

The Gruesome Foursome, a Terrorist Scenario

By Marshall Chamberlain

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Prologue

The True Freedom Coalition (TFC) consists of twenty-six cells. It's headquartered in a restored Victorian mansion known as "Shadowood," located in down-state Illinois just outside the University of Illinois campus at Champaign-Urbana. Originally constructed in 1932 by the wealthy Seagrave family, it has since been owned and occupied by its descendants. The present owner of Shadowood and president of TFC is Kent Seagrave, a shrewd, recently retired and well-respected Chicago criminal attorney.

The TFC organization is funded through the covenants of the Seagrave Freedom Endowment, a trust created in 1919 by the estate of a prominent Seagrave oligarch just after WWI. The goal of the trust was, and remains to this day, "...to do any and all things, intelligently selecting from the means available, to improve the well-being of America's poor while attempting to bring equity to the functioning of government for the benefit of all Americans." Kent Seagrave is the current endowment trustee.

TFC membership requires a screening process similar in vigor to that of a U.S. government top-secret clearance. An accepted applicant serves a novice apprenticeship, absorbing the knowledge base and learning the skill-sets of anti-terrorism. This is followed by a one-year trial period wherein the apprentice is assigned to a senior TFC member to demonstrate his proficiency, devotion, and loyalty during assignments.

Kent Seagrave sets TFC policy through decrees and manifestos promulgated to organization members through a hi-tech email server utilizing the latest encryption technology. He and his inner circle of senior members create missions and assignments for execution.

Membership is totally secret. On several occasions over the last decade, the FBI attempted to penetrate TFC without success. The organization has never had an altercation with any branch of law enforcement and maintains a policy of open-to-inspection by any branch of local, state, or federal government. The Department of Homeland Security has labeled TFC a "patriot group."

Introduction

What you are about to experience is a fictional story, fabricated from the author's fertile imagination, and flavored by his real-life observations and experiences as a disabled veteran who enjoys access to military bases and their facilities worldwide—and who has been profoundly appalled at the lack of security precautions protecting our bases.

In their day, H.G. Wells and Jules Verne were close to seeing future reality. It is my sincerest wish that this depiction will provoke immediate institution of long-overdue reform by the U.S. military and not go down as the harbinger of preventable, homicidal disasters.

Day One

Chicago: Hamond Engraving Industries

1030 Hours

Chicago's Midway Airport gate twelve. Neither knows what the other looks like this time, but Emile is wearing his red and white Atlanta Falcons cap. Video cameras are hidden and prolific these days. Distraction by trying to avoid them is not an option. Full disguise at all times is standard operating procedure. Their exchange is short—cordial, businesslike. "Nice face-job," Teddy says as they ride the moving walkway.

Not one word since they'd picked up the Chevrolet Yukon rental at the airport. "Are you going to tell me what the hell this is all about? I've earned that much." Teddy is well-aware first-hand of Emile's quiet, introspective nature, and his competence; this is his second mission as an apprentice under Emile's tutelage, but he feels vulnerable and insecure.

Emile casts a quick diminutive look at his apprentice. "You've earned nothing yet. Just do what you're told. I'm still in the dark myself on some of this... We just follow the yellow brick road. That's the way TFC is—there." He points. "It's up on the left."

"Hamond Industries? So what." Teddy from Spokane is not used to being kept in the dark. He wanted to become a member so he'd be a part of the process, not its executioner. Emile revealing he doesn't know the details is causing trepidation. Missions typically held elements of danger, but not knowing anything about ground level was stupid. Going along means trusting Emile, who is trusting TFC's president, a man Teddy has never met.

He does trust Emile. The guy has brains and loves the whole planning-mystery thing. Teddy wonders what he does for a living... He has to be some kind of professor. Where's he from? Wife? Kids?

"This is where we get our ID cards." Emile pulls the Yukon into the Hamond parking lot, shuts it down and reaches into the back seat for his backpack.

Twenty minutes later, Emile exits the Hamond parking lot. Teddy says, "That went smoothly."

"It was set up a long time ago."

"No questions. I like that... How much did you have to pay?"

"It's really none of your business, and I'm reaching an irritation level with you."

"I just want to know what's going on. This isn't like the simple delivery we made last time."

Teddy watches Emile turn his head. His face is neutral and calm, glasses distorting the bright blue eyes of a condescending professor's gaze. The mustache makes him look older.

"Be patient. We'll know soon enough. In the meantime there's a golf match coming up to enjoy."

"That's nice to know—almost enlightening—and where are we going now?"

"To Tampa, Florida, home of the Buccaneers."

Wal-mart

1220 Hours

Emile and Teddy arrive in Tampa via Chicago and Atlanta.

The two young men, about the same height and medium build, garbed in non-descript college attire, traipse down the moving concourse sidewalk, backpacks slung over their shoulders. One is in his early twenties with a Buccaneers' baseball cap turned backwards; the other, perhaps thirty, with a red Atlanta-Falcons hat turned the other way.

Emile holds up, swings his pack onto the hand rail, and pulls out a beat-up brown leather wallet. "Here, you may need these, complements of Hamond's."

Teddy thumbs through its contents. "Different guy this time. Cool...disabled veteran?" He removes a flesh-colored ID card with name, rank, organization, and an expiration date of indefinite. "Department of Defense Uniformed Services, Identification and Privilege Card. "Sweet!"

Emile sends Teddy into the National Car Rental to rent another Chevrolet Yukon. They walk to the vehicle in bright sunshine under a cloudless sky. "First stop is downtown. We need a second vehicle. Then a trip to a Wal-mart," Emile says. "Nice day, hey?"

Yeah, for what? He always says 'hey'...Canadian. "Why two cars?"

"Don't start in, Teddy. I'll brief you when everyone's together."

The two-car caravan exits downtown Tampa, Teddy following the red Kia Sorrento in the Yukon. They trail up an I-275 entrance ramp and head west back toward the airport.

Five miles on they turn away from the airport, south down Dale Mabry Highway, a main drag bisecting Tampa's south peninsula, MacDill Air Force Base occupying the southern tip. Four miles later, Emile turns right on West Gandy Blvd. and into the Wal-mart parking lot.

Teddy lags behind Emile as he heads straight down an aisle like he knows where he's going. Electronics, cellphones, Trackphones, T-Mobile Prepaid Plans.

"We need five," Emile tells the department sales person. Before the lady can say anything Emile says, "Boy Scout troop outing—I don't allow them to take their own along—too many distractions. This way we have security, and we set them up so they can only call each other and the leaders. Kids these days don't memorize telephone numbers...so we'll only need telephone numbers and the minimum package of minutes for each phone."

The lady smiles. "I sure know what you mean...but I'll need an address for each."

"Is the troop address sufficient?"

"That should be okay. As soon as your payment is approved, I'll activate the phones from here and you're good to go."

Emile pays with one of the two credit cards he's been authorized to use from his ID set.

Walking side by side on the way back to the vehicles, Teddy doesn't voice the obvious, *what are they for?* "What's next, boss man?"

Howard Johnson Hotel

1350 Hours

Emile and Teddy enter the HoJo lobby and walk up to the reservation counter.

"You have reservations for two adjoining rooms under Emile Campbell?" Emile says to the smiling clerk.

"Yes, sir, and you're fortunate to have made these so far in advance. We are booked. I mean booked."

"Oh? What's going on?"

"Important meetings at the base starting tomorrow evening. Everyplace is full-up this side of I-275."

"We're going to be playing golf on base," Emile says. "The course shouldn't be crowded then.... He looks at his watch. "We've got two buddies flying in around four-thirty. It's our annual golf get-together."

Teddy is standing next to Emile and lightly elbows him in the side. Emile glances at him and glares. Teddy sees the clerk is looking at her computer and flicks a forefinger against his upper lip.

Emile turns away, un-shoulders his backpack, and touches his mustache, mashing it back in place.

In their room they toss backpacks on the beds, and Emile powers up his Google Chrome notebook to check his email account on the TFC's server. He quickly scans his in-box. "It's here. How about you taking a walk outside—give me about ten minutes to digest this?"

"Okay." Teddy quietly pulls the door closed behind him. Foreboding creeps up his spine as he feels the blast of hot air outside. All of this had seemed like a passive adventure. All of a sudden it isn't.

USPS: Tampa Substation

1405 Hours

An overnight package has been sent via USPS to the post office on Church Street, just off Dale Mabry Highway, for pick up by Teddy Smythe.

"Why me?" Teddy asks. "And why can't you tell me what the hell's happening? I'm tired of being in the dark."

"Just hang in there, Teddy. I've been directed to wait until we're all together—and it's you because I can't show my ID. I'm supposed to use my credit card for everything. Sooner or later it's going to get linked to the Kia and all the purchases I make. Seagrave doesn't want me associated with the pick-up—he doesn't want it known how we did it.... Nobody knows you're in Tampa. You're un-traceable. Okay?"

Teddy lets out a breath. "I guess."

"Let's get going. We've got a lot to do before we meet the other team. They're due in on separate flights."

This part of the mission is causing Emile great trepidation. The return address on the package will be bogus in case the package is considered suspicious; and it would have been delivered by some innocuous person, paid for with cash—somebody with no connection to TFC. That would take TFC out of the loop. Its contents will not cause dogs to give alarm, and, even though the USPS doesn't routinely irradiated mail, Murphy's Law is to be considered operant. There's always the possibility that the package is being tracked by the authorities.

"It's only a mile and a half from here and on the way to MacDill. I'll fill you in on the plan while we're driving."

"Okay, there's the post office." Emile drives the Kia SUV past, around the block, and parks just before the stop sign to re-enter Dale Mabry. "This is perfect," he says. "Just the way we discussed." Emile gets out of the car, shoulders his lightened backpack, and heads to the MacDonald's where he can observe the comings and goings at the post office.

Teddy walks back to the post office on the opposite side of the street, memorizes the few cars parked outside, and continues to round the block and across Dale Mabry to join Emile inside the restaurant.

"There were four cars—no people inside—no vans parked within sight—a red Toyota Camry, a green Miata, white Mercedes 350, and a black BMW."

"So, we wait until those cars come back out onto Dale Mabry." Emile hands Teddy his binoculars. "And you check the occupants of every vehicle going to the post office from now on. I'm gonna buy some stamps."

Emile traipses into the small post office and buys a packet of twenty Forever stamps. Nobody suspicious. One old lady at the single service window and two men waiting. The two postal employees behind the counter aren't giving off indications of stress.

Emile exits and takes the side street to walk around the block, looking for signs of observation—parked vans with the engines on, parked cars with people inside. He passes by the post office again, adjusting his pack, and saunters across Dale Mabry.

"Looks clear." Emile scoots into the booth. "Anything happen while I was gone?"

"All four cars came back out. Two cars and a Comcast van went down Church Street. Single drivers. I couldn't see if they stopped at the post office."

"Yeah, I saw them. The van passed me while I was walking around the block—only one guy inside I could see. It kept going. Looked like a legitimate service call. The other two—a man and a woman—went inside the post office. I saw them at the counter as I passed on the way here. I say it's a go. You know what to do. Just stay relaxed and pick up the package. I'll meet you back at the car."

"Okay." Teddy slides out of the booth. "The coffee's for you." Teddy hands the binoculars back to Emile and takes his coffee with him, thinking about staying relaxed—like Emile.

Emile watches him cross over Dale Mabry and disappear down Church Street as it curves around to the post office. He's not going back to the car until he sees Teddy there waiting. Emile takes his coffee outside into the children's play area, sits at a table out of view of the MacDonald's service counters where he can see the Kia, and starts watching the vehicles that turn onto Church Street.

Visitor's Center

1435 Hours

Three miles farther south down Dale Mabry, Emile and Teddy enter the Visitor's Center just outside the main gate at MacDill Air Force Base.

"What's in the package?" Teddy says as Emile parks the Kia.

Emile eyes the surrounding lot. Afternoons were usually the slow time for civilian contractors to come onto the base." Good. Doesn't look too busy—you'll find out in the morning."

"You said we're going to play golf. Do I gather correctly it's on the base?"

"Yes, but that's tomorrow."

"What goes on here?" Teddy asks.

"It's the home of the Sixth Air Mobility Wing—part of AMC's Eighteenth Air Force."

"No, I mean what takes place here?"

"It provides air refueling, airlift, and airbase support anyplace in the world—you ask too many questions. I'll be right back." Emile opens the car door and ambles into the center.

Ten minutes later, Emile returns carrying four manila envelopes—welcome packets for visitors and newly posted military personnel. Maps, calendar of events, the weekly base newspaper, *The Thunderbolt*. He tosses a packet to Teddy and puts the others in the back seat. "Take a look at the calendar of events. Southern Command from Miami is gathering at the convention center here starting the day after tomorrow. And get familiar with the base map."

"How come you know so much about MacDill?"

"Over the last few weeks, TFC sent me to eleven different bases identified as sensitive or strategic to do research. Several other members received similar missions."

"What kind of research?"

"Just the standard procedures for gaining access and getting copies of base information like what I gave you—check out the newspaper. There's an article on the Southern Command meeting.

"Who're the other two golfers coming to join us?" Teddy thinks he is beginning to see the picture.

"All I can tell you is they're from different cells. There's an apprentice and a member. Names are fictitious just like ours."

MacDill AFB

1505 Hours

Emile pulls the Sorrento out of the visitor-center parking and enters the base entrance lane. The line-up is some twenty vehicles: military personnel, contractors, delivery vans and visitors.

"We're just going in...like we're military?" Teddy squirms in the passenger seat.

"Just relax. I've done this a hundred times. Watch—and for shit sake don't look guilty—read the map."

Emile lowers the driver's side window and hands his flesh-colored, DOD disabled veteran's ID card to the smartly uniformed Air Force MP.

Teddy examines the base map with an eye on Emile, watching him pull out his ID. His card says he's a Marine Corps captain.

"Have a nice day, sir." The guard salutes and waves the car forward.

"That was too easy," Teddy says. "They don't check the car—What's that light mean?" They were passing a big, flashing yellow light posted up on the right side of the roadway.

"Homeland Security. Yellow means elevated risk of terrorist attack."

Bay Palms Golf Complex

1515 Hours

A half mile up Boundary Road, the base main drag, they pass the Commissary and PX and, mindful of the speed limit, turn south on Bayshore Blvd. skirting Tampa Bay, the eastern border of the base.

"Nice base," Teddy says. "Wouldn't mind being in the military if I could be stationed here."

"We're just going to pay a quick visit to the golf course." Emile glances at his watch. "We've got an hour and a half to get back to the airport."

"How do you know where you're going?"

"Been here before. This is one of the bases I reconned."

Teddy folds out the map from his visitor's packet and sits back taking in the base signs as Emile drives the two miles down Bayshore Blvd., past the hospital, and into the parking lot at the Bay Palms Golf Complex.

Emile cracks open the car door. "Come on inside the clubhouse—check it out. We'll be having breakfast at the grill in the morning. I'm going to check our reservations, rent clubs and pay for the golf up front."

Tampa International Airport

1620 Hours

Emile and Teddy stride down the concourse, headed for Gate A-4.

"Where are they coming in from?" Teddy asks.

"The member's last departure—which means I don't know where his flight originated—was New Jersey. Standard operating procedure, we don't know where they're from. Remember your training."

"Who's the other guy?"

"His name is José. He's Henry's apprentice."

"Do they know what we're supposed to be up to?"

"No, I'm the leader. They report to me."

"So nobody knows what's going on. Great!" *What kind of shit is this?*

The four casually dressed young men pour into the airport TGI Fridays, looking every bit like they're on their way to the Tampa Bay Buccaneer's Thursday night football game. They take a round table next to the bar.

Henry casts a wary look at Emile "So, all I know is we're Henry and José for this little outing. TFC sent us tickets and IDs and told us to report to you....A golf outing?"

"It's strictly cover. You'll enjoy it. It's you and José against me and Teddy. First round is tomorrow morning. I'm supposed to receive final instructions from TFC tomorrow night.... Relax. Have a couple of pops."

"We're playing golf at a military base?" José looks incredulous.

"Yup. You and Henry are our guests. We're DOD disabled veterans with full access to all base morale, welfare, and recreation facilities." Emile raises his eyebrows.

"Why golf?" Henry asks. "Isn't this a little unusual, even for TFC?"

"It's my experience that nothing's unusual for Seagrave."

"When I got the assignment, I couldn't believe it," Henry says. "I still don't believe it."

"You'll believe it when you two get your butts kicked and have to buy us dinner." Emile smiles.

Teddy looks at Emile askew. It was the first time he'd seen him anything but serious.

"What's the game?" Henry questions.

"Two teams—best ball scramble—thirty-six holes—two days, two rounds."

Teddy notices Emile still has a grin on his face. *Must be a sandbagger.*

"How's it scored?" José says, getting into it.

Teddy leans over the back of the seat and looks at José. He seems out of his element. *If he doesn't know how it's scored, he's a novice.* "I say we go to a steak and lobster restaurant for the winner's dinner." Teddy twists his Buccaneer hat back to the right way.

An hour later all four are packed in the Yukon, traveling away from the airport south on Dale Mabry Highway.

"You can't tell us anything more, right?" Henry asks Emile from the front passenger seat.

"Right." Emile glances at José in the rear view mirror. His arms are flailing.

"Can you tell us where we're going now?" Henry asks.

"Of course. We're going to check into our Howard Johnson *suites*, get you situated, then go have a nice meal at the Steak and Shake, watch TV and get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow we tee off at ten hundred hours. Prior, we'll take a little tour of the base and have breakfast at the club grill." Emile opens his eyes wide, casting his gaze at Henry, measuring any reaction. Henry shakes his head.

Day Two

Main Gate

0730 Hours

Golf clubs strapped to the roof rack of the KIA Sorrento, the foursome nears the Main Gate. The trunk of the vehicle is taken up with golf shoes, rain gear, umbrellas, boxes of golf balls, golf gloves, towels, insulated cups, cooler full of iced-down beer and water, coolie cups, tubes of sunscreen and cans of insect repellent.

"You guys are gonna love this," Teddy says, noting the Henry team is fidgeting in the back seat as they approach the gate. "Our driver is none-other than Captain Emile Campbell, USMC, disabled veteran."

Four cars were ahead of them in line.

"We're just going right through?" Henry pulls himself up between the two front seats."

"Watch the procedure," Emile says. "All he does is check IDs."

The line moved quickly. "Okay, here we go." Emile creeps the car up even with the guard. "Good day for golf. What do ya think, soldier?" Emile hands his ID to the Air Force MP.

A quick look. "Yes, sir. You look ready to go."

"This is an annual affair, and we are ready—I mean ready," Emile says.

The guard hands back the ID card. "Have a good day, sir. Shoot low." The immaculately uniformed guard gives a crisp salute and waves the SUV through the gate.

"Visitors don't need a pass?" Henry has disbelief written across his face. "No vehicle search?"

"Nope, my one ID is good for a carload of anything," Emile says creeping slowly through the gate, over the speed bumps and past the yellow blinking light.

"I can't believe it either." Teddy cranes into the backseat. "We went in yesterday just to check the golf reservations and get the rental clubs. No card swipe machinery, no guest sign-in, no questions."

"I assume there are video cameras hidden all over the place," José says.

"Probably." Emile checks José in the rearview mirror. "But what do we care? Nobody can recognize us. So, just forget about it—and don't you have a different hat. You look too much like Henry."

Emile reaches over and opens the glove compartment. "Teddy, pass out the welcome packets. You guys will have time to go over these later tonight. For now, just pull out the base map. We're going on a little tour, have some breakfast and play golf."

The Tour

0800 Hours

Zemke Ave. and South MacDill Drive

"Looks like a Wal-mart Superstore," José says as they travel down North Boundary Road past the Commissary and PX complex.

"You've never been on a military base, have you?" Teddy says from the passenger seat.

"Not really—once when I was little with my dad."

"That's CENTCOM Headquarters." Emile waves at the building. "It's Central Command, responsible for operations in some twenty countries in and around the Middle East." He turns the Kia down South MacDill Drive some two hundred meters and bleeds into the Bayshore Blvd. traffic.

"What's the big deal about this base?" Henry asks. "We must be here for a reason."

"There's an article in the base newspaper. Big goings on—emergency meeting of Southern Command. They're coming from their headquarters in Miami as well as big wigs from all over Latin America. The word's out they're going to do something about Venezuela—the drugs and human trafficking."

"How are we involved?"

"I don't know if we are. It's just part of the info I picked up on when I researched the base a week ago. Seagrave told me to familiarize myself with the base and ongoing events. I'll give you a full briefing after I get the final word from Seagrave."

Hangarloop Drive and Paul Smith Drive

"The MacDill Inn is just a half mile or so." Emile holds to the 25 mph limit on Bayshore. "Check the map. We turn right on Hangarloop Drive."

"What's the significance?" Henry says.

"Just giving you guys the lay of the land," Emile says. "We could have stayed here if the meetings weren't taking place. The inn was booked up. That's why we're at the HoJo."

Emile enters the inn parking lot and circles the parked cars, pointing out the buildings across the street housing suites for general officers. "We're going to double back to Hangarloop, hang a right and head for the hangars next to the airfield."

Hangarloop Road, Hangar #2

Going slow, not stopping, Emile passes the second hangar. "That's the hangar for Space-A stand-by flights."

"What's that mean?" José asks.

"Retired military and their families can travel on hundreds of flights originating from DOD installations to bases all over the world. No charge—no TSA procedures."

Florida Keys Ave. and Bayshore Blvd.: The Davis Conference Center

Emile turns the Kia around from Hangar #2's driveway, goes south 200 meters and left on Florida Keys Avenue. The Officer's Club is less than a mile directly across the street from the

Davis Conference Center at Bayshore Blvd. He slows, passing the Center. "The Southern Command is having a three-day meeting here starting tomorrow," he says. "Check out the *Thunderbolt* article. The base will be busy. The Inn will fill up today, and there won't be an available room south of I-275."

Cypress Strand Street and Hangarloop Drive

Emile moves up to the stop sign at Bayshore Blvd. and turns right. Then right back on Hangarloop.

"Where now?" Teddy asks.

"The Fitness Center." Emile pulls the Kia in one end of the parking area and out the other side. "We're not getting out," he says. "I just want you to know where it is in relation to our other points of interest. This complex cost around fifteen million dollars. It's got everything you could imagine—racquetball, basketball, sports fields, weights and machines...pool, sauna—the works."

"We going to get a chance for a workout?" Henry says.

"Not exactly... Okay, it's time we head over to the course."

0815 Hours

Bayshore Blvd. and Golf Course Ave.: The Bay Palms Golf Complex

"I'll check in with the pro-shop. You guys grab the bags and the cooler." Emile points at the carts lined up at the pro-shop side-exit. "Load up two carts and meet me in the grill. We'll grab some chow and hit some balls on the practice tee—I don't want any bitching about not being properly warmed up."

The attendant behind the pro-shop counter looks to be a retired senior NCO. Emile browses the aisles of golf gear to get a feel for the place. Next door the Fairways Grill is doing a bang-up breakfast business—mostly retirees, maybe twenty military in uniform from all branches of the service.

Emile waits until the attendant is free from processing golfers and walks to the counter. "We have a ten hundred tee-time. "Should be under Gruesome Foursome...Emile Campbell."

The man locks his attention on the tee sheet shelved below the counter and runs a finger down the entries, squinting through bifocals. "You been here before?"

"No, sir. First time."

"Everyone here?" He looks up and starts typing on a computer keyboard.

"Yeah. They're down by the carts staging our bags."

"A special occasion?" he says, still typing.

"We're all friends from college. It's our third annual gruesome foursome. We go to a different base every year."

"Well, you picked the perfect time. The weather is going to be perfect—mid-eighties—no rain. Let's see...you're all paid. All set. Here're the keys to the carts. They're all the same—I see you rented clubs yesterday, and you're booked for a second round tomorrow at sixteen hundred. That'll be a little tight. Sun sets around twenty hundred."

"We play fast. We'll be okay. We're early so we can chow down and hit some balls. Do I pay you for the balls?"

"There's a quarter-machine and bill-changer in the shed next to the practice tee—about thirty balls for a dollar."

Emile and Teddy won the match two-up. Teddy's assessment was correct. Emile was a scratch golfer.

"Let's grab a pitcher in the grill," Emile says as they add their carts to the return-line. "I want to check on what's happening with the U.S. Open."

"Winner buys," Henry says."

"Yeah, winner buys." Teddy has a big smile on his face.

"I'll return the cart keys," Emile says. "You guys put the bags and cooler back in the car."

The same old guy was behind the counter. "How was the round?"

"We beat them on sixteen—but we lost last year. Now they have to buy *us* dinner."

Day Three

Howard Johnson Hotel

1100 Hours

The lead-paper-wrapped package from the post office contained sixteen, individually hermetically-sealed, standard blocks of military issue M112 C4, each weighing 1.25 lbs. On December 21, 1988, terrorists had utilized a half pound to blow up Pan Am Flight 103.

Emile had been up since 0300. He'd utilized tweezers; a Swiss Army Knife; and four miniature, electrical harnesses—that looked like wire teeth-cleaning stalks—from his personal ditty bag to fabricate the connections to the cell phones.

The other three have gathered in Emile and Teddy's room after filling up on HoJo's buffet. Last night's dinner excesses and Emile's stark mission briefing had resulted in a sleepless night. Conversation had been sparse waiting for Emile to finish his work. An edge of tension was palpable.

Teddy watches Emile wrap the last one in a green half-towel and load it into the clothing pocket of the final golf bag.

"The gifts are finished," Emile says, taking in the others. "Anyone have issues? Last chance."

The three are tidied up in golf attire, facial alterations in place, watching the morning news.

"Our actions today will accomplish a grand objective. The loyal military and their families will finally get the protection they deserve." Emile's face is etched in stone as he wipes perspiration off his hands and face with a paper towel. "Give me a few minutes to get cleaned up." He heads for the bathroom.

"It's pathetic that it takes death to protect life." José is contemplative, sitting at one end of the divan sipping HoJo coffee, not making eye contact.

Teddy is pacing, the poignancy of the moment building. "The government doesn't understand being prepared until you rub its nose in disaster. Then you get action."

"The stupidity...the naiveté—the inadequacies—our own military...truly unfathomable."

Teddy turns his attention to Henry. The way he speaks, he has to be a politician. Teddy doesn't like the guy...something about being the group's straight man. And José, the follower. He didn't have a unique thought in his head. And then Emile the tactician, the academic, God's messenger. *Why does it always come to this?*

The room is silent except for the sound of running water in the bathroom. Teddy finds himself pondering his sense of commitment and shakes his head. He's good with it. No other way has ever been effective in the past.

Emile's decked out like a professional golfer: PGA West golf cap, signature Greg Norman black shirt and shorts, mustache intact, sun glasses. He passes out Midway hand-held radios, explaining the procedure for their use. The radios had been expensive because they included the common CB channels. The base security system used channel thirty-three for routine communications and nine and forty-four for emergencies. The ear buds wouldn't look out of place with people these days glued to their music and smart phones. Use was restricted to the remote possibility they would get separated, and Emile would be monitoring base security.

"Henry, check out the Space-A Facebook Page to see that the flight to Puerto Rico is still on schedule and full. You and José sanitize the room—and don't forget to wipe down the clubs, balls, tees, markers—everything. Then load the bags and cooler in the Kia."

"You want the bags inside, right?"

"Yes, José. And be careful. They're fragile."

José's eyes get wide, but he doesn't say another word.

"What's in Puerto Rico?" Teddy asks.

"Fort Buchanan. It's basically an Army Logistical Command, 12 miles from San Juan." Emile breaks out his base map and folds it out on the table. "Check it out. Here. 8119 Marina Bay

Drive. That's the Air Passenger Terminal. Space-A passengers check in there, but we're going straight to the Hangar. You saw it yesterday. The plane has probably already been serviced. Typically there's a baggage cart staged nearby. That's our first stop. Review the stops we made yesterday—you're my navigator."

Emile leaves Teddy to the map and moves to the couch, opens his notebook, and sends an email: *On the way.*

Teddy tails Emile in the Yukon south down Dale Mabry, left on Interbay Boulevard two miles to Bayshore Blvd., and into the parking lot at TDY's Pub & Eatery. Teddy parks the Yukon in front of the pub—all their travel bags are inside—and gets in the passenger side of the Kia.

"Why did you pick the Puerto Rico flight?" Henry asks from the back seat as Emile exits the parking lot and turns back down Interbay Blvd., headed for the Main Gate.

"Because it's full and scheduled to take off at 1800."

Hangar #2

1310 Hours

"You're up, Teddy." Emile takes a parking spot next to the entrance.

Teddy gets out of the Kia and pops the hatchback. He shoulders one of the golf bags and casually enters the hangar. It's big enough for three planes, but today there's only, a Hercules C-130 at the far side. Teddy approaches the "Departure/Arrival Board" and double checks the C-130's destination and departure time, and at the same time he absorbs the surroundings: one mechanic at the nose of the plane, two uniforms at computers behind a counter not paying attention to him. He sees a four-wheel baggage cart next to the open-ramp rear end of the plane half-full of sea bags, boxes, crates and other passenger luggage. He hikes over the open cement floor and digs for a spot on the cart for the bag to stand upright. The baggage will be the last thing to load before take-off. He waves to the mechanic and heads for the exit.

MacDill Inn

1400 Hours

Emile backs out of the hangar parking spot and turns south on Hangarloop, makes a left onto Paul Smith Drive—just like he did yesterday—and parks under the canopied entrance to the inn. "You ready, José?" he says evenly. He'd been watching José fidget in the rearview mirror.

"Yes, sir." José grips the door handle and casts a quick glance at Henry.

"No sweat, José," Henry says. "Just like we practiced."

Henry examines what he can see of the lobby through the double entrance doors. "There's nobody else inside. It's a lady clerk. You're good with the ladies. Let's go."

José pulls the bill of his golf cap down a little farther and gets out. Emile pops the back end from the dashboard, and the three crane over the seats watching José shoulder the bag. "Relax, José," Henry says. "You're going to play golf with General Allison. Remember, you're his aide."

Jose approaches the desk clerk and places the bag on its stand-ups in front of the counter.

"And what can I do for you, soldier?" the uniformed clerk says.

"I'm not a soldier, miss. I'm General Allison's civilian aide. Okay to leave this for a few hours? He's gonna try to fit in a visit to the range later while the cocktail party's going on at the Davis Center?"

"No problem. I could have them taken over to his suite—"

"No thanks. He's expecting to pick them up here."

"Okay. There's a short term holding closet in the corner." She points to a door past the lobby, next to a bank of vending machines.

José passes through the lobby. The TV is tuned to CNN. His stomach turns. A minute later he's back inside the Kia.

Fitness Center

1435 Hours

"You know what to say." Emile places a stern gaze on his apprentice and reaches for the hatchback switch.

"Yeah. Piece of cake."

Teddy shoulders the third bag. Emile watches him go through the double doors. He looked casual and confident.

"Hi," Teddy says to the lady attendant folding towels behind the counter. He assumes she must be some airman's wife.

"Hi, yourself. What can I do for you? No golfing in here." She grins.

"I just need a place to put these for a couple of hours. General Johanson's flying in and coming to work out. They're supposed to be waiting for him here. "Teddy looks helpless. He was good at that. "The powers that be command me."

"No problem. I know the honchos are taking over this week. Some big meetings. You can put the bag inside the weight room. Nobody will mess with it. I'll leave a note for my relief."

Davis Convention Center

1505 Hours

Emile pulls the Kia up the circular drive. The welcoming cocktail party for Southern Command attendees is scheduled for 1700 hours. Emile decided that Teddy would do the honors after noting José was fretting on the way to the center.

Teddy takes the last bag out the vehicle and caddies it up to the main entrance. Two burly, Air Force MPs, immaculately attired in their dress uniforms, are posted at the doors.

"General Alexander's bag just got delivered to the golf course by mistake." Teddy slips the bag off his shoulder. "I was talking with the pro after finishing my round with some buddies—we were coming to the O-club anyway." Teddy points across the street. "He asked if I'd drop it off for him."

"We'll take it, my man," the MP Staff Sergeant says. "The General hasn't arrived yet, but I'm sure he'll show for the cocktail party." He nods to the Senior Airman MP.

Teddy hands the bag over by the grip. "The pro said he thought the general wanted to hit balls later. They're keeping the range open late."

"We'll see that he gets it," the Staff Sergeant says. "Put it in the hat room, Airman." Very commanding. Teddy is impressed. "Thanks, soldiers."

Exit

1525 Hours

Emile pulls away from the Davis Convention Center, this time turns north onto Bayside Blvd., and heads for the back gate two miles away.

"Good work, you guys." Emile keeps his eye on the speedometer. "We're just about outta here."

"Shit, Emile, the gate's closed." Teddy's heart is jumping.

Henry and José pull up from the back seat to get a better look through the windshield.

"Hang on." Emile comes to the light at North Boundary Boulevard and takes a good look at the Bayshore Gate about 150 meters ahead. "It's just repairs. See the loader and six-by? They're tearing up the street."

"So, now what do we do?" José says, his voice jittery.

"There's another gate at MacDill Avenue. Check the map. It's only a mile or so. I'm betting it's open with all the activity going on." Emile eases onto North Boundary Blvd.

"There it is...it's open."

Three minutes later they're through the gate and doubling back to Bayshore Blvd.

Heading north, the sea breeze is sweet smelling. The street is a tunnel of crowded, overhanging oaks drooping with Spanish moss and skirting the green-blue waters of Tampa Bay. The Yukon is waiting in front of TDY's Pub & Eatery.

As per the plan, they quick-change in the Yukon. Emile drives the Kia, with Teddy following in the Yukon, the three miles up Bayshore to the Colonnade Restaurant where they'd indulged last night in a delectable steak and lobster meal compliments of TFC and Kent Seagrave.

Emile turns down the side-street next to the restaurant and parks the Kia. Teddy pulls in behind. José and Henry remove the bundles of golf clothes from the back end of the Yukon, carefully looking around for any bystanders. They toss them in the dumpster in back of the Colonnade and return to the Yukon to wait for Emile and Henry to finish sanitizing the Kia.

Two minutes later, the two-car caravan heads to the car rental agency in downtown Tampa to return the Kia. Last stop is the airport National Car Rental to drop off the Yukon.

Bay Palms Golf Complex

1630 Hours

The gruesome-foursome guys didn't show for their 1600 tee time. The pro-shop staffer isn't worried. The group didn't cancel, but they're paid. He has a credit card on file and the rental agreement for the clubs. Maybe they'll reschedule. He makes a note on the tee sheet for the assistant pro when he closes down for the day. Meantime, his shift is finished. It's time for the retired Master Sergeant to return to his RV at the base's Coon's Creek Campground for happy hour.

Departure

1745

Emile and Teddy watch Henry and José board their flight to New Jersey. Teddy and Emile are booked on the 1810 flight to Atlanta. From there Teddy will head to Denver. Atlanta is home for Emile.

Emile settles in next to Teddy, carry-on bags stowed, and pulls out his cell phone. "I guess it's time for us to make it a happy hour." Emile smiles. "You did a good job, Teddy Boy. "It went very smooth."

"The whole thing was too easy," Teddy says, but he has a sick feeling inside and perspiration is dripping down inside his shirt.

MP Security

1750 Hours

A thunderous explosion; the searing shriek of C-4. A following shock-wave rumbles.

"Good God, what was that?" Major O'Connor bursts out the rear end of the Quonset hut with Corporal Banks right behind. A cloud plume of grey-white rises over the edge of the airfield where Hangar #2 is supposed to be.

The Major's hand-held squawks. "O'Connor here."

"Unit four, sir. We were parked across the street—"

A second eruption shocks the eardrums of the two MPs. "What the hell's going down?" Corporal Banks barks.

"Banks, get Unit 1 over there." The major gestures toward the playing fields. "That was close to the Fitness Center."

Simultaneous detonations just a few blocks from the security building shriek and blast the area. The major stumbles turning around. He and the corporal are hit by coalescing shock waves, driving them to the ground. They scramble to their feet. Two giant plumes rise and fire licks the air above the two close-together explosions. "Christ, Banks, that last one has to be the conference—and maybe the inn. Send units, call the fire chief, have all the reserves report. Call all our guys in. Go! Go! Go!"

Major O'Connor clicks his radio-phone to the emergency channel. "This is Major O'Connor. All units, close the base. Standard operating procedure—nothing in, nothing out, all vehicles on stop—nothing moves but us. Execute *Containment S4*. DHS Red Alert is now in effect." He punches the CO's speed key.

"General Briggs here."

"This is Major O'Connor, sir. We don't know what's happened yet. Follow your emergency evacuation order, sir. I'll be in touch when the base is secure and I have feedback. O'Connor out."

The major takes a quick look around. The base is in chaos. Fire trucks, ambulances screaming, billowing smoke clouds engulfing the streets and buildings, the stink of torn metal, cement and death.

Two uniformed Air Force MPs, part of his staff, arrive as the major re-enters the building.

"Major, the sites are confirmed," Banks says. "The Space-A Hangar, Fitness Center, the Inn and the conference center."

"Snodgrass, I want you and Tiddle to gather all the video since zero eight hundred that take in those locations. Find me an answer—where're Cahill and Douglas?"

"On the way, sir," Banks says.

1830 Hours

"Play it, Snodgrass," the Major says.

"Jesus! Golf bags—the red Kia—they just walk right in."

"It's leaving the MacDill Avenue Gate—fifteen twenty-two hours," Snodgrass says.

"Feed it to the bunker—call ahead."

CNN

2215 Hours

"And now back to William Reid live at the White House for an update."

"Maria, the President's news secretary has just finished reading the first media-only statement. The Joint Chiefs and the President's closest advisors have been sequestered in the Situation Room for nearly two and a half hours now. Here's the statement verbatim."

Eleven military bases across the United States were simultaneously struck around six o'clock this evening with similar results of devastation and death. The bases have been secured from all public access including the media. It will be some time before what has happened becomes clear. There were multiple explosions at all the bases. First reports of casualty estimates are three to nine-hundred. Further information will be issued in a timely manner. Thank you.

"Maria, there's an ultra-tight lid on this. The nation has never experienced such disaster on this massive a scale since 9/11. We have no other information. Local sources confirm the bases are quarantined. That means nobody in and nobody out. We'll just have to wait for further reports from the White House."

Epilogue

There are more than 1000 U.S. military bases dotting the globe. The author of this story can access ninety-nine percent of them with one disabled-veteran ID card and roam unchallenged, except the ID card has to be shown when making retail purchases at a PX, Commissary, gas station, golf course, etc.

Headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society.

According to the SPLC, the number of anti-government groups in the United States stands at an all-time high, having increased some 800 percent since President Barack Obama took office. It estimates that today there are over 1000 "hate groups" in the U.S., a rise of over 100 percent since 2005. A hate group is an organized group or movement that advocates and practices hatred, hostility, or violence towards members of a race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation of other designated sector of society.

According to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, a "...hate group's primary purpose is to promote animosity, hostility, and malice against persons belonging to a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin which differs from that of the members of the organization."

The SPLC's Intelligence Report, Spring 2013, Issue Number: 149, identified as of 2012, 1,360 so-called "patriot groups" on the "radical right" compared to 149 in 2008. Much of the growth

