged a wall, inching closer to the clash of metal. Suddenly a missile shot out from the smoke and exploded into a QDF tank. The explosion knocked both boys off their feet, sending their video camera tumbling to the ground. A glimpse of a boy's terrified face filled half the picture frame before going fuzzy.

The scene then picked up as the two youngsters ran between some houses and snuck through a back yard, where they hid behind a neatly stacked pile of wood adjacent to a chain link fence. The scene before them was D'Arata's 1st Platoon position with several QDF tanks burning against the backdrop of the damaged Autoroute overpass. Several camouflaged soldiers, pointed out as Americans by the translation at the bottom of the screen, stood on the rail embankment shooting into the burning tanks. A thundering roar then drowned out all sound in the video as the camera spun around to view a very large explosion that went off behind them. A huge cloud of flame and black smoke rose over the trees and houses in the video. Again, their conversation, translated as shouts of horror, scrolled across the television screen.

Mike D'Arata watched hopelessly as the final scene played out. This was the part that still stunned him, because he now premiered as the main actor. The video camera zoomed in as far as it could and focused on a group of soldiers around a smoking QDF tank. Two American soldiers were on the top turret looking down into an open hatch. Their M16s were pointed into the hole. A couple more soldiers approached. One carried a radio backpack and it was obvious from body language that the other one was in command. The officer jumped up on the turret and looked down into the hatch too. After a moment the officer stood up, pointed his M16 into the hatch and fired. The kickback from the weapon jolted the officer's arms. The officer then knelt closer and spit into the hatch. A moment later Colonel LaPointe, as the caption read, was pulled out of his tank. He was shown from afar being dragged, then hit in the back with a rifle butt from one of the American soldiers. They clasped his hands with plastic ties and led him away back toward the Autoroute.

D'Arata winced. Christ, they edited out the fact that LaPointe tried attacking my men! That's why we hit him. Also not a minute after he and Fletcher were shot at by those two Quebecker infantrymen. I wonder if those boys got that on film too or was that a media play? He quickly took a swig of

beer and looked the other way.

“Come on, Mike. Did ya have to go and spit on him? That wasn’t very nice,” smiled Shore, trying to break the tension.

Wes did it again. D’Arata couldn’t help but grin.

The television scene then shifted to several more burning tanks and a building fully involved with flames. Another edit was made in the recording before ending with a dramatic shot of dead civilians near the paper factory. The network then cut to a commercial break about the baseball playoff season.

“Bartender!” shouted Karr, pointing to the television, “please turn that shit off or at least put FOX News on so we can get the real story, and get these guys another round of beers and shots. It’s going to be a long night.”

“You got it, T.J.,” said the bartender.

Karr kept talking as the bartender switched the television off. “War isn’t a bed of fucking roses. You think we, as warriors, have to hold the enemy’s hand when they just tried wiping out our entire battalion? You know, act all humanitarian and shit. If people don’t like scenes like that then they better think twice about using us to send a PR message or to go on a *peacekeeping* mission. Didn’t Abernathy and his cronies learn anything about using the military the right way? The way our greatest CINC ever did it? The Bush way? Abernathy cut too many corners with us and expected too much with too little. His disdain for the military and his direct interference killed our men and for what? So he could show how tough he was to the rest of the world? So he could pass the test of being a tough guy? Mike, what you did out there any one of us would have done in a heartbeat. Don’t let it get to you. I’ve been there. So stay strong.” He paused to take a sip of his beer. “You know the only heroes in this whole fucked up mindtrip are you two sitting at this bar and Mickey T. Remember this boys, if you guys didn’t have the nuggets to stand your ground against those tanks, they would have massacred us in a blink of an eye. It was us or them. I don’t care how many we killed, ‘cause it would have been our whole battalion in those bodybags if we didn’t. We took that bridge and kept it against all odds. We did our job with no questions asked. The mission was bunk from the very beginning. It was thought up by the blue suits because DeMars stuck his tongue out at them. Abernathy sent us in just to settle a personal score. Christ, they acted like kids in a sandbox and we were their fucking squirt guns to win it by. These politicians don’t have one day of military service on their resume. They have no idea what it’s like shitting your pants as a tank round whistles over your head. Yet, we went

anyway. It was the Golden Dragons who cut off and killed that tank force. The Golden Dragons made it possible for the Canadians to advance and surround Quebec City. It's the Golden Dragons who the pukes Abernathy and Wilson owe all the credit to. I'd like to stick those bastards in front of an Abrams tank and let them get a feel for what it's like. Let them piss on themselves. Maybe next time they'll think twice about doing their intellectual job instead of relying on us as the easy way out. We should only be used as a last resort and this Joint Suppression mission was NOT a last resort." Karr stroked his bald head with one hand and took a breath.

After a long silence, D'Arata spoke up. "Thanks T.J., it means a lot," he said sincerely. The men thought back to the battle. Complete animosity painted their minds.

"Hey Captain, what ever became of that asshole RRC commander, you know, the one I popped after he bailed on his crew?" asked Bulldog.

"By the way Wes, I heard why you broke his jaw and I never got to say thank you for sticking up to shitheads like that, especially on our own side, you know?" said D'Arata. Shore nodded his head.

"Yeah, that prick Westfall is getting his due. He was responsible for killing those civilians on the river road when the tanks first came at us. It was right in your sector Mike when I had you change positions," said Captain Karr looking at his lieutenant.

"I saw 'em, T.J. It was a mother and her kids he got. I saw the bodies afterwards. Same ones on that video," said D'Arata with glazed-over eyes staring straight ahead. "I won't ever forget it."

"Well, one of his crewman, I think the gunner, made a report about it 'cause apparently Westfall did it deliberately. Murdered them in cold blood knowing full well they posed no threat. Well, his wealthy daddy down there in Atlanta started pulling some strings to get his son off and I guess it was working until that gunner got wind of it. So he went public. He told the whole story to the Drudge Report, how it all happened, and even how Westfall ditched his crew. And now all the media are out for blood."

"Yeah," nodded Shore, "I thought I saw something about a lawsuit from the relatives against Westfall and the U.S. government too."

"Yep, that just came out a couple of days ago. Anyway, the Army suddenly changed their collective mind and Westfall's now been charged with premeditated murder. It's a real embarrassment for the poor CINC 'cause Westfall's daddy was a big time campaign contributor. Might hurt his high poll numbers now if he tries to blow it off," finished Karr.

“Well, Westfall deserves to sit in Leavenworth. He’s a murderer, not a soldier. He went too far. We all know what it was like out there, and he thought more of himself than of his fellow man,” said D’Arata, still staring.

The leaders of Bravo Company turned silent again as a song came on a radio. They drank their beer, each absorbed in his own thoughts. D’Arata downed a shot of Southern Comfort. He closed his eyes as the sweet whiskey slid down his throat, briefly drowning out the images of the young men who unnecessarily gave their lives on that foggy morning in Trois Rivieres. They would never be forgotten, he decided. Ever.

25 October 2005. *Ottawa Weekly*, Ottawa:

COMPUTER HACKER DIES IN POLICE CUSTODY. Canadian officials are baffled at the apparent heart attack....



A NATO request for military assistance to Canada thrusts a U.S. Army 10th Mountain light infantry task force behind Quebec provincial lines on a moment's notice. Mission objective: Take the airport and bridges and then allow the Canadian Army to pass through their positions. It was supposed to be a permissive spearhead insertion into the St. Lawrence port city of Trois Rivieres, aimed at bringing the breakaway province of Quebec back to negotiations in resolving its claim of secession from Canada. Instead, the American infantry unit is drawn into a violent urban battle with a column of main battle tanks from the revolutionary Quebec Defense Force, a force that is clandestinely supported by France. Follow the soldiers on both sides of the conflict as they battle not only each other, but also deadly setbacks, hasty decisions, and emotional challenges all in the literal fog of this action-packed, street-to-street, combat thriller.



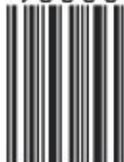
Michael Karpovage was born and raised in western New York. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from Rochester Institute of Technology and is an avid military history enthusiast fascinated with stories from the battlefield. He lives in the Finger Lakes Region of New York with his wife Lisa and boys Jake and Alex.

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