

### CHAPTER THREE

As the jet taxied down the runway began to notice the butterflies in my stomach, the kind, the kind you get just before a big ball game. Inside the Atlanta airport, I ventured down to the baggage area. After waiting a few minutes, I saw Richard Leonard and Sergeant Sprowl near by. The airport was full of servicemen from all branches of service.

"Sergeant Sprowl!, over here," I yelled, waving my empty arm violently, while trying to attract their attention.

"Allen, I see you," Sprowl shouted. "Wait up Leonard."

Out of the corner of my eye , I saw Jonathan Harriden and Gene Wright, two more dog handlers, approaching from the other side. No one said a thing, but only stood around silent. We all knew what was ahead and stood around like lambs waiting to be slaughtered.

"Listen men," Sergeant Sprowl said. "I think there is enough of us here to rent a car, and drive to Ft. Benning. It will be cheaper and with the number of GI's here it looks like it will be a while before we can get out of here.

"I've never rented a car before," I said. "I don't have much money on me."

"With five of us it won't cost that much, and if you don't have enough money now, you can always pay us back later." Richard Leonard said. Richard was a devout Mormon that was very serious about his religious convictions.

"Sounds good to me," I said. "Anyway it beats the hell out sitting around here all night.

It took about thirty minutes to rent the car, and head out for Ft. Benning. It was a long boring ride. Everyone was thinking about the next few days and how to handle the last few days in the states. I wondered if once I left for Vietnam, would I ever see home again.

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"Okay men this is how we are going to disembark. First and fourth squads will be on the first C-141 along with their dogs in shipping crates and two deuce-and-a-halves, and our jeep and it's trailer. Lieutenant Stockdale will accompany the first flight along with Jonathan Wahl, our clerk. The second flight will leave Lawson Field (the air field at Ft. Benning) approximately two hours after the first flight. The second and third squads will load their fourteen dogs into the shipping crates and load them on the C-141 along with their two deuce-and-a-halves, and the water trailer. I will accompany them along with the vet tech, John Carter. Once we are airborne the official sealed orders will be opened, and we will then know our official destination. The planes will be here tomorrow at 0700 hours. The thing to do tonight, is to prepare your selves for the long flight," Sergeant Sprowl announced. "Dismissed."

I couldn't help but wonder if everyone felt like I did. I couldn't shake that innermost feeling of fear, fear of war, fear of leaving my family behind, and just fear of the unknown. My stomach seemed to have that feeling of butterflies flying around in it all the time. To be honest I was down-right scared of the whole situation.

The sad thing about it is, there is nothing I can do about any of it. It seemed as if everyone was afraid of saying anything. I think we were all scared. By 0630 hours we had already had breakfast and was out walking our dogs, in the same area as we started out our training. I ran Sig through the obstacle course a couple of times, as did some of the others. At 0700 hours right on the money we could hear the faint whisper of a jet.

"There she is," Frank said, pointing to the massive C141 Starlifter as it was making its final approach into Lawson Field.

"The bird from hell," I said.

"More like the bird to hell." Joe McMahon said, turning toward the shipping crates with his dog.

"Where is Corsello," Pearce asked curiously.

"He is at Lawson field with the trucks." I said, as I headed toward the shipping crates with Sig.

"That damn plane had to be on time," Frank said in a griping voice, "The whole time I've been in the Army, I Have never seen anything on time. Why did this have to be the first?"

It didn't take Sergeant Sprowl long to appear with two trucks.

"Put your dogs in their shipping crates and start loading them on the trucks," Sergeant Sprowl said. "The dogs will be the first thing we load."

My stomach was really feeling funny now, and I could see the anxiety building up in everyone.

"Are you ready for this trip," Jonathan Wahl asked nervously.

"Can you believe this shit," I replied sarcastically. The bastards are on time. This chaps my ass, and to answer you question, no I want to go home.

"But you are home," Jonathan Whal said, with a shit eating grin on his face.

"Fuck you," was all I could think to say.

It was one hundred ten degrees down on the field about 10:00 AM, when we had finished loading all the dogs and equipment we were going to take on our flight. The humidity was a wet one hundred percent, and I was sweating like a pregnant nun going to confession. I could imagine how those furry dogs felt. We Stood around waiting for the other plane to arrive. Finally we could hear those big jet engines shutting down. It wasn't long that we could see the plane taxiing toward us.

"Listen up men," Lt Stockdale ordered. "First and fourth squads load up."

Inside the big C-141 it was a little crowded, we sat on red webbed seats while the plan took off. Once we were airborne, and into our flight an hour Lt. Stockdale opened the sealed orders.

"We are assigned to the 2nd Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division," Lt Stockdale said over the loud squeal of the hydraulics of the big Starlifter.

I was having shitty luck, only getting fourteen days leave, my closest cousin getting killed in Vietnam, and now I find I'm being assigned to a gung-ho unit like the 101st Airborne. I was becoming very frustrated and paranoid.

We were in the air for eleven hours and the scenery below was beautiful, and seeing the U. S. from the air, I could see why it would be worth fighting for. The problem with Vietnam I'm not sure what we are fighting for.

In the C-141 Starlifter there was no insulation as on civilian planes, so you could hear the hydraulics and gears whine as the plane began to descend to the Air Force Base in Alaska, our first stop on our long voyage half way around the world. The constant high pitch squeal, of the hydraulics, hurt my ears, I could imagine what it did for the dogs, but they didn't seem to mind. I checked on Sig throughout the trip, and he actually seemed to be enjoying the trip. I think he would like going anywhere, as long as I was with him. There was a lot of love and respect between us. It was sad to know that one day I will have to turn my back on him, and walk away without ever looking back. I would be going home alone. He trusted me way too much.

"Wake everybody up, and have them sit up in their seats, and buckle their safety belts," the load-master ordered Lt. Stockdale.

The ones awake began to climb over the trucks and equipment waking everyone. Before to long we were preparing to land. One of the things I learned in the army, is that if you can sleep, it makes the present troubles go away, for a while.

The giant Starlifter came to a halt, and the back ramp began to lower. Lt Stockdale was listening to something the load-master was saying, the sound of the four big jets drowned out all other noises. Then as the jets wound down into silence.

"Okay men," Lt Stockdale said. "There will be a bus here to take us to the mess hall. When you finish chow the bus will bring us back, and you can take your dogs out and walk them for a while. We will be here for about two hours.

The bus was waiting for us when we stepped off the big ramp at the rear of the plane, that was also the back door.

"What time is it," Pearce asked, yawning.

"23:15 hours," The airman driving the bus said grinning.

"Hell it ain't even dark," I said, wondering where all the light was coming from.

"That's right," the airman driving the bus said. "This is the time of the year that it never gets dark."

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